

On Bow and Exit Music

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The Journal of American Drama and Theatre

Volume 30, Number 1 (Fall 2017)

ISSN 2376-4236

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To begin at the end: actors land in a tableau; lights fade; curtain falls. In the American musical theatre, a final chord sounds in the orchestra. End of play. But not end of production, nor end of performance. For the curtain rises again; lights come back on; actors pose for their bows. And, in many musicals, the orchestra accompanies this whole sequence. This ultimate, non-diegetic musical moment stamps indelibly the fate of some shows.^[1] Recalling the industry run-through of *The Music Man*, the show's creator Meredith Willson noted that curtain call as particularly memorable, a sign of good things to come for his masterpiece:

The piano started "Seventy-Six Trombones." Out came the dancers playing their pantomime trombones, swinging cross that stage as proud as you'll ever wanta see anybody be. That's when the audience burst into spontaneous rhythmic applause as though cued to do so—as it has happened with every audience from that day forward. (Walter Kerr described it a year later in a *Saturday Evening Post* article on the theatre, saying that "the rhythmic hand-clapping which greeted the finale of *The Music Man* on opening night was the only time I have ever felt a single irresistible impulse sweep over an entire audience and stir it to a demonstration that could not possibly have been inhibited.")^[2]

While that show's curtain call aroused an unusual level of fervor in its audiences, Willson's story exposes the importance of "bow music," the music that plays while the cast takes their bows, and "exit music," which plays as the audience leaves the theater.

This essay explores the role of bow and exit music in the American musical. Bow and exit music—arriving as they do at the liminal moment when the preceding narrative gives way to everyday life—help audiences interpret the musical as an artistic phenomenon and encourage a particular audience relationship to the show as a commercial product. Performing this dual function, bow and exit music resemble film and television music for title sequences, end credits, and trailers. As a recent essay on that topic summarized, "Title and credit sequences link the inside and outside of fictional texts, the acknowledgement of the real-world origin of a film with its story and storyworld. In doing so, they also connect the institutional and economic reality of a film to its story."^[3] As a form of popular mass entertainment, American musicals, like film and television, must always negotiate "economic reality." Indeed, the strain between the twin domains of art/commerce is audible in much research on the American musical.^[4] Bow and exit music announce with particular poignancy the musical's struggle for both cultural significance and financial success.

The pages that follow provide an interpretive framework for understanding how bow and exit music work

in the musical theatre. First, I consider how bow and exit music both sustain and disrupt extant theories of the non-musical curtain call. I then explore productions that use bow and exit music to reinforce or deflect the preceding narrative, either by emphasizing a show's theme or by reshaping how audiences interpret characters. Shifting to commerce, I attend to shows that rely on bow and exit music to create economic demand. Finally, I argue that bow and exit music allow us better to recognize the strangeness of the creative labor that makes and performs musicals. Throughout the essay, my readings of individual shows model how we may better understand the American musical's attempts to reconcile art and commerce when we listen carefully to the musical's final moments.

Studying Liminal Performance Events

It is hard to know both where bow and exit music come from and how frequently they were heard in any given period of musical theatre history. The practice's origins remain entirely obscure, though Michael Pisani's herculean research into music from the nineteenth-century theater suggests that recovering this history may be possible.^[5] Available evidence suggests that, at least since the so-called Golden Age (roughly 1940 to 1965), bow and exit music have been as normal a part of the American musical as choruses and eleven-o'clock numbers. For the analyses that follow, I examined 34 piano-vocal scores for musicals that opened between 1930 and 1984, among which only two (Rodgers & Hammerstein's *Carousel* [1945] and *Allegro* [1947]) included neither bow nor exit music. Because most scores are available only by rental from licensing agencies, my survey favored successful shows by well-known composers, that is, works that the major university libraries I consulted saw fit to purchase for their collections. I expanded that archive beyond published scores to include printed production scripts, as well as two film recordings. It is not impossible that my haphazard sample overestimates bow and exit music's importance. However, given that bow and exit music derive from standard Broadway production practices (as I explain below), my sample likely provides an adequate view of bow and exit music's normal place in the American musical theater. Indeed, while no archive speaks fully to the performances it documents, bow and exit music are so completely artifacts of production—that is, they come out of such particular production circumstances—that wherever bow and exit music appear in the archive, they most likely sounded in performance. I hazard that my archival explorations underestimate both the practice's prevalence and the nuance with which it has been deployed.

Why then, despite this prevalence, have these musics received so little scholarly (or even lay) attention? For one thing, bow and exit music exemplify liminal performance elements, elements that occur at the border between the theatrical event as such and the broader performance event that encloses it.^[6] Other musical examples of such liminal performance events include overtures and entr'actes. Non-musical practices such as curtain speeches and intermissions fit into this category.

Bow music, of course, underscores the paradigmatic liminal event in the theater, the curtain call, during which performers offer themselves to the audience for recognition and applause. Critical attention to curtain calls, while scant given the practice's ubiquity, acknowledges the practice as a peculiar mélange of the semiotic field of the theatrical illusion and the phenomenal field of the performance. On the one hand, curtain calls provide finality, ending the play and the theatrical event. Yet the curtain call, as part of the performance event, also remains susceptible to audience interpretation; we cannot help but "read" the curtain call and its meanings just as we read the play. For Terence Hawkes, the curtain call thus manages an important kind of double "closure," referring both to the audience's ability to read a play as a meaningful semiotic system (to "close with" a play) and to the final moment of the play itself ("closure"

as in “the end”). The curtain call has particular force, according to Hawkes, on the modern stage, which invites the audience to interpret everything they see and encourages a state of “total semiotization” in which there exists no “event, no matter how gratuitous or unsought for. . . that a modern audience would be unable to close with.”^[7] In other words, Hawkes believes that the circle of meaningful representation in theatre now encompasses any event that takes place in and around a performance, which includes the curtain call, despite that practice’s traditional closure “to critical discussion.” Moreover, Hawkes suggests that curtain calls, far from signifying only unconsciously and accidentally, often reflect explicitly on the semiotic system that preceded them. “Actors rehearse” their bows, Hawkes notes; they circumscribe their behavior to suit the moment. Having just played Hamlet, an actor will not “laugh or caper about as a man might who has scored (in the soccer fashion) a success.” In short, the theatrical event that precedes the curtain call limits what performers can do in the curtain call itself. The curtain call represents, then, not a moment after the play so much as the play’s “edge,” which appears to the audience immediately before the play’s ultimate disappearance.^[8]

