

Audience Study Guide

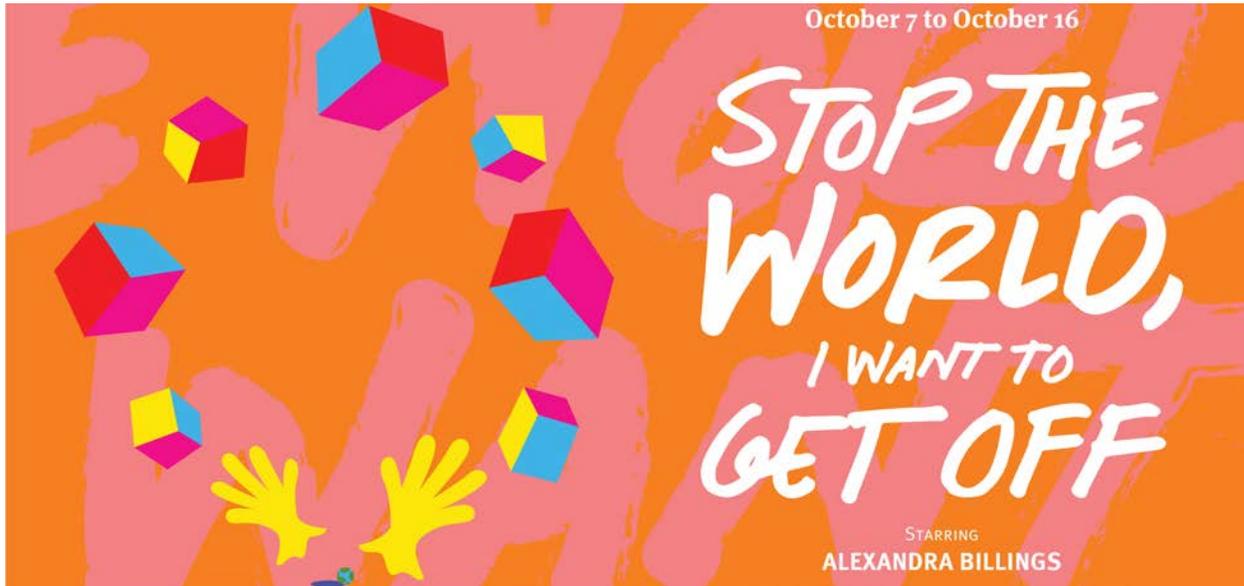


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Introduction to *Stop the World, I Want to Get Off*

While the origins of musical theater can be traced to opera and vaudeville, the earliest traces of musical theater are to be found as far back as the mid-1850s. At that time, musicals had a very simple plot. This plot was a love story where a boy and girl meet and fall in love, but an obstacle keeps them apart. In the end, they find a way to be together again and the musical concludes with a happy ending. It was an easy storyline to follow, and it was a classic formula that would continue in musicals for decades to come. While the musical did evolve over time, during the 1960s there was a dramatic shift in the types of musicals that were being created.

In the 1960s, America was evolving. The country was in the middle of the Civil Rights Movement and the Women's Movement, where African Americans and women fought against segregation and discrimination. These movements led to changing societal norms as citizens started reevaluating the ways they looked at themselves, others, and society's structures. The country also was in mourning after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Conflicts in Southeast Asia escalated into the Vietnam War, one of America's deadliest wars.

The chaos of this changing world inspired composers to create musicals that reflected the society they lived in. This led to the concept musicals – more abstract musicals that may or may not have contained a plot. Examples of concept musicals include *Cats*, *The Fantasticks*, and *The Last Five Years*. Often times the themes and symbols used in the play were the focus more than an actual plot. The storylines would stray from the classic love story plotline that was seen in most musicals up until this time, and focused on social themes that were being addressed in current affairs.

Stop the World, I Want to Get Off was one of the first concept musicals to be produced. This musical, and others like it, inspired composers like Stephen Sondheim (who wrote musicals like *Company* and *Into the Woods*) and Galt MacDermot (who wrote *Hair*) to create more abstract musicals. Musical were created that were not only entertaining but provocative. Musical and thought provoking art were no longer separate; they were combined to create a new form of live performance. The themes that were addressed were controversial, such as racism and infidelity. These performances allowed the audience to see current events in a different way, which helped create more dialogue on the social issues and cause self-reflection on the more personal topics presented onstage.

