

Crazy for You

Music by: George Gershwin **Lyrics by:** Ira Gershwin

Book by: Ken Ludwig

Co-conceived by: Ken Ludwig and Mike Ockrent

Inspired by *Girl Crazy*, a 1930 Gershwin musical with book
by Guy Bolton and John McGowan



A Guide for Study

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A Note for Readers

This Study Guide is intended as a resource for teachers, students, directors, performers, and anyone interested in the Gershwins’ *Crazy for You*, which premiered on Broadway in 1992 but has its roots in the earliest musical theatre. *Crazy for You* is loosely based on *Girl Crazy*, a 1930 Gershwin musical comedy. This study guide explores the historical and social context of both *Crazy for You* and *Girl Crazy*, the way in which the “New Gershwin Musical Comedy” came to be, and the background of the show’s characters. You can find discussion questions and activities sprinkled throughout, several of which refer you to the CD you will find on the inside cover. Keep an eye out for the following icons:



Critical Thinking



Links and More Info



Listening Activity



Viewing Activity



Writing Activity

Feel free to use this Study Guide as it suits your needs—use it in order and in its entirety, or take a single section and use it independently. If you’d like more information on any of the various topics covered in this guide, check out the list of References at the end!

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What is Musical Theatre?

Musical Theatre is defined by Wikipedia as “a form of theatre combining music, songs, spoken dialogue and dance.”

So, what does this mean? It means that Musical Theatre is the most collaborative of performance art forms. Musical theatre blends acting, dance, and music together into a cohesive whole that, if done well, will seamlessly transition from one medium to another to convey the story. All three performance aspects are used to develop characters, reveal plot points, and convey the emotions of the piece.

You may have heard about modern musicals such as *Grease*, *RENT*, *Wicked*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Legally Blonde*. Or, you may have seen *Chicago*, *Hairspray*, or *Sweeney Todd* at the movie theatre or on DVD.



However, Musical Theatre has not always been what it is today. If you saw *The Sound of Music* or *West Side Story* on video when you were a kid, then you know firsthand how much Musical Theatre has changed from the time those movies came out in the 1960s until now.

Girl Crazy, the show that *Crazy for You* is loosely based upon, comes from an even earlier era—the 1930s.

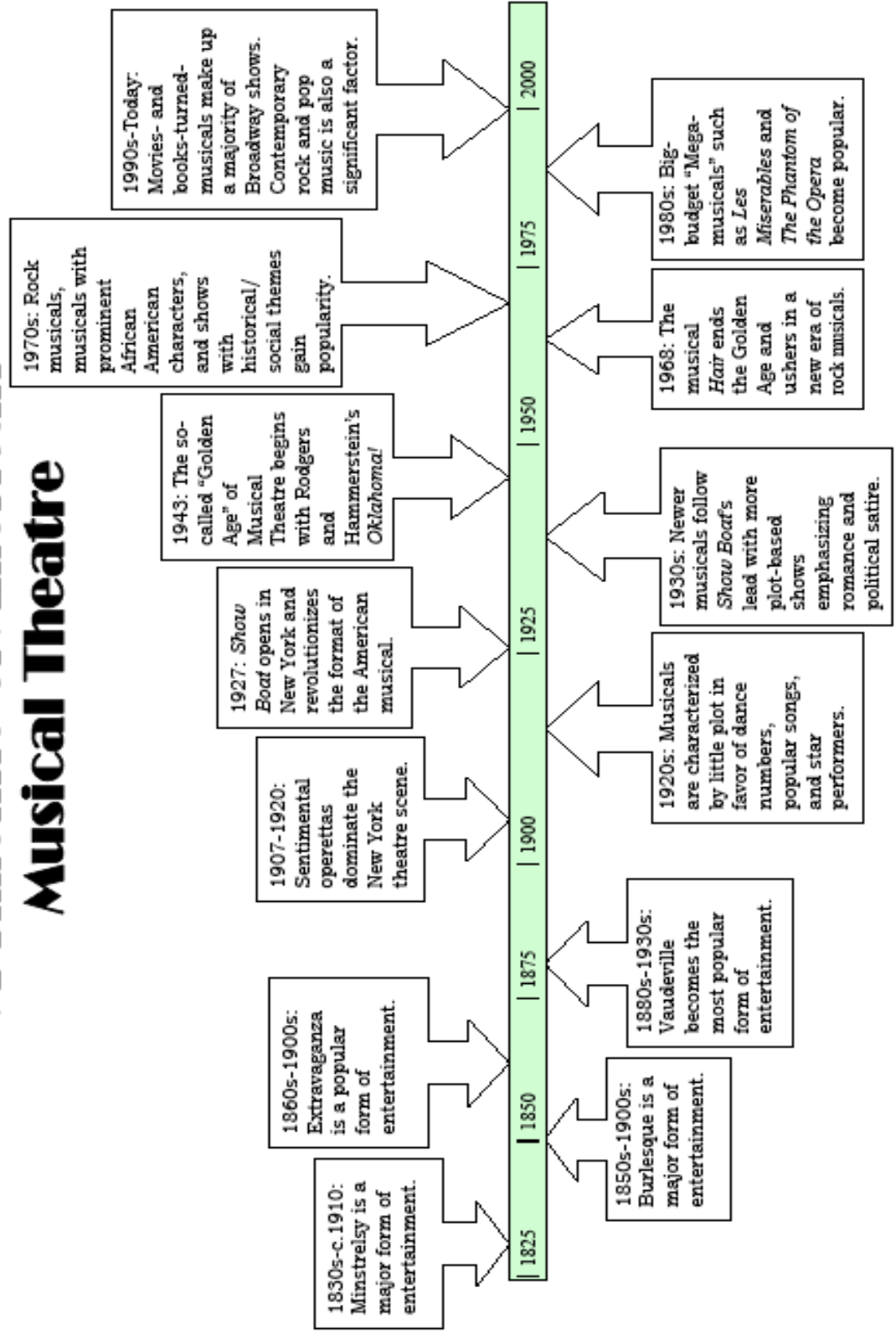
American Musical Theatre is a changing art form with a rich history that is being continually shaped and reshaped. Take a look at the timeline on the next page, and you will get a sense of how our Musical Theatre has developed over the last two centuries.



Viewing Activity!

Obtain a copy of a recent movie musical. *Dreamgirls*, *Chicago*, and *Hairspray* are just a few options! Watch all or part of the movie in class, and talk about it afterwards. What did you like about it? What didn't you like? In your opinion, what sets movie musicals apart from other modern forms of entertainment (such as movies, concerts, and TV shows)?

A Timeline of American Musical Theatre



Let's take a closer look at American Musical Theatre in the earlier part of its history.



George Gershwin's *Girl Crazy*, the show *Crazy for You* is based upon, opened on Broadway in October of 1930. The period during which the Gershwins were writing the show was a crucial time in the development of the American musical.

The Broadway musical as we know it today came about as an amalgamation of many different earlier forms of entertainment. You probably noticed a few words on the timeline you weren't familiar with. Below is a list of the main forms of 19th century to earlier 20th century American entertainment that exerted major influences on the development of the American musical:

- **Minstrelsy** became dominant beginning in the 1830s. This now-disreputable form of entertainment began with a group of Irish men who applied burnt cork to their faces to appear African American. The genre expanded from there to become more popular, eventually including African Americans putting on blackface make-up to portray themselves. A minstrel show consisted of a series of songs, dances, and skits, which unfortunately perpetuated many different stereotypes of African Americans. White performers pretended to be black slaves on a plantation, or blacks assimilating into life in the city, using stereotypical speech patterns actual African Americans didn't even use. As awful as it was, minstrelsy is recognized by historians as the first uniquely American theatrical form.
- **Burlesque** became popular in the 1850s. A "burlesque" was a parody of a more serious piece, a historical topic, or a current issue. This too was a type of variety show, combining comedy, strip tease, music, dancing, cross-dressing, mime, and a host of other elements. The parodistic aspects of burlesque contributed to what we now categorize as political satire.
- **Extravaganza** came about as a prominent form of entertainment in the 1860s. This art form was all about spectacle—in much the same way that modern Broadway musicals have become about spectacle. In addition to the

singing and dancing typical of other concurrent forms of entertainment, extravaganza emphasized acrobatics and circus-like attractions.

- **Vaudeville** became prevalent in the 1880s. A vaudeville piece was a variety show, made up of unrelated acts featuring different performers, with emphasis on song and dance. Other elements present in vaudeville shows included comedians, jugglers, magicians, and acrobats. Oftentimes, vaudeville shows had patriotic themes. Vaudeville performers would travel the country on different circuits, always competing for popularity. George M. Cohan was a huge success in vaudeville. He popularized now-familiar songs such as “You’re A Grand Old Flag,” “I’m a Yankee Doodle Dandy,” and “Give My Regards to Broadway.”
- **Operetta**, very popular early on in America, had dissipated by the end of the 19th century in favor of vaudeville and minstrelsy but experienced a resurgence through the next few decades. An operetta is located stylistically between opera and musical theatre. Operettas were less serious and dramatic than traditional European operas, and contained more spoken dialogue, the way most musicals do today.