Director William Ball emphasizes that theatrical traditions and actors’ egos play their own crucial role in staging a proper curtain call. For instance, Ball insists that curtain calls be kept short and also create a natural dramatic arc by inspiring a crescendo of applause. He identifies the curtain call as a “disciplined ritual,” in which performers should bow simply, accepting audience praise “with ritual gratitude.”^[9] Ball’s emphatic reuse of the word “ritual” underlines the curtain call’s obedience to codes of behavior as strict as those that mark the performance of the play itself. Moreover, to actors, the curtain call adds an essential layer of meaning that Hawkes leaves out. The order in which actors bow and the strength of the audience’s applause reveal to the actor the relative success of her performance. This fact challenges a director staging the bows for, say, *Romeo and Juliet*, in which Mercutio’s performance has likely inspired more audience adoration than Romeo’s. Ball recommends directors bring the two lovers out together after Mercutio, thus ensuring the necessary crescendo.^[10] In determining the order of the curtain call, the director gives a “profoundly significant signal of approval” to the actor.^[11] Doing right by performers when staging the curtain call influences the quality of an actor’s performance: “if the actor feels betrayed, he won’t act well.”^[12] Ball thus reverses Hawkes’ line of causality between play and curtain call. For Hawkes, the performance determines the actor’s possible behavior during the curtain call. Ball emphasizes rather that the curtain call’s staging affects the actor’s ego and, therefore, the quality of the actor’s performance.

Bert States, like Hawkes, recognizes that character persists during the curtain call, “remain[ing] in the actor, like a ghost.”^[13] Yet States also stresses that the bowing actor performs not only herself and the character, but also her vulnerability as a performer, particularly by revealing the residual effects of her labor. In States’s words, the actor cannot, “refuse to display his ‘wounds’: the paint, the perspiration, the breathlessness, all the traces of having been through the role—or the role, like a fever, having been through him. Even the trace of fatigue . . . is in order because it suggests that this was hard work.”^[14]

These theorists of the curtain call all agree that the curtain call means something in relation to the play that it ends. They view the curtain call as a multi-layered performance that inflects the quality of the theatrical event that preceded it, reflects the tenor of the dramatic proceedings, and offers the labor of performance for the audience’s consideration. At this “seam” between the “fiction of the play” and the “fiction of manners,” audiences and actors alike return to the real world through this ritual that sews together reality and dream.^[15] As Nicholas Ridout summarizes, the theater’s “machinery of representation. . . still generat[es] sparks of representation that contaminate. . . a straight face-to-face

encounter” between actors and audience.[\[16\]](#) The curtain call, far from a merely pro forma theatrical ritual, still shimmers with meaning accrued from and borne by the just-concluded performance.

All of the elements that these writers—Hawkes, Ball, States, and Ridout—recognize in the curtain call resonate, too, in bow and exit music. Yet bow and exit music, far from merely duplicating the above functions, retune the way audiences interpret the production, receive performers’ labor, and transition from the play back into the rest of their lives.

Typology

To understand how precisely bow and exit music expand the rich phenomenal experience of the non-musical curtain call, we must first address the fact that bow and exit music are, as a rule, not original musical compositions. Rather, they repeat (sometimes with variations) music that the audience has already heard in the show. Bow and exit music thus present a fundamentally different interpretive problem than the related practice of end credit music in film and television. End credits for today’s prestige television programs often employ a popular song that shapes how audiences interpret the episode that has just ended.[\[17\]](#) But that song only rarely features in the episode itself. These “novel musical postfaces,” as musicologist Annette Davison names them, speak from entirely outside the show, offering an external, sometimes jarring, commentary.[\[18\]](#) Musicals, by contrast, provide their own musical material for the curtain call. As post-show underscoring, bow and exit music may not be part of the theatrical performance, but the songs they rehearse *were* part of that performance.

Bow and exit music thus also diverge from historical uses of music at the end of a performance. Music, of course, plays an important role in most Western theatrical traditions dating back to Greek tragedy. Many theatres use song (and sometimes dance) to close an evening’s entertainments. Such songs may be chosen for their energy, to provide the audience with an extra dose of good cheer on their journey home. Bow and exit music are often selected for the same purpose. But where other traditions draw on popular music from outside the show, bow and exit music are composed from internal musical ideas. They do not simply extend the performance event by providing extra music, but rather extend the music *of* the theatrical event into the performance event.

The musical relationship between bow and exit music and the musical itself takes four basic forms. The first type of bow and exit music is no music whatsoever. *Porgy & Bess*, *Carousel*, *Allegro*, and *West Side Story* include no bow music in their printed scores.[\[19\]](#) These shows follow closely the operetta or opera tradition, in which, after the final chord, one neither can nor should say more, musically.

The second and third types (the most popular) feature a single song for the bow music, often a show’s trademark number. The song can appear either with lyrics or without. A charming example of a single song with lyrics comes from *Kiss Me, Kate*, in which the cast sings “Brush Up Your Shakespeare” as they bow, but with new a couplet: “So tonight just recite to your matie / ‘Kiss me, Kate, Kiss me, Kate, Kiss me, Katie.’”[\[20\]](#) *Babes in Arms* ends with a full cast version of “Where or When”; *Cabaret*’s cast bows to a company rendition of the title song; and *Damn Yankees* closes with everyone singing about “Heart.”[\[21\]](#)

Alternatively—the third category—the single song might appear without lyrics, in a purely orchestral guise. This is the case for *Guys and Dolls*, in which a reprise of the title song serves first as the finale, sung by

the entire company. Composer and lyricist Frank Loesser then repurposes the same number for the bows. The score notes simply: “Repeat Orch[estra] only for Curtain calls.”^[22] *My Fair Lady* harps on “I Could Have Danced All Night”; *The Music Man* trumpets “Seventy-six Trombones”; Stephen Sondheim's *A Little Night Music* circles back to “Night Waltz I” from the Entr'acte.^[23]

Finally, some shows feature a medley, as Sondheim's *Follies* does, with bow music that includes fragments of “Who’s That Woman?” and “Beautiful Girls.”^[24] *Funny Girl*'s bows take place mostly to the rousing “Don't Rain on My Parade,” but transition to the ballad “People” near the end.^[25]

Summarizing bow music’s four general categories, we have: none; single song with lyrics; single song without lyrics; and medley. Each of those forms encourages a different array of interpretations, as the short examples above hint. Thus, the choice among these types, as well as the specific songs chosen, reflect and inflect our understanding of a musical.

