

The title is too general, though it mirrors the topic of the essay.  
Better would be, "Crazy For Musicals:  
The Success of Spectacular Theatre in Bad Times"

## Musicals in Canada

Musical theatre, in spite of high costs for both the producers and the audience, is now, once again, a prominent part of popular culture and often an enormous financial success. ~~What accounts for this change? It may be said that this~~ comparatively recent change in the fortunes of Canadian theatre is caused by two things: an audience eager for spectacle and escapism and a mass market for theatre with an exotic foreign appeal.

This question is unnecessary, and simply a part of the writer's composition process.

Some wordiness can be removed here, without any loss of meaning.

It is certainly clear that the musical is a thriving form of theatrical presentation. The large amounts of money spent on their production, the long runs that many popular musicals enjoy, the increase in theatre building in Canada, at least in centralized areas, and the vast sums spent on merchandizing items all attest to the proliferation of the form of entertainment. Broadway hits like *Miss Saigon* and *Crazy For You* demanded an initial investment of \$10 million and \$5.8 million dollars (U.S.) respectively (Weber C18). The Canadian version of *Miss Saigon* is itself an \$18-million production (Bemrose 54).

The commercial success of musicals in cities like Toronto can be shown by the high degree of entrepreneurial involvement in their production.

David Mirvish, to accommodate his production of *Miss Saigon*, an established hit, built the Princess of Wales Theatre, "the first privately built hall for live theatre to be erected in Canada in almost 90 years." The triumph of that musical in London, New York, Tokyo, and Chicago assured his ability to secure large revenues in Canada and thus to support Mirvish's investment in the theatre.

Nor was the success of *Miss Saigon* an isolated phenomenon. David Mirvish's father, Ed Mirvish, owner of Honest Ed's in Toronto, was himself a wealthy businessman turned theatre owner. He went from a warehouse business

This paragraph lacks a good general topic sentence.

The added detail here will make this point clearer.

Be sure to acknowledge the source of quotations

designed “to sate rampaging middle-class appetites for everything from Hula Hoops to TV dinners” (“Expectations” 92) to the ownership of Toronto’s Royal Alex and Britain’s Old Vic. No longer just a businessman finding ways to profit from consumerism, the elder Mirvish is now considered to have made “a permanent contribution to Canada’s cultural life” (Jenish 28). One can also point to the great, if fleeting, financial fortunes of Garth Drabinsky’s production in Canada of *The Phantom of the Opera* or to the even more lucrative example of *Les Miserables*, which sold 4.6 million tickets in Canada, making it the most successful musical in Canadian history (Bemrose 34). Indeed, the producers themselves see these shows as unabashedly commercial enterprises, though some critics have seen them as evidence of what is disapprovingly called “commodity theatre” (Bentley 281).

Note that the accent in "Miserables" is missing throughout the essay.

Cameron Mackintosh, the British co-producer of *Miss Saigon*, admits to the flashy production values and the commercial appeal of the show when he claims, “if *Les Miserables* is a Cadillac, then *Miss Saigon* is a Ferrari” (Bemrose 10). His analogy of the musicals to flashy cars demonstrates the importance of stunning production values and extravagant visual appeal.

The paragraph will benefit from a definitive concluding sentence.

To understand why such flamboyant financially staggering shows have reached a pinnacle in difficult economic times, ~~the Victorian era might be examined~~. Michael R. Booth, in *Victorian Spectacular Theatre 1880-1910*, argues that there is a “relationship between spectacle, realism, historicity, archaeology, and pictorialism” (29) that accounted in large measure for Victorian theatrical concerns. The Victorians, he claims, were interested in recapturing the past and in seeing the world that was increasingly open to their curiosity. Just as now, Booth acknowledges

it might be useful to draw a comparison with a similar situation in the Victorian era.

The passive voice is awkward here and results in a dangling infinitive phrase.

that spectacular theatre was seen as carrying “the taint of vulgarity and tastelessness” (29), but nonetheless, it was popular and had its origins in the tastes of the times.

Use a comma here in order to punctuate as if the quoted words were your own.