Common to all these forms of entertainment was an emphasis on song and dance, and it is this feature above all else that led to the next phase in the development of the American musical.



Some things to think about...

1. **What are some of your favorite TV shows and movies? What elements of these early forms of entertainment can you see in them?**
2. **Have you ever been to a live concert for a favorite singer or band? If so, what elements of these early forms of entertainment were used in the concert?**

Musical Theatre in the '20s and '30s

Take another look at the timeline on page 4. You will notice there were some important developments in the 1920s and 1930s, at exactly the time George Gershwin was writing.

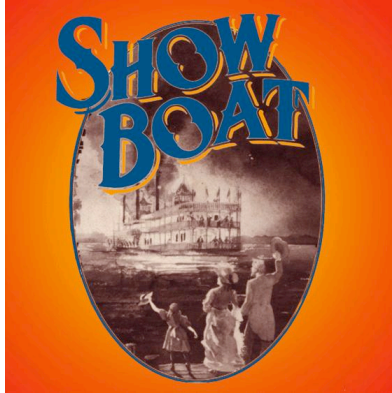
In the 1920s, earlier forms of musical theatre were combining into what we would now consider musical comedy. For the first time, shows other than opera and operetta had a throughline. A vaudeville or minstrel show was essentially a variety show, made up of unrelated acts, but the 1920s introduced plot and storyline to musical theatre.

Granted, 1920s musicals were not quite what we would now consider to be “traditional” musical comedy. They focused on entertainment value, featuring extensive song and dance numbers with long-legged chorus girls in lieu of plot and character development. Those scenes that were included were farcical and slapstick in nature, serving only to get a laugh.



Furthermore, early musicals were often written specifically for their leading performers. A writing team would start with a concept and shape the show around whatever big star they could get to be in their show. You can see an example of this in Gershwin’s *Girl Crazy*—Ethel Merman, an unknown at the time, was brought in to play a minor role with a couple of short songs. The creative team and the audiences liked her so much that they kept expanding her role—and, when all was said and done, she was the second female lead.

Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II’s *Show Boat*, which premiered on Broadway in 1927, forever changed the face of American musical theatre. It was revolutionary not only in the many racial themes it covered, but more importantly in its use of dialogue to further the dramatic story. *Show Boat* was a *musical play*, the first of its kind.



George Gershwin was a *product* of the time period in which he lived, but he also helped *define* it. He and his collaborators went from writing revues and silly, showy 1920s musicals to creating more plot-based shows inspired by *Show Boat*. In doing so, however, Gershwin didn't just follow along in Kern's and Hammerstein's footsteps—he took what they gave him and made the work his own.

The Gershwins introduced political satire into their repertoire in the 1930s, and others followed suit. *Porgy and Bess* took their work even further into the realm of dramatic content. Its operatic style paved the way for later “sung-through” musicals such as *Les Miserables*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, and even *Rent*.

Gershwin's revolutionary work in both musical style and show content influenced later musical theatre composers including Richard Rodgers and Stephen Sondheim. Sondheim directly references Gershwin's “I Got Rhythm” in his song “More”—“I got rhythm / Music too / Just as much as before / Got my guy and my sky of blue...” sings the seductive leading lady in Sondheim's 1990 film *Dick Tracy*.

In spite of an increase in more “intelligent” content in the musicals of 1930s, and more focus on plot, the shows created during this time were still not quite what we recognize as musical comedy today. They were still primarily focused on entertainment value—unlike the deep, psychological, realistic work we now see in theatre. People didn't want realism in the 1930s—they wanted to go to the theatre and have a grand old time, laughing at the people on stage so as to forget their financial woes.

Musical theatre as we think of it today did not come to fulfillment until the so-called “Golden Age” of Broadway, beginning in 1943. Consequently, 1930s musicals were caught between vaudevillian, flashy 1920s musicals, and yet-to-come more realistic shows. From this intermediary state came the beloved “presentational” style of the 1930s musical, evident in both *Girl Crazy* and *Crazy for You*.

The Great Depression



The Great Depression was the worst economic crisis in United States history, lasting more than a decade, from October 29, 1929 until the early 1940s. It began with the stock market crash on Wall Street, and snowballed into businesses closing and people losing their jobs and homes. The failure of over 5000 banks within the next three and a half years caused many Americans to lose their life savings. At its worst point in 1933, one-quarter of the nation's workers were unemployed. Countless families were without the basic necessities of food and clothing.

The devastation wrought by the Depression didn't start to reverse itself until the late 1930s with the advent of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's "New Deal." The New Deal created jobs for Americans and helped to bring the unemployment rate back down. However, it could not possibly remedy all of the country's economic problems, and the U.S. was not completely out of the Depression until we entered World War II.

The Depression took a significant toll on American musical theatre. People were out of work and out of money, so they could not keep up the spending habits they were used to. Broadway shows were expensive both to produce and to attend, so much of musical theatre went on hold.

The advent of the Depression also coincided with the introduction of "talkies," or "talking pictures"—the first movies to use synchronized dialogue sequences (as opposed to the silent films that had previously reigned in Hollywood). High salaries for movie actors seduced Broadway's best out to Hollywood, and low

ticket prices made movies a far more appealing form of entertainment and an inexpensive diversion from tough times. Talent and customers were drawn away from live theatre and into this revolutionary new art form.



Against this trend, *Girl Crazy* opened on Broadway in October of 1930, less than a year after the stock market crash. In the face of immense challenges, the Gershwins and others were able to pull through and continue writing musicals. There is something so immediate about live theatre that cannot be captured in the movies, and though the outlet was dwindling, it could not be extinguished. Attendance had decreased, but some audience members still looked to the theatre as their means of escape. As one writer so aptly put it, “Theatre thrives on hard times.”¹ Those who could afford to went to see shows like *Girl Crazy* to find enjoyment and relief from the toil of everyday life.



Some things to think about...

- 1. When you are going through a rough time, what kinds of entertainment do you turn to in order to relieve the stress? (Movies, music, literature, TV...?)**
- 2. What is it about that particular form of entertainment that helps you to get through a difficult time?**

¹ *The House That George Built* by Wilfrid Sheed, p. 208. See References for full citation.

So who is George Gershwin, anyway?



George Gershwin wrote the music for *Girl Crazy*, as well as all of the songs eventually put together to form *Crazy for You*. He is one of the most well known composers of American musical theatre, jazz, and modern classical music. If you've ever listened to the "Singers and Standards" channel on Comcast Digital Cable, chances are you've heard his music. In his tragically short lifetime (he died at age 38), his work spanned a breadth rivaled by no other musical theatre composer. Gershwin wrote not only for vaudeville, musicals, and movies, but also for concert and opera.

George Gershwin was born Jacob Gershowitz on September 26, 1898, in Brooklyn, NY. His Ukrainian-Jewish parents scraped together enough money to buy a piano for the family by 1910, but with older brother Ira in mind for lessons. Much to his parents' surprise, it was George who showed an aptitude for the instrument, within three years achieving such a level of skill that he ran out of competent teachers.

When he was fifteen, George quit school and sought employment on New York City's Tin Pan Alley, where he became a "song plugger" for a music publishing firm. A song plugger would arrange music and promote the company's new tunes, playing them at various locations in that area of the city. The job also helped him forge the connections necessary to get his own music published. Gershwin published his first song in 1916, when he was only 17 years old, and his first hit song, "Swanee," premiered in 1919.

With his experience in Tin Pan Alley as a springboard, Gershwin moved more deeply into composing. At first, he wrote songs for vaudeville and for George White's *Scandals*, musical revues with a new edition each year. In 1924, he and his brother collaborated on their first Broadway musical, *Lady, Be Good!*, for

which Ira wrote the words. This was also the year George Gershwin premiered his most famous concert piece, *Rhapsody in Blue*.

George and Ira collaborated on many musicals throughout the next decade (sometimes with other writers involved). *Girl Crazy*, the last Gershwin musical of its kind, opened on Broadway in 1930. The two debuted *Strike Up the Band* the same year. This show represented a departure from the style of *Girl Crazy* and their previous musicals, which were typical of the time period—silly plots with big dance numbers and toe-tapping tunes. *Strike Up the Band* was a venture in the direction of political satire, which defined the next set of musicals written by the brothers. *Of Thee I Sing*, written in that same vein, opened on Broadway in 1931 and was the first musical ever to win the Pulitzer Prize.

In 1935, George Gershwin completed his most ambitious project: the opera *Porgy and Bess*. He died only two years later from a malignant brain tumor. He was working in Hollywood at the time, writing music for movies.

The monumental loss of Gershwin's death was felt around the world, by both adoring fans and fellow composers. Vernon Duke, Gershwin's contemporary and former protégé, later wrote, "Death can be kind and death can be just; but it had no business taking our George, who was in the full flower of his fine youth and who was unquestionably doing his best work."²



Together, the Gershwin brothers wrote 17 musicals, 4 movies, and an opera. For music clips, photos, and more info on both George *and* Ira Gershwin, check out the official Gershwin site at: <http://www.gershwin.com/>

And, to get a better sense of the man behind the music, check out the site below for some very funny Gershwin anecdotes! <http://www.anecdotage.com/browse.php?category=people&who=Gershwin>

² *The World of Musical Comedy* by Stanley Green, p. 85. See References for full citation.