Representational Strategies

Single Songs and Themes

Let us consider now how bow music sustains the fundamental dichotomy of all curtain calls, that between the representational apparatus of the text and the phenomenal experience of the performance. The simplest way to bring closure to the theatrical event is simply to restate the central theme of the musical, usually with a single song. While, as I explain below, productions pick single songs for non-artistic reasons, too, a well-chosen single song can neatly reinforce the intellectual and emotional experience of the play. For example, the single song without lyrics accompanying *Fiddler on the Roof*'s curtain call is, unsurprisingly, “Tradition.”^[26] The same song opens the show, serves as the show’s thematic center, and represents a natural choice for the bows. Yet the choice of an upbeat and rousing final tune can also work against the rest of the play. *Man of La Mancha*'s “The Impossible Dream” became that show’s popular standard, yet the title song appears as the bow music, selected perhaps for its driving rhythm. That choice is particularly odd given that the play’s final moments depict Cervantes and his servant’s departure to face the Inquisition, while the cast sings “Impossible Dream.” The driving bombast of the title song, repeated as the bow music, tramples “Impossible Dream”’s memorable rising melody and drowns out the play's stoic and moving final strains.^[27] The show’s creators might well have heeded one Broadway music director’s warning that the selection of bow and exit music “should be made with regard to the audience's experience of the show.”^[28]

For some concept musicals of the 1970s, the single song’s emphatic closure was itself a dangerous trap. Unlike Golden Age musicals with clear resolutions, concept musicals often thrive on uncertainty and open-endedness. Nonetheless, many of those same shows sought to retain ties to the earlier tradition and devised new strategies for using bow and exit music to reinforce their shows’ thematic opposition to closure. Consider, for instance, *A Chorus Line*, one of the finest examples of the musical as meta-theater. The show's subject—the life of a Broadway chorister—organized and inspired the show’s creative process and determined the musical’s narrative structure. Strikingly, the show maintains its vertiginous metatheatrical sensibility in the curtain call, or rather, in the lack thereof. As the playscript notes: “Lights fade on ‘Rockette’ kick line [at the end of ‘One’] . . . After singers cut off, orchestra continues vamp phrase, very loud, until cut off cue from stage manager. There are no additional ‘Bows’ after this—leaving the audience with an image of a kick line that goes on forever.”^[29] The stage directions suggest both the

oppressive repetitiveness of the chorister's life in the "very loud" vamp, and, in the refusal to offer the performers for bows, a gesture towards the absence of closure as the show's meaning. That is, although an individual chorister's career may end, the chorus line "goes on forever." *A Chorus Line* acts against audience expectations about the curtain call-as-closure to deny the finality that the moment usually provides, while still working within the single-song paradigm described above.

Pippin, like *A Chorus Line*, is a highly metatheatrical show. The printed piano-vocal score of Stephen Schwartz's work includes No. 36 "Bows," consisting of the opening number, "Magic to Do," with lyrics.^[30] Schwartz seems to have imagined traditional bows, in which the company closes by celebrating the illusions they had promised the audience at the start of the show. The play, however, ends in a state of extreme anxiety about the "magic" of play-making and needed a different kind of sonic curtain call. In director Bob Fosse's ingenious staging—as captured on video of the touring production—the bows make meaning not through music, but through speech.^[31] The play, a sort of *bildungspiel* about a sensitive son of King Charlemagne, takes place within the frame of a commedia troupe's performance. Everything goes drastically awry in the musical's final scene when Pippin declares his independence from the show. The Leading Player then strips Pippin, his wife Catherine, and their son of costumes, lights, and music. "Orchestra, pack up your fiddles. Get your horns. Let's go," orders the Lead Player. Then, to the pianist, who has been vamping throughout the last scene: "Take your damn hands off that keyboard." The Leading Player then snarls at Pippin, "You try singing without music sweetheart." Pippin complies, singing a few a cappella bars of the finale. Catherine speaks:

CATHERINE Pippin ... do you feel that you've compromised?

PIPPIN No.

CATHERINE Do you feel like a coward?

PIPPIN No.

CATHERINE How do you feel ...?

PIPPIN Trapped ... but happy ... (*He looks from one to the other and smiles*) which isn't too bad for the end of a musical comedy. Ta-da! ^[32]

The three then bow and "*the curtain comes down.*"

At this point, the curtain call is extremely fraught. The end of the play hinges on Pippin and his family's escape from the mode of representation, a fact wryly acknowledged in Pippin's reference to "a musical comedy" and in their bowing. If the production returned to the typical mode of closure for a musical, using Schwartz's music cue for the bows, it would have evacuated the meaning that the show's final moments had so carefully constructed. Fosse solved this problem by having the cast members announce each other with a handheld mic, to no musical accompaniment. Only after introducing the cast (and then the conductor) by name, does the company sing a reprise of "Magic to Do." This curtain call thus has an unusual soundtrack: the names of the performers. Fosse's choice emphasizes actors over characters and assumes a stance explicitly outside the make-believe world of the play. *Pippin* thus continues the tradition of the sonically scored curtain call, and even returns to the single-song format eventually. But by replacing music with the actors' names, Fosse's *Pippin* production closed in the metatheatrical spirit that pervaded the rest of the play and defined its ending.

