



The cast of *Evita* proclaims "A New Argentina," center l. to r.: Patti LuPone (Eva Perón), Bob Gunton (Juan Perón), and Mandy Patinkin (Che).

1970s, in fact, the two shows set the stage for a more intensive British campaign to corner the market in new musicals during the 1980s. Thus the invasion of Broadway broadened and deepened into what seemed more like an occupation in the next decade. Rice and Lloyd Webber would continue to take part in it as well—but no longer as a team.

MACKINTOSH AND THE MEGAMUSICAL

With *Evita* the partnership of Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber effectively came to an end. If not quite the enfants terribles of the 1970s, the rebel collaborators now took separate paths to fame and fortune—and into the English establishment: Sir Tim was knighted in 1994; Sir Andrew was knighted in 1992, then made a lord in 1997. Rice went on to work with several different composers as he provided lyrics, notably for *Chess* (London, 1986/New York, 1988, Benny

Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus) and such Disney sponsored shows as *Beauty and the Beast* (1994, Alan Menken), *The Lion King* (1997, Elton John), and *Aida* (2000, John). Lloyd Webber, for his part, emerged as a businessman in his own right and a showman extraordinaire. He took The Really Useful Company, which he had formed earlier to produce his own work, and expanded it into an international conglomerate and the co-owner of the largest theater chain in London. He also became an artistic force to reckon with in the theater. Teaming up with ever new lyricists, he wrote the music for roughly a dozen London shows, most of which he eventually produced or coproduced himself on Broadway, where some met with unprecedented success: *Cats* (1981/1982, T. S. Eliot), *Song & Dance* (1982/1985, Don Black), *Starlight Express* (1984/1987, Richard Stilgoe), *The Phantom of the Opera* (1986/1988, Charles Hart and Stilgoe), *Aspects of Love* (1989/1990, Black and Hart), *Sunset Boulevard* (1993/1994, Black and Christopher Hampton), *By Jeeves* (1996/2001, Alan Ayckbourn), and *The Woman in White* (2004/2005, David Zippel).

In *Cats*, his first show without Rice, Lloyd Webber helped spark a trend for so-called megamusicals, as he built on his earlier innovations with Rice and took them to another level. Like *Cats*, the great megamusicals of the 1980s all came out of London. They included *Starlight Express*, *Chess*, *Les Misérables*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, and *Miss Saigon*, among others (not all of them by Lloyd Webber). Such shows often resembled rock operas in the underlying earnestness with which they took up sweeping tales of lofty import and grand emotions—or those that at least aspired to such. Their music showed rock opera leanings as well, though, without the influence of Rice, the rock element diminished. They still featured ambitious scores in a variety of styles in which the characters sang almost everything, including the dialogue, and the orchestra seldom stopped playing. Where such shows most differed from their predecessors, however, was in their approach to staging. Eye-popping scenic spectacle, elaborate sets and lighting schemes, high-tech wizardry, an architectural use of theater space, sheer grandeur of scale—all these together helped to justify the new prefix and to turn “megamusical” into an acceptable Broadway buzzword by the end of the 1980s.

Not all of Lloyd Webber's post-Rice shows were megamusicals, of course. Yet *Cats* and *The Phantom of the Opera* certainly fit the description.

And as these shows turned into the supreme successes of Lloyd Webber's career, they make a compelling case for the viability of the genre they have come to represent. The two shows in effect redefined the parameters of a musical's success in global terms and, doing so, they also redefined much of what is now internationally understood as musical theater.

Significantly, Lloyd Webber's most important collaborator on these shows was no longer his librettist, whoever it now happened to be. Instead, it was his producer, Cameron Mackintosh (b. 1946), an entrepreneur who before *Cats* had only a spotty track record. In fact, Mackintosh's earlier hits included only a small revue of songs by an American writer then little known in England, *Side by Side by Sondheim* (1976/1977), and English revivals of *Oliver!*, *My Fair Lady*, and *Oklahoma!* Yet under Mackintosh's command in the 1980s the British invasion would shift into high gear. Through the astonishing triumph of four megamusicals whose successes he engineered, Mackintosh consolidated a basic shift in theatrical relations between London and New York, the West End now becoming as much a source for Broadway as a reflection of it. These shows made Mackintosh the single most powerful theater producer of the age, and a very wealthy man. They include, besides *Cats* and *Phantom*, *Les Misérables* (Paris, 1980/London, 1985/New York, 1987) and *Miss Saigon* (London, 1989/New York, 1991). And as the first three of these also currently hold the record as the three longest-running musicals of any kind in Broadway history, they proved themselves "mega" in yet another sense of the word.