Tin Pan Alley

Tin Pan Alley is the place where American popular music was born. The phrase “Tin Pan Alley” itself actually refers to a couple of specific places in New York City, a time period, and a musical style; and it came to be used as a nickname for the U.S. Music Industry.



Tin Pan Alley was originally located at Union Square, in downtown Manhattan near 14th Street. Beginning in 1885, music publishers starting carving their niche into this part of the city, setting up shop in the same cluster of buildings. At the turn of the century, most of the publishers moved up to West 28th Street between 5th and 6th Avenues. Finally, in the late 1920s, Tin Pan Alley moved once again, this time to the West 40s. The second of these locations is the one most often associated with the name, as it is the place from which came Tin Pan Alley’s most significant contributions.

You can imagine how Tin Pan Alley got its name. Monroe Rosenfeld, a journalist visiting New York City, coined the term to refer to the cacophonous clanging of pianos heard from the city streets in the Tin Pan Alley area, saying it sounded like people banging on tin pans.

Up until the creation of Tin Pan Alley publishing houses, there was no centralized area for the writing and distribution of music. Publishing houses were located in countless cities throughout the country. You must remember that at the time, there were no CDs, cassette tapes, or even records, so the primary medium for distributing music was sheet music—printed paper copies of the notes and words for a song. Even

middle-class families owned a piano, and people would sit around at social gatherings and play popular songs to entertain each other.

Tin Pan Alley established New York City as the central location for the U.S. music industry, where all the newest songs would be written and manufactured, and from which the sheet music would be distributed. It also established NYC as the cultural center of the nation for generations to come.

Tin Pan Alley was *the* place to go for the hottest new songs of the time. Vaudeville artists would return to New York from touring the country, pick up a few new songs from the city's budding young composers, and head back out on the road with a handful of new routines. Tin Pan Alley was the one-stop shop for new material.

The work of the composers associated with Tin Pan Alley had a major influence on popular music as we know it today. Before the work of Tin Pan Alley composers, songs tended to be lengthy and narrative, with many verses and little consistency in form. With the centralization of the music industry, songs tended to conform to one particular format: the AABA 32-bar song form. You can see an example of this on the next page. This process is referred to as the standardization of popular music, and that is why we call these songs “standards.”

The people who worked at Tin Pan Alley are also the ones responsible for the formation of ASCAP—the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers. Until this time there had been no clear cut system of copyrighting music; many of the best composers of the 1800s died broke because whoever could obtain possession of their songs would print their own versions. ASCAP guaranteed that writers would receive royalties (payments) every time their song was printed or used.

Tin Pan Alley is where George Gershwin and many of the best known composers of early musical theatre got their start. Gershwin began as a song plugger working for Jerome H. Remick and Company, arranging music and promoting the company's new tunes. Song pluggers would play a company's new songs at various locations in the Tin Pan Alley area, in the hopes that people would buy them, perform them, and immortalize them. “Take Me Out to the Ballgame” and “God Bless America” are a couple of the Tin Pan Alley songs thus immortalized.



If you want to learn more about Tin Pan Alley and its effects on American popular music, check out the following sources:

- **“America's Music Publishing Industry: The story of Tin Pan Alley”**
<http://www.parlorsongs.com/insearch/tinpanalley/tinpanalley.php>
- **American Popular Music (2001)**
Edited by Rachel Rubin and Jeffrey Melnick
Ch. II—“Tin Pan Alley and the Black-Jewish Nation”



You can notice the STANDARDIZATION of songs in today's popular music, even though the form may not be the same as it was in the 1920s and 1930s.

First, here's an example of a song written in the 1920s. You can listen along; go to Track 1 of your enclosed CD.

"Someone to Watch Over Me" by George Gershwin
As Performed by Ella Fitzgerald, Orig. Release 1950

- A. There's a somebody I'm longing to see
I hope that he turns out to be
Someone who'll watch over me
- A. I'm a little lamb who's lost in the wood
I know I could always be good
To one who'll watch over me
- B. Although he may not be the man some
Girls think of as handsome
To my heart he carries the key
- A. Won't you tell him please to put on some speed
Follow my lead, oh, how I need
Someone to watch over me

See how the lyrics divide clearly into sections, and hear the way the melody corresponds with this format.

Now take a look at an excerpt from a recent song you are probably familiar with. Listen along on Track 2 of your CD.

"Bubbly" by Colbie Caillat
©2007 Universal Republic Records

Verse. I've been awake for a while now
You've got me feelin' like a child now
'Cause every time I see your bubbly face
I get the tingles in a silly place

Chorus. It starts in my toes
And I crinkle my nose
Wherever it goes
I always know
That you make me smile
Please stay for a while now
Just take your time
Wherever you go

Verse. The rain is fallin' on my window pane
But we are hidin' in a safer place
Under the covers stayin' dry and warm
You give me feelings that I adore

Chorus. They start in my toes
Make me crinkle my nose
Wherever it goes
I always know
That you make me smile
Please stay for a while now
Just take your time
Wherever you go

Bridge. What am I gonna say
When you make me feel this way?
I just, mmm

Chorus. It starts in my toes
Makes me crinkle my nose
Wherever it goes
I always know
That you make me smile
Please stay for a while now
Just take your time
Wherever you go

Notice how the AABA format doesn't fit anymore. Instead, the **VERSE-CHORUS** format is the one used by the majority of pop songs today, with some variations. The VERSE has a melody different from that of the CHORUS, and the chorus typically contains the same (or a similar) set of words. The BRIDGE is a stand-alone section in between the second and third choruses that is different from the verse and chorus in melody and lyrics.



Some things to think about...

1. Can you think of other popular songs that have the same VERSE-CHORUS format that we see in "Bubbly?"
2. What differences other than format do you notice between the two songs?
3. Why do you think the standard format for popular songs has changed the way it has over the past century?



Or, if you want to go deeper...

Choose one of the two song formats and try writing your own song in that format! Perform your song for your class.

How did all this music come to be?

The music we know and love from the Tin Pan Alley composers was the result of a collision of cultures that took place in the first decades of the 20th century. Two population migrations happened almost simultaneously, and the interaction of these groups in New York City eventually produced the style of music we know from this era.

The Russian Pogroms

1881 in tsarist Russia saw the beginning of the pogroms, mob attacks that resulted in the systematized and relentless massacre of Jews. The Russian government organized these massacres to encourage dissatisfied workers to shift the blame for the country's political and economic troubles from the government to the Jewish population.



Countless Jews lost their lives in the pogroms, and those who managed to survive often lost their homes and belongings. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, Russian Jews flocked to the United States in record numbers to escape this persecution. Numerous families who fled to find refuge ended up in New York City. Many of the best known composers of the Tin Pan Alley era, including George Gershwin and Irving Berlin, came from these families.

The Great Migration and the Harlem Renaissance

Another important historical and cultural shift was occurring at the time Tin Pan Alley was at its height: the Harlem Renaissance, which grew from a population trend known as the Great Migration that began in the 1910s and lasted through the next two decades. African Americans flocked from the

South to northern cities in search of work in factories, made increasingly available at the advent of World War I. Many of the most educated blacks settled in Harlem, and the neighborhood became a cultural production center.

The period we call the Harlem Renaissance lasted from the 1920s through the early 1930s. Throughout this time, African Americans in Harlem contributed immensely to American culture, producing new art, literature, and music. The Harlem Renaissance represents the first time African American literature and arts were taken seriously in modern America.



Ragtime and The Jazz Age

Ragtime entered the American music scene in the 1890s, at first associated with a lower-class brand of music, as its rhythms stemmed from those of Afro-Caribbean dance and slave songs. Many at the time also associated it with “Negro” music heard in brothels and saloons. Ragtime represented a rebellion against classical music traditions. Many people first reacted to the advent of ragtime the same way parents reacted to the creation of rock and roll in the 1950s—and the same way parents today might react to rap.

Ragtime as a musical style involved syncopation of the melodic line’s rhythm over a steady bass line and a “swinging” quality not present in previous American music. This technique contributed to a loose, free rhythmic feel, as well as a more natural, spontaneous quality.

More technically, syncopation may be defined as “A shift of accent in a passage or composition that occurs when a normally weak beat is stressed.³” We tend

³ <<http://www.answers.com/topic/syncopation>>.

to take syncopation for granted today, as virtually all popular music uses this technique. Without it, the complex rhythms that make rap music so appealing would not be possible. However, at the time, this style was nothing short of revolutionary.

You've probably heard some ragtime tunes without realizing it—"The Entertainer" by Scott Joplin is a popular piece played at piano recitals. Irving Berlin's "Alexander's Ragtime Band," a well known ragtime piece actually produced from Tin Pan Alley, represents the incorporation of ragtime characteristics into popular music.