While *Stop the World, I Want to Get Off* is not a well-known musical, it is a significant musical in relation to the history of musical theater. It was a musical that covered controversial topics like infidelity and child neglect. This musical was also one of the first to not have a happy ending. At the time it premiered, it was difficult to find a musical that did not end in a happy or positive way. *Stop the World, I Want to Get Off* was a musical that helped broaden the possibilities of musical theater, allowing new composers, lyricists, and book writers to create new musicals that could address difficult topics and leave the audience with important messages and questions on their minds.

Stop the World, I Want to Get Off

Character Breakdown

- Littlechap: The main character; A man who struggles to be successful in his career while trying to keep control of the world around him.
- Evie: Littlechap's wife.
- Susan and Jane: Littlechap and Evie's twin daughters.
- Anya: A Russian official; Littlechap's Mistress
- Ilse: A German domestic; Littlechap's Mistress
- Ginnie: An American cabaret singer; Littlechap's Mistress

Song List

Act 1

The A.B.C. Song
I Want to Be Rich
Typically English
A Special Announcement
Lumbered
Welcome to Sludgepool
Gonna Build a Mountain
Glorious Russian
Meilinki, Meilchick
Family Fugue
Typische Deutsche
Nag! Nag! Nag!

Act 2

All-American
Once in a Lifetime
Mumbo Jumbo
Welcome to Sunvale
Life is a Woman
Someone Nice Like You
What Kind of Fool Am I?

About the Composers

Biographies from <http://www.songwritershalloffame.org/>

Leslie Bricusse



Leslie Bricusse, an Englishman with an enormous talent for songwriting, has written more than 30 musical shows and films. He has received two Oscars (eight nominations), a Grammy (six nominations), and eight Novello Awards, including the 1989 Lifetime Achievement Award in 1989.

Born in London, Bricusse attended University College School and Caius College, Cambridge. In his early career, Bricusse enjoyed substantial successes in collaboration with Anthony Newley in such memorable Broadway triumphs as *Stop the World, I Want to Get Off* and *The Roar of the Greasepaint-The Smell of the Crowd*. In the 1980's, he also collaborated with Henry Mancini, John Williams, John Barry, Jule Styne, Jerry Goldsmith, Lionel Bart and Andre Previn. Bricusse also contributed songs and/or screenplays for such memorable films as *Doctor Doolittle*, *Scrooge*, *Hook*, *Victor/Victoria*, *Peter Pan*, *Babes in Toyland*, and *The Pied Piper*.

Anthony Newley

One of Broadway's greatest leading men, Anthony Newley, was born in Hackney, London on September 24, 1931. Newley's beginnings in the entertainment industry go back to his departure from regular school at the age of 14, when he starred in several films such as *Oliver Twist* and *Doctor Doolittle*.

In 1961, songwriter Leslie Bricusse suggested to Newley that they write a show together. The product was the successful *Stop the World - I Want to Get Off*, which starred and was directed by Newley.

Soon after the success of *Stop the World*, Bricusse and Newley wrote the score to the James Bond film *Goldfinger*. In 1971, the pair wrote the score for the film *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*, which included the top ten hit song recorded by Sammy Davis, Jr., "The Candy Man" and was one of the top five grossing films of that year. In the mid-1970's the team also collaborated on the television version of *Peter Pan*.

Newley worked individually as director, actor or producer in a multitude of acclaimed motion pictures. In 1977, Newley was further acknowledged for his successes when he was named the "Male Star of the Year" at the sixth annual Las Vegas Awards Ceremony.



Interview with Director Joanne Gordon

Interviewed by Nicole Koenig

Nicole Koenig: *What drew you to *Stop the World, I Want to Get Off*?*

Joanne Gordon: You can look at it from two directions: the one from the past and the one from the future.

Let's start with the future. We are facing an election, and it is an election that is fraught with a huge amount of passion from both sides. This is a play about choosing your path and choosing your leaders and making choices and also showing the ultimate irrelevance and frivolity of the political world in comparison to the personal. The personal becomes so much more important ultimately. Littlechap is a lousy politician because he is a lousy human being. He discovers too late where his real priorities should be.

Then the past – I saw this play when I was in high school, and I fell in love with it. It was one of the very early concept musicals. It was one of the early plays that used music to explore issues beyond “boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl”. I was blown away because I always loved theater that mattered, but I also loved musical theater. In fact, in many ways, you can see the path very directly for me from *Stop the World...* to falling in love with Sondheim.

