Actualizing the (Im)Possible in Community Musical Theater: An Ethnography of a Tallahassee, Florida Production of Titanic

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ACTUALIZING THE (IM)POSSIBLE IN COMMUNITY MUSICAL THEATER: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF A TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA PRODUCTION OF TITANIC

By

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A Thesis submitted to the College of Music in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Music

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“You should realize that the community with which you deal is not the one of 42nd Street and Broadway, or Hollywood and Vine. These are the crusts on the great American sandwich. The meat is in between.” – Fulton J. Sheen
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ABSTRACT

Community musical theater actively engages individuals in music-making and dramatic performances across the United States. Musical experiences in the realm of community musical theater afford individuals opportunities for meaningful musical and social interactions. This intensive study of music as a social activity chronicles the experiences of a community group in the southeastern United States as they present a production of Maury Yeston’s blockbuster musical Titanic. Participants’ approaches to music-making on the community level, their reasons for involvement, and their view of the relationship between community and professional musical theater are discussed. This examination of community musical theater, which examines its ability to shape and influence the most fundamental aspects of its participants’ lives, reveals the power of this compelling variety of musical and dramatic performance and its vital function in the larger community.

My research focuses on influences that define or confine musical experience and interactions that come to shape these musical activities. Community musical theater is explored as an important activity that affords individuals opportunities to fulfill a need to be musical through self-exploration and collaboration in a social environment. Community musical theater participants are positioned at the crossroads of what Thomas Turino refers to as “the Possible” and “the Actual.”¹ The relationship between the Possible and the Actual is explored as it unfolds in three contexts: between community musical theater and Broadway, within the musical Titanic itself, and for the individual participant in community musical theater. This thesis reveals the power of actualizing possibilities in community musical theater and how the music at the heart of this experience is so meaningful to its participants.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Community musical theater actively engages individuals in music-making and dramatic performances across the United States. In community musical theater, enthusiastic volunteers are afforded socially and musically meaningful opportunities to perform alongside other members of their community. Although a large body of scholarly literature on American musical theater exists, little work has been done that engages individuals involved in community productions and no ethnographic work has been conducted in an attempt to understand participants’ reasons for participation. The American Association for Community Theatre (AACT) reports that community theaters in the US engage nearly 1 million volunteers in more than 46,000 productions for over 375,000 performances each year. While this number is by no means all-inclusive (as not all community theater organization operate in conjunction with AACT and the data includes non-musical community productions), these estimations provide a measure of American community musical theater’s far-reaching and engaging nature.

Through an intensive study of music as a social activity, this thesis chronicles the experiences of a community group in the southeastern United States as they present a production of Maury Yeston’s blockbuster musical Titanic. My research focuses on the influences that define or confine musical experience, and the interactions that come to shape these musical activities. Social anthropologist and ethnomusicologist Martin Stokes states that music defines and transforms social spaces. He argues that music is “socially meaningful... because it provides means by which people recognize identities and places, and the boundaries which separate them.”² This examination of community musical theater, which considers its ability to shape and influence the most fundamental aspects of its participants’ lives, reveals the power of this compelling variety of musical performance and its vital function in the larger community.

Musical experiences in the realm of community musical theater afford individuals opportunities for meaningful musical and social interactions. Based on this, this thesis explores community musical theater not just as a context for the activities of a community of musical performers, but also as what Merriam (1960) termed “a creative cultural activity.”³ The focus here is on “the sources of musical materials, the standards of excellence in performance… and the processes of creation.”⁴ This is embraced in this thesis through the examination of how participants view their relationship with professional musical theater (the source), their approaches to music-making on the community level (standards), and their reasons for involvement (processes.)

**Background and Significance**

Individuals involved in community musical theater are isolated in many ways from both mainstream trained musicians and from the Broadway population where the shows they reinterpret are premiered. Despite this separation, participants are linked to Broadway by way of common experience—the musical itself bridges a gap otherwise widened by distance and differing levels of talent. Of special interest in this thesis is how a particular musical, as a defined and contained experience, can foster fulfilling experiences far from Broadway in the participation-centered performance environment in Tallahassee, Florida. This research into participants' experience in a production of *Titanic* at the community-level is augmented by an interview with *Titanic* composer and lyricist Maury Yeston, wherein the Broadway life and intended after-life of the musical is explored.

Personal interviews and journaling reveal that many of the community musical theater participants see music-making as a fundamental human need. Community musical theater provides the sole outlet that many of its participants have to be musical in any capacity in their lives. As such, it represents an important creative outlet for individuals who see the value in music performance as a human activity outside of their paid profession. The joint production of Maury Yeston’s musical *Titanic* by Tallahassee Little Theatre (TLT) and Theatre A La Carte (TALC) at the heart of this ethnography was

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⁴ Ibid.
no exception to this statement. This thesis illustrates how participation in community musical theater meets a fundamental need for many of its participants—the human need to be musical—developed by many at a very young age.

Survey of Literature

The scholarly literature exploring American community musical theater is surprisingly scarce. Much of the work that exists relates indirectly to the topic of this thesis, discusses theater or musical performance as separate performance entities, or focuses on issues like performance practice or historical transformations of particular traditional practices that do not directly relate to this ethnography. Many works study musical theater in a scholarly manner, several of which deal specifically with the contributions of American librettists, composers, and arrangers.

Musical Theater and Identity Development

Of the extant musicological surveys, the works of Joseph P. Swain and Raymond Knapp have been particularly helpful to my research as they provide a comprehensive background of the history of the genre. These works will be contextualized later in this section of the chapter relative to a theoretical construct of identity proposed by ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino.

In *The Broadway Musical: A Critical and Musical Survey*, author Joseph P. Swain takes a theoretical and critical approach to Broadway musicals, examining the genre through the analysis of musical gestures in terms of their semantic connotations and referential connections. Swain addresses the lack of scholarly consideration of the genre, stating: “musical theater has received virtually no attention from serious music critics at all, and what little it has received has been patronizing at best.”\(^5\) The connection of musical theater to popular styles of music is a frequent reason for its dismissal, though Swain views this connection as a strength of the genre: the popularity of musical theater has insured its survival over the years, and as it matured as a genre,

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it attracted established, well-known composers including George Gershwin, Leonard Bernstein, and Kurt Weill.

_The American Musical and the Performance of Personal Identity_ by Raymond Knapp embraces the medium of musical theater as a vehicle of reimagination, through which writers, performers, and audiences are able to recreate their understandings of themselves and their relationships with others. The dramatic nature of the genre of musical theater provides a fitting opportunity to explore alternative identities. Knapp engages musical theater in terms of how individuals develop and act out identity, striving to understand a “multiplicity of possibilities expressed and experienced in more concrete terms in an attempt to map out the inner self and outer persona... helping to negotiate, within a dynamic of reciprocal influence, the sometimes treacherous terrain that lies between these two frontiers.” Knapp has identified an area of study rife with the potential to contribute to a larger discourse on the relationship between personal identity and music. In many ways, this book’s discussion of personal identity problematizes a musicological approach to the study of personal identity and further illustrates the need for ethnographic research to address this issue. It also echoes key themes discussed in this thesis regarding experiences in musical theater allowing individuals to explore different versions of themselves and possibilities for their lives.

Identity should engage either the performers or audience members that musical theater is said to affect, perhaps employing ethnography or means beyond those embraced in his book. In no way is the argument here that identity in music is exclusively the territory of ethnomusicologists. The argument is, rather, that the study of personal identity in musical theater might be better served by ethnomusicological means that engage the individual and not only the influential sources of identity formation. But how do individuals transfer what they see on stage into their own life? In _Music as Social Life_, Thomas Turino claims that identity involves “the partial selection of habits and attributes used to represent oneself to oneself and to other by oneself and by others.” Knapp posits that musical theater has the power to impact both aspects of identity (self to self, and self to other(s)) as defined by Turino. Knapp argues that:

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Musicals have proven to have an extraordinary capacity to overlap significantly with the lives and souls of their various constituencies, who learn to express themselves, to act, to conceive of themselves and the world around them, and often even to be themselves more fully and affirmatively by following their rhythms, living out versions of their plots, and singing their songs.\(^8\)

But how do individuals transfer what they see on stage into their own life? This thesis examines this transference and reveals that many musical theater participants experience escapism, support, and growth which are then directly transferred to their everyday lives.

Related Ethnographies

Ethnographies related to this thesis include “Heart of the City: Music of Community Change in Vancouver, British Columbia’s Downtown Eastside” by Klisala Harrison. Her dissertation focuses on a poor urban community in Canada. She evaluates how musical activities in this community have improved the overall health and well-being of its members. Through an applied ethnomusicological approach, Harrison reveals how “musical encounters can be situations that, through multidimensional musical action, create social capital and human connections that build a sense of community, and engage multiple social agendas and community types.”\(^9\)

“Ideology in South African Black Popular Theater” by David B. Coplan explores the many expressive resources available to black popular theater and rooted in the history of the discipline.\(^10\) These traditions are elaborated upon and put forward as central to the development of a South African theater tradition that is integrated into the culture as a whole. In “Playing in the Land of God: Musical Performances and Social Resistance in South Africa,” Kruger examines these performances as forms of resistance and corruption that surfaced near the end of the colonial period.\(^11\) This article examines music-making beyond its role as symbolic action, viewing collective musical activities as vehicles for socio-economic change.

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\(^9\) Klisala Harrison, “Heart of the City: Music of Community Change in Vancouver, British Columbia’s Downtown Eastside” (Ph.D. diss., York University, 2008), 247.


In “Gaucho Musical Regionalism”, Maria Elizabeth Lucas discusses musical creation and the circulation of popular music within the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul. The author examines the transformation of rituals during the regional revival, discussing changes, trends, the viewpoints of participants in the culture over the course of the historical changes, and the redefinition of musical boundaries. Although these ethnographies represent disparate cultures, music or theater styles, and central themes, they each illustrate how collective performative musical arts are mediums through which people find meaning in their lives, and how this meaning is connected to larger ways in which the community in which the musical tradition is situated may function.

**Theoretical Approach and Methodology**

Thomas Turino explores the role of music in social experiences in *Music as Social Life*; his discussion of musical participation as an important social process that makes us more whole as human beings is central to the theory that guides this thesis. Through ethnography, community musical theater is explored in terms of meaningful experiences on the part of participants. Turino examines the different ways in which music is socially meaningful, and posits that music comprises “fundamentally distinct types of activities that fulfill different needs and ways of being human.” Journaling responses and interviews conducted for this thesis corroborated this statement. Community musical theater is one of these distinct activities through which individuals are afforded opportunities to explore their musical selves in a social environment.

Beyond this, community musical theater participants are positioned at the crossroad of what Turino refers to as “the Possible” and “the Actual.” Turino defines these terms as follows: “the Possible includes all those things that we might be able to do, hope, think, know, and experience, and the Actual comprises those things that we

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14 Ibid, 16. It should be noted that Turino credits his former student, James Lea, with first introducing the idea of the Possible and the Actual. The dissertation in which Lea explores these ideas is not readily available; e-mail correspondence between myself and Turino indicated that he has lost touch with Lea. From this point forward, this concept will be written as “the Possible” and “the Actual.” Note the capitalization.
have already thought and experienced." Musical and artistic experiences expose us to exciting possibilities that free us from our everyday lives. Turino goes on to explain how the interplay of these two realities is a basic part of all experience, though it often goes overlooked. This thesis explores the relationship between the Possible and the Actual as it unfolds in three contexts: between community musical theater and Broadway, within the musical Titanic itself, and for the individual participant in community musical theater. Community musical theater brings the Possible into the lives of its participants, introducing “elements of life that add dynamism and challenge and that make us want to keep living.” These elements are revealed as the interplay of the Actual and Possible is examined.

The work of John Blacking in How Musical is Man? (1973) also brings forward many of the relational issues explored in this thesis. Blacking looks at the relationships between cultural development and advancement through an intensive ethnographic study of the “innate creative capacities” that characterize the musical behavior of the South African Venda tribe. As mentioned earlier, community musical theater represents the only opportunity that many of its participants have to be musical at any point in their lives. This community of artists collectively produces a model for inclusive, participation-based music-making where musical skill does not solely determine acceptance. The nature of talent, as discussed by Blacking, also factors into the discussion of community musical theater as a group of people who value inclusion over musical perfection. With Blacking’s work in mind, this thesis discusses how music is appreciated and created in different social and cultural contexts, to provide further evidence “that the source of cultural creativity is the consciousness that springs from social cooperation and loving interaction.”

Theory for Ethnomusicology (2008) by Ruth Stone has provided great insight into the approach to fieldwork for this thesis. The object of study for this thesis is a community of musicians, as opposed to an individual song, person, or singular event. In much the same way as Stone explains the approach she took in her work with the

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16 Ibid.
Kpelle of Liberia, this ethnography aims to “understand processes of interaction within... united behavior and sound.”

Interactions within this community are central to the broad questions that guide this thesis. These questions are:

1) How does a musical (like Titanic) create community?
2) Is consideration given to the post-Broadway community musical theater life of a show when it is created?
3) How does Titanic influence and shape the identities of participants in this musical?
4) How do community musical theater artists view the relationship between community musical theater and Broadway?

The ethnographic research for this thesis explores the joint Tallahassee Little Theatre/Theatre A La Carte production of Titanic. The entire production period spanned from auditions beginning on May 17th, 2009 until the final show on July 26th, 2009. Interviews, observations, and participant journaling spanned the entire production period and engaged production staff members, participants (performers), stage crew, orchestra members, audience members, and several Tallahassee Little Theater (TLT) and Theater A La Carte (TALC) board members. A full list of oral sources is included in Appendix D. Ethnographic research spanned 10 weeks and included 110 hours of observation and 41 individual and group interviews. Auditions, rehearsals (musical, scene blocking, dancing), benefit performances, public performances, and other informal cast gatherings were observed. Participants were approached to participate in journaling at the beginning of the production; those who participate in this aspect of the ethnography were sent a question each week to which they responded via e-mail. Chapter 4 includes excerpts from many of the journals.

This thesis constructs a comprehensive picture of the community being studied by uncovering relationships and musical behaviors within the culture. During the fieldwork stage of this thesis I acted as a participant-observer. At first, observations were guided by the research questions of this thesis, and were influenced by questions from Nettl’s Theory and Method for Ethnomusicology (1964). Nettl’s questions explore

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the general materials of the cultural being studied, assist the researcher in becoming familiar with the types of music being heard, and help the researcher engage research collaborators. Once fieldwork was fully underway, my questions were based upon previous observations and guided by the main research questions of the thesis. Informal interviews and journaling were used to follow-up with participants and to ask questions that resulted from observations. These questions explored the nature of the relationship of community musical theater to Broadway, the challenges of balancing participation with quality of product, and the nature of the individuals’ experiences in community musical theater and its place in participants’ lives.

While this work embraces a traditional ethnographic approach, it does not include much detailed description of observations. This decision was strategic, as many observations were of rather static rehearsals wherein the actors were reading prescribed prose from the script. While detailed descriptions are not included, they still informed interview questions and shaped journaling prompts. The exclusion of lengthy fieldwork narratives allows for a different realm of knowledge exchange to be brought to the forefront in this thesis. This realm of knowledge exchange focuses on collaborator reaction and opinion to different events and ideas as evoked by the ethnographic process itself.

Relationships and Reflexivity

My interest in American community musical theater peaked shortly after I began graduate school at Florida State University in September 2005. Having moved to Tallahassee from Ontario, Canada earlier that summer, my first encounter with community musical theater came in the form of a small show entitled Honk! The Ugly Duckling Musical that graced the stage of the Leaf Theater in Quincy, FL in early 2006. I participated as the rehearsal and performance pianist, and, from my piano bench, had a front row seat to a cohesive community that fascinated and inspired me for the duration of that show. I have been active in the community musical theater community ever since, having now participated in eight shows over the past three years with various theater groups in and around Tallahassee. Although I have a substantial amount of insight into this cultural group as a result of my experiences, I had never engaged in
ethnographic research in this or any community prior to this thesis. The established relationships I had before beginning this research assisted me in the preliminary stages of this thesis; I was able to arrange to do my fieldwork at Tallahassee Little Theatre with few problems. I have a genuine interest in this community and have been witness, on several occasions, to the powerfully positive influence that involvement in musical theater can have on its participants. During my observations, I was fortunate enough to accompany a rehearsal of Titanic on the piano, and accompanied two cast members who performed as part of a TLT outreach performance for the Florida Music Educators’ Association. These experiences helped me understand the musical score on a personal level, beyond what mere observations afforded me in terms of experiencing the music as a performer.

