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21st-Century Broadway Musicals and the ‘Best Musical’ Tony Award: Trends and Impact

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Abstract: Recent Broadway theatre seasons consistently saw record-breaking numbers of admissions and grosses, with musicals’ ticket sales making up 78–89% of annual Broadway grosses. The annual Tony Awards continue to serve as an influential theatre industry establishment that helps define a Broadway musical as exceptional and worthy of audiences, especially the awarding of the ‘Best Musical’ category (which can statistically have a profound impact on a production’s longevity). This article offers comprehensive surveying and discussions of significant components of a musical’s initial Broadway success in the 21st century. All 82 musicals that were nominated for or won the ‘Best Musical’ Tony Award between the years 2000 and 2019 are assessed for their source material and original Broadway run length. Subsequent discussions center on diversity and genres of musicals recognized by the Tony Awards, followed by conclusions and predictions of the COVID-19 pandemic’s impact on Broadway’s future and the influence of the ‘Best Musical’ Tony Award. The results of this study display observable patterns among the musicals surveyed, including screen (film/tv) being the most prominent source material and at least a 10–12 month run after the Tony Awards ceremonies for all ‘Best Musical’ winners.

Keywords: Broadway; musicals; Tony Awards; theatre; New York; 21st century

1. Introduction

Every year, multitudes of musical theatre fans eagerly await the Tony Awards’ announcement of which Broadway musical wins the coveted ‘Best Musical’ award. Since 1949, the Tony Awards have been considered “the most prestigious Broadway award” (Everett and Laird 2016, p. 355), which recognizes at least one Broadway musical as the most exceptional musical for each Broadway season (stating “at least one” due to an unprecedented ‘Best Musical’ Award tie in 1960 between *The Sound of Music* and *Fiorello!*) (Tony 2020). Being nominated for—or, better yet, winning—this highly anticipated award can ensure elongated success and popularity for a musical and cement its place in Broadway’s history. Current industry conversations suggest various ways to label a musical’s Broadway run¹ ‘successful,’ emphasizing profitability, longevity, or cultural relevance (Stein and Bathurst 2008, pp. 395–96). Moreover, as Broadway currently experiences an unprecedented instability during the shutdown and the subsequent nosedive of New York City’s tourism economy, the ‘Best Musical’ Tony Award may very well become an even more crucial part of a musical’s survival and its ultimately perceived ‘success’.

This article argues that being a nominee or a winner of the ‘Best Musical’ Tony Award is the most crucial aspect for a Broadway musical’s journey towards measurable success, in both the observable beginning two decades of the 21st century and in the upcoming third decade following the devastating

¹ A Broadway show’s “run” refers to the continuous length of time a show is openly playing at a Broadway theatre before being closed.

impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Trends of previous 21st-century 'Best Musical' Tony Award winners and nominees are explored to discuss measurable patterns among these recognized musicals, with focus placed on comprehensive statistical surveying of source materials and original Broadway run lengths. Subsequent discussions offer supplementary dialogues regarding genre and diversity among 21st-century Tony Award winners and nominees to further elaborate on observable trends. Furthermore, this article provides an up-to-date analysis of the unprecedented impacts of COVID-19 on Broadway (in comparison to previous shutdowns), concluding with speculations of future trends and predictions of increasing levels of influence that the 'Best Musical' Tony Award may possess in post-pandemic Broadway.

2. Broadway Musicals and the Tony Awards: A Brief Overview

For many people (especially Americans), the term "Broadway" represents *the* place for live stage entertainment. Initially coined 'The Great White Way' for being one of the first streets in the United States to utilize electric lights, this famous area of New York City is home to 41 Broadway theatres, making it a magnet for millions of theatregoers every year (Rorke 2018; Vine and Franklin 2017). Broadway's recent 2017–2018 season saw 13.8 million admissions; 63% of those admissions were made up of tourists not living in New York City or surrounding suburbs, while 48% of those tourist admissions were domestic tourists (nearly doubling from 1999), while 15% were international tourists (The Broadway League 2020). The most recent 2018–2019 Broadway season grossed \$1.83 billion and reached an attendance of 14.77 million admissions (The Broadway League 2020). These statistics give this most recent season the highest gross and attendance on record for Broadway (The Broadway League 2020). Although Broadway offers an array of musicals, plays, concerts, and other special events, musicals consistently dominate the box office. Even though recent seasons saw the premiers of more new plays than new musicals, musicals' ticket sales consistently make up 78–89% of annual Broadway grosses (The Broadway League 2020).