Medleys and Characters

While *Pippin* uses sound during the curtain call to question the possibility of closure and to critique representation itself, other shows use music to reinforce the representational apparatus. Music, for instance, can act like a costume, a residue of character that clings to the actors as they receive the audience's applause. The Harold Prince/Chelsea Theater version of *Candide*, for example, uses medley to rich effect, as the principals take their calls accompanied by songs associated with their characters.^[33] The company bows first to "Battle Music," Paquette and Maximillian to "Life is Happiness Indeed," the Old Lady to the Spanish chorus from "Easily Assimilated," Candide and Cunegonde to "Oh Happy We," and Voltaire to "Bon Voyage." The entire company then sings the latter song's final chorus. Music works here almost leitmotivically; the songs index character. But unlike a truly Wagnerian leitmotiv, which metamorphoses along with the changing circumstances of its referent, the melodies in the bow music remain fixed to specific conceptions of character. The music therefore restricts how we read character while the actors bow. Consider particularly Candide and Cunegonde, who find redemption in their final musical number when they accept a simple, quotidian existence and embrace the nobility of work and family. When the couple bow, they do so to the music of their Act I duet, in which Candide's dream of a modest life clashes with Cunegonde's fantasies of wealth. Certainly, "Oh Happy We"'s elegant, spry melody makes livelier bow music than the hymn-like finale, "Make Our Garden Grow." But the journey of these two characters to arrive at the finale's insights washes away in the return of the former tune, which, even if we have forgotten the lyrics, evokes instability in its irregular meter. The choice of music suggests an actor playing Oedipus who, before bowing, washes the bloody makeup from his eyes and changes into a clean tunic. The bloodied costume that clings to a bowing actor signals the Oedipus who has been through a journey. But the choice of music for Candide and Cunegonde here erases their journey. The selection of "Oh Happy We" for the bows may very well be self-consciously ironic. Whether the production used this tune wittingly or not, the musical underscoring instructs us to read character in a particular way.

A slightly different effect arises from the leitmotivic medley at the end of Trevor Nunn's revival of *Oklahoma!*^[34] The curtain call is a dance number, fully choreographed by Susan Stroman. First, the men's and women's choruses and featured dancers bow to "The Farmer and the Cowman," then Ali Hakim to his solo number, "It's a Scandal! It's a Outrage!," then Will and Ado Annie to "All er Nothin'." Aunt Eller, then Curly and Laurey all bow to "Beautiful Mornin'," a fittingly bucolic tune that was also the show's finale. Before this final trio appears, the antagonist, Jud, bows to the bathetic duet he sings with Curly, "Poor Jud is Daid." The noble theme, as sounded in William David Brohn's orchestration for brass choir, underscores not Jud's function as a melodramatic villain, but rather his humanity. Indeed, the song reminds us, if we recall the words, that Jud *is* dead, and that *Oklahoma!* resolves at the expense of Jud's life. If Jud bowed instead to his aria, "Lonely Room," a twitching, minor key number, full of clustering dissonances, our reception of that character during the bows would differ significantly.^[35]

Nunn adds one further flourish after all the actors have bowed: the entire company gathers in a group to reprise the choral section of the title song. As a quick key to the implications of this gesture, consider Andrea Most's reading of *Oklahoma!* Most suggests that "anyone willing and able to perform the songs and dances can join" the community of a musical.^[36] But neither Jud nor Ali Hakim is on stage to sing "Oklahoma" during the play's wedding scene. Nunn's decision to have them sing with the full company here thus suggests that these two characters, identified by Most as outsiders, are actually integral to the community, as I have argued elsewhere.^[37] When Jud and Ali Hakim sing "Oklahoma" with the full company, the tensions necessary to create a stable community come to the fore. The audience recognizes that the community cannot make Oklahoma without the internal pressure provided by Jud and Ali Hakim.

In the full company reprise of the title song during the bows, those two purported outsiders perform their true status as insiders. The Nunn production's bow music helps us better interpret these characters.

Bow music can thus be another residue of character, like a costume. Medleys prove particularly useful forms for this use of bow music because the medley allows the bow music to speak directly to each character by playing that character's best-known tune. But by selecting a melody for each character, bow music cues specific aspects of a character, adding a last moment of semiotic representation that draws on and revises what we have experienced in the rest of the show.

Commercial Strategies

The original production of *Oklahoma!*, as captured in the score and in a published playscript, ends not with the now-famous title song, but with a full company reprise of the duet "People Will Say We're in Love."^[38] In many ways, the song is a bizarre choice for the bows, being neither an anthem for the show nor for the company, but rather a private song for Curly and Laurey. Indeed, the number's conceit is that the lovers should not show public affection because the community might comment on it. Yet during the bows, the whole cast sings it. Why?

Because the production team expected the song to be a hit. This factor, the song's potential economic afterlife, is the final—and perhaps most important—function of the musical curtain call. That is, bow music cues the audience to buy a cast album. In this respect, the musical theater's bows differ significantly from those of non-musicals. As Nicholas Ridout observes, although all curtain calls "conclude a market transaction," because the actual economics of the performance were "sorted out before the curtain even rose," the curtain call's applause (and the performers' acceptance of applause) forms part of a gift economy.^[39] But in many musicals, both musical motifs and commercial motives underscore this gift exchange between the audience and the actors. Bow music, for such musicals, answers the demands of commerce: which tune is most salable? Thus, Gershwin's *Girl Crazy* wraps up with "Embraceable You" before jumping to "I've Got Rhythm"; Rodgers and Hart's *Pal Joey* signs off with "I Could Write a Book" (in fairness, about half of the songs from that show have hit potential); and the same authors' *The Boys from Syracuse* goes back to "Falling in Love with Love."^[40] I noted above that *Funny Girl*'s curtain call music transitions from "Don't Rain on My Parade" to "People." I conjecture that the change in tune cued star Barbra Streisand's entrance. Both songs became huge hits and remain associated with Streisand, but only "People" put Streisand on Billboard charts in 1964. Indeed, she had recorded that number as a single even prior to the show's premiere.^[41]