Relationships guided all aspects of this thesis. In regards to the theoretical underpinnings of this project, relationships were explored as they exist between performer and performance, individual and group, community theater and Broadway stage. From a methodological point of view, an ethnographic approach allowed me as a researcher to connect with my collaborators. I worked diligently at every stage of this process to honor the connections made to individuals in the community by balancing my observations with those of my collaborators. I shared my research and writing with collaborators at every step of this ethnography and welcomed their feedback.

Outline of Chapters

The chapter following this introductory chapter, “An Undertaking of Epic Proportions: Tallahassee Little Theatre and Theatre A La Carte’s Joint Production of Titanic” provides a histories of the two organizations involved in mounting this production. This chapter provides detailed information about the creative atmosphere in which individuals are afforded opportunities to be musical; it serves to contextual the chapters that follow it.

Chapter three, “How Did They Build Titanic?: Mounting the Production and a Conversation with Maury Yeston” examines how TALC and TLT worked together on this specific production. This chapter also explores the relationship between community musical theater and Broadway by presenting information gathered in an interview with
Titanic composer and lyricist Maury Yeston. This interview investigated whether Yeston considered the potential “Broadway afterlife” of Titanic when the show was written. Yeston discussed the story of Titanic as rising to the level of a myth; this chapter explores musical theater as a ritualized musical experience that brings myths like Titanic to life. Here the first two levels of interaction between the Actual and the Possible—between Broadway and community musical theater and within the musical Titanic itself—are introduced.

The fourth chapter, “In Their Own Terms, On Their Own Terms: Capturing Meaning in Cast Member Journals” examines the third level of interaction between the Actual and the Possible—individuals’ experiences participating in community musical theater. This chapter details a ten-week journaling process that directly addressed the research questions driving this thesis by having participants’ respond to a series of journaling prompts. Chapter five, “To Be Human is to be Musical: Examining the Individual in Community Musical Theater” further explores the experiences of individuals in this production of Titanic. Participants’ reasons for involvement and the nature of their participation with community musical theater are discussed. This chapter looks at a common life progression among participants that reveals how life events have brought individuals to see music as fundamental to their existence. Chapter five closes by examining how community musical theater is able to provide participants who have vastly different abilities and interests fulfilling experiences.

The conclusion to this thesis synthesizes all of the previous chapters and reflects further on the importance of social musical activities, such as community musical theater, in the lives of individual who embrace music-making as an activity central to who they are as human beings. This fundamental need to be musical drives individuals’ participation in community musical theater, illustrating the importance of this performance medium in the lives and communities of so many.
CHAPTER 2
AN UNDERTAKING OF EPIC PROPORTIONS: TALLAHASSEE LITTLE THEATRE
AND THEATRE A LA CARTE’S JOINT PRODUCTION OF TITANIC

A detailed description of the atmosphere in which Titanic was brought to life is an important component of this thesis. The description will illustrate the boundaries that define and confine the creativity of the musical’s participants. These boundaries are not exclusively negative and should not be viewed as limitations or restrictions. Many of the seemingly insurmountable problems found in the environment surrounding this production of Titanic, and inherent to the musical itself, challenge individuals in ways that otherwise financially or creatively limitless situations may not. Here is where the true wonder and “magic of community musical theater,” as it is described by many of its participants, is first uncovered.

This chapter provides a description of the two production companies involved in bringing Titanic to life in the summer of 2009: Tallahassee Little Theatre (TLT) and Theatre A La Carte (TALC). A brief history of each company and information about each group’s organizational structure is included; the overview also highlights unique aspects of each company. Most of the information in this chapter was gathered through personal interviews conducted with board members and long-time participants involved with one or both of these organizations. Over the course of the interviews, it became very clear that much overlap exists between TLT and TALC both in terms of personnel and in terms of territory (creative, physical, etc.).

Tallahassee Little Theatre (TLT)

Tallahassee Little Theatre (TLT) was founded on February 10th, 1949. The first show ever produced by this company was Boy Meets Girl, a play written by Samuel and Bella Spewack that ran on Broadway for 669 performances from 1935 to 1937. This production took place at an old military base west of Tallahassee in an abandoned auditorium and airplane hangar which had been turned over to the city. In an interview with Dick Sherwin, Historian and Archivist on the TLT Board of Directors, some additional challenges of this situation were brought forward:
Shows were held over two weekends like we currently do but they had to get all the sets and props off the stage every Sunday and transport them back to the base. Then, in the middle of the week, they had to come back and rebuild it all. And we think we have it tough now.\textsuperscript{20}

The military base auditorium remained the home of TLT until 1954 when the facilities were condemned and closed. The growing theater company moved to St. John’s Church in downtown Tallahassee but due to challenges presented by space availability, TLT continued to store and build sets and props in the airplane hangar. TLT produced shows in St. John’s Church until 1957 when a small parcel of land near the corner of Betton and Thomasville Roads in Tallahassee was donated to the group by Mr. and Mrs. Guy Winthrop and Evelyn Randolph, Mr. Winthrop’s sister. A Stage House, complete with workshop, storage, rehearsal space, stage, and audience seating area was built in 1961. Sherwin, who began volunteering with TLT in 1965 after moving to Tallahassee in 1964 has very warm memories of the early days of the new theater:

The theater opened in 1963. They didn’t get air conditioning until 1974. You can imagine Tallahassee in the summer… needless to say there weren’t many summer shows before that.\textsuperscript{21}

The theater was renovated in 1991 thanks to grants from the Knight Foundation and the State of Florida Division of Cultural Affairs, donations from private donors, and tireless fundraising work on the part of the TLT Board of Directors. An enlarged west lobby, a new east lobby (known as “The Magnolia Room”), a shop, and 259-seat auditorium were opened on May 1, 1994. The five-show “Mainstage” season found at TLT was established in 1982 and continues on today.\textsuperscript{22} Since then activities at TLT have expanded to include programs on- and off-stage for participants and spectators alike.

\textsuperscript{20} Dick Sherwin, interview by author, 26 July 2009, Tallahassee, digital audio recording. See Appendix for full listing of interview citations. Information regarding the history of the Tallahassee Little Theatre can also be found on their website: http://www.tallahasseeelittletheater.org/about.htm.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{22} Productions that take place in the theater at TLT are referred to as “Mainstage” productions. This label helps to distinguish the larger productions from shows that take place in the Coffeehouse (the lobby of the theater transformed for smaller, sometimes edgier shows with less anticipated mass-appeal), and as part of other series or off-site special events.
designed to engage a wide variety of age groups. These programs include an acting group for senior citizens, summer drama camps for kids, and a matinee series.

Figure 1: Tallahassee Little Theatre, 22 June 2009, Tallahassee, FL. All photos by Jillian Bracken unless otherwise noted.

Today, TLT features several full-time administrative staff including an Executive Director (Naomi Rose-Mock), Member Communications Coordinator (Caroline Sturtz), and Technical Director (Matthew Newbury). There is no full-time artistic staff at TLT; directors apply to direct each show and assemble artistic teams for each production.
TLT Board of Directors

Together with the Executive Director, the TLT Board of Directors oversees every aspect of the theater. This group is comprised solely of volunteers who give of their time to organize theater events and productions, coordinate off-stage theater activities, manage the budget, and maintain the theater building. Positions include President, two Vice Presidents (one in charge of membership; one who oversees the productions), Treasurer, Secretary, Past President, a Presidential Appointee, Historian/Archivist, and several slots for Members-at-Large. When asked how a person on the board becomes involved, Sherwin described a potential member as follows:

They have to be able to breathe... and they have to give the selection committee some indication of interest in being on the board. Once they get onto the board a lot of them stay the full term which is a maximum of four years. But, it’s tough to get a group of 12 or 13 to commit themselves.\(^{23}\)

Sherwin, who has held every position on the board in his 44 years with TLT, mentioned several times the difficulty he has had finding people to serve on the board when he was personally involved with the selection committee. He described the responsibilities as being more than just attending one meeting per month; each member is expected to head a committee and be involved with the volunteer appreciation cast parties that occur after each production at TLT.

Play Selection

One of the committees overseen by the Board of Directors is the Play Selection Committee. To assist this committee in making its play choices, TLT holds an open forum each year where the general public is welcome to make suggestions as to plays and musicals they would like to see on the TLT stage. The committee compiles a list of shows based upon these recommendations which is then presented to the Board. From here, decisions are made and a season is populated with shows that are projected to be both commercially successful and interesting for the community. The final decision of what shows are produced and how the season is designed rests in the hands of the

\(^{23}\) Dick Sherwin, interview by author, 26 July 2009, Tallahassee, FL, digital audio recording.
board. Changes can be made based on issues with securing the rights to produce a show, budget concerns, or problems with scheduling.

Marketing and Resource Management

TLT is funded by a combination of city, county, and state grants, ticket sales for performances, and donations from patrons. Naomi Rose-Mock, the Executive Director of TLT, spoke candidly in a personal interview about the challenges facing the theater:

One of my favorite quotes ever is: “How do you make a small fortune in community theater? Start with a large one.” (laughs) It’s just such a gamble.24

She indicated that ticket prices will be increased for the upcoming season of shows in an attempt to boost revenue for the theater. The past season was extremely hard on TLT because of a tough economy; the theater saw a sharp decrease in ticket sales due to what Rose-Mock speculates to be a widespread decrease in discretionary income of potential patrons.25 Both Rose-Mock and Sherwin made mention of the challenges of marketing TLT’s shows to the greater community. Often times, people see “Little” as part of TLT’s name and immediately think the theater offers only children’s programming or confuse it with the Young Actors Theater (YAT).26 Another challenge is advertising productions to the greater public. As advertising rates with the local newspaper, the Tallahassee Democrat, have recently increased, Rose-Mock indicated that the theater has begun to depend on free publicity more than ever before.

During a discussion of the financial situation facing TLT, Rose-Mock made several insightful comments as she reflected on her years of involvement, both on- and off-stage, with various community theater groups. She talked about the need for community theaters to manage all financial and social resources as these support

25 The 2008-2009 season at TLT included Arthur Miller’s 1949 play Death of a Salesman. The show opened in the midst of the first few weeks of the economic downturn and corresponding public panic. Death of a Salesman may have hit too close to home for many patrons and attendance was abysmal; it was an unforeseeable yet costly coincidence for TLT.
26 Young Actors Theater (YAT) is a theater company in Tallahassee that offers theatrical training and performance opportunities for young people from age 3 through age 18. More information on this organization can be found at: http://www.youngactorstheater.com/.
sources are equally valuable. Volunteers are considered a community theater’s most valuable resource, as they keep the organization afloat; volunteered time is what allows TLT to convert the creative experiences bound up in a musical into ticket sales (monetary capital.) The theater’s dependency on volunteers often shifts its focus away from artistic virtuosity towards an environment of inclusion and participation. This is not to say that the quality of shows at TLT is not high, but to differentiate this community of artists from a performance group whose mandate is to audition and select performers who, based upon some predetermined criteria, are considered “the most talented.” Community theater must have volunteers to survive; these individuals must feel valued, welcomed, and personally fulfilled to be willing to give of their time. An inclusive environment is one that does not exclude people on the basis of musical and/or artistic ability. As such, TLT values individuals who “get the job done” over those who may be the most skilled or talented. TLT has been very fortunate in the past to attract many individuals who are both incredibly talented and willing to volunteer their time for no compensation. While TLT’s Board of Directors must be concerned with a commercial success to ensure funds are available to sustain the theater, the volunteer experience must also be positive to guarantee personnel for future productions. TLT’s Executive Director Rose-Mock felt strongly that commercial success should not be the sole marker of a successful show at TLT. If the experience individuals have while participating in a TLT production is so unbearable that no one wishes to return, the show has not been successful. She indicated that balancing show quality with individuals’ quality of experience is an ongoing challenge.

**Theatre A La Carte (TALC)**

Theatre A La Carte (TALC) was formed in January of 1990 with a production of the Bock and Harnick musical *She Loves Me* in the Florida High School auditorium. Eric Hurst, along with several friends who had worked together on several shows at the First Baptist Church in Tallahassee, brought together a group of actors and production staff to make the show possible. This production was TALC’s first in what has since amounted to a successful run of shows that have been ongoing for nearly twenty years. After finishing law school at The Florida State University and getting a job in
Tallahassee, Hurst began putting on more musicals with his newly formed organization. Funding the productions was an ongoing challenge at first, but many of the volunteers who so eagerly supported TALC’s first production continued to volunteer both their time and money to ensure the group would succeed. TALC next put up *Evita*, with music by Andrew Lloyd Webber and lyrics by Tim Rice. That production was successful enough to make money and Hurst began to consider how to expand his burgeoning company.

![Figure 2: Theatre A La Carte’s 1990 production of *She Loves Me.*](image)

*Photo by Ray Colletti. Used with permission.*

TALC struck up a formal relationship with TLT after their new theater had been fully renovated. While waiting for the remodeling to be completed, TALC put on a dinner theater at a local hotel in the fall of 1991. TLT finished its renovations in 1992, and TALC began producing its shows there in the fall with their production of Sondheim’s *Into the Woods*. Each subsequent season featured two shows at TLT. TALC formed a
full Board of Directors, incorporated as a not-for-profit organization, and achieved tax-exempt status in 1992 which allowed them to legitimately accept donations and issue donors receipts. Ticket sales, donations, and grant funding from the City of Tallahassee and the State of Florida allows TALC to continue putting on musicals for the community of Tallahassee. Hurst indicated that the production staff has learned how to “stretch a buck” but will not skimp if a few extra dollars spent is the difference between a mediocre show and quality production. Unlike TLT, TALC has dedicated Executive and Artistic Staffs that remain consistent throughout nearly all productions. The Executive Staff includes an Artistic Director (Eric Hurst), Technical Director (Scott Freese), and Communications Director (Jenny Wilhelm); the Artistic Staff includes a Dance Director (Michele Ackermann), Musical Director (Michael Norris), and Costume Designer (Wanda Tillman).

The tale behind the development of the name for TALC is an interesting one. While telling the story of the early years of the group, Hurst said the organization was named prior to its first show in 1990. He summed up the decision-process as follows:

> We had to think up a name. And, literally just from sitting around for a few weeks, thinking up a name, we came up with Theatre A La Carte—the idea being no prescribed season, no prescribed format, just whatever we want it to be whenever we want it to be.27

The name is indicative of the group’s desire to never be tied down to one location or a narrowly defined repertoire of musical theater.

There are several ways in which TALC and TLT differ beyond the surface level similarities in location, primary function, and similar audiences. Many of these differences, most of which are structural aspects that guide the day-to-day running of TALC, were identified by Hurst as being central to the positive experience on the part of both performers and other volunteers.

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27 Eric Hurst, interview by author, 3 March 2009, Tallahassee, FL, digital audio recording.
**Permanence of Board**

Two of the current members of the board, Eric Hurst and Chris Gorsuch, are founding members of TALC and have remained on the organization’s Board of Directors in the same positions (President and Vice President, respectively) for all twenty years of TALC’s existence. This type of consistency is unprecedented in any community musical theater group in Tallahassee and is very different from the TLT Board of Directors. A permanent board allows TALC to maintain a consistent vision and prevents any lapses in consistency that can happen when individuals take over positions and have to learn new skills. This is an outstanding volunteer commitment on the part of those individuals who have been with TALC for its entire history. Ultimately, this stability of the Board of Directors coupled with a dedicated artistic staff has given the organization the security necessary to survive any challenges the group faces.

**Time Management**

Another type of stability that TALC offers its members comes in the form of Hurst’s organization and time management skills. Time management is viewed here in terms of respect for participants. A relationship exists between structure and creative space. Although some may see restriction and order as impediments to creativity, TALC shows that when volunteers are involved, organization is the key to showing participants that their time is valued and respected. When individuals feel their contributions matter, they are more willing to make the sacrifices that the creative process demands. All members of TALC are volunteers; the time they offer the organization is given freely and without any type of monetary compensation. The discussion earlier regarding the balance of volunteer and monetary resources in regards to TLT also applies to TALC.

**Show Selection**

Unlike TLT, TALC puts on only musicals; a unique characteristic of TALC is the mandate that governs their selection of musicals. Hurst described the group as choosing shows that may not necessarily be done by an average high school or community group, and shows that musical theater fans are intrigued or excited by but may not necessarily be mainstream enough to give artists the opportunities in which to
perform. He indicated that this mandate brings with it certain challenges. As the shows they put up are not necessarily widely known or commercially popular, ticket sales are not always what they could be if the group put on a mainstream musical. Since TALC is funded primarily by ticket sales, projected attendance does factor in to the selection process.

Considering the importance of ticket sales to the organization’s survival, it is rather remarkable how well this system of show selection has worked over TALC’s history. By considering both the value of a show in terms of performer interest, TALC has managed to put on rather daring musical theater productions that many community production companies might avoid. By focusing more on the creative interest and excitement behind doing a show and less on the projected commercial success of a musical, TALC challenges its performers and production staff. As interest is the driving force behind participation, individuals are motivated to participate, and no artificial inflation of the benefits of the process is needed.