Cats was a revue with virtually no umbrella to cover its musical numbers. Lloyd Webber simply chose poems from a collection of light verse by T. S. Eliot, detailing the idiosyncrasies of different kinds of cats, and set them to music in a pastiche of styles from rock to the Pucciniesque. Eliot, the great modernist poet who had died in 1965, was in no position to object. Moreover, his widow approved. She even provided access to an unpublished poem, which inspired the show's great power ballad, "Memory." The immense popularity of "Memory" outside the theater, following "I Don't Know How to Love Him" (*Superstar*) and "Don't Cry for Me, Argentina" (*Evita*), confirmed Lloyd Webber as the sole composer of the era consistently capable of writing show songs of sufficiently broad appeal to become top-selling singles on their own.

But the genius of the piece went beyond its score. Mackintosh assembled a production team in whose hands the show became, he said,

“an experience rather than just another musical.” Director Trevor Nunn (b. 1940), scenic and costume designer John Napier (b. 1944), and choreographer and codirector Gillian Lynne (b. 1927) turned *Cats* into a veritable pageant. They not only costumed the actors to look like cats, they also created an environment for them to cavort in as cats. They converted the theater space into a junkyard $3\frac{1}{2}$ times life-size, with man-made rubbish scaled to the size of the actor-cats and strewn about without distinction between the stage and the auditorium. That placed the audience eye to eye with the kitties it had come to watch from the safety of the house, and it whimsically obliged the audience to experience *Cats* from the cats’ perspective. The cats even mingled with the spectators; and in London’s New London Theater, where the show premiered, the stage itself revolved—and so did a section of the auditorium where the spectators sat. (“Latecomers not admitted while auditorium is in motion” ran one publicity line.) But for the seats of the theater being bolted to the floor of the house, *Cats* aspired to nothing perhaps so much as a theme-park ride. “It’s based on the same basic, unspoken contract as Disneyland,” said Nunn of his next Lloyd Webber collaboration, *Starlight Express*, though he might as well have been talking about this one. “Here is my money, hit me with the experience.”

What hit the Broadway community hardest about the experience was the spirit of mass culture that informed it. Although the show originally traded on the cachet of the poems of T. S. Eliot, *Cats* tweaked its whiskers at any literary approach to the stage. Its appeal was unabashedly physical, even thrilling in its sense of fun. It drew on the allure of theme parks with their wraparound environments, daredevil simulations, and high-tech special effects. The climax of the show consisted of a mystical ascent to cat heaven on a huge rubber tire that rose like a spaceship twelve feet above the stage. The effect, together with others, cost \$2.5 million to accommodate, by means of gutting and rebuilding New York’s Winter Garden Theater. Spectacular coups de théâtre of this sort became megamusical emblems in the hands of Mackintosh and company: *Phantom’s* chandelier crashing down over the heads of the audience; a helicopter landing and taking off again in *Miss Saigon*. But it was *Cats* that set the pace, changing the look and texture of a Broadway show by the boldness of its physical design and an emphatic engagement with technology.

Such overwhelming sights were matched, moreover, by overwhelming sounds that rivaled FM and CD in quality and movie theaters and rock arenas in volume. Here, too, technology worked its powers to transform the experience of musical theater. While the practice of concealing microphones onstage to ensure acoustic balance went back at least to the 1940s, it took the impact of *Promises, Promises* (1968) and *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1971) to promote the overt miking of singers and instrumentalists as something desirable. *Cats* went further still. Every one of its performers now wore a wireless radio mike, which allowed each of them a new freedom of movement. It also gave their voices a certain disembodied presence, as if the cats were all lip-synching to prerecorded songs when they were actually singing. The sounds they made no longer reached the audience directly. A new kind of theater technician controlled them: a sound designer, who digitally amplified, equalized, compressed, and otherwise manipulated them on a soundboard before sending them via loudspeakers throughout the house. This new system of sound delivery, now the norm in the musical theater, enabled a genre like the rock musical to thrive in a way that would not have been possible earlier. But it also changed the relationship between performers who no longer needed to project their voices to be heard, and audiences who no longer needed to make the effort to listen in order to hear what was performed. It compromised, or at least complicated the Broadway musical as a "live" experience.

