

Missed cues: music in the American spoken theater c. 1935-1960

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MISSSED CUES:
MUSIC IN THE AMERICAN SPOKEN THEATER C. 1935-1960
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The period from the end of World War I through the 1950s has been called “the Golden Age of Drama on Broadway.” Subsumed within this period is another sort of golden age, of music in the American spoken theater, Broadway and beyond, c. 1935-60. Unlike more familiar, and better-studied, genres of dramatic music such as opera, ballet, and the Broadway-style musical, music composed for spoken dramas is neither a definitive part of the dramatic form nor integral to the work’s original conception. Rather, it is added in production, like sets, costumes, and lighting. This study traces the roots of this rich period of spoken-dramatic music to the collaboration of producer John Houseman, director Orson Welles, and composer Virgil Thomson on the Federal Theatre Project, beginning in 1936. The musical ramifications of that collaboration eventually extended to include composers Paul Bowles and Marc Blitzstein, influential theater companies such as the Theatre Guild and Group Theatre, innovative directors such as Elia Kazan and Margo Jones,

and major playwrights such as Lillian Hellman and Tennessee Williams. Following a consideration of the forces that gave rise to this musically rich nexus and the people, materials, and practices involved, three high-profile theatrical collaborations are examined, along with three scores that resulted from them: Thomson's score for Houseman's 1957 "Wild West" *Much Ado About Nothing*; Blitzstein's score for Welles and the Mercury Theatre's 1937-38 "anti-Fascist" *Julius Caesar*; and Bowles's score for the original production of Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* (1944-45). Each score is located within the musico-dramatic history that produced it, and analyzed within the context of the production for which it was written. This work aims to begin to recover a vast body of forgotten American dramatic music, to limn the role of the spoken theater in the careers of these three noteworthy American musical artists, to probe a busy intersection of high and commercial art forms, and to suggest music's important role in the development of the American spoken theater.

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Missed cues: Music in the American spoken theater c. 1935-1960. Gabriele Cesare Alfieri. Performance in review. Text and Performance Quarterly. Mark Gallaher, Keith Henning(California State University, Los Angeles). Although musical theatre overlaps with other theatrical forms like opera and dance, it may be distinguished by the equal importance given to the music as compared with the dialogue, movement and other elements. Since the early 20th century, musical theatre stage works have generally been called, simply, musicals. Musical theatre is a form of theatrical performance that combines songs, spoken dialogue , acting and dance. The story and emotional content of a musical – humor, pathos , love, anger – are communicated through the words, music, movement and technical aspects of the entertainment as an integrated whole. [56] The Gershwins' *Porgy and Bess* (1935) featured an all African-American cast and blended operatic, folk and jazz idioms.