In spite of some initial resistance to the new music, the qualities of ragtime could not help but catch on. What started as a simple musical technique in Missouri and other southern and Midwestern states quickly spread throughout the nation, even to Europe.

Ragtime also had practical effects. The piano was the instrument of choice for ragtime music; this led to an increase in piano sales across the nation and therefore the prominent place of the piano in Tin Pan Alley.

Ragtime led into the Jazz Age (1918-1929). World War I had ended, the stock market was soaring, and people were finally having a good time. Throughout the "Roaring Twenties," as the period also came to be known, jazz music grew immensely in popularity. People loved to dance to it—women shortened their skirts and learned popular new dance moves at lush, extravagant parties.



The development of jazz took up where ragtime left off, and ran with it. An emphasis was placed on improvisation, as the music became more about creation and personal voice than ever before. Added into the syncopation and swinging of ragtime was the frequent use of “blue” notes (sung or played lower than the major scale). Mixed with the characteristic ragtime piano were several other instruments, most importantly string bass and drums. Jazz was all about rhythm and improvisation—a true jazz song would have a basic chord structure and then musicians invented melodies based on these chords as they played.

Jazz, too, came from the African American population, with roots in a number of different black musical traditions—West African music, black folk music such as spirituals and blues, black minstrel songs, and, of course, ragtime. The rhythmic characteristics, as well as the emphasis on improvisation and the use of different vocal colors, all came from these traditional forms of entertainment.

Jazz came into its own during the Harlem Renaissance, and the African American culture in Harlem at the time was instrumental (no pun intended) in its development. Black musicians would perform piano bars throughout the neighborhood, each adding his or her own individual nuances to the emerging musical style.

Culture Collision!

Tin Pan Alley was driven by Jews, on both the creative and business ends. According to Jonathan Karp, “It’s not that it reflected a Jewish essence or expressed a collective Jewish agenda; it’s just that it was simply dominated by Jews.⁴” George Gershwin and Irving Berlin are the two best known Jewish composers of Tin Pan Alley, and important Jewish publishing firms included M. Witmark & Sons, Charles K. Harris, Harry Von Tilzer, and Jerome Remick.

The Jewish composers of Tin Pan Alley were nevertheless subject to outside influence. Gershwin visited Harlem often and was swayed by the jazz music he heard there. The jazz standards composed by Gershwin and his contemporaries developed from a blend of their own classical training and the influences of this so-called “street music.” Even Gershwin’s “classical” pieces, such as *Rhapsody in Blue*, contain considerable jazz and blues influence, and his opera, *Porgy and Bess*, was an African American drama.

⁴ “Killing Tin Pan Alley” by Jonathan Karp.

<http://www.guiltandpleasure.com/index.php?site=rebootgp&page=gp_article&id=62>.



According to scholar Jeffrey Melnick, “A popular line of thinking in Gershwin’s day argued that though African Americans had certainly invented ragtime and jazz, these musical styles were being brought to their highest level by outsiders—almost always Jewish Americans.” Wilfrid Sheed asserted that some have gone so far as to define the music of Tin Pan Alley as “Jewish response to black music.”

In this convoluted manner, the vibrant African American culture of the 1920s was able to reach beyond the limitations of the Harlem neighborhood and engrave indelible marks into American popular music.

Listen to Gershwin’s earliest music and compare it to his later work. Earlier in his life, his compositions stemmed from classical training and the popular style of contemporary music. Later on, as he developed his own distinct style, a greater African American influence becomes clear. While both pieces exhibit the use of syncopation, the second incorporates the blue notes characteristic of jazz. Take a look at the activity below to experience the growth of Gershwin’s music and the African American influence.



Listen to Tracks 3 and 4 on your enclosed CD.

Track 3 is a recording of “Tee-Oodle-Um-Bum-Bo” (©2004 Asv Living Era), written by Gershwin in 1919. Track 4 is “It Ain’t Necessarily So” (©2006 Analekta), from Gershwin’s opera *Dorgy and Bess*, which premiered in 1935. Both are piano recordings, but they have some major stylistic differences.

- 1. How would you describe the musical style of “Tee-Oodle-Um-Bum-Bo?” How does listening to it make you feel?**
- 2. How would you describe the style of “It Ain’t Necessarily So?” How does it make you feel?**
- 3. What major differences do you notice between the two songs?**

GIRL CRAZY

The Plot

The show centers around a “girl crazy” cowboy named Danny Churchill. In the beginning of the play, Danny’s father sends him out west to Custerville, Arizona, to spend two years on the family ranch in hopes it will reform his playboy ways. In Arizona, Danny falls in love with Molly Gray, the local postmistress, and decides to turn the place into a dude ranch, complete with women, alcohol, and gambling. Danny proposes to Molly, but then his old rival Sam Mason comes from New York and threatens to take her away.

Eventually, Danny gets his girl, but not before countless beloved stock elements come into play, including mistaken identities; unfaithful lovers; and drunken, violent antagonists. Side stories include that of Kate Fothergill and her husband Slick, who arrive from San Francisco to perform and gamble, and the saga of Gieber Goldfarb, the taxi driver who took Danny out to Custerville and eventually wins the position of town mayor. All comes to a happy end; lovers get together and everyone lives happily ever after—except, of course, the apprehended outlaws.

In the 1943 film adaptation starring Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland, the roles of Molly and Kate were combined. This synthesizing concept was kept when the original book was revised to create *Crazy for You*. For more plot details and to see the direct parallels (as well as some major differences) between the plots of *Girl Crazy* and *Crazy for You*, check out pages 24-25.

Background and Context

Girl Crazy incorporated elements of every precursor to traditional musical theatre found on pages 5-6. Its humor thus lay in several different tactics. It was a burlesque of the western, poking fun at many stock character types. It also included some elements of political satire, which stemmed from the earlier burlesque tradition. The aim of the show was to entertain, in much the way that vaudeville and minstrel shows had done, exhibiting the flashy dance numbers of the former and the ethnic and racial humor of the latter. In this way, *Girl Crazy* was a stepping stone, paying homage to the traditions of 1920s musical theatre but also paving the way for what was to come.



For more detailed information on *Girl Crazy* and its significance, check out Howard Pollack’s *George Gershwin: His Life and Work*, Ch. 25.

Fast Facts

Opened: October 14, 1930

Ran: 272 performances

Played at: Alvin Theatre

Music: George Gershwin

Lyrics: Ira Gershwin

Book: Guy Bolton & John McGowan

Director: Alexander Leftwich

Choreographer: George Hale

Producers: Alex A. Aarons & Vinton Freedley

Notable Cast Members:

Ginger Rogers,
Ethel Merman,
Willie Howard,
Allen Kearns,
William Kent

Notable Orchestra Members:

Benny Goodman,
Gene Krupa, Glenn Miller, Jimmy Dorsey, Jack Teagarden



“I Got Rhythm”

from *Crazy for You* (1992)

Music by George Gershwin,
Lyrics by Ira Gershwin

©1993 BMG Music

**Days can be sunny
With never a sigh
Don't need what money
can buy
Birds in the trees sing
Their day full of song
Why shouldn't we sing
along?**

**I'm chipper all the day
Happy with my lot
How do I get that way
Look at what I got**

**I got rhythm
I got music
I got my man
Who could ask for
anything more?**

**I got daisies
In green pastures
I got my man
Who could ask for
anything more?**

**Old Man Trouble
I don't mind him
You won't find him
'Round my door**

**I got starlight
I got sweet dreams
I got my man
Who could ask for
anything more?
Who could ask for
anything more!**



**Go to Track
5 on your CD to
listen along!**

Significance

Girl Crazy was the last Gershwin musical of its kind. The fun-loving, silly spirit that had given birth to the musical comedies of the 1920s was fading in favor of more “intelligent” work. A few months before *Girl Crazy* opened on Broadway, the Gershwins premiered their first political satire, *Strike up the Band*. After *Girl Crazy*, their writing would head further into this direction, resulting in *Of Thee I Sing* (1931), as well as several other satirical pieces.

Girl Crazy launched the careers of several performers and musicians who would eventually become household names. It was Ethel Merman's first Broadway show, and Ginger Rogers's second; the latter eventually became famous as dance partner to Fred Astaire. In the orchestra were yet-unknown gems Benny Goodman, Jimmy Dorsey, and Glenn Miller.

Girl Crazy also left us with more hit songs than any other Gershwin show, leaving an indelible mark on American musical theatre and popular song. Thus, it is no coincidence that *Girl Crazy* was the show chosen from which to model *Crazy for You*, the “New Gershwin Musical.”

“I Got Rhythm”

The number in *Girl Crazy* that stopped the show was “I Got Rhythm.” Sung by Ethel Merman at the end of Act I, it contained all the winning features of music of the time. It was a huge dance number, as dictated by the catchy rhythm and driving syncopation taken from its roots in ragtime and jazz. Even the language betrays the era in which “I Got Rhythm” was created—with such informal phrases as “I got” and “Old Man Trouble,” it epitomizes a time period in which music was becoming less formal and more fun.