Virtual Social Space

In the absence of a physical theater location, TALC has actively used the internet to communicate information and to network with its members across distance. When first researching these community groups, several TALC members referred to TALC as existing between shows in a “virtual social space,” communicating via a TALC electronic mailing list called “TALC Chat” since 1997. While TLT also has a website and attempts to organize its volunteers through social networking websites, TALC takes things one step further. Hurst creates specific electronic mailing lists for each TALC show to share rehearsal schedules, cast contact information, and to keep everyone informed of changes throughout the process. The TALC website has also been a way of keeping members of TALC connected to each other both during and after shows. Electronic mailing lists and an organization website are central to members of TALC being given the opportunity to maintain social connections. There are several reasons beyond the group’s use of internet that also factor into the definition of TALC as a type of virtual community.
Due to the lack of a dedicated TALC meeting place, participants rely heavily on the social spaces that can be created online to bring disparate individuals together. For volunteers, the use of the internet is also quite attractive as there is no cost involved; anyone can open an e-mail address for free. Another defining characteristic of TALC that causes the group to rely heavily on the internet is the transient population from which many of the performers are drawn. A large body of college students, most of whom are only in Tallahassee for a short amount of time, gets involved with TALC while at school. With the exception of several dedicated board members and community members who are permanently in Tallahassee, TALC features a new group of individuals for every production it undertakes. *Titanic* was no exception to this; several individuals had never worked with TALC before and/or indicated that this show was their first time on stage at TLT. Although the group changes its members with each show, the virtual community helps to keep everyone unified. It also allows for continuation of socialization in the gaps between shows, as TALC puts on only two shows per year.

TALC is a vibrant group of creative musicians and artists at the heart of the community theater scene in Tallahassee. With the help of TLT’s facilities, the organization has put up thirty-eight musicals over the span of nearly twenty years. As discussed above, the permanence of the production staff, the time management, and organization on the part of the production staff, the unique show selection process, and the creation of virtual social space have kept this organization successful over its history. Much like TLT, TALC still has to deal with the challenge of working with community members with different talent levels and musical training, and of raising enough funds through ticket sales and successful grant applications to keep the organization afloat. While the absence of a physical theater space may be seen as an obstacle, Hurst reported that the lack of a building is actually a blessing as it removes the added stress that can come when a group has to consider the upkeep of a physical space.

TALC is strengthened by the challenges they overcome together; in a way, the very existence of the challenging factors that work against TALC is what makes the community so tight-knit and supportive of one another. People serve as the foundation when so much else is unsteady and unpredictable, and people are what have made and
continue to make TALC what it is today. Central to all TALC relationships is one rather extraordinary individual: Eric Hurst. As its founder, longstanding board member, and artistic and executive director, Hurst has tirelessly supported TALC over its twenty-year history. As it is his ongoing perseverance and artistic vision that makes TALC what is today, it seems only fitting to close this brief history of the organization with some words from its founder that comment where TALC is headed in the future:

I just want to do good theater for as long as I have the resources. That's it. I'm not trying to build a building... I'm not trying to create a dynasty... I just want to do good theater as long as people show-up. I realize how very lucky I am that all of these very dedicated people show up and say “okay, let’s do it!” I appreciate them, and never for a minute… (hurriedly) I’m getting all emotional here… take that for granted. I know how rare that is and I’ve seen so many organizations that haven’t made it because they don’t have continuity and volunteers don’t come. My feeling is that as long as we have this very dedicated core group of people, we’ll find the rest. We’ll make it work.28

TLT and TALC are each successful, innovative theater companies with their own unique yet intertwined histories. This chapter presented a detailed account of the creative environment from which this co-production of Titanic emerged. Later chapters will build upon this overview, examining how artistic brilliance emerges in the navigation past these obstacles. The discussion in this chapter was not intended to suggest the superiority of one production company over the other; rather, strengths and weaknesses were brought forward in this comparative analysis to provide a deeper understanding of the constraints each group faces and the similarities and differences that allow TLT and TALC to form a symbiotic, co-dependent relationship. Volunteers feature prominently at each stage of the history of both organizations, helping to make difficult productions such as Titanic possible.

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28 Eric Hurst, interview by author, 3 March 2009, Tallahassee, FL, digital audio recording.
CHAPTER 3
HOW DID THEY BUILD TITANIC?: MOUNTING THE PRODUCTION AND A CONVERSATION WITH MAURY YESTON

In every age mankind attempts / To fabricate great works
At once magnificent / And impossible...

On desert sands, from mountains of stone / A pyramid!
From flying buttresses alone / A wall of light!
A chapel ceiling / Screaming one man's ecstasy! / One man's ecstasy...

Miracles them all! / China's endless wall...
Stonehenge, The Parthenon, The Duomo / The aqueducts of Rome

We did not attempt to make / With mammoth blocks of stone
A giant pyramid / No, not a pyramid... / Nor gothic walls that radiate with light...

Our task was to dream upon / And then create / A floating city!
A human metropolis... / A complete civilization! / Sleek! / And fast!
At once a poem / And the perfection / Of physical engineering...

“In Every Age” – Act 1, Titanic (music and lyrics by Maury Yeston)

Bringing a blockbuster musical like Titanic to life on a small, community stage requires great dedication on the part of its participants. But was a musical like Titanic intended or designed to live beyond the bright lights of Broadway? If so, what does this reveal about the genre of musical theater and its community of musicians, performers, and admirers? This chapter discusses how the genre of musical theater transcends budgetary, artistic, and “talent” boundaries, revealing through macro-level analysis the power musicals can have in different micro-level contexts. Experiences of individuals involved in this particular musical are detailed here to contextualize research presented in subsequent chapters.

This chapter provides information about the history and “Broadway life” of the musical at the center of this ethnography. A breakdown of responsibilities shared by TLT and TALC in this co-production and an income and expense report are included. It also examines the connection between the Broadway and community stage as discussed in an interview with Titanic composer and lyricist Maury Yeston. This interview explored the creative process and investigated how a musical like Titanic, as a
defined and contained experience, can foster fulfilling experiences in disparate communities. Inspired by Yeston’s comments in this interview, the attractiveness and fulfilling nature of musical theater is explained in terms of individuals’ opportunity to mediate myths through involvement in the rituals of community musical theater.

Creative processes necessary to reinterpret Broadway musicals bring individuals together on the community level to recreate existing music. A show, as a confined musical unit, has pre-determined songs and dialogue; performers also face tight restrictions regarding what changes can be made to a show, put in place by licensing companies like Music Theater International and Samuel French.\(^{29}\) Regardless of this, a musical allows its participants to be involved in the recreation of an experience that, in the case of Titanic and many other musicals, was premiered on Broadway in New York City. A cultural connection is established here by means of a ritualized musical experience—while not occurring at the same time, in the same place, or in the same way, these experiences unify a large group of artists and audience members in many different locations across America.

**Titanic: The Musical**

Titanic is a musical with unique challenges neither TLT nor TALC had seen before—a musical of such epic proportions that it required the full financial forces and creative energy of both companies. The quotation that opens this chapter, taken from the opening song in the musical, illustrates how the challenge to create a “floating city” was a dream that drove the story of the musical. Just as the designers and builders who brought the ship to life in the early 1900s dreamed of creating something far bigger than themselves, so too did the production staff of the TLT/TALC production of the musical uses all their financial and creative resources to bring history to life in Tallahassee.

\(^{29}\) Music Theatre International (MTI) describes themselves as “one of the world’s leading dramatic licensing agencies” whose aim to protect the legacy and rights of composers, book (libretto) writers, and lyricists. More information on MTI can be found at: http://www.mtishows.com. Much like MTI, Samuel French represents play publishers and authors and allows performance companies to apply for performance rights to various shows. More information on Samuel French can be found at: http://www.samuelfrench.com.
Titanic, a mega-musical with music and lyrics by Maury Yeston premiered on April 23, 1997 at the Lunt-Fontanne Theater on Broadway. The musical ran for a total of 804 performances. It is described as embracing an unlikely topic for a musical, focusing on “a sea disaster with no happy ending,” following “a handful of characters from the crew, first class, second class, and steerage… from the departure of the White Star Line ocean liner Titanic to its sinking in the mid-Atlantic.”

The 2009 co-production of Titanic brought TLT and TALC together for the third time in the history of both organizations. Past co-productions include Peter Pan in 2001 and Seussical! The Musical in 2006, both of which were commercially and socially successfully musicals. In very broad terms, the relationship between these two organizations when carrying out a co-production has TLT addressing administrative, publicity, and facility issues while TALC provides the artistic staff, casts the show, and oversees technical and creative processes from auditions to post-production strike. Naomi Rose-Mock, Executive Director of TLT, describes the relationship as follows:

While legally we are separate organizations, we have so much cross-pollination with our volunteers and our patrons that I think the relationship is mutually beneficial. I think it would be detrimental to both groups for us to not maintain this relationship.

When asked why co-productions are so infrequent, Rose-Mock responded:

There has to be a joint production that both companies want to do. The project has to benefit from the collaboration. For Titanic, neither one of us could carry the burden of that cost alone.

Dick Sherwin, Historian and Archivist on the TLT Board of Directors, echoed Rose-Mock’s initial sentiments, stating that many patrons do not even realize there are two

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32 Previous co-productions have been deemed socially successful to indicate the overwhelmingly positive experiences recounted by participants who make mention of forming friendships, feeling more connected to members of the Tallahassee community, or simply having an enjoyable time.
33 Naomi Rose-Mock, interview by author, 24 July 2009, Tallahassee, FL, digital audio recording.
34 Ibid.
separate organizations as all productions take place at TLT. Since the quality of shows has historically been high regardless of who has creative control, both organizations benefit from the blurred organizational lines.

Figure 3: *Titanic* marquis at Tallahassee Little Theatre. 22 June 2009, Tallahassee, FL.

Planning meetings prior to the musical being announced as a forthcoming co-production first brought about budget concerns. How could a little theater with a small stage and even smaller budget bring this grandiose musical to life? Nancy Franklin, in her 1997 article “The Gem of The Ocean” printed in the *New Yorker*, reported that when *Titanic* was produced on Broadway, “the show cost more to mount than the Titanic did to build” mentioning further how “ongoing, embarrassing technical problems” plagued
the production.\textsuperscript{35} Once the numbers were crunched, a budget of approximately $30,000 for the TLT/TALC production was set. Table 3.1 shows a breakdown of all income and expenses, and how the costs were shared between the two production companies.

Large expenses included the costuming and set, which together account for nearly two-thirds of the entire budget. As was the case for the Broadway production, the set presented an assortment of logistical challenges that had to be overcome to create the illusion of a ship sinking on stage. Of all of the elements of the musical, set design was one aspect that could not be overlooked; while most audience members were not familiar with the Maury Yeston’s \textit{Titanic}, you would be hard-pressed to find a patron who was not well aware of the ill-fated ship central to the musical. When you consider audience familiarity with the history of \textit{Titanic}, set believability is one of the most important components of a successful production of this musical. Fabulous singing, elaborate costuming, and compelling acting will be forgotten if the ship does not sink. The set was designed to have a 10 foot wide by 32 foot long platform built on top of the TLT stage that would tip to create the illusion that the stage itself was sinking. The platform was attached to the I-beams in the roof and pulled upwards with chain motors. In an interview with set builders Matt McCormick and Dale Holcomb, Holcomb talked about the inspiration for the design and the technical issues involved in \textit{Titanic}:

Eric (Hurst) and I had a discussion a year or so ago about whether or not it was even conceptually possible to do this show on this stage. The staging directions for the show, the big tipping platform … assuming all of that, can we do that on this stage? We assessed various options for being able to make a platform tip – either pulling from the ceiling or lifting or if that wasn’t possible bracing on the floor and lifting. So, we worked out a basic plan for the show and worked out some pricing, some really rudimentary pricing on how much something like this would cost since that’s always a consideration. We decided based on those things that it was doable.\textsuperscript{36}

The theater staff consulted engineers to ensure that this configuration would be reliable and would not injure the actors who were on the platform as it was raised in the scene.

\textsuperscript{36} Dale Holcomb, interview by author, 2 June 2009, Tallahassee, FL, digital audio recording.
when the ship finally sinks on stage. Appendix A shows the progression of events as the TLT stage was transformed for this production of *Titanic*.

![Figure 4: List of “To Do” items in TLT backstage workshop.](image)
Table 1: Income and Expense Report for TLT/TALC Production of Titanic.

### INCOME

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Amount held by TLT</th>
<th>Amount held by TALC</th>
<th>Total Amount</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canteen Proceeds</td>
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</tr>
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<td>50/50 Drawing Proceeds</td>
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### EXPENSE

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The costumes were rented from Costume World, a theater costume rental company with an office in nearby Deerfield Beach, FL.\(^{37}\) In 2005, Costume World acquired the inventory of New York City’s Dodger Costumes which contained the costumes from the original Broadway production of Titanic. While she would not reveal the detailed cost of this acquisition, Costume World employee Jadene Deems indicated in a phone interview that these costumes have earned the company a prestigious reputation around the world. Deems stated that the shipment of costumes for the

\(^{37}\) Costume World was founded in the early 1980’s by Marilynn A. Wick, who is also the company’s current CEO. More information on Costume World can be found at: http://www.costumeworldtheatrical.com/theatrical-plots.php.
TLT/TALC co-production included 60-70% original Broadway costumes. To account for differences in shapes and sizes of this production’s actors, the remaining 30-40% was filled in with other costumes from Costume World’s inventory. When asked about the frequency of rentals of the *Titanic* costumes, Deems indicated that the entire set is rented approximately twice a year. She stated that the show’s set of costumes is not a popular rental as the show itself is not accessible to the average community group, given *Titanic*’s on-stage technical demands and necessary costumes.\(^{38}\)

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\(^{38}\) In a personal interview, TALC’s Costume Designer Wanda Tillman made mention that Costume World had originally offered the costumes for a $15,000 rental fee not including shipping or dry cleaning. Through a series of negotiations, TALC and TLT were able to settle on a $10,000 rental fee that included both cleaning and shipping.
An Interview with Maury Yeston

TLT and TALC were able to bring Titanic to life with a small budget and a large amount of creativity and volunteer support. As an observer of this process, I was fascinated by the dedication of these ardent performers and fans, and curious to know whether Titanic was intended to be performed by community groups. I was able to make contact with Titanic’s composer and lyricist, Maury Yeston, and arranged an interview in early September of 2009. The interview turned into a pilgrimage of sorts; armed with questions from cast members in Tallahassee, many curious to know the meaning of certain lyrics or the motivation behind particular lines of dialogue, I traveled to New York City, eager to learn about the creative intentions behind Titanic and to meet the man behind the music.

Yeston was born in New Jersey in 1945 and studied music composition and theory at Yale where he received a Ph.D. in 1974. Titanic is the third of Yeston’s musicals to be performed on Broadway: Nine premiered in 1982, followed by Grand Hotel in 1989. Titanic received the Tony award for ‘Best Original Score’ in 1997, and although it is known as a “megamusical” because of its elaborate staging and epic story, it is now seen frequently on the stages of community theaters across the United States. An interview with Maury Yeston conducted by Paula Vitaris for Show Music magazine in 1997 described Yeston as “exuberant and gregarious,” needing no encouragement to begin speaking about his latest project at the time, Titanic. Over 12 years since this interview, Yeston greeted me with the same kind of excitement, his exuberance towards and love for Titanic still undeniably intact.

I met Yeston on September 4, 2009, exactly 24 years to the day in 1985 when the first underwater pictures of the wreck of the Titanic were released following its discovery by a team of explorers lead by Dr. Robert Ballard. While coincidental, it seemed fortuitous that he and I should come together on this anniversary to discuss his musical incarnation of the historic ship Titanic. The interview proceeded effortlessly,

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with Yeston both recalling anecdotes and opinions captured in previous interviews and offering fresh answers in response to questions regarding the post-Broadway lives of his shows on community stages around the world. Other than a brief interruption for a phone call when Yeston discussed some matters concerning the movie version of his musical *Nine* (which was, at that moment, in post-production), the interview lasted approximately ninety minutes.

Yeston began the interview by discussing his education at Yale and Cambridge, and his background as a music theorist, and how these varied experiences have shaped his outlook on life. He identifies as much as a jazz enthusiast and historian as he does a music theorist, composer, lyricist, and educator:

> I think I have an unusual view of the world from having been a jazz historian to understand that in fact America has created not one but two great art forms that have become world-renowned. The first one is obviously jazz and blues. The second is musical theater, which now has really become in the last twenty-five to thirty years truly vernacular not just here but all over the world. There are Broadway babies in Ginza, there are Broadway babies in Hamburg. It’s wonderful to see these kids… they’re 20 years old, they tap dance, they know everything, they can do everything that American kids from the Midwest can do. It’s really quite extraordinary.  