Thus was the sensationalism of nineteenth-century extravaganza refitted for an electronic age—and a global audience. *Cats* asked "nothing of [its] audience beyond attendance on a certain night," remarked English critic Sheridan Morley, "No language problem for tourists, no demands of a shared heritage or education, no cultural barriers to be stormed." Perhaps that was the basis for its seemingly inexhaustible popularity—virtually everywhere (London, New York, in franchise around the world) and for all time (to quote its own publicity, "Now and Forever").

By contrast, *The Phantom of the Opera*, a lurid melodrama with a romance at its core, took a rather different approach to the musical stage. Based on a Gothic novel set in nineteenth-century France, the show told the backstage story of an opera composer (Michael Crawford) who wears a mask to hide a facial deformity; of his thwarted pas-

sion for the soprano Christine (Sarah Brightman), who loves another man; and of his reign of terror inside the Paris Opera House in order to have his way—above all, with Christine. Building on the underlying sexual tension of the plot, *Phantom* knowingly moved back and forth between romance and horror, kitsch and camp, without settling comfortably in any single vein. Lloyd Webber called the novel “a piece of hokum.” It also describes the show.

But inspired hokum—particularly in the hands of director Harold Prince and stage designer Maria Björnson (1949–2002). The staging fairly reveled in an almost baroque sense of astonishment, nowhere more so than in the sensuous spectacle of scenes that brought the Paris Opera to life in all its glory: inside the house, with its sweeping staircase; on the roof overlooking the City of Light, where Christine met her lover Raoul at night; even below the basement, as the Phantom rowed Christine in a gondola to his hiding place on the other side of a subterranean lagoon exquisitely lit by hundreds of candles. The music, too, evoked the richness of a repertoire once actually heard at the house—sometimes simply to burlesque the artifice of opera (“Hannibal,” “Il Muto”), yet at other times quite genuinely to enlist the genre’s heightened emotionalism in the service of the romantic plot (“The Music of the Night,” “All I Ask of You”). The through-sung score and lush orchestrations, the rhapsodic lyricism of the show’s many ballads, and the legitimate singing required to do them justice—all gave clear indication that with *Phantom* Lloyd Webber wished to move away from rock opera toward something closer to the “real thing.”

Others, too, sought to fashion heartfelt stageworks approaching “the grandeur of opera in popular garb”—works often dubbed pop operas, or, more archly, poperettas. The most successful at it were lyricist Alain Boublil (b. 1941) and composer Claude-Michel Schönberg (b. 1944), two Frenchmen with close ties to the pop recording industry in France. Boublil saw *Jesus Christ Superstar* in its original stage form in New York and found in it his inspiration. He admired the monumental subject, the pop-infused song style, the through-sung structure. And he hoped to create something comparable in Gallic terms, even though French audiences did not take kindly to Broadway-style musical shows—notoriously so, almost as a matter of national pride. Together, Boublil and Schönberg wrote *La Révolution Française* (1973),

based on that defining epochal moment in the history of France (and indeed the West); and *Les Misérables* (1980), based on a monumental literary classic familiar to readers wherever French culture held sway. They produced each as concept record album first, then staged it as a spectacle (in the French sense of the word) in Paris's Palais des Sports. The second of these caught the attention of Cameron Mackintosh. He waxed enthusiastic on hearing the recording and proposed to convert *Les Misérables* into an entertainment more suited to English-speaking audiences. Mustering the forces of London's Royal Shakespeare Company under the direction of Trevor Nunn and John Caird, Mackintosh oversaw its remake into the show now affectionately known the world over as "*Les Miz*." The triumph of *Les Miz* in global terms, in fact, and of *Miss Saigon* by the same writers four years later, effectively transformed the British invasionary force into a multinational coalition.

In order to arrive at *Les Miz*, Mackintosh and company had to do more than translate *Les Misérables* into English. They had to transform a particularly Gallic form of entertainment into something closer to an Anglo-American musical. The French creators, assuming their audiences already knew the story, had presented scenes from the novel in a series of tableaux rather than a fully developed narrative. The English collaborators could not make the same assumption. They had to rework the material to make the narrative clearer, adding a prologue and fleshing out character. They even introduced an ongoing theme of religious belief that required Boublil and Schönberg to create new songs to express its various perspectives (e.g., the hero's selfless prayer to a redeeming God, "Bring Him Home"; the belief of the hero's nemesis in a righteous God who metes out justice, "Stars"). In its new incarnation, the show became not only the most successful megamusical of the 1980s, but the single most successful musical of all time. Perhaps the surest confirmation of how supremely well the Englishmen accomplished their conversion came in 1991 when, after almost universal success elsewhere, *Les Miz* finally opened in Paris—retranslated into French—and failed.