“I Got Rhythm” contained the perfect chord structure upon which creative instrumentalists could improvise, making it the quintessential jazz song. Typical of the music of Tin Pan Alley, it flawlessly combines the primitive and the sophisticated. Its fusion of vernacular language and a simple theme with Gershwin's unparalleled writing results in a perfect combination, appealing to audiences and critics alike. At its premiere, “I Got Rhythm” was the epitome of a toe-tapper, and has had audiences jamming and humming along ever since.



Something to think about...

“I Got Rhythm” expresses an appreciation for the simple things in life. Can you think of any modern songs that have a similar theme?

CRAZY FOR YOU

Fast Facts

Opened: February 19, 1992

Ran: 1622 performances

Played at: Shubert Theatre

Music: George Gershwin

Lyrics: Ira Gershwin

Book: Ken Ludwig

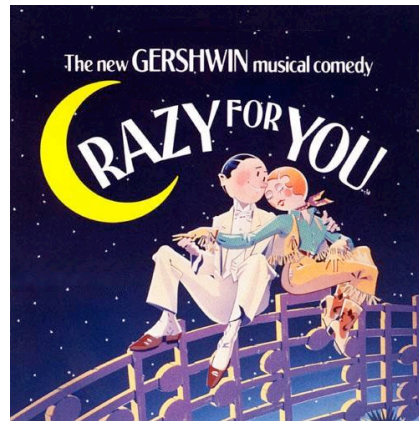
Awards: Nominated for nine Tony Awards; won for Best Musical, Best Choreography, and Best Costume Design

Director: Mike Ockrent

Choreographer: Susan Stroman

Producers: Roger Horchow and Elizabeth Williams

Notable Cast Members: Harry Groener, Jodi Benson, Beth Leavel, Bruce Adler, Michelle Pawk, John Hillner, Jane Connell



The Book

Crazy for You is the story of Bobby Child, a young man who wants only to sing and dance but has other things expected of him. At the start of the show, his mother sends him to Deadrock, Nevada to foreclose on an old theatre. When Bobby gets out West, he falls in love with the local postmistress, Polly Baker, who happens to be the daughter of the man who owns the theatre. Bobby decides to put on a show to try to save the theatre and win his love. Mistaken identities and beloved stereotypes make this show an endearing, hysterical journey for cast and audience alike.

Crazy for You almost didn't happen—at least, not in the way it finally did. Roger Horchow, a “Texas multimillionaire” and one of the producers, had gotten the rights to a slew of Gershwin tunes and wanted to see a reimagining of *Girl Crazy*. He contacted playwright Ken Ludwig and asked him to write the book, but Ludwig turned him down multiple times, saying he only wrote straight plays. Eventually, Ludwig relented and agreed to write the book.

Looking at the libretto of *Girl Crazy*, Ludwig discovered a wealth of challenges before him. There was no way they would be able to do a straight revival of the earlier show;

the book was too dated; the same things weren't funny anymore. So, they decided to keep the basic concept of the story but substantially rework the book.

The book of *Crazy for You* came to include elements of both the 1930 Broadway production of *Girl Crazy* and the 1943 movie. The setting is the most notable parallel—*Crazy for You* is set during the Great Depression, bringing the story full circle, as *Girl Crazy* was written then. It also includes much of the same kind of humor—slapstick, parody, and elements of political satire. For example, the barricade of chairs constructed at the end of “Stiff Upper Lip” pokes fun at *Les Miserables* and the epic musicals of the 1980s the same way *Girl Crazy* poked fun at westerns. While the book was cleaned up a bit socially (Native American characters and jokes were completely removed), ethnic humor still runs rampant with the character of Bela Zangler.



On a more specific level, there are clear parallels between the old and the new in terms of characters. Bobby and Polly are modeled after a combination of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, and their earlier *Girl Crazy* counterparts. Danny Churchill becomes Bobby Child, who in all three versions has a love for the ladies that gets him into trouble. Molly Gray and Kate Fothergill become Polly Baker, the local postmistress in all three versions.

Supporting characters have slightly less clear lineages. The character of Bela Zangler is based on real-life Florenz Ziegfeld, but also seems to serve the same purpose of Jewish humor as did the character of Gieber Goldfarb in the 1930 *Girl Crazy*. Lank Hawkins seems to come from a combination of Sam Mason, Danny's New York rival in *Girl Crazy*, and Lank Sanders, one of the Custerville troublemakers. Irene Roth seems to come from Tess Parker in *Girl Crazy*, but the name Tess was ironically used for another character in *Crazy for You*. Danny's overbearing father becomes Bobby's overbearing mother, for comedic effect; and the New York City girls appear in both.

Plot and song parallels are also evident. “Bidin’ My Time” is used in the same way in all three versions—to set the scene as soon as we first glimpse the “West.” “Could You Use Me?” is also used in the same way as in the earlier show. The same idea of sending Danny/Bobby to a place with no women has stuck from the beginning.

Perhaps most significant are the effects of the 1943 *Girl Crazy* movie on *Crazy for You*. In many ways, the movie is a stepping stone between the two shows. It consolidated the characters, combining Molly Gray and Kate Fothergill into Ginger Gray to introduce the idea of one female lead. Ginger is a postmistress with the same tough, but secretly yearning, personality Polly has in *Crazy for You*. In this way, Polly is a combination of the charismatic leading lady and the ingénue leads present in *Girl Crazy*. Interestingly, there is a minor character in the movie named Polly Williams; perhaps this is where the name comes from.

The 1943 *Girl Crazy* movie also raised the stakes of the story in a few different ways. It introduced the idea of Danny/Bobby going west for his own education instead of merely getting away from girls, which factors in to *Crazy for You*. It also introduced the idea of Danny saving the day to win his love. Just as Polly's father's theatre is in danger of closing in *Crazy for You*, so too is Ginger's grandfather's college in the *Girl Crazy* movie. The original *Girl Crazy* had little conflict; there was no ranch or theatre or school in danger of closing. The new plot was more compelling and had a more logical sense of cause-and-effect.

In constructing the book, Ludwig walked a fine line between preserving the historical nature of the piece and making it work for a modern audience. Fortunately, he managed to find the perfect balance, breathing new life into the old material. As reviewer Frank Rich put it, the show “makes everything old seem young again.”¹



Viewing Activity!

Some have said that there are no new stories. *Crazy for You* is very clearly based on *Girl Crazy*, but there are many more modern stories that contain a lot of the same elements. Obtain a copy of the 1943 *Girl Crazy* movie starring Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney. As you watch, think about the different plot and character elements in the movie. Can you think of any TV shows, movies, or books that have some of the same story elements as *Girl Crazy*?

The Music

Crazy for You took Gershwin songs out of cabarets and concerts and put them back where they belong: on Broadway. Again according to Frank Rich, “The miracle that has been worked here ... is to take some of the greatest songs ever written for Broadway and Hollywood and reawaken the impulse that first inspired them. ‘Crazy for You’ scrapes away decades of cabaret and jazz and variety-show interpretations to reclaim the Gershwins' standards, in all their glorious youth, for the dynamism of the stage.”⁵ Finally, these songs returned to the context they were intended for.

The creative team started with five songs and part of a sixth from *Girl Crazy* and added a dozen more Gershwin tunes, seven from shows and five from movies, to create the

⁵ Rich, Frank. “Review/Theater: Crazy for You; A Fresh Chorus of Gershwin on Broadway.” *See References*.

so-called “New Gershwin Musical.” Gershwin favorites such as “Someone to Watch Over Me” and obscurities such as “Naughty Baby” were brought in from other Gershwin shows. Two songs included in the show, “Tonight’s the Night” and “What Causes That?,” were unearthed in a warehouse in Secaucus, NJ in 1982. The latter, a previous unknown, became the hit song of the show. *Crazy for You* thus introduced a new way of looking at older songs, both revitalizing and paying homage to an old art form. Check out Wikipedia’s article, “Crazy for You,⁶” to see a list of all the songs in the show and where each came from.



William D. Brohn, the show’s orchestrator, went beyond taking songs from old Gershwin musicals, taking snippets of songs from other Gershwin pieces. Gershwin’s “Concerto in F” makes an appearance in the second act’s “New York Interlude,” and “A Stairway to Paradise,” while never sung, is incorporated into multiple songs. Making appearances at the end of the “Overture,” the beginning of “Entrance to Nevada,” and the end of “I Got Rhythm,” it becomes the show’s unofficial theme song.

Although the lyrics were not touched, songs were trimmed down or lengthened in order to suit the new show’s needs. “Bidin’ My Time” was a prolonged dance number in *Girl Crazy* and was severely cut down for *Crazy for You*. “Could You Use Me?” was about twice the length it is in *Crazy for You*; it was spliced together in order to give way to the extensive dance sequence in the adjoining “Shall We Dance?” Other songs, such as “I Got Rhythm,” were lengthened, so as to allow longer and more inventive dance sequences.