NK: *During your time at this university directing musicals, what is the biggest challenge you find?*

JG: It is not a challenge. It is just a joy. Of course it is more difficult. You have to have the people who sing and move and act. You have to combine in the most extreme way every aspect of the theatrical world. I no longer am excited by traditional realism, and the minute someone sings you are immediately outside the realm of realism, and you are in a theatrical space where, for me, it is the most exciting.

NK: *Is there a specific question or message you want the audience to take away from this show?*

JG: Yes. Love truly. Love honestly. Love without illusion. Recognizing that joy, when you find it, and cherishing it, is the important message of this play.

NK: *In this production, the only male character is Littlechap. Even the ensemble is made of only women. What was the significance of that?*

JG: It is endemic to the script because this is Littlechap's world. In Littlechap's world, the world is filled with women who should adore him. He is the ultimate male chauvinist pig, and I repeat, the connection to our current election cycle is not accidental.

NK: *The most famous song from this show is titled “What Kind of Fool Am I”. What kind of fool are you?*

JG: I was the fool who did fall in love, and therefore I am a wise fool. I repeatedly fell in love and deeply in love, and I wouldn't have it any other way.

NK: *Anything else you would like to add?*

JG: There might be a little confusion by the clown ambiance, but remember that life is a circus. We all know our tricks. We all want to entertain, and ultimately we all fall flat on our faces.

Musical Theater Terms

In the world of live performance, there are some terms that you hear being used in musicals.

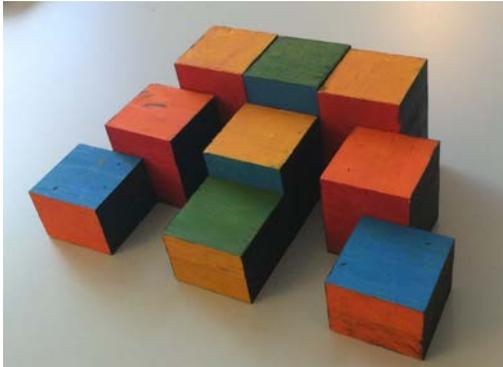
How many of them are you familiar with or have you heard before?

See if you can identify any of these when you watch the performance.

- **Belt:** To sing out loudly, strongly, and clearly, so that one's voice is heard by everyone in the theater, whether in the front row or the back of the balcony.
- **Big Number:** A song in which BIG emotions are expressed by a main character or two and the music SWELLS and sounds noble and thunderous.
- **Book:** The actual story of a musical; the play part.
- **Book Musical:** A musical with a story. Some musicals don't have any kind of a story.
- **Button:** The payoff moment in a song; the moment when the song is "buttoned up" and finished.
- **Chorus:** The background singers and dancers (and occasional actors).
- **Concept Musical:** A musical in which the idea or concept takes precedence over the plot; usually a nonlinear story, or one that incorporates several threads.
- **Eleven O'Clock Number:** A song in which the main character has some kind of revelation or undergoes a major emotional moment that brings the musical to a climax. It is often the final song.
- **Entr'Acte:** The music played at the beginning of the second act of a musical, before the action resumes. Often just another version of the Overture.
- **Libretto:** The lyrics to a musical. Often includes some "connective tissue" that explains what happens between the songs. See also Book.
- **Overture:** A song used to open a musical; it almost always consists of a medley of good bits from the other songs in the show.
- **Patter Song:** A song that's more spoken than sung.
- **Production Number/Big Production Number:** An elaborately staged song, usually with dancing and flashy costumes and lots of people involved.
- **Reprise:** A repetition of a song sung earlier in a musical.
- **Revue:** A show that consists of disparate musical numbers, either by many different composers or by one individual or team. What separates a revue from a plain old concert is the staging; the songs are performed rather than merely sung. Sometimes there might be a thematic thread running through some or all of the songs, but there is no overarching storyline.
- **Showstopper:** A musical number, a song or a dance or both, that creates such excitement in an audience that the show has to pause because people keep cheering and applauding.
- **Sung-Through (Sung-Thru, Through-Sung, Thru-Sung):** A musical where all the dialogue is sung.
- **Take-Home Tune:** A very memorable, "hummable" tune that audiences remember afterwards.
- **Triple Threat:** Someone who can sing, dance, and act.
- **Wanting Song:** A song that expresses longing for something such as love, excitement, or respect.