This economic imperative is so insistent that the great production team of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II refused to let bow music's commercial potential pass them by, even in their shows without bow music. As noted above, some of the pair's most high-minded works, such as *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, and *The Sound of Music*, follow the operatic tradition and include no bow music. Those shows do, however, include scored exit music, music to be played while the audience leaves the theater. Exit music does not distinguish itself enough from bow music formally to merit a separate discussion. It does, however, underline how much these last two musical numbers speak to the musical theater's commercial interest. For if bow music, due to the presence of the actors, contains traces of its representational function alongside its economic imperatives, exit music seems to have given up representation entirely. Exit music exists almost solely to worm a catchy tune into the audience's ear. One guide to writing a musical explains that exit music supplies "the flavour that will be left in the

public's ear, the one you want them to keep humming as they make their way to the lobby and perhaps buy on cassette or compact disc."^[42] Thus, *South Pacific's* exit music is "Some Enchanted Evening" (a number one hit for Perry Como in 1949), which leads into "Bali Ha'i"; *The King and I* features "Whistle a Happy Tune" and then "Shall We Dance"; and *The Sound of Music* essentially repeats the entr'acte with a medley of the title song, "Do Re Mi," and "Sixteen Going on Seventeen."^[43] In the 1950s, these shows were big business; the albums for all three sat high on the Billboard Charts at various times.^[44] And although these three shows offer themselves for the audience's approval in silence during the curtain call, accepting the purer gift relationship suggested by Ridout, they immediately assume an actively commercial stance as the audience files out of the theater. Thus, if a show's representational economy recedes in the final moments of a performance event, through the use of bow and exit music, the economics of representation come to the fore.

Musical Labor

Exit music—and some bow music—thus faces as much towards the audience as towards the actors. That is, if one regards bow and exit music's "sparks of representation" (to use Ridout's phrase) as fundamentally coloring the fictional world of the play, the economic imperatives that undergird these musical numbers project outwards, into the audience, now figured as consumers. As I suggested above, the naked commercial desires in bow and exit music differ meaningfully from the ghosted economic exchange in the non-musical curtain call, as theorized by Ridout. But the dual model I have described thus far for bow and exit music remains fundamentally the same as that theorized by Hawkes, Ball, States, and Ridout. There remains one significant element of the curtain call hinted at by Ball and States that I have not yet addressed: labor.

Unlike non-musical curtain calls, curtain calls underscored by bow and exit music conspicuously divide labor between two groups of performers: actors and musicians. The usually invisible labor of technicians, not to mention the persistent but forgotten labor of countless other creative and administrative performers (house staff, casting agents, etc.), always ghosts the curtain call, and merits consideration in the general theory of curtain calls. But the case of musicians who play bow and exit music differs from that of backstage workers accustomed to having their labor go unacknowledged. In other circumstances, musicians can and do accept their own applause, not only for non-theatrical performances, but even in other categories of music drama such as opera. Silent curtain calls, by allowing on- and off-stage performers to rest together, equalize the labor of instrumentalists and stage performers.^[45] Such unity becomes more apparent when compared to musical theater's bow and exit musics, which undermine the integration of music and drama in the so-called integrated musical by so clearly dividing the laboring performers into two camps. During musical curtain calls, the actors transition towards their leisure time while the musicians continue to work. And in shows with exit music, a particularly speedy actor may be out the theater door before the musicians have played their final chord.

Just as William Ball suggests that the order in which actors bow can impact the quality of their performances, James H. Laster, advising aspiring music directors, suggests that exit music's liminality also informs its quality. A "young, inexperienced orchestra may feel that the exit music is not important," Laster warns. "But they need to be informed that their job is not finished until the cut-off at the last note of the exit music."^[46] Steve Suskin, author of a book on Broadway's orchestrators, hears not boredom or inattention, but rather joy in exit music. Embedded among the musicians for a performance of *Sweeney Todd*, Suskin explained the end of the show thus:

Everybody leaves; everybody except the orchestra, which plays the exit music. But it is a lighthearted group of musicians playing now: the drama is over, the tension is gone, the spell is broken. It is now merely music. [The music director] gives the final cutoff, the music ends with a crisp button from the brass, and we file out of the pit.[47]

Whether the musicians celebrate bow and exit music as a moment for relaxed improvisation or let their minds wander at the seemingly unimportant (and often unheard, beneath applause and chatter) end of a long performance, the fundamental disparity remains: musicians continue their labor in the musical theater well after other performers have ceased their own work.

And what of the labor that goes into creating bow and exit music? A show's orchestrator and her staff traditionally select and arrange the bow and exit music, often only in the last moments of a show's rehearsal process. Yet, while the final decision about such music occurs quite late, the tunes are frequently among the first written for the show because bow and exit music often derive from among a production's "utility" arrangements, arrangements made during the rehearsal period to fulfill practical needs in the rehearsal room. As Robert Russell Bennett, the dean of musical theater orchestrators, explains, "You take three, four, or five of the principal melodies and arrange them (with the tune in its original form complete in each case) so that, at the direction of the conductor, they may be played" by any section of the orchestra at any volume.[48] Such utility arrangements provide placeholder music for scene changes and underscoring, as well as the overture, entr'acte, and the "Chaser, Exit or Outmarch." [49] Each of these categories later receives "special treatment" as the production takes final form and as the orchestrator has time to focus on them individually. In Bennett's general narrative of an orchestrator's work, however, that time might arrive only during the final few preview performances.[50]

Two points here deserve underlining. First, in bow and exit music the orchestrator and team of arrangers announce themselves as essential members in the vast peripheral, artisanal workforce that crafts a Broadway show.[51] Their work on bow and exit music enhances both the artistic value of the show, when bow and exit music addresses the play's representational apparatus, and the production's economic value, when the exit music helps inspire sales of recordings. Second, bow and exit music, though the last elements of a show in performance, appear very early in the production process (at least, in their form as utilities). This fact strongly differentiates bow and exit music from the non-musical curtain call, which directors rarely think about until dress rehearsals. Although the production staff might settle on bow and exit music quite late in the process, the tunes from among which the staff chooses, far from being an afterthought, literally underscore the show's rehearsals. The practice of relying on utilities codifies those melodies as essential to the entire structure of the show: they are the beginning (overture), middle (entr'acte), and end (exit music), well before the company sets the rest of the show. As a result, songs written early, songs that captured a relatively primitive conception of a show, occupy a large sonic space in the rehearsal period.[52] Fundamentally, utilities reveal how much *work* a show's purely orchestral music does for the rest of a production. It is no coincidence that utilities are so called: they are, first and foremost, useful. Even if they later sound differently (or disappear entirely), they noisily—and, paradoxically, inconspicuously—underscore a significant portion of the production process. The utilities that become bow and exit music may end up as the musical last word or as an afterthought, but they are often also part of a show's origin.

