



The Singer's Library

Like No Business I Know

BY BRIAN MANTERNACH

Two new books are sure to give singers aspiring to careers in musical theatre the know-how they need to succeed.

There's no business like show business." In the years since Irving Berlin wrote those words for Broadway in 1946, the "business" of launching and sustaining a career on the Great White Way has become increasingly complicated. For many productions, performers need highly developed triple-threat skills in acting, singing, and dancing. Vocally, it is a given that singers must understand *how* to sing in styles appropriate to musical theatre—but they also must know *what* to sing based on their castable "type." As potential employees, performers must also negotiate the world of agents, unions, practices, and procedures that are specific to the world of Broadway.

Thankfully, two new books address those very issues. In *The Musical Theater Codex: An Index of Songs by Character Type*, author Anita Endsley provides singers an extensive list of repertoire, arranged by both character type and voice type. By following the guidelines on how to identify the qualities that make up both types, Endsley's text will help singing actors zero in on the repertoire that will highlight their castability.

Meanwhile, in *The Business of Broadway: An Insider's Guide to Working, Producing, and Investing in the World's Greatest Theatre Community*, authors Mitch Weiss and Perri Gaffney break down the many facets that go into putting on a successful Broadway show. Readers will gain a clear picture of the many indispensable parts of the great Broadway machine—many of which are not seen onstage.

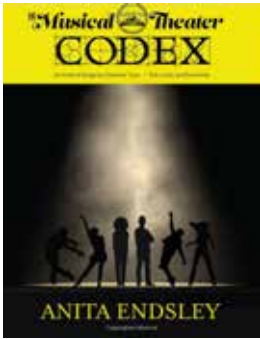


Brian Manternach

'The Musical Theater Codex'

In the brief introductory pages of *The Musical Theater Codex*, Endsley emphasizes the importance of understanding character type and refutes the idea that a type is defined entirely by a certain look. Rather, she expands the consideration to include physical "presence" and demeanor.

To help determine their own character type, she encourages readers to consider three questions:



- What characters are cast with actors that match my presence in profit-making theatre, television, and film?
- What characters have my vocal quality?
- What characters are written with my dependable vocal range?

In the operatic Fach system, voice quality, range, and size are often the most significant factors in casting, with character type being a secondary concern. For example, although the title character in *Madama Butterfly* is identified as a 15-year-old, it would be rare to find a teenager with the vocal technique and stamina to negotiate the range and tessitura (and volume!) of the role. Case in point, in the 2017–18 Metropolitan Opera production, the role is shared by two sopranos: 45-year-old He Hui and 43-year-old Ermonela Jaho. Because of the significant vocal demands, vocal type must take precedence over character type.

Conversely, in musical theatre, actors are expected to both look and sound the age of the characters they are playing. Since the title character in *Dear Evan Hansen* is a high school student, the directors of the 2016 Broadway production felt that 23-year-old Ben Platt had the right appearance, demeanor, and tone quality to convincingly play the role. Platt's Tony Award for Best Actor in a Musical would seem to confirm their judgment. It is unlikely that a gray-haired tenor with a robust chiaroscuro tone quality would be cast in the same role.

According to Endsley, by establishing an accurate picture of character type—and knowing how that may change over the length of a career—actors increase the plausibility that they will be hired. Therefore *The Musical Theater Codex* links voice type and character type to organize logical repertoire pairings.

Drawing from 178 musical scores from Broadway, off-Broadway, and regional productions dating from 1925 to the present, the 495-page book lists songs under the following categories:

- Solo songs by character type
- Solo songs by vocal type (soprano, alto, tenor, or baritone)
- Solo songs by composer
- Duet songs by character type and voicing
- Ensemble songs by voicing and age group

Each entry identifies the show, composer, year, role, song, tempo, vocal type, vocal range, and character type. As an example, readers can flip to the section

titled “Character Ingénue Female” to find nine pages of songs listed in order from oldest to newest. The first entry reads: “Show: *Crazy for You*, Year: 1926, Role: Polly Baker, Song: “Someone to Watch Over Me,” Tempo: Ballad, Vocal Type: Alto, Range-Bottom: Ab2, Range-Top: C4, Category: Lead.”