Les Misérables, the musical, adapted and compressed the sweep of Victor Hugo's magisterial novel of the same name (loosely translated, "The Downtrodden"). As an epic, the show had to balance a multiplicity of themes as it dramatized them: above all, a story of love required,

an outcry against social injustice, and a search for spiritual redemption. It took three hours to convey all this on the stage. Over the course of seventeen years, from 1815 to 1832, the show traced the sufferings of Jean Valjean (Colm Wilkinson), an ex-convict and parole jumper—his relentless pursuit by Javert (Terrence Mann), the honor-bound policeman whose life Valjean ultimately saves; his devotion to the orphan girl Cosette (Judy Kuhn), whom he raises as his daughter; her love in turn for Marius, a student involved in an ill-fated Paris uprising brutally suppressed by army troops. Yet, as many of the plot connections became lost in the interlocking welter of details, and as the show contained almost no spoken dialogue to help sort them out, the success of *Les Miz* depended less on the narrative as such than on the power of projecting the narrative thrust in sounds and sights.

The score followed the sprawl of Hugo's melodrama through a fluid soundscape of recurring numbers. Yet, unlike reprises of songs for a dramatic point in a more traditional show, musical self-references here at times took on lives of their own. The score proved remarkable nonetheless for the immediacy of its characterizations and the variety of its expressive purposes and musical shapes. It moved between reverence ("Bring Him Home") and vulgarity ("Master of the House"); public outcry ("Do You Hear the People Sing?") and private confession ("On My Own"); the simplicity of a nursery rhyme ("Castle on a Cloud") and the complexity of an operatic finale ("One Day More"). At its most ambitious, the score even suggested the kind of emotional heft one expects of opera rather than of musicals—perhaps more than suggested, as a comparison

Ex. 15-2a. Claude-Michel Schonberg, music, Herbert Kretzmer and Alain Boublil, lyrics:
"Bring Him Home," *Les Misérables*

Andante
VALJEAN: A D/A A D/A C# C#7 F#m

You can take, — You can give, — Let him be, — Let him live.

Ex. 15-2b. Giacomo Puccini, music: "Humming Chorus" (transposed), *Madama Butterfly*

Moderatamente mosso
CHORUS (hummed): A D/A A D C#/G# F#m E

of the music to "Bring Him Home" (Ex. 15-2a) and that of the Humming Chorus in Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* (Ex. 15-2b) itself suggests.

As he had done with *Cats*, John Napier brought his environmental approach to the staging of the show. "My starting point was the centre of the play's biggest moment, the barricade," he said. "Once that was solved everything else fell into place. The barricade could split, lift, and revolve, and was a mass of *objets trouvés* which the actors picked up from time to time and used." Indeed, the scenic design interpreted the plot through stage pictures extraordinarily vivid in their impact and sufficiently unambiguous in their meaning to bypass the need for words altogether—the massacre of students barricaded in the streets of Paris; Valjean's escape with a wounded Marius through the sewers below; Javert's suicidal leap into the Seine. Many left the theater overwhelmed by the power of such depictions and, as these served to suggest Hugo's indictment of social injustice and Valjean's moral ascent, even uplifted by the experience. Others found it stultifying. For them, *Les Miz* and shows



Michael Maguire (Enjolras) mounts the barricades in a doomed attempt at revolution in *Les Misérables*.

like it succeeded all too easily by eliciting responses from audiences that were often unmotivated by dramatic development—ready-made rather than earned. “They give the impression, rather than the reality, of feeling,” wrote Richard Eyre and Nicholas Wright, “like Victorians scattering water on letters to look as if they’d been written in tears.”