The context of each song was also modified significantly. According to Ken Ludwig, the show’s librettist, “We wanted audiences to believe that each song was written especially for ‘Crazy for You’ -- that they couldn’t possibly have come from anywhere else.... [One night] we overheard a couple talking about the show. The woman asked, ‘Are George and Ira Gershwin still alive?’ And her husband said, ‘They must be. They’re still writing musicals.’”⁷ In the 1943 *Girl Crazy* movie, many songs seem to come out of nowhere. “Embraceable You” and “I Got Rhythm” are done purely as performance numbers. Audiences today are too savvy for that—if a song is not furthering the plot line, they just won’t buy it.

⁶ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crazy_for_You>.

⁷ Great Performances - *Crazy for You*. <<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/gperf/crazyforyou/look.html>>.

The fusion of Gershwin’s musical theatre pieces with snippets of his classical works combines to create one beautiful salute to Gershwin’s music, bringing his life’s work together into one incredible tribute!

The Dance

Crazy for You was choreographed by Susan Stroman, a then-unknown who has now become one of the most famous choreographers on Broadway. The show effectively launched her career from chorus girl and small-time choreographer to Broadway favorite. Timing was everything for her—she came through at a time when notable choreographers on Broadway were dwindling. Reviews deemed her work “athletic,” “romantic,” “witty,” and “inspired,” and she won the Tony Award for Best Choreography.

The beauty of Stroman’s work in *Crazy for You* was her ability to fuse the old with the new. “‘We wanted to direct and choreograph in a more contemporary fashion,’ she [said], ‘even though the story and music dictated the 1930’s. They dance with emotion, as was done in old movies. The prop dancing in ‘Crazy for You’ stems from what they did, not only telling a story but incorporating a plot to strengthen the character of the piece.’”

To do this, Stroman incorporated older dance styles into the show—such as the partnering work that recalls duos such as Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, and Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney. Her work exhibited historical awareness, but she also put a lot of herself into the show, letting her choreographic trademark stand out. She brought about new uses of movement and props—in “Slap That Bass,” the chorus girls are used as string basses, and in “I Got Rhythm,” an entire percussion section is created from washboards, corrugated tin roofing and mining picks.



A few factors set Stroman’s choreography apart from her predecessors. She used choreography to tell a story and to further the show’s plot. Secondly, the dancing in *Crazy for You* comes from the characters. The way the New York City showgirls dance is vastly different from the way the gruff Nevada townspeople dance, and the choreography reflects this.

There is nothing random about Stroman’s choreography; there is no prolonged “company number” just for the sake of dancing, as there so often was in older versions of the musical. An example of this storytelling through dance is the beginning of “Shall We Dance?”—it articulates the beginning of a relationship between two characters. There is banter in their dancing, in their movement, as though they are physicalizing a conversation. Stroman took what Fred and Ginger gave her and reinvented it.

For more information on the dancing in *Crazy for You*, check out the exclusive interview with the dance captain from the original Broadway production on page 29.



Let’s Move!

Susan Stroman placed a huge emphasis on character dancing, meaning that the movement of every person in the show came directly from who he or she was portraying. Try exploring the movement of the different characters. Have your class start walking around the room as either a New York City showgirl/boy or a Nevada cowboy/girl. As they are walking, start to play music, any music. When the music starts, students should start dancing as their characters. Be creative—partner up, dance with each other! Stop the music and have everyone walk around again, this time switching characters—those who were cowboys before are now New Yorkers, and vice versa. Continue the same process until students have had a chance to play with the movement of both character types a few times.

Some Final Thoughts

The old Gershwin musicals didn’t last, because the presentational style soon became outdated as musical theatre evolved into more realistic, plot-driven shows. The musicals of the 1930s aren’t performed anymore because their stories are just too simple and their jokes too dated. However, the songs from these shows live on, and *Crazy for You* breathed new life into them, putting them back in the context for which they were meant. One reviewer summed up *Crazy for You* thus: “[Ludwig’s] book has no intellectual content, and wants none, but is a model of old-school musical-comedy construction in its insistence on establishing a context, whether narrative, comic or emotional, for every song.⁸”

Crazy for You came at the perfect time. Broadway needed a retreat from the heavy, epic musicals like *Les Miserables* that had recently been dominating. *Crazy for You* was a retreat to simple song-and-dance, for the purpose of pure entertainment, in the same way *Girl Crazy* had been so many years before. *Crazy for You* represents the rejuvenation and revitalization of an old tradition, and it was enormously successful in this vein.

⁸ “Review/Theater: Crazy for You; A Fresh Chorus of Gershwin on Broadway” by Frank Rich. See *References for full citation*.

Exclusive Interview with Angelique Ilo

Angelique Ilo is a Broadway veteran who was the dance captain on the original Broadway production of *Crazy for You*. I had the privilege of meeting with her on Wednesday, October 22, 2008 in a quaint coffee shop called Bunbury's in the beautiful town of Piermont, NY. As I walked into the coffee shop, I noticed at once the familiar atmosphere of a small town one would expect to find hours from any city—certainly not a mere 30 minutes northwest of New York! On the right wall of the seating area were costumes hanging up, and on the left was a bookcase filled with old books that appeared as though they had been read over and over again. When Angelique walked in, she greeted everyone in the shop with a friendliness and warmth that became increasingly apparent over the course of our conversation...⁹



Kelly Karcher: What other shows have you worked on, on Broadway, etc., both before *Crazy for You* and since?

Angelique Ilo: I started my career in the first *Chorus Line*. I was hired in 1979, and auditioned for a show that had already been running for four years; so with the record of shows running on Broadway—and they don't run very long—I thought, why should I audition when the show is gonna close, and meanwhile it ran for another 11 years! So, I was in the first *Chorus Line* off and on for 11 years...and then when that closed, I thought I was really all done. And then I auditioned for [choreographer] Susan Stroman in 1992 for *Crazy for You* and got that, and then I became the dance captain... I was really left to manage [the show] along with the Stage Manager, which taught me the show inside-out upside-down...so, as a result, I started putting *Crazy for You* together...

K: So, you started in the New York production and then you...

A: I branched out. [I did] half a dozen productions regionally, and then worldwide, the last one being in Amsterdam, in Holland...after that I did Susan Stroman's *Steel Pier*, which was short-lived, I was the dance captain on that as well, and then I went on to do Stroman's *Contact*, and

⁹ This interview has been edited from transcribed notes.

I was the dance captain on that...After *Contact*, I keep thinking I'm all washed up, and I got my real estate license, but then I went on to do *Wedding Singer* for Rob Ashford, and I was dance captain in that too.

K: How did you get to be involved with *Crazy for You*? Did you go through many levels of auditions, and did you know anybody involved with it?

A: I didn't know anyone involved with it, I really felt like I was all done, I had two little kids, I thought, what's the likelihood of my getting this, I haven't tapped since I was five years old...I hadn't tapped and it's a total tap show! But somehow in my bones I remembered tapping. They opened in February, I got the show in April; I was the first swing they hired, outside of the [original cast]...so I just auditioned and there were probably about two or three callbacks, and I couldn't believe it but I got it; and it was four years...

K: Were you hired as a dance captain, or a swing and then you became the dance captain...how did that work?

A: [I was] hired as a swing... and then very quickly, just within a couple of weeks, they asked me to become the dance captain. I was...learning the show from [assistant choreographer] Chris Peterson... From that experience, him working with me, he recommended me to Stroman.

K: What were your specific duties, in the rehearsal stages and once performances had begun?

A: A dance captain's responsibility, especially at that point, is to preserve what the choreographer and the director have initially established. Once the show opens and they freeze the show, that's what it should be, barring accidents, or barring somebody has an injury and they have to make a compensation. [An injured] actor must come to you and say, I have a really bad right hamstring and I don't think I can do that cartwheel to the right, can I do it to the left? And then we would say, OK, let's see if this works for your partner, and we'd have a rehearsal at whatever the stage manager says is a good time to get onstage...[and] we'd work it out... That's what a dance captain would do, a dance captain would make sure that the show remains in its original state.

K: When new people were brought into the show, was your responsibility to teach choreography to them? How did that work?

A: Whenever anyone was hired, I was part of the audition process. I did auditions along with Chris Peterson and Susan Stroman. So [then we'd] put the new people in the show. It was challenging sometimes... If somebody's off mark, 'cause you know when you start to do eight shows a week you drift off your mark, and then all of a sudden you'll hear about the person in the back who can't be seen...They always come to you, they never can speak to the actor, and if they do, it's a big no-no. You have to go to the liaison, which is your dance captain...

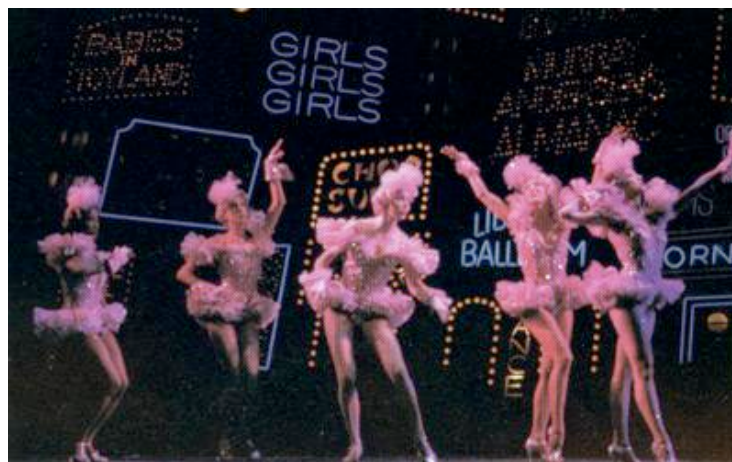
K: So, you're kind of like the liaison between everybody who doesn't want to talk to each other.