Nostalgia and the desire for spectacular stage effects, as in Victorian times, coupled with bad economic conditions, have led to the success of the musical in recent years. As Morley writes: “Musicals enjoy a boom in a period of economic recession . . . An audience that has trouble finding the money for its tickets is also keen to see how the money is being spent, and musicals with huge sets and lavish costumes fulfil an economic and escapist need. They also pose no real challenge: in the case of a revival, where one can actually go in humming familiar songs, the public can also be reasonably sure of what they are buying in advance at the box-office”.

Musicals are a recognizable and happy representation of life that comforts the audience (220) and delivers the expected goods for the purchase price.

Add four periods in an ellipsis to indicate the end of a sentence as well as words left out.

Remember to indent quotations of four lines or more. Also, be sure to explain the point of the quote.

As in Victorian times, the emphasis on the pictorial may be accounted for by an increasing sense of participation in the larger world. Victorians, ~~who were~~ fascinated with exotic foreign places and with remote times, demanded a stage that could reproduce them. These days, with so much money at stake, as British critic Sheridan Morley remarks, “a successful record plus a Broadway deal, and if possible a film option as well, are needed months if not years before a first night” (210). To

Eliminate these in order to make the writing smoother.

make money, spectacular musicals must appeal to the wider world and not be constrained by national concerns. Media often <sup>transcend</sup> ~~transcends~~ national borders, allowing for the growing import of British and American productions. Not all critics are happy about the turn that theatre has taken as a consequence of media salesmanship. Robert Wallace, a Canadian theatre critic, writes, for example, that national theatre will suffer as a result:

“Media is plural, so takes the plural form of the verb.”

now that commercial theatres are producing foreign work with the

economic backing of international corporations—not to mention major financial support by all levels of government in the case of the Elgin and

Winter Garden theatres—the strength of this competition has increased enormously. With millions of dollars to market their products and palatial theatres in which to present them, companies like Cineplex Odeon have changed the face of Canadian theatre. Their high profile in

the media and the marketplace—*Phantom* is “co-marketed” in ads for Pepsi Cola and American Express—works to redefine what Hans Robert

Jauss calls the “horizon of expectations” that an audience brings to the theatre. (54).

This tendency, Wallace effectively argues, works against anything but central, urban, mainstream theatre financed by multinational corporations. It may, consequently, silence the voices of groups without that kind of financial backing or that kind of access to the world marketplace. It may result, he argues, in a homogenized theatre incapable of providing expression to marginalized ways of thinking. Such an international and corporate domination of the theatre may also be hurtful to Canadian nationalism.

In the minds of many people, productions like *Les Misérables* and *The Phantom of the Opera* confirm an idea of theatre that much indigenous Canadian work has tried to disestablish during the last 20

years: namely, that theatre is a special, expensive “event”—a product of older, more established cultures that Canada must import and enshrine in lavish institutions deemed appropriate to its revered status. (Wallace 54)

Wallace’s point here is that theatres should not be seen as institutionalized corporate bodies <sup>because</sup> ~~due to the fact that they~~ sanction certain attitudes, but should instead challenge the minds and the societies in which they find themselves. Indeed, Swain argues powerfully that the popular tradition of musical theatre would benefit from critical attention that attempts to explain its aesthetic effects (7).

Despite their capacity to evoke former times and thus appeal to nostalgic yearnings, musicals are not always frothy productions devoid of social conscience. <sup>which Morley terms “an angry musical about blood and death and social corruption” (203),</sup> One need only think of Stephen Sondheim’s *Sweeney Todd* <sup>^</sup> and Willy Russell’s <sup>considered a “marvellously tough, grainy, black show” (203),</sup> British musical *Blood Brothers*, to realize their potential to affect the emotions of their audiences to social ends. <sup>^</sup>

Yet is also true that the most profitable shows are frequently those that transcend national barriers and hence, often social concerns, like Lats or The Phantom of the Opera whose main appeals are clearly spectacular and escapist.

This is wordy. It can be replaced with "because" or you might find a way to eliminate it altogether.

The paper lacks a conclusion that echoes the original points being made in the thesis statement. Also, be sure to add the works cited.

Provide more detailed information to make the point clearer.

#### Works Cited

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