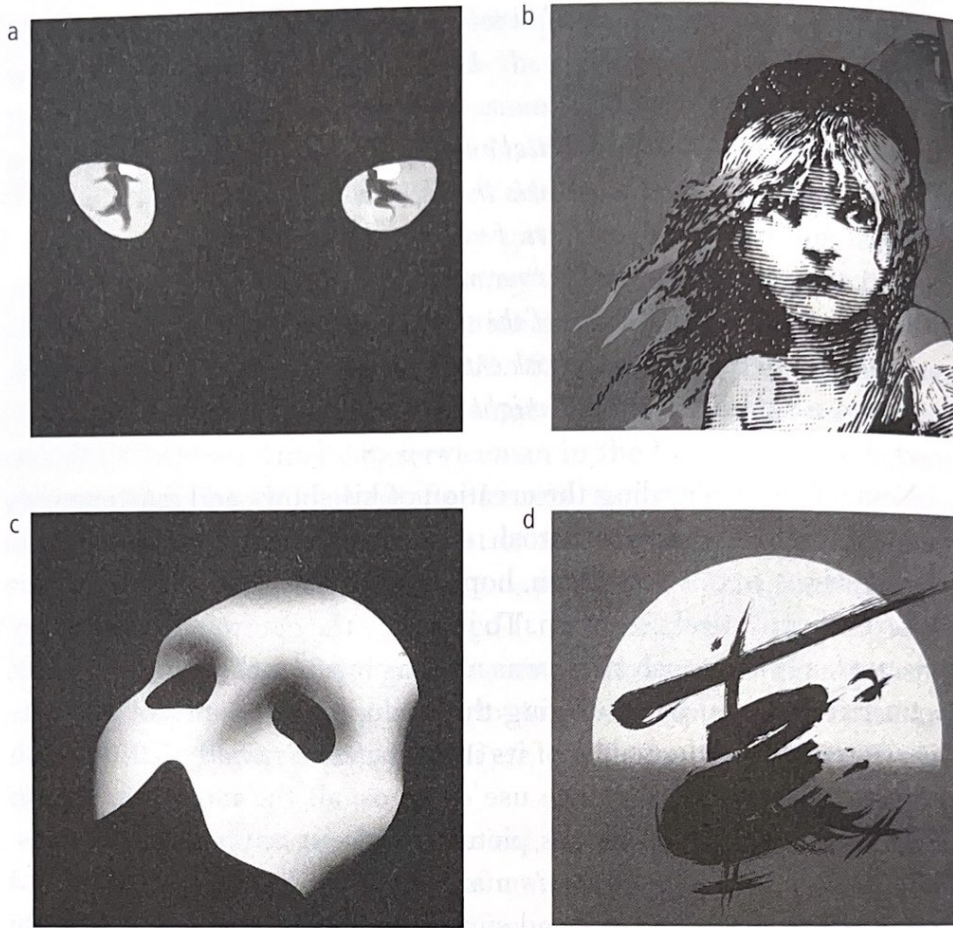
In a similar vein, *Miss Saigon* gave Boublil and Schönberg the opportunity to revisit *Madama Butterfly*, this time not to seek inspiration in Puccini’s score but to sensationalize the plot. An Anglo-French venture now from its inception, *Miss Saigon* turned the very intimate story of the original into a monumental one. It updated the turn-of-the-century tale of an American serviceman in the Far East and the Asian girl who bears his child alone after he returns to the United States, and placed it in the brutalizing context of the Vietnam War and its aftermath. This Mackintosh venture, too, proved to be an enormous hit. Yet the megamusicals that followed it to Broadway with comparable designs on the Gothic and melodramatic literature of the nineteenth century—many of them now Anglo-American ventures—proved less successful or even flops (*Jekyll & Hyde*, 1997; *Jane Eyre*, 2000; *Dracula, The Musical*, 2004).

What has defined the megamusical, however, has not been its content but rather “its replacement of content by a form in which spectacle and sound are constitutive of its nature.” Due to its mass appeal, overriding the boundaries of language, this form has lent itself to a commercial trajectory of global proportions, which no one has pursued with greater aplomb than Cameron Mackintosh. In an age of increasing rule by committee, Mackintosh has approached the business of making musicals as the man-in-charge of an enterprise that systematically encompasses everything from financing and production to marketing and distribution. First, Mackintosh joined the forces of London’s commercial and subsidized theaters to produce heavily capitalized shows at about one third the cost of production in New York, then tested these in front of British audiences to minimize the risks in positioning them for Broadway. The approach would surely not have worked the other way around, had he started in New York. For between London and New York—outposts of what can be viewed as a single English-speaking culture—lies an ocean of differences in norms and expectations when it comes to the theater. Nunn elaborated:

*In New York the commercial theatre . . . is the sole form of theatre that reaches a large public. . . . In London the scene is dominated by government-subsidised theatre. . . . Therefore the London theatre is fundamentally more experimental and less traditional than the Broadway stage. . . . A theatre business that has only smash or flop categories is problematic for investors, because if the critical judgements of journalists go against, there is no management skill or expression of faith that can alter the doom of the stricken show. So not surprisingly, nobody wants to back a high-risk enterprise; if it had been necessary to originate *Cats* in America, it might not have got off the ground.*

