

**About the Seminar** 

## ANGLO-AMERICAN OPERETTA

What is *Scalar 2*?

It is an open-source platform for digital scholarship created by the Alliance for Networking Visual Culture at the University of Southern California. Scalar 2 enables combining of media content and HTML pages into a "book" or network of user-created "paths" (ordered lists of specific pages) and "tags" (descriptors by which pages are linked). In addition to a relevancy word-cloud, it provides several additional ways in which connections between pages can be visualized, and allows for comments by site visitors. No special programming or scripting knowledge is required.

# URL: scalar.usc.edu



Eleven music graduate students participated in my Advanced Topics in Music History seminar entitled "Anglo-American Operetta and Musical Theater, I: From *Trial by Jury* to *Show Boat*" (MUSIC 730, Spring 2017. A major feature of the learning process was my construction of a knowledge base comprising written summaries of relevant literature and written abstracts of individual research projects. Students gave brief, illustrated inclass presentations on assigned journal articles and book chapters, then provided written summaries tagged with subject headings related to topics, significant persons, and important works. They also conducted personal research and completed traditional papers. The core of the knowledge base includes 46 such summaries—a mosaic of scholarly commentary on aspects of musical theater history in Britain and the USA. Students were also tested on familiarity with the contents of all summaries. My desire to **visualize the resulting connections** in an interactive online environment led me beyond the use of a blog or digital repository to the discovery of Scalar 2.

## AND MUSICAL THEATER, I: FROM TRIAL BY JURY TO SHOWBOAT (MUSI 730, Advanced Topics in Music History) Wednesdays, 7:20-10 pm – Jan. 25 to May 10, 2017 MTB 1023 – Prof. Steve Gerber

**THIS SEMINAR EXAMINES** the development of the comedic musical theater genre in England and the USA from approximately 1870 to 1930 in socio-cultural and musicanalytical contexts, and in relation to antecedents and successors. Themes explored may include, but are not limited to: caricature, satire and parody; sentimentality and "middlebrow" aesthetics; colonialism and exoticism; gender politics; musical and theatrical innovations; biographical aspects; marketing and dissemination; reception, influence and legacy. *Prerequisite:* MUSI 662 (or equivalent) recommended.



mage source: Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News (London), 1 May 1875; David Henry Friston, artist; public domain, available online]

# How Scalar Was Used

I created HTML pages in Scalar for each of 46 contributed summaries, created additional pages

defining each of the subject headings by which the students tagged them, and linked them to the summaries. These headings included a finite list of thirteen predefined Topics/Themes, and longer lists for the Persons, Works, and Years related to each summary. To impose some structure on the 200+ resulting pages, I defined four "paths" by which users of the site could begin exploring the knowledge base: Seminar Participants, Literature Summaries/Research Abstracts, Topics/Themes, and a Timeline of years. Only the timeline is linear in the conventional sense, and paths need not be traversed in order: after clicking into and reading a page, the viewer can either proceed to the next page on the path or click other links and thus branch out into other pages.

Once a page is selected, a visualization tool will display its direct connections to other pages in several ways: most useful in this case are a "grid" format and an animated "force-directed" format. The Scalar platform can also display all tags as a word-cloud where the larger, darker, more central terms are the most frequently referenced. All items in all visualizations are clickable to open the documents to which they refer.

**Fig. 1.** Screen shot of home page at the Scalar server for the seminar; URL = scalar.usc.edu/works/angloamerican-music-theater-i/index. This introduces the web site with an explanation, links to four paths (Participants, Topics, Summaries, Timeline), and a small detail of a word-cloud of tags (which can be expanded to show all tags, full-screen).

### Anglo-American Operetta & Musical Theater, I

Person: Sullivan, Arthur 1924 Work: Jazz Singer Topic: Antecedents Person: Gilbert, William S. **Fig. 2.** One of the student-written summaries of scholarly literature from the seminar's Scalar book, in this case his summary of an article on musical theater historiography. At the end are the tags for associated Persons, Topics, and Works; each is a hyperlink to further information.