See More Musical Theater Terms at <http://www.rationalmagic.com/Bursting/Glossary.html>

Designer Collaboration



Scenic Design by Danila Korogodsky

A show is crafted through the collaboration of several creative minds. There is the director, who has a vision of what they want the show to look like as a whole; in a musical there is a choreographer, who has a vision of the type of dancing that will be done throughout the show; and a music director, who knows how they want the songs to be sung. Then, there are the designers; each of whom is focused on their vision of their specific discipline – sound, set, costumes, lighting, etc. These creative minds come together to create a production and must find a way to connect to each other in order to tell the story.

One way to facilitate a collaboration is through production meetings. These are held before rehearsals begin and throughout the rehearsal process. Before rehearsals have started, the director, designers, stage manager, and other theater technicians, meet to discuss everyone's visions for the show. In advance of this meeting, the director and designers have read the play, and have likely brainstormed ideas about their designs. Everyone arrives at the production meetings and discusses the ideas that they have with the rest of the team. Communication is important in these meetings because these are the moments when the designers and directors make sure that they are all trying to demonstrate the same vision and themes in their work. Production meetings start happening long before rehearsals begin so that the designers can start creating specific looks for characters or scenes to match the agreed-upon tone of the show. When rehearsals start, these meetings become the opportunity for the production team and the director to check in on the progress of rehearsals and the progress of construction of the sets, costumes, etc.



Lighting Design by Caitlin Eby

Every person is unique, so it can be difficult for these designers to create a unified look for the performance. One strategy for ensuring a unified vision is to indicate a specific theme of the play. Designers and the director can then focus on the specific theme in their work in order to create a look that connects each element together. For example, *Stop the World, I Want to Get Off* has a circus setting, so the designers explored various ways to work with this theme. Scenic Designer Danila Korogodsky created a set of blocks that could change to create different locations, with the bright colors creating a circus feel. Lighting Designer Caitlin Eby used colorful lights to help depict significant moments of Littlechap's life and to reflect the emotions and action happening onstage. She also utilized bright lights (as shown in the

rendering) to emulate the spotlights given to the ringmaster at a circus. Continuing with the circus theme, Costume Designer Amanda Martin created costumes that reflected mime and clown costumes.

Another way a unified vision can be established is through the use of color – either by using similar colors across the design elements, or by using different colors to create a juxtaposition that symbolizes an aspect of the plot or a specific character. *For Stop the World...* Danila's and Caitlin's use of bright colors help create the feeling of the circus. Caitlin also incorporates colors to help communicate the specific moods and tones that are happening onstage. Amanda's selection of specific colors, or lack of color, in the costumes not only demonstrates the mime aspects of the show, but also allows the small amounts of color used in each costume to stand out. Having specific color choices on certain characters can also symbolize some aspect of that character.



Costume Design by Amanda Martin

Design collaboration is difficult. It requires several unique, creative individuals to come together to create a unified look and set the tone of the production. With creative discussions starting early in production meetings, the creative team (designers and director) can work together and construct a show that is not only unified in its themes and vision, but also demonstrates the unique talent and style of the director and each designer. This creative cooperation generates not only a great work environment for the entire company, but also produces an amazing production that speaks to the audience and tells the story.

From Stage to Screen

Stop the World, I Want to Get Off was adapted from a stage musical into a film in 1966. After seeing the production, watch the movie. What changes did you see? Why do you think the director and screenwriter made those changes?



Discussion Questions

1. What images and ideas does the title of this play, *Stop the World, I Want to Get Off*, suggest to you? How does the title relate to the circumstances of the play?
2. In musical theater, spoken dialogue is punctuated with song. Drawing from specific examples from the show, why do you think the writers and composers designated particular moments in the story to be rendered in song as opposed to speech? What kind of communication does music facilitate that exceeds the capacities of spoken speech to express emotions, thoughts, and situations?
3. The story takes place in the context of a circus. What are the associations you have with the circus from your own experience? Why do you think the story is served by its setting at the circus? How was the circus represented on the stage? In other words, what elements of the world of the circus did the designers/director select to represent for the audience? Can you imagine the events of the play unfolding in a different context?
4. This musical explores the process of experiencing regret for past actions and decisions. What does it mean to regret something? Think of examples from your own life of past actions you regretted later. How does the experience of the characters in the musical shift your perception about your own experience with regret?
5. Pick two characters and describe their costumes. What do the costumes reveal about the characters' station in life, actions, or feelings?