

The Context of the Development of British Musicals

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Abstract: Musical theatre (Musical) has been sought after since its birth, and after years of development, it has gradually become an art form that has taken the world by storm. The origins of musicals can be traced back to operettas, and early musicals were known as "Musical comedy". As one of the origins of musicals, this article helps us understand the past and present of British musicals and its development by sorting out the development of British musicals.

1. Introduction

Musical theater is a musical theater form that integrates a variety of arts, because of its comprehensiveness, modernity, pluralism, commerciality, flexibility and other characteristics, since the birth of the West End of London, England, for more than a hundred years, after continuous development, gradually popular in countries around the world. Like other art forms, the production and development of musical theater did not happen overnight, and it has experienced different periods of development in the more than 100 years since its birth, and the performance of musical theater in each period is also different. If you want to understand the art form of musical theater, you must go back to the roots and sort out its development from the source. To this end, the author will briefly sort out the development of musicals in the United Kingdom, the birthplace of musicals.

2. The origins of British musicals

2.1 The background of the era in which British musicals were produced

The emergence of early British musicals coincided with the British Industrial Revolution. Before the Industrial Revolution, Britain's productivity was low, the urban population grew quite slowly, the upper aristocracy of England dominated the leisure and entertainment culture of Britain, the aesthetics and customs of ordinary people were deeply influenced by the upper class, in addition to the Italian opera sought after by the British aristocracy, religious drama was also loved by them. After the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, the situation was very different: as a transitional stage of capitalist industrialization, the Industrial Revolution brought about a great development of productive forces in Europe at that time; The development of productive forces has led to industrialization following suit, the process of urbanization has accelerated, and cities have become one of the symbols of the maturity of human civilization. Compared with rural areas, urban medical conditions are more progressive, sanitary conditions are better, resulting in large-scale population growth, and the citizen class has entered the historical stage with the industrial revolution. Many of

the citizens of this period were moved from the countryside to the cities to work in factories because of the policies of the Industrial Revolution, and they urgently needed art forms that suited their entertainment aesthetics[1].

2.2 The source of British musicals

Due to the rise of the civic class and the art forms demanded by it, operetta and comedy opera, as opposed to the main opera, have gained significant development. Early musicals evolved from 18th-century English folk operas and nineteenth-century comedies and operettas. According to this statement, the development of early musicals can be traced back to the 18th century [2]. In 1728, a folk opera "Beggar's Opera" was premiered in London, England, written by the English writer Guy, directed by British director John Kay, and composed by the German composer Pepsch, the music of the play mostly uses British folk songs and widely circulated tunes in the city, based on two major events that happened in London in the eighteenth century, telling the life of the lower class in London at that time, and being extremely sarcastic and satirical about corruption. As soon as this drama was staged, it caused a sensation, impacted the aesthetic ideas of the citizen class, and was angrily denounced and opposed by the upper class of the British society at that time, but it was deeply sought after and loved by the citizen class. This folk opera not only attacked the dominance of Italian opera in the British theater at that time, but also challenged the Italian opera that was popular throughout Europe at that time. The script was written by an English author, so it was sung in English, because the use of this Chinese was more down-to-earth than the Latin Italian opera, so it was not loved by the British upper class but loved by the British citizen class. The Beggar's Opera was later called "the first musical" in human history[3].

3. The development of early British musicals

3.1 Musical comedy

To sum up, "The Beggar's Opera" can be regarded as the prototype or precursor of early British musicals. "The Beggar's Opera" is full of British national characteristics, and it is an English folk opera, not a "musical comedy" known as an early musical. Before it was officially named, the concept of "musical comedy" was vague, until 1893, "Happy Girl" was staged at the Prince Theatre in London, England, the play was created by the British composer Jones, with humorous and witty stage performance, relaxed and pleasant musical melody is the play once it was staged by the public class loved and sought after, this play was also given the title "musical comedy" for the first time, and the early musical - "musical comedy" was born. As the first musical comedy to be named, "Happy Girl" has many of the properties and characteristics of today's musicals, such as the performance is relaxed and pleasant from beginning to end, the lines are humorous, the actors' action performances are lively, and the drama, opera, and dance drama are integrated. Because of the success of "Happy Girl", many musicals about "girls" appeared, and early British musical theater creation ushered in a period of development[4].

3.2. The decline of early British musicals

After the success of "Happy Girl", although many musicals about "girls" were later born, but the development has been stagnant, the reason is that from the British itself, the citizen class is mostly concentrated in the city, and the United Kingdom, which has just experienced the industrial revolution, is still in its infancy, and the cities during this period are still dominated by London, Oxford and other former political centers, and the political center is dominated by the British elite,

so the development of musicals in the UK has begun to stagnate; At the same time, the United States, a former British colony, ushered in a great development of musicals. As a large immigrant country, the United States is known as a "melting pot of cultures" while its musical diversity is also highlighted. Influenced by musicals from the former metropolis of Britain, as well as French opulence and native black music, musical theatre creation in the United States began to flourish, and the world center of musical theater shifted from its origins in London's West End to Broadway in New York, and British musical theater production declined.