#### Jerry Kavinski - MUSIC 730 - Assignment 2

#### Borroff, Edith. "Origin of Species: Conflicting Views of American Musical Theater History." American Music 2, no. 4 (Winter 1984): 101-11.

When looking at the evolution of Western music, historians are all but unanimous in their assertions: Palestrina is the master of Renaissance polyphony; the Baroque period spans from 1600-1750, ending with the death of Bach; and Beethoven's musical innovations bridge the stylistic gap between the Classical and Romantic periods. Fast forward to the American scene one hundred years hence, and historical delineations are blurry at best. In her 1984 article, Edith Borroff highlights a series of contradictions among those who specialize in the study of the history of American Musical Theater. At the outset, two contradictory quotes from Miles Kreuger and Martin Gottfried assign "early...European" and "purely American" foundations to the American Musical. Borroff writes that this confusion is partially because there is an overlap between the various types of staged works. She continues, marking one clear distinction in that "some musicals are plays and some are not." Musicals in the former grouping are often written by one composer, and thus have a continuity that is not always found in the latter, a variety show format, which seeks to entertain rather than tell a story. **Fig. 3.** Below, left, the page for the tag (subject heading) *Satire/Parody* showing links to the literature summaries which it describes; right, a grid view which shows that this selected page connects directly to 17 other pages out of the 200+ in the entire site. Hovering over any block in the grid displays the title of the page it represents; clicking on it selects it and displays

# **Topic: Satire/Parody**

Satire is a literary device or theatrical form that exposes and criticizes foolishness and corruption by using humor, irony, exaggeration or ridicule. Parody is a work that imitates other works within a

specific artistic, musical, literary, or theatrical genre, pu

comical effect.

### This page is a tag of:

 Summary: Black Mikados • Summary: Capitalism and Colonialism [Utopia] Summary: Cockney Replicant Summary: Continental Recollections [Duke] Summary: English Magic [Sorcerer] Summary: Estrangement [Mikado] Summary: Garrick Gaieties Summary: Gender Breach [Trial] • Summary: Gothic Nautical [Ruddigore] • Summary: Imaginary Republicanism [Gondoliers] • Summary: Minstrel Misrule Summary: Nautical Melodrama [Pinafore] Summary: New Light [Patience] • Summary: Past Foreign [Yeomen] • Summary: Recollecting Illegitimacy [Pirates] • Summary: Transformed Fairies [Iolanthe] Summary: War Between Sexes [Ida]

« Continue to "Topic: Social Critique"

its connections (in addition to those of any previously selected blocks); by clicking a title's "visit" button one leaves the visualization and opens the desired page.



#### <sup>1917</sup> Work: Iolanthe <sup>1939</sup> Topic: Genre/Form Person: Berlin, Irving <sup>1934</sup> <sup>1935</sup> Topic: Musical/Theatrical Features <sup>Person: Jolson, Al</sup> Topic: Satire/Parody<sup>Work: Pirates of Penzance</sup>

About this visualization | CI Full screen

**This site**, a work-in-progress, comprises a **knowledge-base** under construction from written materials provided by participants in a graduate seminar in music history at George Mason University during Spring 2017. The course is MUSIC 730 (Advanced Topics in Music History): <u>Anglo-American Operetta and Musical Theater I</u>. This site's elements are **literature summaries** written by participants (originally reported orally in class with audio/video examples), **abstracts of the final research projects** conducted by each participant, and **tags** for Years, Topics, Persons, Works, and Participants by which all pages are linked together. It is **under continuous construction** throughout the semester and will be complete on May 4, 2017, our last day of class. The course covered the period from the 1870s (jump-started by Gilbert & Sullivan's 1875 *Trial by Jury*) to the 1930s (peaking with Kern and Hammerstein's 1927 *Show Boat*). SCALAR provided an excellent tool by which to visualize connections.