Other character-type categories include Romantic Lead Female, Ingénue Female, Character Female, Maternal, Mature Female, Juvenile Female, Romantic Antagonist Female, and Antagonist Female. There are corresponding lists for male singers, and both indicate whether a particular role is ethnically specific.

Duets can be accessed by their voicing (Bar/Alto, Sop/Sop, etc.) as well as by character type (CM/CF, MM/CIF, etc.), and ensembles are listed in order from oldest works to newest. This list, in addition to featuring the pertinent information listed in other categories, includes the requisite ensemble voicing (SATB, SA, etc.) and age group.

The Musical Theater Codex has innumerable uses. Singers of a particular voice type can browse the corresponding section to look for songs that fit their range and character types. In that same section, they can look for contrasting selections based on

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tempo, era, or composer. Similarly, singers with a well identified character type can peruse that section to see what other roles and songs may fall within that same category and to see if the vocal range fits their capabilities.

Endsley has indicated that in 2018 *The Musical Theater Codex*—a formidable, thoroughly researched collection—will be released in multiple volumes by voice type to make it smaller, specifically targeted, and more affordable for performers.

'The Business of Broadway'

In both opera and musical theatre, significant role preparation is crucial to the performer's process. Delving into the script and score builds an understanding of composer and lyricist intent, which helps actors know and express their characters more completely. Further study may explore the history of an opera or musical (placing it in context within a particular composer's oeuvre) as well as the performance history to analyze how previous performers have interpreted the work.

Weiss and Gaffney encourage a similar multilayered approach when researching the many roles available in the inner workings of the Broadway industry. These roles are explored in *The Business of Broadway*.

Part 1 of the book, *What Makes Broadway Tick*, provides detailed descriptions of the many jobs involved in a Broadway production, ranging from creative positions to supervisory, production, and consultant positions. An all-important chapter outlines "Who's in Charge, and What Are They in Charge Of?" and provides differentiation between the similarly named positions of general manager, company manager, production stage manager, stage manager, and house manager.

Actors may be aware of unions like the Actors' Equity Association (AEA), but Part 1 describes the function and purpose of 17 other unions that represent press agents, directors, choreographers, ticket sellers, scenic artists, stagehands, and custodians, among others.


Part 2, *Selling Tickets/It's Not What It Seems*, covers everything related to selling tickets, including marketing, press, promotion, advertising, merchandising, cast recordings, media, and critics. Part 3, *The Big Surprises*, addresses the financial aspects of producing, investing, and royalties. Part 4, *What the Pros Want You to Know*, outlines common misconceptions about what certain positions entail, relating firsthand "That's not my job" experiences. Part 5, *Budgets*, follows the money by showing a typical budgetary breakdown for a Broadway show.

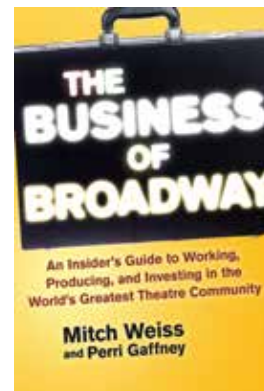
Finally, Part 6, *In Summary*, asks various people in the business to each provide a couple of paragraphs offering stories, advice, and reflections on their involvement in Broadway. Reminiscent of the *Sesame Street* song "People in Your Neighborhood," it profiles producers, general managers, stagehands, actors, a director of casting, company managers, and a head usher, among others.

Though the book's information comes from 2014–15, updated information and materials are available on the companion website at www.JustLearnSomething.us.

When employees in any field have a better awareness of the structures and chains of command within their workplace, they cannot help but have a clearer understanding of their own job expectations. For performers aspiring to be employed by a Broadway theater, knowing how their roles as employees differentiate from the roles of those around them is essential information. In this regard, Weiss and Gaffney's *The Business of Broadway* is a necessary reference guide for the modern, career-minded music theatre performer.

Let's go on with the show!

Brian Manternach is on the voice faculty of the University of Utah's Department of Theatre. In addition to his contributions to Classical Singer, he is an associate editor of the Journal of Singing. An active singer, he holds a doctor of music degree from the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music. Visit www.brianmanternach.com for more information or contact him at bmantern@gmail.com. 





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