From here, Yeston discussed how many of his productions have been mounted by companies around the world, describing the amateur production life of *Titanic* as “extraordinary.” He estimated that forty different operatic societies in England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales alone have put on productions of *Titanic*. He mentioned that one of the most powerful productions took place in Belfast in May of 2005, where the Titanic was built in the early 1900s.

Yeston discussed that while his family is American, he and many of his relatives were educated in England. He felt that his knowledge of both American and British cultures gave him a better understanding of both shores in the story of the Titanic.

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42 Maury Yeston, interview by author, 4 September 2009, New York, NY, digital audio recording.
Yeston saw the story of the Titanic as thoroughly British; he stated that only the arrogance of the British Empire at the end of the British scientific revolution could be so innovative and yet so recklessly confident that a ship the size of the Titanic could be considered its own lifeboat.

Figure 6: Maury Yeston (left) and Jillian Bracken (right) at Yeston’s home in, holding the Titanic musical score and Yeston’s 1997 Tony Award for Best Original Score. 4 September 2009, New York City, NY.

Moving from his personal background and basic information about the construction of Titanic, Yeston transitioned with no prompting to discuss the suitability of the Titanic story as a musical. Much of what was discussed in the interview echoed
Yeston’s comments in his section “A Composition of Titanic Proportions” in *Titanic: The Complete Book of the Musical*, best summarized in the following quotation:

I never wrestled… with the thought that the sinking of the Titanic wasn’t “suitable” for a Broadway musical. I felt completely confident all along. I’m of the opinion that things that sound initially like “bad” ideas really turn into great musicals, whereas things that sound like “good” ideas often don’t do well.44

While the impetus for him to make the story of the Titanic into a musical seems eerily similar to that of the historic ship’s designers, Yeston’s singing-and-dancing ship fared much better than the actual boat. The intrigue and disbelief surrounding the musical is what has drawn many interested and skeptical audience members alike to buy tickets to see this musical wherever it is staged. The success of the show both on- and off-Broadway supports Yeston’s theory that sometimes ideas that seem impossible or overwhelming make for the best musicals.

As the interview continued, it was clear that Yeston did not gage the success of a show merely by the longevity of its run or by income earned; he spoke honestly of his desire for those performing *Titanic* to enjoy the music and connect with the story regardless of the forum in which they perform. Yeston strives to balance his role as an author and composer with his background as an educator. He indicated that he is most fulfilled when he can play a part in helping someone discover their talent. With this in mind, it was not at all shocking to learn of Yeston’s desire to see his shows live beyond Broadway and his wish for individuals on as many different stages and from different walks of life to experience the story of the *Titanic* while also having the opportunity to be musical. Yeston stated that he is committed to writing music that transcends boundaries; he describes his approach to composition as being driven by the accessibility and aesthetic attractiveness of the music:

If I wanted to write an opera, I would. If I wanted to write opera, I’d write everything… I’d write it for massive virtuos. Then one-tenth of one-tenth of one-tenth of the universe would be able to perform it. I write musical theater because I was ten years old when my parents took me to see *My Fair Lady*. I write a form of what might be called popular entertainment that everybody can sing, and I’m aware of it. My philosophy of the musical is very specific, and I wish it were followed more

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often these days by musicals that I feel are less than what they should be in the writing, and are saved by billions of dollars in production. I believe that the entire musical must succeed simply by sitting down at the piano and singing the song in a living room. If the show works with one person playing through the score and talking through the story in a living room, it’s going to work anywhere. If it ain’t on the page, it ain’t on the stage.\textsuperscript{45}

Yeston confirmed that he does consider the Broadway afterlife of his work when crafting a show, calling this a “huge concern.” He even mentioned how he strongly believes that each venue should have “a great deal of leeway” when it comes to interpreting a show in a way that is financially viable, that considers the talent available, and in a way that is meaningful to the culture in which the show is presented. Yeston stated that different interpretations can make the same musical meaningful to diverse performers and audiences, often showing him things as a composer that may not always have been evident from his creative or cultural vantage point.

As the interview moved on, it was clear that Yeston was passionate about his craft and strongly believed that he had a responsibility as an artist to create musicals that were meaningful to as many people as possible. The latter part of the interview focused on the transcendent and unifying power of the musical \textit{Titanic}, discussed by Yeston in terms of music’s power to mediate between differing views of mankind.

\textbf{Titanic as Myth; Musical Theater as a Unifying Genre}

What came to bear in this conversation with Yeston was the culturally significant connection that exists between Broadway and community stages. Yeston explained this in terms of his view of \textit{Titanic} as a story elevated to the level of myth, understood here as French anthropologist Lévi-Strauss defined the term, where the story mediates between two opposing views of the universe. Myth is used here not to discount the historical truth of the \textit{Titanic}, but to show how the story itself exemplifies something greater about the conflict between humanity’s centrality in the world and desire for progress, and the unpredictability of a world in which humans are an infinitely small part. Yeston discussed the power of \textit{Titanic} as a story that has become a unifying historical event across the world:

\textsuperscript{45} Maury Yeston, interview by author, 4 September 2009, New York, NY, digital audio recording.
Titanic is a show that is not simply about a story and not simply about an historic event. The story of the Titanic has become indelibly interwoven with human culture in every language, in every land, ever since it happened. The sinking of the Titanic was the first, single tragic event in the world experienced simultaneously by everyone because of the invention of the telegraph.\footnote{Maury Yeston, interview by author, 4 September 2009, New York, NY, digital audio recording.}

Beyond its place in history, Yeston mentioned how the story of the *Titanic*, while an actual historical event, has components that he described as rising to the level of myth:

I’ll explain this anthropologically if I can. The function of myths in society is to mediate between two potentially contradictory notions or ideas in the society. I think the story of the Titanic is a universal myth for the following reason. I think because one of the things we’ve inherited from the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries is two diametrically opposite views of the universe. The first is that man is the center of all things… what we’ve inherited from the renaissance… and all we have is progress. Extraordinarily, the Titanic enters as the epitome… the shining example of the results of the Renaissance, the scientific revolution, and the discoveries of Galileo and Newton… “we will defeat the universe; we are the center”… and with one wave… ONE WAVE… we discover that compared to the power and the absurdity and the inhumanity of the universe, we are in one second at the bottom of the sea. This story of the Titanic plays out in contradiction… these two extraordinarily different world views. In the telling of the story, we are, in my opinion, generating and experiencing this phenomenal myth that mediates between these two opposing views of ourselves.\footnote{Maury Yeston, interview by author, 4 September 2009, New York, NY, digital audio recording.}

When a myth-rich story is made “real” through the medium of the musical, the experience both for the music-makers, who actualize and encounter the myth through their personal interpretations of ritualized songs and dances, connects individuals to a particular facet of the what Clifford Geertz would call the “social history of the imagination”, made available to all by way community musical theater productions.\footnote{Clifford Geertz, “Art as a Cultural System,” in *Modern Language Notes* 91 (1976): 240.} While Geertz identifies how this pool of thought can complicate situations for those who turn to it for “remedial wisdom” or “a prosthetic corrective for a damaged spiritual life,” he fails to acknowledge how access to the social history of the imagination creates possibilities as much as it multiplies uncertainties.\footnote{Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983): 45.}
The power of the myth-made-real in musical theater can also be embraced as a side of “The Possible” and “The Actual,” mentioned in the introduction to this thesis. Turino, in *Music as Social Life*, argues that artistic processes “…crystallize the very essence of a good life by dramatically emphasizing the interplay of future possibilities with experiences and things we already know from the past—all within a specially framed and engrossing present.” Lévi-Strauss argues that “the myth exists on the conceptual level and the ritual on the level of action”. In the case of *Titanic*, the historic story is the myth, brought to life by the ritual of the musical. This argument can be strengthened further by examining the transcendent power of collaborative music-making, an important part of this thesis. Turino argues that making music is unifying as it emphasizes sameness—“of time sense, of musical sensibility, of common goals”—made possible through interaction, or “musical merging.” This subjective experience of feeling bonded to others through music is confirmed by participants and discussed further in later chapters.

An examination of the genre of American musical theater, the story of the *Titanic* as explored in an interview with Maury Yeston, and the individual experiences captured in the ethnographic portion of this thesis reveal the many processes of navigation through challenging situations in attempts to “actualize the possible.” The musical as ritual—what participants are actually doing—allows for individuals to be exposed to the contradictory nature of myths, which can only be explored as possibilities. This chapter revealed how this process is inherent to the genre of musical theater, and how a show like *Titanic* is a prime example. Working down to the micro-level of the production central to this thesis, the only layer left to examine is that of the individual. Chapter 4 details personal experiences from participants in *Titanic*, giving further evidence to support the power of actualizing possibilities in community musical theater and revealing how the music at the heart of this experience is what makes all of this possible.

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CHAPTER 4
IN THEIR OWN TERMS, ON THEIR OWN TERMS: CAPTURING MEANING IN CAST MEMBER JOURNALS

Overview

As mentioned in the introduction, a goal of this thesis is to uncover ways in which experiences within community musical theater are socially and musically meaningful to participants. This chapter chronicles the e-mail-based cast member journaling, a large research component of this thesis. Consideration is given both to the results of this process in the context of the present research and to the usefulness of this approach for future ethnographic and/or ethnomusicological research. This chapter is a cursory introduction; key themes that emerge here are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

E-mail-based weekly journaling provided a way to gather *Titanic* cast members’ accounts of events; this research method brought forward insightful responses in a meaningful way for journaling participants. Journaling was restricted to cast members since the cast was the largest pool of volunteers involved in the production, and the group that was involved in the show from the very beginning. Ongoing participant journaling allowed for hypotheses formed prior to research to be tested and ideas observed during fieldwork to be further explored. This form of research-driven interaction also allowed for a more fluid ethnographic investigation allowed me to conduct a more fluid ethnographic investigation; ideas brought up in face-to-face interviews could be explored in journaling, and vice versa. In journaling, thoughts from informal conversations or seemingly widespread group beliefs overheard in passing were explored beyond one person—done not to devalue the experiences of one individual, but to look for trends common to many or all members of this community. Full transcripts of journaling prompts e-mailed to participants are included in Appendix B.

Participant journaling was also effective in finding a way to ask the right questions at the right times. The progression of questions followed steps for participant-observer fieldwork outlined by Emerson et al.; these categories were used to define journal topics. A summary of journal dates, topics, and participants is included below.

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in Table 2. Journal prompts began with initial impressions and introductions and then moved into reflections on key events during *Titanic* rehearsals and performances.

**Table 2: Summary of Journal Topics and Responses.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Journal E-mailed to Participants</th>
<th>Journal Topic</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
<th>Names of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. May 18, 2009</td>
<td>Participant Biography and Auditions Reflection</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Bobbie, Connie, Crystal, David, Jarrod, Jordan, Marisa, Miriam, Neil, Scott, Sean, Stu, Wesley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. June 1, 2009</td>
<td>A Meaningful Personal Memory</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Bobbie, Connie, Crystal, Jarrod, Jordan, Marisa, Miriam, Neil, Scott, Sean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. June 15, 2009</td>
<td>Catch-up and Interviews, Part I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. July 6, 2009</td>
<td>Catch-up/Interviews, Part II</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final stage of questions dealt with personal reflections; by this stage of the journaling process, participants understood the format and the freedom of the activity, making them better able to provide detailed reflections. This progression from impression to experience to reflection on the part of the *Titanic* cast member journaler aligned the journaling accounts with the goal of the process; as Emerson et. Al phrase it, it allows the research to be “…concerned not with the members’ indigenous meanings simply as static categories but with how members of settings invoke those
meanings in specific relations and interactions.” Journal responses, discussed in more detail below, indicated that many respondents found the process to be beneficial. A positive side-effect of this research project was that participants were exposed to a skill that may assist them beyond their participation in Titanic journaling.

Summary of Journal Prompts and Responses

Week 1: Participant Biography and Auditions Reflection

The first journal entry was designed to gather general demographic and background information about journal respondents. Beyond that, the questions were intended to ease participants into the process by providing very direct, specific questions, to which respondents would have little difficulty responding. This journal entry also asked respondents to reflect on their first experience with Titanic—auditions. Thirteen cast members, ranging from age 19 through to “the north side of age 65,” responded to this journal.55

When asked about how cast members chose the night of their auditions, most indicated the decision was made for practical reasons. 19-year old University of Florida student Jordan Weinstein was the only respondent who indicated she had been planning on attending Titanic auditions for quite some time. Few respondents indicated that they had made any drastic steps to prepare for auditions. Bobbie Freese, a long-time Tallahassee community theater volunteer and Titanic cast member, discussed how she will often do research on a show’s production staff prior to auditioning:

I check on who is directing and the primary production staff members. If I don’t know them, I ask around to see if there are any horror stories from recent shows that I need to be aware of.56

Other journalers made mention of researching roles that might fit their vocal type, resting both body and mind days before the audition, and preparing audition materials with singing teachers and loved ones. Veterans of the community musical theater scene

55 Cast member Stuart Folland identified himself as being on “the north side of 65” in his first journal submission.
56 Bobbie Freese, journal entry sent to author, 18 May 2009, Tallahassee, FL, e-mail.
brought forward how different the audition environment can be when the auditionee knows the production staff of a show. Freese spoke in detail of how relationships can change audition performance and perception:

When I audition for directors and production staff who are my friends, they have to maintain a professional distance and avoid all appearance of favoritism. It’s hard to tell sometimes when people are genuinely impressed or are being supportive, because I have very loving and generous friends.\(^{57}\)

Another seasoned veteran of both professional and community theaters, Connie Clineman, indicated that her audition song choice was determined by the environment:

I gauged the mood in the room as people all seemed to be choosing serious ballads. WhenEric called my name, I looked at both of my songs and grabbed the one that was upbeat. I felt it was time to change the mood of the room and to liven things up a bit.\(^{58}\)

Audition stress is a reality for performers at any level. Most journal respondents indicated that their audition stress was minimal, or easily managed by strategies learned to use in other situations (like public speaking or test-taking.) Retiree Stu Folland offered up some stress-management-related wisdom that he attributed to many years of life experience:

Since I’ve experienced about 25,000 sunrises, I’m a bit past the phenomenon of “audition-related stress.” Any “stress management strategies” are part of the comment relating to preparations. When preparations are complete and the mind is focused, stress becomes irrelevant.\(^{59}\)

Stress can also be experienced after the auditions are over while potential cast members wait patiently to receive phone calls as to whether or not they have been cast. Miriam Hilmer, a music therapist at Tallahassee Memorial Health Care, spoke of her approach to the post-audition waiting period as follows:

I watched this news story one time about how Denmark is statistically the happiest country in the world and why this was so. Apparently, the theory is that everyone in Denmark has really low expectations for things. That way, pretty

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\(^{57}\) Bobbie Freese, journal entry sent to author, 18 May 2009, Tallahassee, FL, e-mail.

\(^{58}\) Connie Clineman, journal entry sent to author, 18 May 2009, Tallahassee, FL, e-mail.

\(^{59}\) Stuart Folland, journal entry sent to author, 18 May 2009, Tallahassee, FL, e-mail.
much everything is better than expected and therefore, they are happy because their expectations were exceeded. I try to follow this thought process in some aspects of my life…I find that is actually works.\textsuperscript{60}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Cast Member Connie Clineman (center) on stage as Alice Beane in Titanic.}
\end{figure}

Other cast members reported that they try to stay busy to help the time pass by quickly. Most were able to distract themselves with work responsibilities or regular day-to-day activities. When the phone call comes from the director, auditionees are either pleased or disappointed by the part they are offered. David Hearn, a family man in his mid-40s whose most recent show prior to Titanic was in 1996, mentioned that he always maintains “realistic expectations” of what part he’ll be given based on his preparation and performance in auditions. The majority of journal respondents indicated they would

\textsuperscript{60} Miriam Hilmer, journal entry sent to author, 18 May 2009, Tallahassee, FL, e-mail.
be happy with whatever part they got as they merely wanted the opportunity to be involved in the musical.

**Week 2: Acting In/Out/Through History**

Week 2 of journaling challenged participants to consider the connection between acting and real life, to explore the challenges inherent to portraying a real character on stage, and to consider the overall compatibility of the *Titanic* story with the genre of musical theater. Of all journal prompts, responses during this week were the longest and most detailed. In the context of this week’s questions, participants were encouraged to reflect on an Oscar Wilde quotation: “I love acting. It is so much more real than life.”  

Participants were also asked to reflect on a quotation by cast member Crystal Nelson taken from her first journal entry:

> And this event in history is such a powerful story to tell--it tears at the very fabric of what it is to be human... the pride, the passion, and the loss we feel just by being alive. Ordinary people living in one extraordinary moment that touched the lives of millions around the world.  