A: Well they may want to talk to each other, but they really shouldn't, so that everybody can have a clear, healthy relationship, simply go to work and do your job, and you don't have any personal animosity. If you have any animosity onstage, then it's just no fun, and if you're not havin' fun, it's not worth it. You gotta have fun. And look, how brilliant is this? You get paid, and you have fun. Every single show I have done, in all the years I've been on Broadway, I

have had fun... It's all about the people. I'd say my whole career, I've had so much fun onstage, and it's because of the clarity of the relationships. You respect one another, you help one another, and if you have any little kind of dispute...you learn to choose your battles.

K: Tell me about the process of how the show was put together? Were there workshops beforehand?

A: I recreated the PBS Great Performances...Quite a few of [the cast] had never done the show before...Everybody, especially the men, had very distinct parts, and [late director Mike Ockrent] let them come up with characterizations of who they were and what perhaps the relationship they had eventually with some of the girls. So it gave it a life. It's definitely not a bunch of dancer boys and dancer girls. It's really important that each person in the show, even if they think they're not dancing that much and they're way in the back, has a full-on character...The beauty of the show is that you watch [the men] kind of shuffle around the stage for a good [majority of the] first act, then all of a sudden by "Slap That Bass" they're being literally taught how to dance...It's very, very important that they act their dancing, so it doesn't come out of nowhere; every move is motivated ...It's not easy for somebody who is very agile to look uncoordinated, and that's something to work at so that it's a real journey that goes on with their growth.



K: What was different about *Crazy for You* as compared to others shows you had previously worked on? What different challenges were posed, for example, by the weight of the costumes?

A: All shows have their different challenges. I think, for *Crazy for You*, it looks very straightforward and simple, but it's very sophisticated, and the nuances of the show, the attention to detail of it—otherwise it would just look like a bunch of dancing boys and a bunch of dancing girls. I think what makes it different and that we haven't seen in so long is that they took a very simple story and they made it live and breathe...the whole company had full depth to their characters, and that helped with the storytelling... it's a simple story. You could never improve upon the music, the music is amazing, it's Gershwin. But you know it's based on *Girl Crazy*...and they just recrafted it, and how often people try to do that and then it bombs?

K: What was different about the style of the dancing, the acting, and the piece in general, from other shows? It's a very different style than *Chorus Line* and a lot of other shows that were coming out at the time period.

A: I have to respect Stroman so much because she does her homework, and she has an adoration for that period of the '30s, and she loves the Fred [Astaire] and Adele [Astaire] and Ginger [Rogers]...that whole era, I would say...But in the '30s they had very specific styles, and the choreography has a mixture of all those styles, from what you'd call the black community; "Slap That Bass" has so many black moves in it, it has some jitterbug moves... "Shall We Dance" is completely a Fred and Ginger number, all those moves are from that era, and she's pretty true to the era. And the tap dancing, the style of tap dancing too, it's Stroman's style, but she put in little pieces that would give it a time signature.



K: What is [Stroman] like to work with?

A: ...She's extremely thorough. She leaves no page unturned. She's very, very highly detailed, does her homework, research, and she works very, very closely with her dance orchestrator. [Her dance orchestrators] have these fabulous heads, they watch her and they'll see that she's doing something, and they'll say, well, what about something like this, [and she'll say] ooh yeah that's it, that's matching my steps...or if it's partner work and I know what she kind of wants, Chris [Peterson] and I would be working something out and she'll stop and say, can you get on the other side, and then I'd have to figure out what's the best way to get to the other side?...She has a vision in her head.

[Editor's Note: *At this point in the interview, "But Not For Me," a Gershwin tune in both Girl Crazy and Crazy for You, came on the radio in the coffee shop!*]

K: So, what comes first, the choreography or the orchestrations?

A: Stroman would know what the music is, the basic melody, and she would choreograph in all different styles, and the dance arranger would try to fit it. Peter Howard was her dance arranger for *Crazy for You*. Usually they're very good about figuring out what she wants, but if not, she'd call out "double time" or "stop time," so they could figure out what worked...She would use all different dance styles on the same melody, that's what she's known for, "I Got

Rhythm” is a great example—you take the standard feel of, say, a horse trotting and then the dance arranger would try to match that feeling, of what she is trying to execute. And then you have the New Orleans minstrel style, the player piano/early ’30s/ragtime style, and then of course the end of “I Got Rhythm” is all tap.

K: What special role do you feel the dancing plays in *Crazy for You*?

A: It tells the story. It propels the storyline forward. Each production number takes us on a journey and has a complete arc, a beginning, middle and end. “Shall We Dance?” is a perfect example of that. Agnes de Mille in *Oklahoma!* really changed the way dance was used, and Stroman’s work is about carrying the torch, using the dance to tell a story.



K: What did you like most about working on this show?

A: I always thought of the show as this big tree, and I got to sit on a different branch every night. So I got a chance to see it from all different angles. And I loved it, watching from the house one night, and then being onstage, and being in a different place onstage every night. You know, I was a swing, but I also I understudied the roles of Tess and Patricia Fodor...I was in the show I would say on average three to four times a week. And I got to watch the show from onstage and watch the traffic patterns onstage, it was prop hell! But always when I was onstage performing I was watching the show as well...

K: When you were in the show, what was your favorite part of the show to perform?

A: I liked “Entrance to Nevada,” it just packed such a powerful punch, because you know you hear “Stairway to Paradise” and it’s this raunchy striptease, it totally changes the feel when the chorus girls come in; it’s so rich. And meanwhile we’ve got these ten mini treadmills across the back of the stage. And the costumes, William Ivey Long did such an amazing job creating these brightly colored, silk dresses that are just the perfect length, and they’re juxtaposed against the grayish/brownish set, and it’s so powerful.

K: Did you do any research for the different characters you played? What kind of background work did you have to do?

A: I learned it mostly through osmosis, watching the show every night... I was brought up on the Fred and Ginger style, so I used a lot of my own experience. The most important thing was

the body language, it's not contemporary and it needs to look period. As for preparation of the roles, Tess is the dance instructor in the show, and I was the dance captain, so she was myself but a bit more aggressive, and Mrs. Fodor was a stereotypical British lady; she was a combo of watching a bit of British sitcom on cable in addition to being inspired by the actor playing the role, Amelia White. She was English and wonderful in the role.



K: What feedback did you get from people who saw the show and talked to you about it afterwards? What do you think was the audience appeal of the show?

A: Well Kelly, you know, the show was very successful. It's a happy show, and it had recognizable tunes...At the time *Crazy for You* was playing, the music union hadn't trimmed down the Broadway orchestras yet, so there was a full orchestra, as opposed to the 15 pieces or so that you hear now. The music was so full and of course Gershwin was so satisfying to hear, I think people loved that. They could go out humming a multitude of tunes. I would have to call *Crazy for You* a sophisticated simple show. There was enormous attention to detail that the audience couldn't recall but it all counted within the evening's experience.



Dance Party!

Angelique Ilo talked about the many different styles of music and dance in “I Got Rhythm” (©1993 BMG Music). Go to Track 5 on your CD and listen to the whole song. Discuss as a class where you think the music changes style, and describe the different styles you hear. Decide how many distinct styles you think there are, and break up into as many groups. In each group, talk about how the music for your section makes you feel and what you think of when you hear it. Think of your own dance for your section and perform it for your class! Afterwards, talk about the different styles you saw among the different groups.

For the Performer

Who are these people?

While several of the main characters in *Crazy for You* stem from characters in *Girl Crazy*, ensemble members do not have as specific a history to draw from. Below is some background information that will be helpful when creating an ensemble character:

- **The Women**

1930 in America was a significant time to be a woman. Women had just gotten the right to vote, in 1920, and for the first time legislation was enacted to ensure equal opportunity and equal pay for women in the workplace. The 1920s was an era of liberation and confidence for women; they shortened their skirts and reveled in the new music and dances the Jazz Age brought. If you've read or seen *The Great Gatsby*, you've seen the attitudes of many women at this time. Women carried themselves with pride in their sex, and lifted, confident posture.



The showgirls in *Crazy for You* are largely based on those in the Ziegfeld Follies shows of 1907 to 1931. For showgirls at this time, a lot was changing. Performing was finally becoming a more respectable profession for a woman—in early musical theatre, the only jobs for women were stripteases in burlesque shows. However, the Great Depression adds a whole new aspect to this. Every performer's job was threatened when the stock market crashed. Broadway shows were expensive to produce and to attend. A showgirl can look at this issue many different ways—are you grateful to still be working? Worried you won't have a job for much longer? Completely naïve and oblivious to the whole thing?