For over 100 years, musicals have been a staple in mainstream American culture. With mixed influences of European operettas, British musical halls, burlesque, and American vaudeville variety entertainment, the 'musical' is considered a quintessentially American art form (Kenrick 2017, pp. 2–4; Willis and Hodges 2005, p. 262). The musical is America's major narrative invention; the language of Broadway is the language of America (Wolf 2002, p. 17). During its mid-20th century heyday, often referred to as the 'Golden Age of Broadway,' the American musical offered its audiences sentiment, fantasy, nostalgia, and escapism, all through familiar, comforting musical styles and contemporary American English vernacular (Wolf 2002, p. 17). As New York City quickly became the place to nurture, debut, and celebrate musicals, Broadway became seen as a Mecca for musical talent (Kauffmann 1985). The term 'Broadway' has come to exist as a descriptor of various concepts; 'Broadway' is a geographical reference to a street and district, is an esteemed notion of high-quality performances, and is a unique expression of "a state of mind" representing a glamorized illusion of "the American theatre" (Hischak 2009, p. 1). Adding the word 'Broadway' in front of the word 'musical' instantly heightens the expectation of greatness. Thus, as contemporary author Thomas Hischak describes, the definition of a 'Broadway musical' in the 21st century is not merely a description of a musical itself, but an insinuation of expectations:

The expression of 'a Broadway play' or 'Broadway musical' refers to a highly polished, highly publicized kind of theatre experience . . . the most expensive, most sought after, most famous form of American theatre.

Hischak (2009, p. 1)

The annual Tony Awards, nicknamed The Tonys, were established in 1947 by The American Theatre Wing to celebrate excellence in theatre. The award's name is in honor of Antoinette Perry, an accomplished and dedicated leader of the American Theatre Wing, who had passed away before the Tony Awards' inception (Everett and Laird 2016, p. 355). Other existing awards programs were

recognizing theatre excellence during this time: The New York Drama Critics' Circle, established in 1935 ([New York Drama Critics' Circle 2019](#)), and the Donaldson Awards, established in 1944 by *Billboard* magazine ([McLamore 2018](#), pp. 132–33). Both awards programs offered 'Best Musical' awards: The first New York Drama Critics' Circle 'Best Musical' award went to *South Pacific* in 1948 ([New York Drama Critics' Circle 2019](#)), and the first Donaldson 'Best Musical' Award went to *Carmen Jones* in 1944 ([Billboard 1944](#)). Although the New York Drama Critic's Circle still currently exists, the Donaldson Awards were eliminated in 1955 due to the Tony Awards, their rival, being officially sanctioned while the Donaldson Awards were not sanctioned ([McLamore 2018](#), pp. 132–33). The inaugural Tony Awards debuted at the Grand Ballroom of the Waldorf Astoria hotel on Easter Sunday, 6 April 1947 ([Tony 2020](#)). However, a 'Best Musical' Award did not exist; that category would not be created until 1949, being awarded to *Kiss Me, Kate* ([Everett and Laird 2016](#), p. 355). Furthermore, the Tony Awards did not initially announce nominees, only winners; it was not until the 1956 award season that nominees for the Tony Awards were publicized ([Tony 2020](#); [Culwell-Block 2019](#)).