Not exactly a "book," the site is not intended to be traversed linearly from a beginning to an end. Rather, one might start on one of the sequential "paths" below, but veer off to explore connections and, especially, to read the summaries. One path is a chronological timeline of years for appearances of some significant works of musical theater (or their inspirations). Another is a path through a list of seminar participants by which their contributions (i.e. written summaries) can be reviewed. There is a path listing the topical/thematic "tags" (subject headings) which link to the literature summaries to which they apply.

Once any element--for example, a particular summary, participant, work, or topic--has been selected, use one of the **visualization** schemes (clickable under the "compass" icon in the toolbar at the top of every page) to view its connections to other elements.

Start with any of these **paths** below (or, expand the **word-cloud** above to full-screen and click a "tag"):

Seminar Participants Topics/Themes Literature Summaries & Research Abstracts Timeline of Works

All eleven students in the seminar agreed that their summaries could be posted online—thank you to Master of Music and Master of Music Education students Beth Atkins, Kelly Burcher, Natalie Duchen, Mary Halco, Jerry Kavinski, Veronica Kokas, Felix Polendey, Jimmy Stevens, Nigel Tangredi, Rhea Tucker, and Andrew Velez. Delving further into the contradiction the introduced the article, Borroff cites twenty-eight scholarly assertions as to the development and lineage of the American Musical. Among these quotations, we find *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), Gilbert & Sullivan Operettas (from 1875), Italian *intermezzi* influenced by Negro folk music, and the works of George M. Cohan, as influenced by London burlesque. One of the only points that is agreed upon by two or more of those quoted is that Irving Berlin was the "first composer of musicals," though one author's reasoning is due to his work with the Ziegfeld Follies (especially 1919) and the other leans heavily on his Jewish heritage fused with the musical stylings of Negro spirituals.

Following this exhaustive listing of theories, Borroff posits her own 'anti-theory' that although the creative process is influenced by one's prior experiences, this sort of influence does not constitute a genetic link between the newly composed work and various past influences upon its creator. Her view of music history places greater importance on present day cultural influences; opera and operetta emerged from European culture and Vaudeville shows sprang up amongst a fledgling, pioneer society where professional musicians were a rarity.

The natural extension of Borroff's commentary is that American Musical Theater historians are looking back in time and attempting to explain when, how, and why this new artistic genre came into existence. In general, music historians attempt to categorize events and ideas and to conform the evolution of what is essentially a temporal art form into an archetypical hierarchy. In the case of musical theater, however, this proves to be an impossibility. The composers and performers themselves were pioneering a new style that had not existed previously; thus, in a certain sense, they themselves had no knowledge as to what the new genre would finally become following decades of formation.

With the focus of this article being on the vast difference of opinion regarding the emergence of American Musical Theater, Borroff's citations include only secondary sources, with the earliest being a 1978 reprinting of Edward Hipsher's 1927 book *American Opera and Its Composers*. Several other books surveying the history of musical theater alongside an article from the *New Yorker* and album liner notes round out the bibliography.

#### This page is tagged by:

Person: Berlin, Irving | Person: Cohan, George M. | Person: Gilbert, William S. | Person: Ziegfeld, Florenz, Jr. | Topic: Antecedents | Topic: Cultural Appropriation | Topic: Genre/Form | Topic: Successors | Work: Beggar's Opera | Work: Ziegfeld Follies

Fig. 4. A "force-directed" visualization of four selected pages and their connections. Here, the topic *Ethnic* Caricature is shown with its connection to the summary of an article about 19th-century "Uncle Tom" Shows, and the article's connection to the author Harriet Beecher Stowe and to her novel Uncle Tom's Cabin. The novel also connects to the year 1852 on a historical timeline. Each element of the visualization is a clickable link to the page it represents. The force-directed visualization can also be used to display all 200+ pages and their direct connections to each other simultaneously; it takes approximately ten seconds for the elements to populate the diagram as they jostle each other for position. (The resulting tangled mass of connecting lines challenges comprehension, albeit the animation is fun to watch. The grid visualization in Fig. 3 above is better for viewing part-to-whole.) Scalar's visualization tools also allow for a radial diagram where each page is a sector of a circle; this particular graphic format is also unwieldy for more than thirty or forty pages.