Take a Bow

This article has considered how bow and exit music affect our interpretation of the musical theater, and particularly how these musical practices amplify the often discordant relationship between the musical's artistic and commercial aspirations. Like the curtain call that bow music underscores, bow and exit music occupy a strange border at the end of the theatrical event and near the end of the performance event. Despite a relatively narrow set of formal types available for bow and exit music, productions have used those musics to reinforce the show's theme, to revise the audience's understanding of character, and to promote the show's commercial afterlife in recordings. A longer analysis of a specific show might benefit from exploring more the choice of songs (particularly in relationship to the overture), and the details of tempi (usually moderate to fast), meter (usually duple), or arrangement (usually the same key and orchestration as an earlier iteration). One might also consider bow and exit music as utilized by a particular orchestrator, composer, director, etc. With a more comprehensive data set, one might explore how bow music changes from era to era, or from subgenre to subgenre. As I hope this sketch of bow and exit music's functions makes clear, musicals do not cease making meaning when the curtain falls, but actively and consciously continue to do so until the moment that an audience member steps out of hearing range of the orchestra. In other words, music performs in the musical theater longer than any other medium.

And when we listen to that music, we might have to reinterpret some shows. To conclude with one example, consider *The Pajama Game*, the Richard Adler and Jerry Ross musical of 1954. In a recent history of the musical theater, Larry Stempel accuses George Abbott, the show's original director and co-book writer, of avoiding politics. The plot concerns a struggle between management and labor at a pajama factory, a struggle that constrains the romance between a foreman and a shopworker/union leader. As Stempel notes, the show opened in the midst of the McCarthy hearings, a climate not amenable to claims for strong workers' rights. Citing Abbott's own statement denying any "propaganda" in the show, Stempel declares *Pajama Game* "militantly apolitical," with "no serious intent of any kind."^[53] As far as most of the show goes, Stempel is right, the politics are tepid. Even the finale plays up romantic fun rather than politics, with a version of the title song that accompanies a fashion parade, culminating with the appearance of the leads, Babe and Sid wearing only a pajama top and bottom, respectively. That number also functions as a curtain call; the principals appear in the appropriate order. The entire company then sings the title song's chorus.^[54] This is charming, but, as Stempel complains of the entire show, emphasizes the romantic plots at the expense of the management-labor conflict.

But then the company sings a different tune. They do not sing the ballad "Hey There," a hit for Rosemary Clooney in 1954.^[55] They do not sing the catchy love duet "There Once Was a Man." They do not sing the jazzy "Steam Heat," which featured iconic Bob Fosse choreography for Carol Haney. No, they sing none of the show's hits. Rather, the entire cast sings a march in six-eight time, which, while certainly energetic, is not memorable enough to sell an album. They sing the show's rallying labor cry:

Seven and a half cents doesn't buy a helluva lot,
Seven and a half cents doesn't mean a thing,
But give it to me every hour
Forty hours every week
That's enough for me to be
Livin' like a king.^[56]

This number's return, at this moment, is a striking political gesture, a reminder that behind the play's love stories lurks a serious economic struggle. This message, moreover, occupies what is traditionally the most overtly commercial moment in musical theater. We might, then, hear this bow music's explicit turn to economics as a wry wink at the function of bow and exit music itself. The number says in all seriousness that economic circumstances are at the root of contemporary life, even as it asks you to buy the recording when the performance ends, that is, when the music finally stops.^[57]

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^[1] Diegetic music forms part of the narrative world of a play; characters within the narrative frame can hear it and/or produce it. Only the audience hears non-diegetic music. For example, in *The Pajama Game*, "Steam Heat" is a diegetic number, a literal performance in which three characters dance and sing for their fellow union members. "Hey There" is non-diegetic: the character Sid Sorokin does not sing; the actor does.

^[2] Meredith Willson, *But He Doesn't Know the Territory* (St. Paul: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 153-154.

^[3] Phil Powrie and Guido Heldt, "Introduction: Trailers, Titles, and End Credits," *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image* 8 (2014), 111.

^[4] See, for example, Bernard Rosenberg and Ernest Harburg, *The Broadway Musical: Collaboration in Commerce and Art* (New York: NYU Press, 1993) and Steven Adler, *On Broadway: Art and Commerce on the Great White Way* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004).

^[5] Michael V. Pisani, *Music for the Melodramatic Theatre in Nineteenth-Century London & New York* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014).

^[6] For a theory of the boundaries between the theatrical and the performance event, see Richard Schechner, "Drama, Script, Theater, Performance," in *Performance Theory* (London: Routledge, 2003). Scholars of film titles and end credits seem to prefer Gérard Genette's language of "paratext" to describe those musical practices. See Powrie and Heldt, "Introduction: Trailers, Titles, and End Credits," 111-112.

^[7] Terence Hawkes, "Opening Closure," *Modern Drama* 24 (1981), 355-356. Hawkes offers the example of a pimple on an actor's nose as an unintentional element that audience members might "be prepared to acknowledge, interpret, and even perhaps to applaud."

^[8] Hawkes, "Opening Closure," 356.