For the first 18 years, the Tonys were held in various New York City ballrooms and broadcast over the radio. The awards ceremony began airing on local channels in 1956. In 1967, the Tonys made their debut as a nationally televised awards ceremony. The historical broadcast took place in The Schubert Theatre and lasted one hour ([Tony 2020](#)). In 1978, CBS began carrying the Tony Awards and has been broadcasting the annual event ever since. The ceremony is now presented during June and is usually located at either Radio City Music Hall or the Beacon Theatre. The award handed to winners is a disc-shaped medallion mounted on a black pedestal; one side of the medallion depicts the iconic 'comedy and tragedy' Greek masks, while the reversed side displays Antoinette Perry's profile. After the ceremony, the winner's name is engraved onto the award. The medallion has been presented to winners in every year of the Tony Award's existence, with the exception of the first two years; during the 1947 and 1948 awards, winners received a scroll and gender-specific tokens, such as a compact for women and a cigar lighter for men ([McLamore 2018](#), pp. 132–33).

Current eligibility requires that shows must have opened during a Broadway season before the cutoff date in early May. Nominations for the Tony Awards' 26 categories are made by the Tony Award Nominating Committee, consisting of approximately 50 theatre professionals; membership to the nominating committee is rotated (three-year terms) and selected by the Tony Awards Administration Committee ([Tony 2020](#)). Nominators are instructed to attend every new Broadway show in a season, gather after the eligibility cutoff date, and vote in nominations through supervised secret ballots; the results of the nominations are then announced the following day ([Tony 2020](#)). Once nominations are announced for all the categories, approximately 800 voters must attend a performance of each production that is nominated in a specific category to qualify as a voter towards that category ([Everett and Laird 2016](#), p. 355; [Tony 2020](#)). Final votes are cast online, and the winners are announced during the broadcast Tony Awards ceremony in June.

The Tony Awards are still considered the industry leader in recognizing excellence among Broadway theatre productions, with the 'Best Musical' category arguably being the most popular and most important. Among all of the Tony Award categories, the 'Best Musical' award statistically has the most profound effect on a Broadway production's longevity ([Warne 2017](#)). To exemplify this widely accepted notion within the industry, an advertising executive for the 2004 hit Broadway musical *Wicked* explained to the show's producers that, although the production received 10 Tony Award nominations, the 'Best Musical' award is the "one Tony that matters" ([Hershberg 2018](#)). A publicist for the show echoed the same sentiment, stating: "Frankly, you talk about the Tony Awards, and there are a lot of them . . . but the one that really counts is the one for Best Musical" ([Hershberg 2018](#)).

The notion that the 'Best Musical' is the most crucial award to win, or at least to be nominated for, is validated through statistical data. Existing research shows that 'Best Musical' nominees are nearly 60% less likely to immediately close than Broadway musicals that are not nominated, and winning the 'Best Musical' award triples a production's likelihood of remaining open ([Warne 2017](#)). With average Broadway show ticket prices exceeding \$100, theatregoers are inclined to attend shows nominated for or

receiving prestigious awards to reduce risk (Hershberg 2018). Therefore, winning a ‘Best Musical’ Tony Award is considered by the industry and most audiences to be the highest achievement a Broadway musical can accomplish.

3. The Long Road to ‘Success’

21st-century Broadway musicals are risky investments, with only around 25% of Broadway shows becoming profitable (Long 2016). Broadway musicals currently cost millions of dollars to produce, requiring multiple generous investors. Even though recent Broadway seasons earned record-breaking ticket sales, a large portion of those sales were from a handful of immensely popular hits, such as *Hamilton*, *Dear Evan Hansen*, and *Frozen*; despite these highly publicized blockbusters, Broadway investors recently lost a combined \$100 million due to a spike in show closings (Seymour 2019). Producing a Broadway hit is an extremely competitive game. Nearly half of Broadway’s theatres are filled with successful, long-running productions like *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Wicked*, and *The Lion King*, leaving approximately two dozen theatres each year—all owned by just three companies—to be auctioned up by commercial producers attempting to debut new shows (Seymour 2019).