Next, after shepherding the creation of his shows and masterminding their production, Mackintosh embarked on aggressive marketing campaigns to promote them, hoping to ensure their public success whatever their critical reception. To judge by the nature of the publicity generated, a Mackintosh show was no longer just a show but an event, commercially hyped by saturating the media with all kinds of artifacts and ads reminding the public of its importance. Typically, Mackintosh anchored his campaigns in the use of logos, all the more effective in their instant recognizability as pictures without any need for words: *Cats's* twin green eyes; *Phantom's* mask and rose; *Les Miz's* Cosette and flag; *Miss Saigon's* helicopter and sun. (By removing language entirely as a marketing factor, such images were perfectly designed to fit the global trajectory of the Mackintosh enterprise.) In sum, Mackintosh managed to create and maintain a must-see aura about his shows that kept audiences coming to them despite often negative reviews. He made his shows, in a phrase, critic proof.

Finally, instead of selling his rights to foreign buyers as British producers had previously done, Mackintosh retained control over his shows, re-producing them around the globe with notorious "breath for breath" fidelity to the original. Thus the roles in his musicals have tended to stamp the actors who perform them more than the actors have put their stamp on the roles. In fact, the standardized product and interchangeability of performers necessary to transport it anywhere in the world have come to characterize the megamusical in Mackintosh's hands as much as the spectacular use of state-of-the-art technology to create virtual environments on the stage. The Mack-



Official logos for the four megahits Cameron Mackintosh produced:
 (a) *Cats*; (b) *Les Misérables*; (c) *The Phantom of the Opera*; (d) *Miss Saigon*.

intosh model, however, has not proved easy to follow. Others who have pursued similar approaches in musicals have generally failed to recoup the staggering costs of their Broadway investments—the case, for example, with *Chess* (\$6 million), *Carrie* (1988, \$8 million), and even such Lloyd Webber shows as *Starlight Express* (\$8 million), *Aspects of Love* (\$8.5 million), and *Sunset Boulevard* (\$13 million). Mackintosh, by contrast, has consistently succeeded to recoup—*Cats* (\$4 million), *Les Miz* (\$4.5 million), *Phantom* (\$8 million), *Miss Saigon* (\$10 million)—and then gone on to reap hitherto unimaginable profits with runs that have lasted from ten to more than twenty years on Broadway alone.

No one ever expected the British invasion to turn into the long-

term occupation of Broadway that it did, starting in the 1980s. Yet by the early years of the twenty-first century that occupation seemed largely to have spent its force: the “forever” of most of the Mackintosh megahits turned into “now,” and “then” with their Broadway closings. Some of the later work of Lloyd Webber (*Whistle Down the Wind*, *The Beautiful Game*) and Boublil and Schönberg (*Martin Guerre*) did not even make it to New York—though probably because the relatively modest reception of such shows in London’s West End precluded positioning them for a shot at Broadway. It seems unlikely that high-profile musicals would succeed elsewhere and bypass New York. Even in a globalizing age, when it comes to musicals, the Broadway cachet is still considered at least an economic plus. “I think you can have a huge hit in London, and you can have great successes that go around the world,” said Mackintosh. “But in the musical theater, that hit needs to also be a hit on Broadway, and that is what dictates it on its final journey around the world.” Mackintosh’s emphatic “also” speaks volumes, however. The great influx of European megamusicals on Broadway may be over. But the revolution that influx sparked is ongoing. And in its wake, the most fundamental cultural assumptions about the Broadway musical—ones concerning its origin, its identity, even its ownership—can no longer be taken for granted. As musical theater scholar John Snelson sees it:

A musical no longer has to be, or aspire to be, American. In itself, this is a significant redefinition of the “Broadway musical,” moving it toward a global art form, with expressions of national identity becoming more a localized coloring than an essential element of the musical’s identity.

DISNEY AND THE MOVICAL

The prospect of a future of Broadwayless Broadway musicals irked not only showgoers with a keen attachment to Broadway’s past but also show makers with a stake in renewing it. Thus for many, the big news of the 1990s was the rise of entertainment conglomerates on this side of the Atlantic seeking to produce shows that might rival the British megahits—even on their own turf. But the rise of such conglomerates