Most respondents indicated that they had done some research into their characters in an attempt to augment the information provided in the script and any historical knowledge they may have already had. Marisa McInnes-Taylor, a sophomore at FSU, reported a strong connection to her character in *Titanic*, Madeline Astor:

> After researching my character, I tried to figure out just how I could successfully play this remarkable woman. I am, in fact 19 years old, so I tried to imagine leaving my life to marry someone 30 years older than me at this time in life. I also try to wrap my head around the fact my character was carrying a life inside her while in this crisis. I don’t think I could be as brave as Madeline was, knowing that the only person who accepted her and loved her in her new world was going to die, and that she would have to raise a child alone, and all in one night.

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62 Crystal Nelson, journal entry sent to author, 18 May 2009, Tallahassee, FL, e-mail.
63 Marisa McInnes-Taylor, journal entry sent to author, 25 May 2009, Tallahassee, FL, e-mail.
All respondents indicated that they had done some kind of internet research. Several indicated that they “Googled” their characters name or visited Wikipedia. Freese stated she also visited Encyclopedia Titanica to research general history of the Titanic.

Responses regarding the difficulty of portraying a historical figure on stage were split; many respondents felt that playing a real character on stage is harder than playing a fictional one while others think it is easier to do because you do not have to “fill in the blanks” as you often do with fictional characters. Jordan Weinstein felt it was more difficult to portray a historical figure, as discussed below:

I do think that it is more challenging to portray a historical figure, because there are limitations of fact when developing the character. While it is nice to have things handed to you, like age, it is more difficult to guess at relationships with other characters. For instance, my character is the mistress to Benjamin Guggenheim, but I have no idea what kind of relationship they shared. I have to use my imagination to fill in the blanks, like with a fictional character, but I must remember that my presence had a specific impact on the other passengers and I have to find a characterization that gels with that historical impact.64

Unlike Weinstein, Wesley Callihan, a graduate of Bryan College, made the point that he feels all characters he plays are real in theatrical time and space—the “reality” of the theater; in this sense, the character’s connection to the “real world” is unimportant.

This week’s journal prompt brought forward participants’ impressions of the relationship between community musical theater and Broadway. Weinstein gave a succinct statement as to the difference between in regards to a product-process orientation:

Broadway is a business, like anything else, and relies on the best of the best to put out the best possible product. Community theater, in my experience, is more about the process. I think the biggest thing that comes across to the audience is the heart of the show. A good community theater production may not have the world’s greatest actors, singers, dancers, etc. but the performers are still a success if they manage to convey their enjoyment of the process to the audience.65

64 Jordan Weinstein, journal entry sent to author, 25 May 2009, Tallahassee, FL, e-mail.
65 Ibid.
Regarding the music of *Titanic*, journal respondents such as Weinstein mentioned how the moving nature of the story draws people to attend this production out of curiosity and fascination:

Musicals are so frequently fluff, mental junk food, meant as a vibrant, colorful escape. It seems an unlikely juxtaposition to transfer the tragic story of the Titanic into musical form. I understand why people consider it a joke, too. As far as Titanic is concerned, I think that this show has the potential to be moving and successful. I believe the audience will come to see it because, though they may know how the story ends, it is a fascinating moment in history and therefore one worthy of revisiting from different perspectives.\(^{66}\)

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\(^{66}\) Jordan Weinstein, journal entry sent to author, 25 May 2009, Tallahassee, FL, e-mail.
In the same vein as Weinstein, Hilmer reflected as follows:

It is a story that portrays humankind in all forms...goodness, greed, unselfishness, strength. Catastrophic events bring humanity out in the open and people are drawn to these stories. For this reason I do feel that people will want to see it despite knowing the ending. The journey is the most important part to the end is the most important part and what they are coming to experience. If not important, it is certainly an interesting story to tell for the reasons.\textsuperscript{67}

Zinser saw the re-telling of the *Titanic* story as providing a service to those who lost loved ones on the day the ship went down:

I believe it's important for this story to be told strictly for the sake of the families affected by this event. The general population can always use a reminder of how pride and peer pressure can lead to very tragic ends. But the most accurate retelling can certainly bring a sense of closure to those most closely involved. That's what I would hope for: healing.\textsuperscript{68}

**Week 3: A Meaningful Personal Experience**

Week 3 asked participants to reflect on experiences from their previous involvements in community musical theater. The goal with this week’s journal prompts was to learn more about respondents’ experiences in community musical settings and the power or impact that these experiences may have had. These responses revealed key elements of previous musical experiences that inspired individuals to continue being involved in group-based musical activities. If *Titanic* was the respondent's first community show, he or she was asked to reflect on another group-based musical experience. Reflections centered on what made the experience meaningful, what role music played in the experience, and how the experience was inspirational and/or motivational. Of the week’s 10 responses, 7 reflected on community music theater experiences while 3 discussed experiences with community or school-based choirs.

Freese's response discussed a rehearsal for TALC's production of *Zombie Prom* that she attended on September 11, 2001. Despite the terrorist attacks that happened earlier that day, director Eric Hurst contacted cast members to indicate that that evening’s rehearsal would move forward as planned. Bobbie uses this example to illustrate how community theater becomes a kind of surrogate family that allows its

\textsuperscript{67} Miriam Hilmer, journal entry sent to author, 25 May 2009, Tallahassee, FL, e-mail. \textsuperscript{68} Jarrod Zinser, journal entry sent to author, 25 May 2009, Tallahassee, FL, e-mail.
members distance and perspective on “real life” events in a safe, supportive environment. Bobbie describes the September 11 rehearsal as follows:

It was not as though nothing had happened but it was because we needed to have the rehearsal, the community, the comfort of family. It was important to us to have our lives working the way we wanted them you, that it was our choice. We had the freedom to have that rehearsal and get the most we could out of our time together. So we did. A production company is very much a family. The ties connecting you to the other people on the cast and crew do actually continue after the show closes, becoming more like extended family. Once you’ve been “in a show” with someone, you have a connection to them that doesn’t go away.  

Weinstein’s reflection continued along this same idea of theater as family, but expressed the power of a musical experience she had more in terms of her amazement with what people can create when individual strengths and passions are combined. She discussed an experience with her high school all-girls chorus when they performed at the Southern Division ACDA in Louisville, Kentucky:

I consider music to be a very challenging and demanding subject. Theory and pitch recognition and all of that are daunting to me, and I struggle with those concepts. However, when I had the chance to lend my voice to the larger choir, I was able to enjoy all the aspects of music and convey them to the audience, even though I may not have a firm grasp of them on my own. This experience was a personal example of the power of teamwork as well as the ability of music to affect the emotions of hundreds of people all at once.

Neil Coker, a 20-something music student at Tallahassee Community College discussed musical experiences in terms of the social purpose they serve, focusing on a meaningful experience he had in a Quincy Music Theatre production of Fiddler On The Roof. He mentioned that the time commitment involved in community theater performances seem to almost guarantee that a cast will bond:

As much as I enjoy it, I acknowledge the often taxing nature that people undergo during productions, especially considering that everyone is a volunteer and must

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69 Bobbie Freese, journal entry sent to author, 1 June 2009, Tallahassee, FL, e-mail.
70 Jordan Weinstein, journal entry sent to author, 1 June 2009, Tallahassee, FL, e-mail.
71 Quincy Music Theatre is located in Quincy, FL, approximately 20 minutes west of Tallahassee by car. The theatre calls itself “North Florida’s Largest and Only All-Musical Community Theatre.” More information can be found at: http://www.qmtonline.com/
balance acting between a day job or school or sometimes both; it does affect one's ability to have a social life when 5 days out of the week a good chunk of their day is devoted to rehearsing or performing. I don't think someone who hadn't had that kind of experience would be able to endure all that, because without it, the likelihood to remind one's self why they're doing all this is much harder to attain. I have done shows that I absolutely hated, and certainly had some trouble reminding myself, and had I not had positive experiences like I described, I probably would have considered giving up at some point.72

Here we see community musical theater as a kind of reciprocating social environment that seems to guarantee and perhaps even necessitate that individuals are closely connected. To be in a show, an individual must give up a great deal of time. In exchange for that sacrifice, and by virtue of the commitment made, individuals are rewarded with extremely strong relationships that, in the reflections of Weinstein, Freese, and Coker, create safe, supportive, and social connections.

**Week 4: Audience Expectations and Reasons for Attendance**

Journal 4 asked journal respondents to reflect on reasons why people attend community musical theater productions. The intention here was to take these responses and compare cast member speculation with the feedback gathered through conversations with audience members who attended *Titanic*. Questions explored audience reasons for attendance, the draw of live entertainment as opposed to other forms of mass-consumed entertainment like the cinema, and if there is a particular “type of person” who attends community music theater shows.

All respondents indicated that most people attend community musical theater to support family and/or friends who may be involved in the production. Beyond this, several respondents indicated that people may attend musicals to be entertained, or to experience a kind of escapism that the fantasy of theater provides. When it comes to a musical like *Titanic*, people are intrigued to see how the historical event could be transformed into a musical. Clineman discussed another reason for attending community musicals in her journal response; she indicated that audience members are seeking to experience the bright lights of Broadway on a smaller, more accessible stage:

72 Neil Coker, journal entry sent to author, 1 June 2009, Tallahassee, FL, e-mail.
Another reason people go to musicals produced locally is because they can experience "Broadway" on a budget right in their own hometown. The live orchestra, the dancing, the costumes...they all let them forget their troubles for a while. Times of economic depression are always great times for theatrical productions. People need hope. They need an escape from reality. What better way to do that than with a song? Movies, with their special effects and high speed chases may get the adrenaline going, but to have live actors right in front of you, sharing their joys and their sadness through music is something quite special.\(^{73}\)

Freese commented on another reason the audience members flock to community theater productions. The unpredictable nature of live theater is steeped in excitement on the parts of both the audience and performers—how is the production going to go? Will there be mistakes? Will the performances be spectacular? Freese reflected on how a performance does not really exist without an audience presence and how the relationships between performer and audience expressed as a “bath of energy” that gives volunteer performers a type of compensation not found elsewhere:

> There is an energy that a live audience provides to the performers. It is as important to making the show "live" and work as the air the actors are breathing. It comes from the active listening of the people in the same room, their emotional involvement in the characters and the outcome, the tension and resolution of the story. Experiencing the audience's expression of their appreciation and gratitude for your gift to them of a good performance is like taking a bath in energy. It's a two-way transfer: the audience is also feeling the performers' energy, I think this is why they feel good also.\(^{74}\)

**Week 6: Broadway and Community Musical Theater**

The strong relationship that exists between community musical theater and Broadway by virtue of a common repertoire of shows was explored in Journal 6. Respondents reflected on the relationship between community and professional theater. Journalers discussed whether they had dreams of being on Broadway, whether they felt community theater is a training ground for Broadway, and the general similarities and differences that exist between Broadway and community theater.

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\(^{73}\) Connie Clineman, journal entry sent to author, 8 June 2009, Tallahassee, FL, e-mail.

\(^{74}\) Bobbie Freese, journal entry sent to author, 8 June 2009, Tallahassee, FL, e-mail.
The journal prompt regarding the similarities and differences between community theater and Broadway yielded many insightful responses. Hilmer stated that community theaters often have to deal with unrealistic goals of mimicking Broadways shows:

Overall the level of talent is much higher when you are talking professional theater. Perfection is expected and people endure grueling schedules of rehearsal and performance. For many of them this is their job. The Broadway business is so cut-throat that if someone falters, there is always someone with equal talent waiting to take someone's place.\(^{75}\)

In the same vein, Weinstein identified challenges inherent to recreating a Broadway musical on a community stage:

There is an obvious desire in recreating a show to want to make it as good as the original. The most obvious way to do that is by copying. Actors copy character choices, directors copy blocking, designers copy sets, it's a common thing. But I think it's sort of tragic, and the audience is cheated. There is no way for a community theater to match the talent or the budget of a Broadway show, so instead of trying and inevitably failing, community productions should strive to make the show their own. Instead of lamenting the small space, make it work by creating more intimate scenes. Play to the strengths of the cast and work with what is available. The result, by design, will be totally unique and I think that will come across to audiences far better than a bargain-priced knock-off of the original show.\(^{76}\)

Zinser, who also mentioned these challenges, felt the comparison was unmerited:

The audience and performers tend to compare shows, which is unfair to everyone. Every show has a right to its own interpretation. I believe community theater directors should go in a completely opposite direction than the original show when at all possible.\(^{77}\)

Most respondents indicated they did not have any aspirations of being on Broadway at any point in their lives. The only exceptions to this were McInnes-Taylor, Nelson, and Callihan. McInnes-Taylor stated that her dreams were crushed by a school experience:

\(^{75}\) Miriam Hilmer, journal entry sent to author, 22 June 2009, Tallahassee, FL, e-mail.

\(^{76}\) Jordan Weinstein, journal entry sent to author, 22 June 2009, Tallahassee, FL, e-mail.

\(^{77}\) Jarrod Zinser, journal entry sent to author, 22 June 2009, Tallahassee, FL, e-mail.
It wasn’t until I dropped out of an arts school in the fall of 2008 that I realized that I will never be good enough to be on Broadway. I am still trying to come to terms with the fact that I am a mediocre singer, not that great of an actor, and an alright dancer. Luckily, in community theater, you can be just alright and still perform in a show. Honestly, I think I’m using this show to slowly detox from theater frenzy. After this, I don’t think I can perform anymore. It hurts my heart too much to do this at a small level and know that I won’t be able to go any farther with it.  

Callihan indicated his dreams of being on Broadway are still alive and well, and stated he uses community theater a stepping stone to what he hopes will be a professional career. Griffin said that he hopes to work with a professional company in a large city that does not necessarily have to be New York.

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78 Marisa McInnes-Taylor, journal entry sent to author, 22 June 2009, Tallahassee, FL, e-mail.
Week 7: Relationships in Titanic

Building on last week’s journal entry, Journal 7 asked respondents to reflect on meaningful experiences in this production of Titanic. Specifically, this journal focused on how Titanic participation helped the individual grow as a musician, if friendships had formed, and what fears or expectations the journaler had as the production transitioned to the TLT stage. With only one exception, respondents reflected on growing friendships, and recalled experiences they had have getting to know other individuals in the cast. Many of the community theater veterans also mentioned that they were thrilled to have the opportunity to reconnect with friends with whom they had worked on previous shows.

In terms of these often repetitive rehearsals, Nelson reflected on how emotionally demanding the show can be at times, given the tragic nature of the story of the Titanic:

> The emotional acting in this production is very strong - you need to maintain control as well as portray the emotion of these characters as well as possible. I have had to do this type of acting a little bit but not on this level.\(^{79}\)

This week’s journal entry captured emotions and anticipations felt on the part of these journalers as the production was one week from opening. In this time, the production gained access to the Mainstage at TLT, transitioning the cast and crew from rehearsal space into their performance space. Many expressed concerns with yet-to-be-unresolved technical issues, and a lack of energy on the part of the cast due to many weeks of monotonous rehearsals.

Week 9: Performance Reflection

Performance reflections were the focus on Journal 9. Respondents reflected on their impressions of the first weekend of performances, as Titanic had opened to an audience by the time of this round of journals. Journalers explored their feelings about their personal performances, any emotions the experienced, and any feedback they may have received from friends or family who attended the show. Griffin explained how

\(^{79}\) Wesley Callihan, journal entry sent to author, 29 June 2009, Tallahassee, FL, e-mail.
his enjoyment of the first set of shows was rooted in both audience feedback and in discovery new facets of his character:

It feels good to be in front of an audience again. They bring a new kind of energy to the show, and I end up doing things slightly different in front of them than I do in rehearsals, and I begin to get in my character's skin more honestly. I even discovered a few things about Guggenheim that I didn't realize before we had an audience. It's a good feeling.80

Every journaler stated that they were pleased with the first weekend of performances, and that they felt well-prepared to perform. Stu mentioned that there were a few glitches in line-delivery from his vantage point, but credited the production staff with preparing the cast to face any problems.