4. The development of modern British musicals

4.1. The development of British musical theatre in the early twentieth century

In the thirties and forties of the twentieth century, British musicals ushered in a certain development, and a large number of musicals adapted from domestic literary works appeared, such as the musical "Oliver! It is adapted from the novel "Orphans of the Fog" by British writer Charles Dickens, and musicals such as "Pierwick" and "Sixpence" are also adapted from domestic works. However, the musicals created in Britain at this time were influenced by the boom in the American musical theater industry at the same time, obviously with the shadow of American musicals, full of American colors. Although Britain and the United States have a deep relationship in culture and history, it can be seen through musicals that there are great differences in the artistic aesthetics of Britain and the United States in this regard: British musicals have a common root, so their screenwriting, music, dance and other details are very exquisite; Americans are more open and receptive to new things, their musicals are open and closed, entertained for entertainment's sake, not interested in some of the content inherited from opera, and rapid economic development has made their musicals more entertaining and commercial than in Britain. Under the influence of this American musical, the local creation of British musicals fell into a low ebb, and its local characteristics were declining.

4.2. The development of English musical theatre after the mid-twentieth century

4.2.1. The revival of British musicals

Before World War II, Broadway musicals in New York, USA, developed into a golden age. After the end of World War II, politically, because of the great contribution of black Americans to the victory in World War II, the opportunities for black people to participate in politics at equal rights were greatly increased, and musicals that satirized black people in the past or promoted white culture were protested; Economically, the development of the musical theater industry was frustrated by the impact of the pre-war Great Depression and the large number of casualties after the war; Culturally, influenced by the European absurdist drama and existential thought, morbid literary genres such as "black humor" have been produced, which have a great impact on culture; In terms of creation, the high adaptation cost of the original work and the huge appearance cost of popular movie stars made the creation of Broadway musicals difficult, which hindered the continued development of American musicals. After the sixties, at this time the industrial transfer policy of the United States, the formation of a global industrial chain and value chain after President Reagan's reform, and the inflation caused by the economic crisis, the creation of American musicals began to decline significantly, which made British musicals take this opportunity to achieve great development and gradually establish their own localized style, the most important representative of which is Andrew Lloyd Webb.

4.2.2. Andrew Lloyd Webb's musical composition

At the same time, great rock bands such as the Beatles were born in Britain, and rock music developed tremendously, and was loved by the younger generation, and the creation of musicals was also influenced by this. British musical theatre giant Andrew Lloyd Webb came to the stage of history at this time. Andrew Lloyd Webb was born in London, England, a musical family, from a young age to British musicals, he boldly tried in the musical "Jesus Christ Superstar", in this religious, more serious musical theme, unexpectedly increased the expression of rock music, the electroacoustic band into the musical, greatly enhanced the modernity of the musical and the expression of musical. Since then, he has composed two popular episodes of "Memories" in the musical "Cat" and "Argentina Don't Cry for Me" in "Evita", which also established the importance of the theme song in the musical. The award-winning musicals "Cat" and "Phantom of the Opera" were composed by Weber and are called the "Four Great Musical" together with "Les Miserables" and "Miss Saigon", because the latter two musicals were composed by French composer Claude-Michel Schoenberg, so I will not repeat them here.

4.2.3. Landscape musicals

Under Weber's leadership, British musicals returned to the center of the world musical stage, and the massive injection of capital made the West End of London rich. In this context, the British musical theatrewright, with ample funds and formal innovation, opened the creation of the "Spectacles" (landscape musical). The so-called "landscape musical" is to introduce the progress of science and technology into the musical, so that the stage set of the musical is more gorgeous, the sound effect is more brilliant, and the special effects are more realistic, which makes the development of the musical enter a new stage, making the performance of the musical more gorgeous and modern. For example, Weber's "Phantom of the Opera" did not have many modern technical effects in its premiere; In the subsequent anniversary versions such as the tenth anniversary, the audience was amazed by the addition of special effects stunts, especially the huge chandeliers that fell from the stage around the audience, making the audience more engaged in the enjoyment of the musical. It can be seen that the vitality injected into the musical by landscape musicals cannot be underestimated, and it also points out the way for the future development of British musicals.

4.3. British musicals of the twenty-first century

The creation of British musicals has not been able to make further breakthroughs since the emergence of popular works such as "Phantom of the Opera" and "Cat" in the eighties, and after the millennium, although the creation of works such as "Billy Elliot" and "Mamma Mia!" and other musicals, but there is still a gap compared to the works known as the "four major musicals". After the twenty-first century, in addition to performing a few popular new works, most of the performances are arranged for classic plays in the history of British and American musicals, such as "Porgy and Bess", "The Sound of Music", etc., or the "four musicals" that are popular all over the world [5].

5. Conclusion

Musicals have been sought after since the birth of the United Kingdom and are now popular around the world. The origins of British musicals can be traced back to The Beggar's Opera, which is directly derived from the early musical - "musical comedy"; Its development has gone through the prosperity and mid-term decline of its inception, to Weber's revival, or today's "landscape

musical". As a popular art form in the 21st century, the artistic value of musical theater is worthy of our attention, and it has only a hundred years of history since its birth in the United Kingdom, but its global impact cannot be ignored.

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