- **The Men**

Silver mining in Nevada had begun in 1858, with Nevada achieving statehood six years later. However, the mines were drying up around the turn of the century, with the last great silver mining district developed in 1900. Meanwhile, the 1920s and 1930s in America saw a move toward urbanization. People flocked to the nation's cities as they became the cultural centers of the country. Western mining towns, once lively places, were left to drifting. Gambling in Nevada had been

outlawed in 1909 and was not re-legalized until 1931, so the Las Vegas gambling industry was not conceivable at the time *Crazy for You* is set. Fictional Deadrock, Nevada is a town of lazy, aimless people caught between the prosperity they once experienced as a mining town and the yet-to-come prosperity of the Nevada gambling industry.

Why the presentational style?

The presentational style of *Crazy for You* comes from different sources. *Girl Crazy* was written in 1930, at a time when the development of musical theatre was caught between the showy vaudeville acts of the first couple decades of the 20th century, and the more realistic theatre to come in the Golden Age of Broadway, beginning in 1943. *Girl Crazy* was a stepping stone in the development of musical theatre (see pages 21-22). Because the show is caught between the flashier shows of the past and more plot-driven shows of the future, it exhibits features of each.

Shows from this time period aimed to entertain above all else. The Great Depression had just begun, and people did not go to the theatre to see something deep and psychological. People did not want realism; they wanted to be able to escape from their financial woes. So, the musicals of this period are rife with flashy dance numbers and silly scenes. This concept is still relevant in today's society.

What was the objective of all this music?

The songs in *Crazy for You* were originally written for various shows and movies, but they had a dual purpose. The music of Broadway in the 1930s was also the popular music; the “standards” were the songs that would have been on the radio. These songs were written as character songs and dance numbers, but they were also written for great singers, and for the general population. They had to be feasible as stand-alone pop songs. This is why there aren't any true duets in the show; had the music been written today, you can imagine Polly and Bobby having intense interwoven duets. The important thing is that you are able to take a song written for such broad application and make it specific for your character.



A Writing Activity for Students

Think about what it was like to be a man or a woman at this time in America. Create a character for yourself and write a character biography. Think about your life as this character—what is your name? How old are you? Where do you live? Do you like where you live? Do you have family? What are they like? Do you have a job? Did you have a job before the Depression? Use your imagination to come up with a background and a life for the character you have chosen.

OK, so why do we care about all this old stuff?

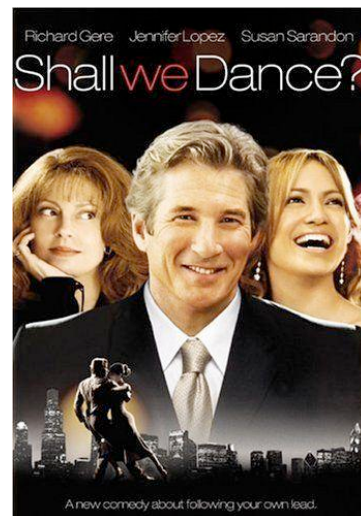
Believe it or not, George Gershwin's effects can be felt in many areas of our culture. Who are some of your favorite musical artists? Performers such as Rihanna, Ne-Yo, and Kanye West probably top the lists. These talented African American performers might not have a voice or a style to thrive in, were it not for the work of Tin Pan Alley composers like George Gershwin. Here are some of the ways Gershwin has contributed to contemporary American culture:

Influence on African Americans

Aside from the obvious African American influences in his music (see pages 19-20), Gershwin's one and only opera, *Porgy and Bess* (1935), was centered on African American characters. While the opera has been criticized for perpetuating undesirable stereotypes, it made significant steps toward legitimizing African American culture, chronicling African American characters and their struggles. The majority of Gershwin's contemporaries wrote only for whites. His decision to branch out was, at the time, ground-breaking.

Contributions to Movies

Later in his career, at first in 1931 and then in 1936, George Gershwin headed West to California to begin writing music for movies. He collaborated with his brother Ira on four films, including *Shall We Dance* (1937) and *A Damsel in Distress* (1937), the latter in production at George's death. After his death, George Gershwin's music was used in countless films, including *An American in Paris* (1951). He made an enormous contribution to the development of the movie musical in 1930s Hollywood, which in turn greatly affected the production of future movies.



Influence on Popular Music

Gershwin’s playful, experimental spirit can be felt throughout all of his work, especially later in his career. He was never afraid to try something new. From this artistic fearlessness came many contributions to popular and classical music. He fused African American musical styles with classical training and his own personal touch to create a whole new style of music.

Gershwin’s effects can best be felt in the rhythms of his music—he took the concept of syncopation and used it to create rich rhythmic complexity in his compositions. Without his experimentation we would not have the many rhythmically-oriented musical styles of today, including rap and R&B.

At the time he was writing, Gershwin’s music didn’t just *affect* the popular music—it *was* the popular music. The songs heard in the latest Broadway show were what young people were listening to. Imagine music from shows such as *Rent*, *Wicked*, and *Legally Blonde: The Musical* being played on the radio! Nowadays, that process is reversed—writers will take popular music and turn it into a musical. *Mamma Mia!* and the movie *Across the Universe* are two examples.



So, why do we care?

History repeats itself. You’ve probably heard the saying, “Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it,¹⁰” in one form or another. This may seem drastic when we’re talking about music and pop culture, but that sentiment still rings true. The effects of George Gershwin’s work can be felt in every genre of modern popular music. Take a look at the activity on the next page—you can see firsthand how music history repeats itself, and how some songwriting conventions never change!

¹⁰ George Santayana <<http://www.wisdomquotes.com/002322.html>>.



In these two songs you can see how some of the same conventions used in Gershwin's music still hold true today. Listen along to "Tee-Oodle-Um-Bum-Bo" on Track 3 of your enclosed CD. "Disturbia" is Track 6.

"Tee-Oodle-Um-Bum-Bo" (1919)

Music by George Gershwin
Lyrics by B.G. De Sylva and Arthur J. Jackson
©2004 Asv Living Era

Soon you will meet
Folks on the street
And you'll want to know the little tune
They croon
I'm one who knows
Just how it goes
I will sing that little thing that
You're missin'
Now listen

Tee-oodle-um-bum-bo
That's how it goes
Tee-oodle-um-bum-bo
The tune that grows
More chummy
And hummy ev'ry day
So snappy
Each happy man and miss'll learn to whistle

Tee-oodle-um-bum-bo
And then you'll see
No matter where you go
That tune will be
I'll bet you
It gets you when it becomes
The tune that ev'rybody hums
Um-um-um-um
The tune that ev'rybody hums

"Disturbia" (2008)

Written by Robert Allen, Andre Merritt, and Chris Brown

As performed by Rihanna
©2008 The Island Def Jam Music Group

Bum bum be-dum bum bum be-dum bum
Bum bum be-dum bum bum be-dum bum
Bum bum be-dum bum bum be-dum bum
Bum bum be-dum bum bum be-dum bum

What's wrong with me?
Why do I feel like this?
I'm going crazy now

No more gas in the rig
Can't even get it started
Nothing heard, nothing said
Can't even speak about it
All my life on my head
Don't want to think about it
Feels like I'm going insane
Yeah

It's a thief in the night to come and grab you
It can creep up inside you and consume you
A disease of the mind, it can control you
It's too close for comfort

CHORUS:

Throw on your break lights
We're in the city of wonder
Ain't gonna play nice
Watch out, you might just go under
Better think twice
Your train of thought will be altered
So if you must falter be wise
Your mind is in disturbia
It's like the darkness is the light
Disturbia
Am I scaring you tonight
Your mind is in disturbia
Ain't used to what you like
Disturbia
Disturbia

Bum bum be-dum bum bum be-dum bum (x4)

Faded pictures on the wall
It's like they talkin' to me
Disconnectin' your call
Your phone don't even ring
I gotta get out
Or figure this s--- out
It's too close for comfort

It's a thief in the night to come and grab you
It can creep up inside you and consume you
A disease of the mind, it can control you
I feel like a monster

CHORUS

Bum bum be-dum bum bum be-dum bum (x4)

Release me from this curse I'm in
Trying to maintain
But I'm struggling
You can't go, go, go
I think I'm going to oh, oh, oh

CHORUS

Bum bum be-dum bum bum be-dum bum (x4)



Some things to think about...

- 1. What do you notice about the two songs that is similar? What are the major differences?**
- 2. What does this say about the way music has grown and developed over the past century?**

A Note from the Author.

Putting together this study guide has been an amazing process and an opportunity I have been privileged to have. I am a musical theatre major and performer, and approaching the creative process from a different angle has been enormously rewarding. Special thanks to Prof. Neil Baldwin for his dramaturgical mentoring and inspiration. Monumental thanks to Marie Sparks, Clay James, Carrie Urbanic, Alfred Fredel, Angelique Ilo, Stephanie Samaras, Paul Hostetter, and the 2008 Montclair State University cast of *Crazy for You*, all of whom were absolutely instrumental in the process.

—K.L.K.



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