Week 10: Reflection on the Journaling Process

The final round of journals, Journal 10, encouraged respondents to reflect on the entire Titanic experience. They were asked whether they would miss the experience once it was over, whether they had set any goals as participants that they had or had not met, and whether their experience as a cast member in Titanic changed or reinforced their view of the purpose and place of community musical theater in their lives and in the larger community. The second component of this journal had respondents reflect on their experiences as Titanic journalers. While it may seem self-serving or perhaps redundant (journaling about journaling?), respondents' comments indicated how beneficial the process had been. Zinser indicated that the journaling process was enjoyable on several levels:

It has been a wonderful experience journaling for you! If anything, it has given me the chance to be emotional and vulnerable; two things I typically don't have time for. I am saddened that the entire experience is almost over.81

Folland also enjoyed the journaling process, and indicated that the structured activity revealed the multi-faceted, multi-leveled nature of community theater:

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80 Sean Griffin, journal entry sent to author, 13 July 2009, Tallahassee, FL, e-mail.
81 Jarrod Zinser, journal entry sent to author, 20 July 2009, Tallahassee, FL, e-mail.
Thank you for the compelling points you have posed in previous Journal posts. It has allowed (forced?) me to think more reflectively on this experience. Rather than being a superficial experience, these journals have suggested that there are many dimensions to this effort. Combined with the quality of the cast, the historic dimension synergistically propels us into a realistic awareness of the magnitude of this story.82

Respondents indicated that cast members would miss the strong relationships they had made, and that they felt they had grown as musicians and/or actors. Many indicated they would miss the feeling of purpose the experienced as part of the Titanic cast, and felt strongly about the importance of community theater in Tallahassee.

E-mail-based Participant Journaling: Focus on Methodology

E-mail journaling broadened the research methods used in this ethnography. As mentioned by Cooley and Barz in their introductory chapter to Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology, “... today’s fieldwork must take into account the benefit of what living in the digital world can afford us all.”83 While simply using the internet to disseminate journal prompts and collect responses may not be as technologically radical as Cooley and Barz had in mind, it is a step in the right direction towards broadening ethnomusicological fieldwork.

Participants indicated their interest in journaling and were sent weekly questions and reflection points over the course of a ten-week period. This research method was a cost-effective, time-sensitive, meaningful-response-yielding way to “vividly represent member-recognized meaning.”84 This research approach was inspired by the chapter on “Pursuing Members’ Meanings” in Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw. With a cast of 37, a production staff of approximately 60, an orchestra of 17, and a limited timeframe, it was imperative to find a way to engage Titanic participants through a methodology that would elicit meaningful responses from a large number of

82 Stuart Folland, journal entry sent to author, 20 July 2009, Tallahassee, FL, e-mail.
people in a short amount of time. Emerson et. Al argue that “…a sensitive ethnographer draws upon her own reactions to identify issues of possible importance to people in the setting but privileges their “insider” descriptions and categories over her own “outsider” views." Participants had the opportunity to use these journals to reflect in their own terms, on their own terms. As almost all members involved in this production of Titanic were volunteers, it was also important to respect the time commitments participants had already made to the production itself, and not overwhelm anyone with additional, intensive research requirements for the purpose of this thesis. Respondents were in control of their responses to each of the journal questions; this yielded accounts rich with indigenous meaning. From the perspective of the journaling participant, it also made the process far more enjoyable. While this approach posed benefits for researcher and participant alike, it does have its limitations. The journaling process is not as interactive as a standard interview; journalers have the opportunity to revise and present a journal response with no direct interaction with the ethnographer. This limitation was addressed by having two weeks of interviews interspersed with the eight journal prompts. While the lack of direct interaction is a shortcoming to this method, the benefits of this approach far outweigh the drawbacks.

E-mail-based weekly participant journaling proved extremely successful—a pleasant surprise, as no information existed regarding the usefulness of such a research approach in ethnographies with this type of musical community. Journals produced diverse responses from a group of dedicated respondents, many of whom answered all journals over the 10-week process. Following the initial presentation of the journaling activity and dissemination of consent forms, 20 out of a possible 37 individuals indicated interest in participating. The most responses received were in the first week, where 13 individuals contributed; an average of 10 responses was submitted each week. 8 individuals submitted journals every week.

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85 Aside from the cast who were present every night, many of the other positions (especially orchestra) may have involved more individual than those names given credit in show program, from where these numbers are based. Orchestra members will often hire substitute players to cover nights on which they might be absent. It is also important to note that other than a few members of the core production staff, the orchestra members and full-time TLT staff involved, all other Titanic participants were unpaid volunteers.

The final journal entry, wherein participants were asked to reflect on the entire journaling process, produced numerous comments that indicated how beneficial participants found journaling. Cast member Griffin commented as follows on his journaling experiences:

This show is a truly special one to me, and I've loved reflecting on my thoughts, feelings, and experiences of the rehearsal/performance process these past few months. Journaling my shows may become routine from now on!\(^{87}\)

Many participants indicated that the journaling process caused them to consider ideas and experiences in ways they had never done before. Personal thoughts and memories were shared through an approach not always possible by face-to-face interviewing alone; these reflections inspired subsequent journal topics or interview questions.

E-mail-based \textit{Titanic} participant journaling did more than capture motivation and experience; the weekly submissions captured interaction and relationships as a group of strangers came together for a common musical purpose. E-mail-based participant journaling also allowed for a strong relationship to be built between researcher and respondent. Cohen speaks of the relational nature of fieldwork, stating that “we, as ethnographers and ethnomusicologists, are essentially chroniclers of relationships: between people at least as much as between people and sound.”\(^{88}\) The extensive accounts gathered through this process are joined in Chapter 5 with data gathered through observations and personal interviews. The summary provided here is intended to honor the experiences and relationships of \textit{Titanic} cast members as authentically as possible; discussion in the final chapter of this thesis analyze and dissect these experiences in an attempt to answer the larger questions driving this ethnography.

\(^{87}\) Sean Griffin, journal entry sent to author, 20 July 2009, Tallahassee, FL, e-mail.
CHAPTER 5
TO BE HUMAN IS TO BE MUSICAL: EXAMINING THE INDIVIDUAL IN COMMUNITY MUSICAL THEATER

This chapter synthesizes interviews and observations to construct an individual-level assessment of how community musical theater can create community and why it is that this activity has so many enthusiastic and dedicated followers. Personal experiences of *Titanic* cast members are chronicled in this chapter; participants’ reasons for involvement are unpacked and many of the ideas and impressions recounted in previous chapters are further explored. Conclusions regarding why community musical theater is powerful for its participants, the nature of their participation, and how involvement informs their understanding of themselves are also discussed.

What is unearthed here, amidst hours of interviews, pages of journal entries, and numerous accounts of intensely personal musical experiences, is an understanding of the important place of music in the lives of community musical theater participants. A common progression of life events among several participants is discussed, illustrating how individuals come to develop their fundamental need to make music, and how community musical theater provides them ongoing opportunities to fulfill this need.

Personal testimonies reveal the interaction of the Actual and the Possible in this production of *Titanic*. Turino defines the Possible as our “dreams, hopes, desires, [and] ideals… elements of life that add dynamism and challenge… that make us want to keep living.” Community musical theater provides opportunities to explore different ways of expressing one’s self and interacting with others, thus creating needed variety and excitement in life. We see this in the discussion of community musical theater as a forum for relationship-based support, a means of escaping everyday experiences, and an arena for artistic growth. Beyond this, the centrality of music to the heightened personal and social experiences recounted by many participants is explored further.

Why Community Theater? Experiencing Escape, Growth, and Support

Individuals are attracted to this performance medium for the opportunities it affords them to encounter a life other than the one they live day-in and day-out. This is experienced through musical or dramatic escape; the musical, or more specifically an individual’s role in a musical, creates opportunities to live in a different time or interact with others as a different self. While many community musical theater participants lead fulfilled lives, even the happiest person can be pulled down by the monotony of life’s demands. The unique experiences offered by community musical theater that make it such an attractive refuge for many regardless of their relative contentment with life. Change and challenge in a musical forum can benefit the fulfilled and unfulfilled alike.

Crystal Nelson described her escapist experiences in community musical theater as fulfilling because they allow her to become someone other than herself:

I feel that becoming another "person" and allowing myself to be reflected in a small way through my characters helped me build confidence in me as a strong willed individual in control of my future and my life.  

Crystal brings forward how opportunities for escape (experiences with the Possible) allow her to build skills that she can then transfer to her everyday life (the Actual.) Performing a role or exploring a different persona provides many community musical theater participants with cherished opportunities for self-discovery. Bart Pisapia also mentioned how his experiences outside of himself have helped him grow:

I mean, you can use acting in anything you do because we all play roles. It’s interesting... you can watch people who wouldn’t regularly do theater. You can see them putting on a persona, which is exactly what acting is. Acting can help in many ways. One of the things that it has taught me is that when things go wrong, you improvise. Acting has helped me practice those things.

Jarrod Zinser mentioned how he enjoys the opportunity to play a character much different than himself and the social aspect of community musical theater:

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90 Crystal Nelson, journal entry sent to author, 25 May 2009, Tallahassee, FL, e-mail.
91 Bart Pisapia, interview by author, 11 June 2009, Tallahassee, FL, digital audio recording.
I have fallen in love with my character. [Harold Bride] It is a part that I haven’t had the opportunity to portray yet: shy, clumsy, introverted. Plus, he sings some of the most touching songs in the show. I’m certainly looking forward to my interpretation of this character; what we’ll both evolve into. A big reason I said yes to the show is the social aspect. I love meeting new people! Plus, this is a moment that we’ll share forever (whether or not we keep in touch.)

This same sentiment was echoed by Miriam Hilmer:

I also believe that it is an outlet for many to be someone different from themselves and this can be very powerful. So, in this sense... it is a very real experience and allows you to perhaps experience a “real life” you might otherwise not.

Zinser’s and Hilmer’s sentiments are echoed below by Matt Jarvis:

I know Bobbie [Freese] comes here because it is something she loves. She has a job, and she likes her job, but that doesn’t fulfill her. I love working at Beethoven and Company, because I made money but it’s not the same as this.

These three quotations maintain a separation between the self and the role played on stage, while acknowledging that a connection exists. Matt characterizes escapist experiences as fulfilling, comparing his work life and that of his fellow cast mate, to what he has found through his involvement in community musical theater. Miriam even goes so far as to identify what she encounters when escaping to the Possible as a type of alternate yet parallel reality that is detached from the everyday but still vivid enough to seem real.

Many participants believe that the transcendent power of community musical theater is rooted in the making of music. Music allows individuals not only to explore different versions of themselves, but it also gives them license to change how they interact with the world. Bobbie Freese holds this belief, explaining how telling a story with music seems to strengthen the experience while also making it more meaningful:

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92 Jarrod Zinser, journal entry sent to author, 18 May 2009, Tallahassee, FL, e-mail.
93 Miriam Hilmer, journal entry sent to author, 25 May 2009, Tallahassee, FL, e-mail.
94 Matt Jarvis, interview by author, 22 May 2009, Tallahassee, FL, digital audio recording.
Musical theater brings an intensity of emotion to the storytelling. It's somehow stronger to sing a story than to tell it. It's probably because it allows both halves of your brain to take in the experience at the same time, making it a totally involving journey of the mind.\footnote{Bobbie Freese, journal entry sent to author, 25 May 2009, Tallahassee, FL, e-mail.}

Tank Spears also mentioned how it is the music that allows for individuals to escape, and how beneficial the experience of escape can be:

Because through music, I think, you can express that emotion beyond the acting part. In the musical, you have the dialogue and you can only go so far. The music is the next step. It expresses… it takes you to a place… a magical place, if you will… for a lot of folks.\footnote{Tank Spears, interview by author, 1 June 2009, Tallahassee, FL, digital audio recording.}

Music simplifies communication; this simplification is made possible through a shared understanding of the conventions and parameters established by Western musical notation. Individuals come together to bring to life a musical wherein relationships are defined through melodies and dialogue, and interaction is prescribed by choreography and blocking. It seems that by establishing clearly defined boundaries that overwrite sometimes-troubling everyday communication conventions, a simplified forum for interaction is revealed. Here, in a creative space free of unknown expectations, is where the Possible is actualized. By setting musical parameters for interaction, individuals are free to explore new ways to express themselves and relate to others.

Not only does this change in the interactional boundaries allow for individual exploration, but it also seems to heighten the impact of interpersonal relationships. Many respondents discussed their relationships in community musical theater as offering them a type of support, understanding, or encouragement that they may not receive in any other areas of their lives. Neil Coker discussed in a journal entry how community musical theater affords him opportunities for personal fulfillment through dramatic storytelling, while also acting as a self-esteem booster:

For me, I feel the sensation of pulling people into a story and making them believe is real truly affects the perception of those both onstage and in the audience for a good two or three hours depending on the length of the production. Before I discovered musical theater, I was depressed, withdrawn,
and didn't think I was good at anything. It has been perhaps the most positive change I've ever made in my life.³⁷

Spears, who works as a massage therapist, characterized the positive experiences he has in community musical theater as providing him with support and release that he could not find elsewhere. When asked why he participated, he stated:

Therapy. Support therapy. I guess it’s the release, you know. For me, I deal with other people’s problems all day long. I hear what they say… in my everyday life, I have to deal with a lot of that. So, just to get that hour and a half on stage to go wild and crazy, I think it’s good for a lot of folks… it is for me.³⁸

⁹⁸ Tank Spears, interview by author, 1 June 2009, Tallahassee, FL, digital audio recording.

Figure 10: Titanic cast rehearsing in the lobby at TLT before the stage is available.
Developing the Creative Self

Experiences in community musical theater have a profound influence on participants by allowing individuals opportunities for self-exploration. Over the course of this ethnography, a trend emerged when participants discussed how it was they came to be involved in community music theater when asked why is they so thoroughly enjoy the performance medium. A similar story told by many different voices emerged wherein individuals become excited about music at an early age, decide to pursue musical theater through secondary school, have dreams of being a full-time music performer dashed or reevaluated during post-secondary years, which leads them to ultimately turn away from a life completely devoted to music. This common story yielded a familiar ending; most participants turned to community musical theater when they wanted to continue developing and exploring their creative, musical selves, and needed to find a way to balance this desire with their career, family, and other commitments. The trend captured in their prose is by no means all-encompassing; as with any group of people, there were several outliers to this common path of development. Regardless of this, the qualitative data gathered in this ethnography provided overwhelmingly analogous experiences across many different life-stories. Interviews are excerpted here to provide an overview of how many community musical theater participants view themselves as musicians, and how their musical paths have led them to community musical theater.

What was revealed in these conversations was how individuals who perform in community musical theater develop an understanding of the centrality of music-making to their identity at a very early age; they learn that to be human is to make music. This common progression of life events is captured on the proceeding page in Figure 5.1. In this chart, we see a series of events in boxes, categorized as musical experiences and exposures. These experiences move forward chronologically in time, as indicated by the top arrow which shows the progression of individuals’ “Life Stages.” Five life stages are identified here: pre-school years, school years, post-secondary years, early 20s, and post-post secondary years. Mirroring the life stage arrow at the bottom is a string of quotations included to capture individuals’ understandings of the self as a musical being and their changes in understanding of the role of music in society over time. While these are not actual quotations taken from any research participants, they are
generalized statements used to capture the essence of many similar opinions specific to each life stage on the chart.

The chart shows how many community musical theater participants' understandings of the self as a musical being is developed at a young age; many participants were able to identify a key musical experience, many but not all in community musical theater, that inspired the individual to seek out more musical experiences. One example of such an experience is captured here by Sean Griffin; the excerpt below is taken from a journal entry:

When I was in the Pensacola Children's Chorus, we were doing a small number of songs from *Aida* for our spring show one year. We were all dressed in these cheese cloth "Nubian" outfits and slowly entering the stage for a song called The Gods Love Nubia. It was the finale to our whole show, and as the music built and built, we got bigger with it. At one point in the song, the music goes out and the whole company sings a capella for about 8 measures. That was the most emotional moment in a show I had had up to that point. I was on the verge of tears, and everyone around me was feeling it as well. We received a standing ovation each night for all three nights of our performance before the song was even over. I will never forget this moment, because it was the moment that I knew...this was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life.⁹⁹

Griffin’s experience is not uncommon to many participants in community musical theater. Most individuals were able to pinpoint powerful musical and/or theatrical experiences experienced early in life that are incredibly influential, which also constructing in their minds an understanding of human being as fundamentally musical. Many participants also indicated that these initial experiences were social in nature, taking the form of choirs, middle school plays, community choruses, etc.

From early powerful encounters with music and theater, many individuals moved forward to seek opportunities to express themselves, develop musical skills, and continue experiencing that which first hooked them to musical performance. Many students become widely involved and highly specialized in their secondary years, participating in school choirs and drama troupes, community ensembles, and even having the opportunity to participate in semi-professional or professional productions.