- ^[9] William Ball, *A Sense of Direction* (New York: Drama Publishers, 1980), 143.
- ^[10] Ball, *A Sense of Direction*, 145. Ball cites other plays such as *Othello*, *The Three Sisters*, and *The Man Who Came to Dinner* that pose similar problems in balancing star supporting turns against the work of a relatively unsympathetic lead.
- ^[11] Ball, *A Sense of Direction*, 145.
- ^[12] Ball, *A Sense of Direction*, 146. Dressing room assignments are, Ball notes, similarly loaded status symbols for actors, and, like curtain calls, can affect an actor's work on stage.
- ^[13] Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 199.
- ^[14] States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms*, 203.
- ^[15] States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms*, 203.
- ^[16] Nicholas Ridout, *Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 162.
- ^[17] See Annette Davison, “The End is Nigh: Music Postfaces and End-Credit Sequences in Contemporary Television Serials,” *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image* 8 (2014) for an explanation of this practice's origins and uses in *The Sopranos*.
- ^[18] Davison, “The End is Nigh,” 197. Davison observes that some shows have begun linking end credit music more closely to the preceding episode's “sound world” (212).
- ^[19] George Gershwin, Du Bose Heyward, and Ira Gerswhin, *Porgy and Bess (Piano-Vocal Score)* (New York: Gershwin Publishing Corporation/Chappell & Co., Inc., 1935); Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, *Carousel (Piano-Vocal Score)* (New York: Williamson, 1945); Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, *Allegro (Piano-Vocal Score)* (New York: Williamson, 1948); Leonard Bernstein, Arthur Laurents, Stephen Sondheim, and Jerome Robbins, *West Side Story (Piano Vocal Score)* (New York: G. Schirmer, Inc. and Chappell & Co., Inc., 1959).
- ^[20] Cole Porter, *Kiss Me, Kate (Piano-Vocal Score)* Chappell & Co., Inc., 1967), No. 24a “Grand Finale—Last Curtain.”
- ^[21] Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart, *Babes in Arms (Piano-Vocal Score)* Chappell & Co., Inc., 1960), No. 23 Curtain Calls; John Kander and Fred Ebb, *Cabaret (Piano-Vocal Score)* Times Square Music Publications Company, 1968), Curtain Calls (No. 29); Richard Adler and Jerry Ross, *Damn Yankees (Piano-Vocal Score)* Frank Music Corp., 1957), No. 33 Heart (Bows).
- ^[22] Frank Loesser, *Guys and Dolls (Piano-Vocal Score)* Frank Music Corp., 1953), “The Happy Ending.”
- ^[23] Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe, *My Fair Lady (Piano-Vocal Score)* Chappell & Co., 1958),

Music for Curtain Calls (No. 27); Meredith Willson, *The Music Man (Piano-Vocal Score)* Frank Music Corp., 1958), Curtain Call Music (No. 26); Stephen Sondheim, *A Little Night Music (Piano-Vocal Score)* Revelation Music Publishing Corp. & Rilting Music, Inc., 1974), Bows (No. 33).

^[24] Stephen Sondheim, *Follies (Piano-Vocal Score)* Range Road Music Inc., Quartet Music Inc., Rilting Music Inc., and Burthen Music Company, Inc., 1971), No. 20 Bows.

^[25] Jule Styne, *Funny Girl (Piano-Vocal Score)* Chappell-Styne, Inc. and Wonderful Music Corp., 1964), Curtain and Exit Music (No. 30).

^[26] Sheldon Harnick and Jerry Bock, *Fiddler on the Roof (Piano-Vocal Score)* Sunbeam Music Corp., 1965), Music for Bows (No. 34).

^[27] Mitch Leigh, Joe Darion, and Dale Wasserman, *Man of La Mancha (Piano-Vocal Score)*, Revised ed. (Greenwich, CT: Cherry Lane Music Co., 1965), Bows (No. 30). The show does, however, conclude No. 31 Exit Music with “The Impossible Dream.”

^[28] Joseph Church, *Music Direction for the Stage: A View from the Podium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 240.

^[29] James Kirkwood, Michael Bennett, and Nicholas Dante, *A Chorus Line* (New York: Applause Books, 1995), 145.

^[30] Stephen Schwartz and Roger O. Hirson, *Pippin (Piano-Vocal Score)* CPP/Belwin, Inc., 1988).

^[31] *Pippin, His Life and Times*, dir. David Sheehan (Tulsa: VCI Home Video, 2000), DVD.

^[32] Stephen Schwartz and Roger O. Hirson, *Pippin: A Musical Comedy* (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1975), 83.

^[33] Leonard Bernstein et al., *Candide (Piano-Vocal Score)* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1976), Bows (No. 22). The printed score includes stage directions and dialogue from the Prince production. Those directions indicate that, when the curtain rises after the finale, “*the COMPANY pours out onto the ramps [around the seating area] as the PRINCIPALS take their bows in the order of their precedence to the following music*” (230). Bracketed character names above particular measures in the score indicate when in the number each character appears. The score of the original production included no bow music (Leonard Bernstein, Lillian Hellman, and Richard Wilbur, *Candide (Piano-Vocal Score)* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1958)), while the authorized Boosey & Hawkes edition (Leonard Bernstein, Hugh Wheeler, and Richard Wilbur, *Candide (Piano-Vocal Score)* (New York: Jalni Publications, Inc. and Boosey & Hawkes, 1994)) does include No. 28 Bows. That number appears to be the final section of the Overture (bars 231-287), minus ten bars of melody from the upper woodwinds.

^[34] A film documents this production’s incarnation at the Royal National Theatre in London. *Oklahoma!*, dir. Trevor Nunn (Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2003), DVD.

^[35] Perhaps not entirely coincidentally, actor Shuler Hensley’s performance as Jud was exceptionally well

received. Hensley received multiple awards for his performance, including the Olivier, Tony, and Drama Desk Awards for Supporting Actor in a Musical. "Awards," *Oklahoma!* (2002), Internet Broadway Database, <http://ibdb.com/production.php?id=12938>, accessed 26 May 2015.

^[36] Andrea Most, "'We Know We Belong to the Land': The Theatricality of Assimilation in Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!*," *PMLA* 113, no. 1 (1998), 79.

^[37] Derek Miller, "'Underneath the Ground': Jud and the Community in *Oklahoma!*," *Studies in Musical Theatre* 2, no. 2 (2008).

^[38] Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, *Oklahoma!* (New York: Williamson, 1943), Finale Ultimo (No. 29).

^[39] Ridout, *Stage Fright*, 162, 164.

^[40] George Gershwin, Ira Gershwin, Guy Bolton, and John McGowan, *Girl Crazy (Piano-Vocal Score)* (New York: New World Music Corp., 1954), Final II (No. 25); Richard Rodgers, Lorenz Hart, and John O'Hara, *Pal Joey (Piano-Vocal Score)* (New York: Chappell & Co., 1962), Curtain Calls (I Could Write a Book); Richard Rodgers, Lorenz Hart, and George Abbott, *The Boys from Syracuse (Piano-Vocal Score)* (New York: Chappell & Co., 1965), No. 20 Curtain Music.