The risky journey of producing a 21st-century bona fide Broadway hit musical is a lengthy and complicated obstacle course. The production must raise millions of dollars in investments and earn a residency at one of the only two dozen available Broadway theatres. The show must then execute an attractive marketing strategy, which often means that the musical is based on a recognizable title or intellectual property (such as a popular film or story). If enough audiences come out to provide a solid opening box office, the musical arguably needs recognition from the Tony Awards—especially in the ‘Best Musical’ category—to hopefully guarantee a more extended Broadway run. If the show earns a nomination—or, better yet, a win—for the coveted award, then the show will most likely need to go on national and international tours in order to earn more substantial profits; musicals often make more money with tours than they do on Broadway due to the larger venues and cheaper average ticket prices that attract more audiences (Hershberg 2019). If a lengthened Broadway run and successful tours are achieved, a musical could possibly be adapted into a movie that would heighten the show’s cultural presence and relevance. However, transitioning a successful Broadway musical to the screen is not always a guaranteed success either. Although 21st-century film adaptations of the popular Broadway musicals *Chicago*, *Dreamgirls*, *Hairspray*, *Mamma Mia*, *Les Misérables*, and *Into the Woods* were critical and commercial successes, film adaptations of the record-breaking Broadway musicals *The Phantom of the Opera*, *The Producers*, and *Cats* were met with much criticism and disappointing box offices (D’Alessandro 2019; Welk 2018).

4. Source Materials of 21st-Century ‘Best Musical’ Tony Award Winners and Nominees

The scope of this survey consists of all 82 Broadway musicals that have won or were nominated for the ‘Best Musical’ Tony Award during their original Broadway runs between the years 2000 and 2019. Source materials for the censused Broadway musicals were assessed in ten selected categories: Literature, screen (film or tv), play,² real people or events, revues,³ other musicals, opera, jukebox,⁴ comic,⁵ or original. It should be acknowledged that there is no one official, definitive list of how Broadway musical source materials should be categorized. However, these ten selected categories are commonly identified as prominent source material categories, as is evident in numerous publicized

² A staged or broadcast dramatic work not belonging to the musical theatre genre.

³ A variety of music numbers unified by a common theme, such as specific performers, composers, directors, choreographers, or concepts (Kislan 1995, pp. 82–95).

⁴ A musical that features pre-existing popular music threaded together into a plot (Robinson 2014, pp. 259–60).

⁵ Visual story-telling art form consisting of sequences of separate images; examples include comic strips and comic books (Groensteen 2007, p. 13).

media, research works, and books (Dvoskin 2014, pp. 402–4; Culwell-Block 2018; Davenport 2015; Kaiser 2013, p. 161).

This article does acknowledge that interpreting a musical's source material as one single quantifiable category can be subjective due to combinations of blended inspirations that frequently occur among artistic endeavors. If a musical had multiple source materials, the material assessed to be the more widely recognized or apparent direct influence was selected. For example, although the Broadway musical *Thoroughly Modern Millie* (2002) is partly based on the play *Chrysanthemum* (1956), the musical is more directly based on the film *Thoroughly Modern Millie* (1967); thus, this article considers the musical to be of 'screen' source material instead of 'play'.

The current census enhances existing data reported by Davenport (Davenport 2015). Davenport's research consisted of assessing source materials of 'Best Musical' Tony Award winners during a 50 year span, starting with *Fiddler on the Roof* in 1965 and ending with *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder* in 2014. The present investigation builds on these existing data by expanding the survey's scope to all 21st-century musicals that have won or been nominated for the award, thus integrating the years 2015–2019 into the data.

During the 21st century thus far (2000–2019), 82 musicals were nominated for the 'Best Musical' Tony Award, with 20 of those nominees winning the award. The nominees represented seven source material categories: Literature, screen, original, play, real people or events, revue, and jukebox musical; the winners represented six source categories: Literature, screen, original, play, real people or events, and jukebox musical (see Table 1).

Table 1. Source materials of 'Best Musical' Tony Award winners and nominees (2000–2019).