⁹⁹ Sean Griffin, journal entry sent to author, 1 June 2009, Tallahassee, FL, e-mail.
Figure 11: Individuals' understanding of the self as musical being tracked through musical experiences and exposures throughout several life stages.
This involvement only heightens and intensifies the people’s desire to perform. As they continue to age and develop, their understanding of the human being as musical is continually reinforced through these activities. The youngest cast member in *Titanic*, Ryan Koch, is a current example of this phase. In an interview with this eleven-year-old and his father Mark, Mark mentioned how Ryan’s involvement in many different activities is important to his development as an artist. In the quote below, we see the magnitude of Ryan’s musical and theatrical involvements and experience and the importance of these activities to his father:

He was in *Big* with YAT in 2007 followed by *Oliver* in 2008, and he was a munchkin in the Broadway musical *The Wizard of Oz* that came to Tallahassee in April, and then the very next day… I found out online that they were auditioning for this, and he said he was willing to this, even though this had a solo song audition… that was a big deal for him… he’d never done this. So, ah, we prepared for a week, and then he did it and we were proud of him just for doing that.\(^{100}\)

With solid training, good experience, and a firm understanding of the self as fundamentally musical, many individuals progress to post-secondary education, pursuing music, theater, or music theater degrees. A large number of music and theater students from FSU were involved in *Titanic*; many indicated their desire to go on to perform on Broadway, or “make it big” somewhere outside of Tallahassee. Dreams intact, affirming experiences behind them, they push forward. Many discover at this phase of development that performance is a highly competitive and demanding career path, full of sacrifices. Bart Pisapia, a *Titanic* cast member, captured his post-secondary crisis-of-sort as follows:

My bachelor’s degree is in theater. I was really just doing something that I enjoyed. When I graduated, I realized that I really didn’t want to go to New York or California. I had been to New York, so I knew I definitely didn’t want that. I just don’t have the personality that would be able to take that kind of life. It’s a very hard life. You are putting yourself on the line with auditions and it can be a very disruptive kind of life going from job to job. I enjoyed doing theater, but decided that I didn’t want that kind of life. You have to be really… you have to have that strong will to achieve. I didn’t want that to come out of necessity to live. I wanted

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\(^{100}\) Mark Koch, interview by author, 29 June 2009, Tallahassee, FL, digital audio recording.
to settle down and that’s hard for actors to do, at least at the beginning. I stayed in Tallahassee and got another degree in teaching. I decided to use some of my creative gifts as an Elementary school teacher, which I did for 13 years.\textsuperscript{101}

Other participants indicated being troubled by thoughts they are not talented enough to pursue a career as a performer, sometimes even being told this by an applied instructor or professor. A conflict arises for the individual—they are challenged to reevaluate what it means to be musical, and how they can continue “being human” without dedicating themselves solely to music. As a result of this, many chose to change degrees within the first few years of post-secondary education, complete their music or theater degree and then pursue another more “practical” degree, or drop out of their degree program without graduating. A few make it and persevere beyond this conflict, be it through persistence, exhaustive practicing, nepotism, or sheer luck. These are not the people who end up spending decades performing exclusively on community stages.

Moving past crisis, many individuals indicated a desire to return to being musical, and found community musical theater waiting to welcome them back with open arms. In the post-post-secondary life stage, music-making opportunities in school are either no longer available or no longer viable, and professional opportunities are now exclusively available to the few who have dedicated themselves to performance. Experiences in post-secondary settings have often soured individuals on what it means to be “musically talented” and tend to intensify their desire to have meaningful musical experiences that value participation over perfection.

This common life progression and development of the self provides great insight into how and why individuals come to be involved in community theater, while also shedding light on how individuals’ understanding of the self as fundamentally musical, drives the “need to make music,” as it was referenced in so many interviews. Following experiences during post-secondary education that are often trying, participants turn or return to community musical theater, as it is a forum for social musical participation that is almost always available and welcoming.\textsuperscript{102}

\textsuperscript{101} Bart Pisapia, interview by author, 11 June 2009, Tallahassee, FL, digital audio recording.

\textsuperscript{102} The availability and welcoming-nature of community musical theater varies from place to place and from one organization to another. Two Titanic participants who had been involved in community theater outside of Tallahassee indicated that the community of artists that comprise groups like TLT and TALC
Community musical theater is embraced both as a stepping-stone to professional theater (“bigger and better things”) by secondary and post-secondary students, whose dreams of performance careers are still alive, and a place for interested community members who feel compelled to be musical are afforded opportunities to perform. This section examines Titanic participants’ sometimes conflicting understanding of the purpose of music-making on the community level, their corresponding expectations for their experience in a production, and how this conflict is mediated with the use of the internet and audio recordings.

are unique, characterizing them as being more welcoming than some other production companies. Regarding the availability of community musical theater productions, it should also be stated that this varies from one location to another. Between TLT, TALC, and nearby QMT, anywhere from 8-10 musicals take place in any given year; this number may be high compared to some communities, but low when compared to others. Apart from this, the audition process may limit participants’ ability to be involved. That said, no community group in Tallahassee would ever turn away a volunteer who was not successful in the audition phase of the production but who still wished to be involved with the show.
Purpose and Function

Many secondary and post-secondary students involved in Titanic viewed their involvement in community musical theater as a stop along the way on their road to professional theater and a life of performance. In an interview with cast member Marisa McInnes-Taylor, she discussed her view of community theater as “a place to grow as an artist.” (June 23) Numerous students involved in the production of Titanic indicated that their dreams of performing on Broadway remain intact. One such individual is cast member Neil Coker. He captures a very common understanding of Broadway from the perspective of a student in the following quotation:

Broadway or other professional performance venues just seem to be the next logical step which I assume I'll make an attempt at once I've gotten all of my affairs in order theater-wise locally. When you feel all you've accomplished in one area has been outgrown, it's time for you to move forward. I realize this is no easy feat and the success rate is slim, but as long as I give it my best, I won't hold anything against myself for not having made it "all the way." Community theater, in that regard, is really more of a transitional step and a resume/experience building exercise. It does offer certain things that will never be replaced by professional-level theater, however; such as a wide range of talent and experience because of differing goals as far as theater is concerned.103

While community musical theater is commonly seen by students as a forum for growth and development, observations of the process of Titanic did not reveal a rehearsal approach that allowed for intensive musical skill-development to be the primary focus. This is by no means the fault of the production staff but occurs due to the extremely tight schedule and great variation in musical knowledge and expertise among the cast. For the student, the opportunities for growth in community musical theater are driven solely by the individual him or herself. While exposure to established musicals is important for one considering a career in this repertoire on Broadway, few other opportunities for production-driven intensive musical training are available on the community stage. This is not to say that musical training does not take place, but rather to indicate that training beyond that which is necessary to bring a show to life (often far

103 Neil Coker, journal entry sent to author, 29 June 2009, Tallahassee, FL, e-mail.
too elementary or obvious to the average university-level musical student) does not take
place.

On the opposite end of the spectrum to students are community members with
past musical training which they have not utilized in many years, those in non-
performance-based musical professions such as teaching, or those with good musical
intuition who cannot read music but enjoy singing. With such disparities in training, the
challenge is to find a way to balance musical knowledge with a desire to make the
experience inclusive and the production of the musical believable. In an interview, cast
member Travis Young commented on this challenge:

I think it’s a blessing and a curse because if you get students from FSU and they
are very talented, they have the drawback of not being old enough for some
parts, or not being the right look, age, or build. Directors will generally work
around that to make it so that the most talented fit the role, but it’s a fine line that
a director has to work in a community theater because you do want to fit
everyone. You want everyone to have a role, to have ownership of the
production, but you also want the show to do well.104

As was the case with Titanic, a director faces the struggle of balancing disparate
musical interests, different levels of talents with the casting demands of the show and a
desire to be inclusive. One of the ways that this conflict is mediated is through
technology and cast recordings, used as a way to bridge the gap between those who
can read printed music and those who cannot.

The Internet and Cast Recordings

Accessibility to musical theater by way of recordings, either on the internet or on
compact discs, was a recurrent theme throughout many interviews. Several cast
members indicated that the Internet assisted them in preparing for their Titanic
auditions. Zinser made reference in a journal entry to using the internet to assist him
with preparing for his stating that he will often “listen to the songs via iTunes and do a
simple Google search to find background information, musical reviews, cast

104 Travis Young, interview by author, 4 July 2009, Tallahassee, FL, digital audio recording.
Freese also mentioned how technology makes musicals more accessible especially since she does not play the piano: “I think in the future, the web is going to be more and more helpful since I don't play piano. It's definitely in my prep techniques list now. I'm also looking at software for my PC.”

Figure 13: Cast vocal warm-ups in the Magnolia Room with the orchestra before a performance.

Taken in broader context, recordings play an important role in attracting individuals to the genre, and in making the music accessible once an individual has been cast in a particular show. Not only do they serve to level the playing field in a group of differently-experienced musicians, they also accelerate the rehearsal process.

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105 Jarrod Zinser, journal entry sent to author, 18 May 2009, Tallahassee, FL, e-mail.
106 Bobbie Freese, journal entry sent to author, 18 May 2009, Tallahassee, FL, e-mail.
As both of these functions would serve a community musical theater production well, it is not surprising to discover their centrality in this production of *Titanic*. Recordings function as talent equalizers and rehearsal tools, but also as living artifacts of the Broadway rendition of a particular musical. In this capacity, the recording maintains the connection between Broadway and community, origin and recreation. In the role as Broadway artifact, recordings serve as ongoing reminders of this connection, which also serves to heighten the experience for an individual recreating a highly-coveted Broadway role on a community stage far from New York.

Recordings were ever-present during *Titanic*, mentioned in speeches encouraging cast members to practice their parts outside of regular rehearsals and used in dance and blocking rehearsals when live piano accompaniment was not available. The production staff kept a commercial recording available to cast members to listen to and study. Interviews, observations, and journal entries revealed that the majority of cast members musically trained or otherwise, used this recording to rehearse. Cast member Matt Jarvis, a recent graduate of the vocal performance program at FSU, said he frequently uses recordings. When asked how these recordings influence his performance, he stated:

> Generally on the recordings I have this problem with copying... we all do—those of us who pick things up aurally. I don’t think that this was a bad choice in this case because Brian d’Arcy sings it very well, and the things he’s doing are very good. They are also the choices that I would have made.\(^\text{107}\)

While recordings serve in several positive roles for community musical theater groups, the question remains as to what impact they have on the creative process. During a music rehearsal near the beginning of this production, *Titanic* Music Director Mike Norris was confronted with the way a particular song in the show was supposed to be performed. Connie Clineman made reference to the “traditional” performance of the song, to which Mike responded:

> That phrase “in this show, it is traditionally done this way”... to me, that’s just bunk. You are correct in that when you hear this you often hear it sung... all that

\(^{107}\) Matt Jarvis, interview by author, 22 May 2009, Tallahassee, FL, digital audio recording.
(points to several musical notes) in one phrase. What I would say is this: once you are comfortable with the blocking, and the movement, and what’s going on, at that point, uh, I’m going to be fine either way. I’m going to be fine if you sneak the breath in there.¹⁰⁸

This notion of tradition was established by the recording of the song in question. For musically trained and untrained alike, the recordings served more often as a blueprint for “how things should be done” as opposed to “how things could be done.” Broadway recordings are viewed as authoritative interpretations, commonly viewed as recounted above by Jarvis and used to establish traditional renditions, as mentioned by Clineman. No clear consensus on the creative implications of recordings could be established in the present study; future research could examine the impact creative dilemma that recordings create in terms of influencing or perhaps even prescribing musical interpretation.

Turino argues that “successful artistic experiences and performances draw special attention to the interplay between the Possible and the Actual, waking us from habit, and thus provide that temporary sense of a life more deeply lived.”¹⁰⁹ Community musical theater is one such experience; its ability to provide a release from the Actual, which for many is a life otherwise void of opportunities for expression and appreciation, speaks to its widespread and ongoing importance. This chapter’s investigation of a progression of life events common to many participants demonstrated how community musical theater allows individuals to nurture their fundamental need to be musical. This chapter also illustrated the ways in which individuals come to embrace community musical theater and how participation-centric music-making, made accessible by cast recordings, is a transformative and affirming experience.

¹⁰⁸ Mike Norris, quotation taken from Titanic music rehearsal, 21 May 2009, Tallahassee, FL, digital audio recording.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

Three levels of the Actual and the Possible were revealed in this production of *Titanic*. The first captures the relationship between the community stage (Actual) and Broadway (Possible). These two disparate music-making communities are joined together by virtue of a shared repertoire of shows. This level of Actual-Possible realization reveals on the surface-level why community musical theater is so powerful to its participants: they are afforded the opportunity to recreate a musical that premiered on a professional stage, performed by individuals who community performers revere and admire. Actualizing the Possible on this level provides fulfillment as performers experience a world—Broadway—that they see as the pinnacle of musical theatre performance.

The second level is uncovered in the musical itself, and is specific to *Titanic*. As mentioned by *Titanic*'s composer and lyricist Maury Yeston, the story when told in musical form is a myth-made-real; a historical tale mediates between two seemingly contradictory notions ideas about humanity and is brought to life through musical performance. As community level participants perform this musical, they experience the actualization of possibilities in yet another way: the work being performed acts a vehicle for exploring some of the most uplifting or terrifying aspects of life that fascinate humanity. By participating in a musical like *Titanic*, performers can “be” characters who experienced possible outcomes to life that seem so far from these performers' “reality.”

The final level is experienced by the individual, building upon the two previously mentioned levels of Actual-Possible realization. Some reasons individuals are drawn to this experience were captured in a chart that tracks a common progression of events that leads many individuals to community musical theater. As mentioned in journals and interviews, individuals in community musical theater have the opportunity to experience a microcosm of what the world could be like through experiences of escapism, support, and personal expression.

Many individuals who participated in this production of *Titanic* identified as feeling compelled to perform, with community musical theater performance often being their
only outlet to be musical in any capacity in their lives. It appeared as though this intense desire to be musical came from some positive musical experience that occurred for an individual at a young age. The individuals’ definition of humanness came to include the word “music” in some way. Because of this, individuals seem to not be able to feel wholly human without acting on this desire and filling what many referred to as a “void” in their life. In the quote below from journaler Wesley Callihan, we are introduced to the profound nature of performance as an observed and appreciated demonstration of what a human being can be:

Acting, I have heard said, is living truthfully under imaginary circumstances. Throughout our own lives we tend to ignore those things that we do not want to accept in reality when it is possible to do so, i.e. responsibility, conflict, our own mortality. However, while you are acting, you know that you have a purpose, so that whether or not you achieve that purpose, you know that somehow you have attempted to do something of worth that others will notice, if for no other reason than they are meant to sit in their seats and watch you do it.\footnote{Wesley Callihan, journal entry sent to author, 15 May 2009, Tallahassee, FL, e-mail.}

Performance is heightened by the presence of an audience whose sole responsibility is to sit and observe those performing on stage. Performance on a community stage is not meant to reach the peak of musical virtuosity, but rather to provide a forum to appreciate the very fact that humans can be musical and what people can create when they work together. If being human means being musical, musical performance on a community stage allows for this performance of “human” to be fully appreciated.

\textbf{Avenues for Future Research}

This ethnography yielded a wealth of rich information, some of which was not included in this document. While interviews with audience members, crew, and orchestra members informed this thesis, the experiences of these community musical theater participants were not explicitly included. Issues and ideas brought forward by the cast and crew provided more than enough information to examine the significance of community musical theater in its participants’ lives. Beyond this, these unique outlooks brought forward issues that could add countless additional chapters to this
thesis. As such, future research into the impact of community musical theater on its participants could focus solely on these backstage and off-stage perspectives.

Recordings were discussed in this thesis as Broadway artifacts that expedite musical learning for community musical theater performers. The use of recordings brings forward issues of musical “copying” and imitation; future research could explore this idea by analyzing the influence recordings have on performance. This investigation could consider the role of recordings in popularizing Broadway, as the recordings bring this performance genre into the realm of popular media, making it accessible to people far outside the New York City area. By examining the role of recordings as Broadway “popularizers,” the argument that community musical theater participants are drawn to the performance genre because it allows them to have a piece of Broadway (a performance environment they hold in the highest regard) could be bolstered.

While the relationship between Broadway and community stages was discussed from the point of view of community performers and *Titanic* composer and lyricist Maury Yeston, the relationship between these two music-making communities could be further examined through interviews with Broadway performers. Future research could explore professional performers’ views of community musical theater and the place of community musical theater in their development musical backgrounds. Another area of research that could be expanded upon is the life stage development chart introduced in thesis. This theoretical analysis of a trend that emerged in this ethnography might be strengthened by research in developmental psychology. The chart might also be used in future interviews, where community theater participants are asked to respond and react to the progression, providing further evidence of this common musical developmental track.

To the best of my knowledge, this work is the first of its kind; never before has an ethnomusicological study of community musical theater that employs ethnography as the primary means of research taken place. It seems as though there are two reasons why ethnomusicologists may have stayed away from this community of musicians for so long. American musical theater is neither foreign nor is it exotic; these well-publicized performances recreate well-known musicals in urbane centers all over the United States of America, featuring performers who are for the most part average, white, middle-class
Americans with little formal musical training who become involved with a musical like *Titanic* to escape or enhance their everyday lives.