^[41] As one biographer explains, "Barbra agreed to go into the studio and record ['People'] as a single. But since Capitol Records, not Columbia, was to record the cast album, Columbia executives were reluctant to do anything to promote *Funny Girl*. In the end, they agreed to release the single only if 'People' was on the B side of the record. Columbia would do little to promote the song, instead focusing their efforts on the A side, 'I Am Woman.'" Christopher Anderson, *Barbra: The Way She Is* (New York: William Morrow, 2006), 119. Despite Columbia's lack of interest, that single spent 12 weeks on the Billboard Hot 100, peaking at number five. Joel Whitburn, *Pop Memories 1890-1954: The History of American Popular Music* (Menomonee Falls, WI: Record Research, Inc., 1986).

^[42] Stephen Citron, *The Musical: From the Inside Out* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), 257. The author notes, even more practically, that up-tempo exit music also "facilitate[s] clearing the aisles" more quickly.

^[43] Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, *South Pacific (Piano-Vocal Score)* (New York: Williamson, 1949), Exit Music (No. 49); Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, *The King and I (Piano-Vocal Score)* (New York: Williamson, 1951), Exit Music (No. 46); Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, *The Sound of Music (Piano-Vocal Score)* (New York: Williamson, 1960), No. 47 Exit Music. "Some Enchanted Evening" spent five weeks at number one for Perry Como (his B side, "Bali Ha'i," hit number five), while also reaching the top 10 on recordings by Bing Crosby, Jo Stafford, Frank Sinatra, Ezio Pinza (the song's originator in his role as Emile de Becque), and Paul Weston. Whitburn, *Pop Memories*.

^[44] *South Pacific* appeared on the pop charts at number seven on 21 May 1949; number one was *Kiss Me, Kate*. Within two weeks, *South Pacific* was the best-selling popular music LP in the country, where it remained for 69 weeks, ultimately spending 400 weeks on the top charts. Laurence Maslon, *The South*

Pacific Companion (New York: Fireside, 2008), 153. *The King and I* performed the least well, hovering around number four (for both 75s and 33s) in summer and fall 1951. *The Sound of Music* spent 276 weeks on Billboard's Top 200, including 16 weeks at number one. Joel Whitburn, *The Billboard Albums*, 6th ed. (Menomonee Falls, WI: Record Research, Inc., 2006).

^[45] I sense some condescension in how conductors accept audience accolades on behalf of the orchestra, particularly when the conductor joins the actors or singers on stage, leaving the musicians in the pit below. The disparity between conductor and instrumentalist seems slightly less wide in musicals, even if the conductor bows quickly for the audience during the bow music, perhaps because such a gesture permits the orchestra a fleeting moment of performance without the conductor's guidance. Or, as one writer makes the same point negatively: "Providing the playing of the bow music will not fall apart if the conductor stops beating time, he can acknowledge [the actors' pointing at the orchestra during bows] by turning and bowing to the audience." James H. Laster, *So You're the New Musical Director!: An Introduction to Conducting a Broadway Musical* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2001), 146.

^[46] Laster, *So You're the New Musical Director!*, 127.

^[47] Steven Suskin, *The Sound of Broadway Music: A Book of Orchestrators and Orchestrations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 289. Broadway music director Joseph Church affirms Suskin's view that exit music achieves an "informality" that "reflects the relaxation of the theater experience in its closing moments." Church, *Music Direction for the Stage*, 240.

^[48] Robert Russell Bennett, *Instrumentally Speaking* (Melville, NY: Belwin-Mills Publishing Corp., 1975), 107.

^[49] Bennett, *Instrumentally Speaking*, 107. Bennett suggests that, among these standard orchestral numbers, only the overture regularly merits careful attention, and not much care at that. Even a "fancy permanent" or "New York overture," as Bennett wryly calls it, earns little more than a single orchestral read-through before opening night. A 1951 *New Yorker* profile of Bennett opens describing the composition of *The King and I*'s overture, completed mere hours before the first tryout in New Haven. Herbert Warren Wind, "Another Opening, Another Show," *The New Yorker* (1951), 46. Today, overtures have become quite scarce, according to Joseph Church. Church, *Music Direction for the Stage*, 239.

^[50] Bennett, *Instrumentally Speaking*, 111. Conductor Rob Berman recently affirmed that, while "composers might have some input" in choosing exit music, the selection derives usually from among the utilities. Exit music remains "one of the last pieces of music created for a show." Robert Simonson and Kenneth Jones, "Ask Playbill.com: A Question About Exit Music and Musical," *Playbill.com*, <http://www.playbill.com/features/article/ask-playbill.com-a-question-about-exit-music-at-musicals-187760>.

^[51] Suskin, *Sound of Broadway Music* provides an excellent account of orchestrators and arrangers, who occupy the strange liminal space between creative artistry and technical labor that defines so much backstage work.

^[52] The situation differs, of course, for revivals, for which the score already exists. In such cases, the production staff may have even more creative energy to expend on overtures or bow and exit music, as

evidenced by the *Candide* and *Oklahoma!* revivals discussed above.

^[53] Larry Stempel, *Showtime: A History of the Broadway Musical Theater* (New York: Norton, 2010), 424.

^[54] Richard Adler and Jerry Ross, *The Pajama Game (Piano-Vocal Score)* Frank Music Corp., 1955), No. 25 “The Pajama Game—Closing.”

^[55] “Hey There” spent 24 weeks on *Billboard*’s “Honor Roll of Hits” (issues of 24 July 1954 to 1 January 1955), reaching number one in the 2 October 1954 issue (survey week ending 22 September) and remaining there through the issue of 13 November (survey week ending 3 November), for seven weeks at the top. Another song from the show, “Hernando’s Hideaway,” spent 18 weeks in the top twenty (issue of 29 May 1954 to 25 September 1954), but never reached number one. The “Honor Roll of Hits” combines sales of recordings and sheet music with juke box and radio performances.

^[56] Adler and Ross, *The Pajama Game*, No. 25a “Seven and a Half Cents—Reprise.”

^[57] For a list of piano-vocal scores consulted, many of which are also cited in the body of the essay, see my personal website, http://visualizingbroadway.com/broadway/bow_and_exit_music_table.html.



MARTIN E. SEGAL THEATRE CENTER
PUBLICATIONS

“On Bow and Exit Music” by Derek Miller

ISSN 2376-4236

The Journal of American Drama and Theatre

Volume 30, Number 1 (Fall 2017)

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New York NY 10016