Ethnomusicologists’ failure to acknowledge this community brings to bear a shortcoming of the approach; too often, musical practices that take place so “close to home” are dismissed because they appear to be overly developed or uninteresting. As Stock and Chiener point out in their chapter in *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*, “doing fieldwork at home contributes to a more rounded ethnomusicology where all music making is treated as genuinely worthy of study, not just the far-distant.”\(^{111}\) It is the hope of this researcher that the research detailed in this thesis will add to the work of many ethnomusicologists who continue to challenge this notion of what ethnomusicology really is and what it can be if we are not so quick to narrow our focus.

**Closing Thoughts**

Community musical theater demonstrates how making music binds individuals together and allows for individuals to relate in a way not possible through normal day-to-day communication. Through music, the terms of interaction are somehow simplified, allowing for different people to more easily align themselves with one another. Here, the focus is placed on what Turino identifies as “sameness,” understood to include musical habits, patterns of action and thought, musical sensibilities and knowledge as individuals work together to achieve a common goal.\(^{112}\) This builds upon the comments of John Blacking, mentioned briefly in the introduction to this thesis. This feeling of sameness is where creativity comes from; support is experienced as relationships are built and strengthened, making anything seem possible. In music-making, individuals experience the Possible: what they can be as individuals, what they can be a part of when they join a group, and perhaps even what the world could be if our terms of existence or circumstances were different. The Possible is enshrouded in hope; it is the

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experience of this hope as individuals actualize the Possible that makes community theatre so gratifying.
APPENDIX A

PHOTOGRAPHED TRANSFORMATION OF TLT STAGE


June 23, 2009. Working on the lifted platform
June 29, 2009. First cast rehearsal on the stage.

June 30, 2009. First rehearsal with cast members on the lifted platform.
July 4, 2009. Most major set pieces are completed.

July 26, 2009. Production closes; striking the set.
APPENDIX B
FULL LISTING OF JOURNALLING PROMPTS

Journal Entry #1: Brief Biography and Audition Reflection

1. Please provide me with a one paragraph biography to help me get to know you. Include anything you feel is important/interesting.

2. Reflect on your experience through the Titanic audition process. Refer to the following questions for inspiration/guidance:

- What did you sing, and why that song? How do you pick your song?
- How do you choose which audition night to attend?
- What preparations do you take prior to auditions in general?
- Do you experience audition-related stress? Do you have any stress-management strategies?
- How do you gauge your performance during and after auditions?
- How do you survive "the waiting period" after auditions?
- Were you happy with the part you were offered? Why did you say "Yes, I'd love to be in this show"?

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to e-mail me. I will also be at rehearsal tonight (Monday).

Journal Entry #2: Acting In/Out/Through History

I hope you having a wonderful long weekend!

(Answer any or all of the questions listed below, or reflect on anything else meaningful to you from the rehearsal process thus far. Thank you again for your participation!)

1. Oscar Wilde once said, "I love acting. It is so much more real than life." Consider this quotation and its connection to your experiences in community musical theatre. Do you agree or disagree with Mr. Wilde? If you agree, what makes performance experiences "more real?" If you disagree, why do you feel differently?

2. Acting seems to be even more of a challenge when one is portraying a real life person, which is the case for many of you in this production of Titanic. If you are playing a historical figure, explain any research you have done or are planning to do. Is playing a real life person in a musical more challenging than playing a fictional person, animal, or thing? If so, what are the challenges this type of portrayal presents?

3. In a previous journal entry, cast member Crystal Nelson wrote the following:

“And this event in history is such a powerful story to tell--it tears at the very fabric of what it is to be human... the pride, the passion, and the loss we feel just by being alive. Ordinary people living in one extraordinary moment, which touched the lives of millions around the world.” (included here with Crystal's permission)

Consider this statement as you reflect on the compatibility of musical theatre and the story of the Titanic. Do you agree or disagree with Crystal's description of the power of this story? Why do you think people would want to see this musical given that most are well aware of its tragic ending before the curtain even goes up? Is it important for this story to be told? Why or why not?
I will be at rehearsal again on Tuesday. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to e-mail me (jillian.bracken@gmail.com).

Journal #3: A Meaningful Memory

For this week’s journal entry, reflect back on an experience you have had through your involvement in community musical theatre. If Titanic is your first community show, use another music-related experience.

- Describe the experience.
- Why was this experience meaningful?
- Could you have had an experience like this in an environment that did not involve music, or was the music central to the significance of this experience?
- Did this experience motivate or inspire you? If so, how?
- In your opinion, is this experience common or uncommon? Have you had it before/again? Have you heard of others having a similar experience?

I will be at rehearsal Monday and Tuesday this week to answer any questions you may have; from there, I am home to Canada for 8 days! My next journal e-mail (#4) will be sent to you on June 8th from the Great White North!

Journal #4: Audience Expectations and Reasons for Attending

For this week’s journal, please reflect on reasons why people attend community musical theatre productions. (Later in my research, I will be speaking directly with audience members who attend this production of Titanic. It will be interesting to compare your speculations with their feedback.)

Some suggested areas to touch on:
(Please feel free to take this in any direction you'd like!)

- Why do people attend community musical theatre productions in general?
- Do you think their reasons for attending will differ for this particular show?
- How does live theatre differ from other forms of mass-consumed entertainment, like the movies?
- If you have attended shows in the past, what prompted you to go?
- Do you think there is a particular type of person who attends community shows, or does it vary based upon the show that is being presented?

Journal #5: Catch-up and Interviews

Let’s shake things up a bit this week with a change of pace. Instead of having any points for reflection, I will be contacting you individually to arrange brief interviews this week to chat with you face-to-face about some of your journal entries. If I have already spoken with you individually in the past four weeks, I may not contact you again in this round of interviews.
If you would like to continue the journaling process but have not completed a few of the earlier journals, please take this opportunity to complete any or all of the journals that you have not yet written and e-mail them to me at your convenience.

If you no longer wish to receive these e-mails, please let me know and I will remove you from the list.

If you have completed the previous four journal entries, thank you for your diligence and participation!

Journal #6: Broadway

A strong relationship exists between community musical theatre and Broadway by virtue of a common repertoire of shows. This week’s journals will gather your opinions on the nature of the relationship between community and professional theatre.

Some questions to address:

- Do you currently have dreams of being on Broadway or did you ever have dreams of being on Broadway? How did/does your participation in community musical theatre contribute to these dreams? If you no longer dream of “making it big,” when and why did your dreams fade?

- How does the performance environment on Broadway differ from the environment on the community level?

- Is community musical theatre a good training ground for Broadway? Why or why not?

- What challenges do community musical theatre performers encounter when recreating shows that premiered on Broadway?

Journal #7: Titanic experiences

Building on last week's journal entry, take the time this week to reflect on meaningful experiences in this production of Titanic. What have you learned? Who have you met? How have you grown?

A few ideas for journal reflections:

- How has your participation in this production of Titanic helped you grow as a musician or actor?

- Have you developed any strong friendships with other cast members? How did these friendships form?

- What have you learned thus far being in the cast of this production?

- What fears/expectations do you have as the production transitions onto the TLT stage and closer to opening night?

Journal #8: Catch-up

In light of this week's events, we will forgo a journal entry... if you have not completed an entry or two from previous weeks, you are welcome to use this as an opportunity to catch-up.
Best of luck with final preparations. I will be at rehearsal tonight!

Journal #9: Performance Reflections

Take the time this week to reflect on the first weekend of performances. Some guiding questions for your journal entry:

- How do you feel the first few performances went?

- How do you feel that you personally performed? Describe emotions you experienced and when they occurred. Were you surprised by anything you felt?

- Did you have any friends or family attend any of the first performances? If so, what feedback did they give you about the performance?

- Is there anything specific that you are going to change for upcoming performances, or is there a particular song or scene you will work on while in between shows?

- What are you going to do with your time off?

Thank you for your time and diligence in this journaling process. Enjoy your well-earned time off and I will see you later in the week!
APPENDIX C
HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL AND INFORMED CONSENT FORMS

Office of the Vice President For Research
Human Subjects Committee
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2742
(850) 644-8673 · FAX (850) 644-4392

APPROVAL MEMORANDUM (for change in research protocol)

Date: 4/2/2009

To: Jillian Bracken

Address: 633 E College Ave Tallahassee, FL 32301
Dept.: MUSIC SCHOOL

From: Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair

Re: Use of Human Subjects in Research (Approval for Change in Protocol)
Project entitled: Bright Lights on Small Stages: An Ethnography of a Community Musical Theater Production of Titanic

The form that you submitted to this office in regard to the requested change/amendment to your research protocol for the above-referenced project has been reviewed and approved.

Please be reminded that if the project has not been completed by 4/1/2010, you must request renewed approval for continuation of the project.

By copy of this memorandum, the chairman of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should review protocols as often as needed to insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protection. The Assurance Number is IRB00000446.

Cc: Frank Gunderson, Advisor
HSC No. 2009.2581
GENERAL INFORMED CONSENT FORM
“Bright Lights on Small Stages: An Ethnography of a Community Musical Theater Production of Titanic.”

This form outlines a thesis project that I will be undertaking with your informed consent. The goal of this project is to conduct an in-depth ethnography of community musical theatre performers, production staff, and musicians. Specifically, the project will:

- Explore the reasons why individuals participate in and attend musical theatre productions at the community level
- Examine the ways in which personal identities are constructed and shaped by participation in community musical theatre
- Investigate the creative (musical), logistical (financial, temporal, spatial), and ethical issues surrounding the recreation of Yeston’s blockbuster musical *Titanic* on a community stage
- Study musical theatre as a community of musicians, artists, and ardent supporters unified by a common goal of creative musical exploration on the community level

Although a large body of scholarly literature on American musical theatre exists, little work has been done to engage the individuals involved in these productions in an attempt to understand the value participants place on this musical genre, and little to no ethnographic work has been conducted. As such, this thesis has the potential to contribute to the larger body of work on American musical theatre. It also has the potential to assist community theatre companies in applying for grants, as it will provide personal insights into the value of this performance opportunity for those involved.

By signing this form, you will be agreeing to the following:
- All rehearsals for *Titanic* between May 17th and July 8th, 2009 will be observed for ethnographic purposes; none of these rehearsals will be recorded on video, but many may be tape recorded
- All performance of *Titanic* between July 8th and July 26th, 2009 will be observed for ethnographic purposes; none of these performances will be recorded on video or on audio tape, except those that the production staff requests from outside sources for archival purposes (thus making them outside the scope of this project)
- Participate in individual interviews as interested between May 17th and July 26th, 2009; please fill out the interview portion of this consent form to indicate your interest in participating in this part of the ethnography

### Interview Consent

Please check the appropriate box to provide interview consent:
- ☐ I am interested in being interviewed on an individual basis
- ☐ I am NOT interested in being interviewed on an individual basis

If you agree to be interviewed on an individual basis, you have the right to ask that I be referred to with a pseudonym in the final thesis document. I will approach individuals periodically throughout the ethnography.

By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you have been given the right to ask and have answered any inquiry concerning this thesis project. For any additional questions, please contact me at:

Jillian Bracken  
College of Music, Florida State University Tallahassee, FL 32306-1180  
850-222-0841, jlb05u@fsu.edu
Any questions about rights as a subject/participant in this thesis can contact be directed toward my Major Professor, Frank Gunderson, through the College of Music at (850) 644-3424 or fgunders@mailer.fsu.edu. Alternatively, you can also contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee, Institutional Review Board, through the Vice President for the Office of Research at (850) 644-8633.

I have read and understand this consent form.

Name: __________________________ Signature: __________________________

Date: __________________________

________________________________________

INFORMED CONSENT FORM: JOURNALING

“Bright Lights on Small Stages: An Ethnography of a Community Musical Theater Production of Titanic.”

This form is to be completed by individuals wishing to participate in the journaling portion of this thesis project. It is supplementary to the general form that indicates informed consent for the project as identified above.

The goals of this project are included below:

- Explore the reasons why individuals participate in and attend musical theatre productions at the community level
- Examine the ways in which personal identities are constructed and shaped by participation in community musical theatre
- Investigate the creative (musical), logistical (financial, temporal, spatial), and ethical issues surrounding the recreation of Yeston’s blockbuster musical Titanic on a community stage
- Study musical theatre as a community of musicians, artists, and ardent supporters unified by a common goal of creative musical exploration on the community level

The journaling portion of this study is intended to get participants’ personal insights and reflections over the course of this production. You will be asked questions that respond to events that occur throughout rehearsals and performances of Titanic. These questions will explore the goals listed above; you will be asked to reflect on things like your reasons for participation and your general experiences.

To participate in this journaling, you will need to submit your e-mail address below. I will not give this information to anyone else. If you so desire, a pseudonym can be used to identify you in the final thesis project when any of your journaling content is included.

By signing this form, you will be agreeing to the following:
- You will submit your e-mail address below
- You will receive one e-mail per week between May 17th and July 26th, for a total of 10 e-mails
- You will submit a response to each e-mail at your convenience
- You will have the option to respond to any follow-up e-mails or interviews; as with all aspects of this project, you have the option to decline any requests for additional meetings or e-mail

Please fill out the following information:

E-mail address: ______________________________________________________

Please check one of the following:
- ☐ I wish to be identified using a pseudonym.
- ☐ I do not wish to be identified using a pseudonym.
By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you have been given the right to ask and have answered any inquiry concerning the journaling portion of this thesis project. For any additional questions, please contact me at:

Jillian Bracken  
College of Music, Florida State University Tallahassee, FL 32306-1180  
850-222-0841, jlb05u@fsu.edu

Any questions about rights as a subject/participant in this thesis can be directed toward my Major Professor, Frank Gunderson, through the College of Music at (850) 644-3424 or fgunders@mailer.fsu.edu. Alternatively, you can also contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee, Institutional Review Board, through the Vice President for the Office of Research at (850) 644-8633.

I have read and understand this consent form.

Name:_________________________ Signature:______________________________

Date:_________________________
APPENDIX D
ORAL SOURCES

George, Sarah. July 17, 2009. Cast member: Kate Mullins. Interview conducted at the
Tallahassee Little Theatre. Digital audio recording in personal collection of author.
Knight, Jeddy. Crew member. Interview by author, 1 July 2009, Tallahassee, FL. Digital audio recording in personal collection of author.
Koch, Mark. Father of cast member. Interview by author, 29 June 2009, Tallahassee, FL. Digital audio recording in personal collection of author.
McHugh, Ben. Cast member: Thomas Andrews. 6 June 2009, Tallahassee, FL. Digital


APPENDIX E

CATALOGUE OF AUDIO AND VIDEO RECORDINGS

All audio and video recordings listed below were taken over the course of this ethnography by the author at the Tallahassee Little Theatre, Tallahassee, FL. Digital audio and video recordings are all housed in the personal collection of the author.

Audio

June 1, 2009
Act 1 Opening. 4:18.
Barrett’s Song. 2:28.
God Speed Titanic. 2:04.
Ladies' Maid. 5:03.

June 2, 2009
The Blame. 5:18.

June 12, 2009
God Speed Titanic, Reprise. 1:01.
Wake Up, Wake Up. 10:42.
We’ll Be On Our Way. 3:32.
We’ll Meet Tomorrow. 2:20

June 13, 2009
Doing The Latest Rag. 5:13.
Staircase. 0:59.
The Proposal. 4:23.

July 1, 2009
God Speed Titanic. 1:29.
In Every Age. 2:05.
July 6, 2009
Act Two Finale. 1:35.
No Moon. 3:07.
The Proposal. 4:16.

July 7, 2009
Ladies’ Maid. 4:11.
The Proposal. 4:20.
What A Remarkable Age. 3:28.

July 10, 2009
End of Act One. 7:48.
End of Act Two. 3:43.
   Curtain Call. 1:16.

July 16, 2009
The Latest Rag. 4:07.
The Proposal. 4:28.

July 17, 2009 – All Orchestra Only
Barrett’s Song. 3:37.
Ladies’ Maid. 4:08.
Latest Rag. 4:01.
No Moon. 2:53.
What a Remarkable Age. 2:16.

July 18, 2009
Act Two Finale. 3:40.
Still. 2:51.
The Vision. 3:24.
Video
Act Two Finale. 2:29. 18 June 2009.
Barrett’s Song. 3:28. 15 June 2009.
First Class Dining Salon: Orchestra only. 1:31. 17 July 2009.
Mr. Andrews’ Vision. 2:49. 30 June 2009.
No Moon. 2:53. 15 June 2009.
The Blame. 5:17. 29 June 2009.
The Blame. 5:10. 4 July 2009.
The Suitcase. 0:46. 4 July 2009.
We’ll Be On Our Way. 1:09. 4 July 2009.
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