Year	'Best Musical' Tony Award Nominees	Source Material
2000	* <i>Contact</i>	Original
	<i>James Joyce's The Dead</i>	Literature
	<i>Swing!</i>	Revue
	<i>The Wild Party</i>	Literature
2001	* <i>The Producers</i>	Screen (Film)
	<i>A Class Act</i>	Real People or Event
	<i>The Full Monty</i>	Screen (Film)
	<i>Jane Eyre</i>	Literature
2002	* <i>Thoroughly Modern Millie</i>	Screen (Film)
	<i>Mamma Mia!</i>	Jukebox
	<i>Sweet Smell of Success</i>	Screen (Film)
	<i>Urinetown</i>	Original
2003	* <i>Hairspray</i>	Screen (Film)
	<i>Amour</i>	Literature
	<i>A Year with Frog and Toad</i>	Literature
	<i>Movin' Out</i>	Jukebox
2004	* <i>Avenue Q</i>	Original
	<i>Caroline, or Change</i>	Original
	<i>The Boy from Oz</i>	Jukebox
	<i>Wicked</i>	Literature
2005	* <i>Monty Python's Spamalot</i>	Screen (Film)
	<i>Dirty Rotten Scoundrels</i>	Screen (Film)
	<i>The Light in the Piazza</i>	Literature
	<i>The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee</i>	Original
2006	* <i>Jersey Boys</i>	Jukebox
	<i>The Color Purple</i>	Screen (Film)
	<i>The Drowsy Chaperone</i>	Original
	<i>The Wedding Singer</i>	Screen (Film)

Table 1. Cont.

Year	'Best Musical' Tony Award Nominees	Source Material
2007	* <i>Spring Awakening</i> <i>Curtains</i> <i>Grey Gardens</i> <i>Mary Poppins</i>	Play Original Real People or Event Screen (Film)
2008	* <i>In the Heights</i> <i>Cry-Baby</i> <i>Passing Strange</i> <i>Xanadu</i>	Original Screen (Film) Original Screen (Film)
2009	* <i>Billy Elliot</i> <i>Next to Normal</i> <i>Rock of Ages</i> <i>Shrek The Musical</i>	Screen (Film) Original Jukebox Screen (Film)
2010	* <i>Memphis</i> <i>American Idiot</i> <i>Fela!</i> <i>Million Dollar Quartet</i>	Original Jukebox Real Person or Event Jukebox
2011	* <i>The Book of Mormon</i> <i>Catch Me If You Can</i> <i>The Scottsboro Boys</i> <i>Sister Act</i>	Original Screen (Film) Real People or Event Screen (Film)
2012	* <i>Once</i> <i>Leap of Faith</i> <i>Newsies</i> <i>Nice Work If You Can Get It</i>	Screen (Film) Screen (Film) Screen (Film) Jukebox
2013	* <i>Kinky Boots</i> <i>Bring It On</i> <i>A Christmas Story</i> <i>Matilda</i>	Screen (Film) Screen (Film) Screen (Film) Screen (Film)
2014	* <i>A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder</i> <i>After Midnight</i> <i>Aladdin</i> <i>Beautiful-The Carol King Musical</i>	Literature Revue Screen (Film) Jukebox
2015	* <i>Fun Home</i> <i>An American in Paris</i> <i>Something Rotten!</i> <i>The Visit</i>	Literature Screen (Film) Original Play
2016	* <i>Hamilton</i> <i>Bright Star</i> <i>School of Rock</i> <i>Shuffle Along</i> <i>Waitress</i>	Real People or Event Original Screen (Film) Real People or Event Screen (Film)
2017	* <i>Dear Evan Hansen</i> <i>Come From Away</i> <i>Groundhog Day</i> <i>Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812</i>	Original Real People or Event Screen (Film) Literature
2018	* <i>The Band's Visit</i> <i>Frozen</i> <i>Mean Girls</i> <i>SpongeBob SquarePants</i>	Screen (Film) Screen (Film) Screen (Film) Screen (TV)
2019	* <i>Hadestown</i> <i>Ain't Too Proud</i> <i>Beetlejuice</i> <i>The Prom</i> <i>Tootsie</i>	Literature Jukebox Screen (Film) Original Screen (Film)

* Award winners.

The overall comprehensive assessment of source materials for all 20 musicals awarded the ‘Best Musical’ Tony Award between the years 2000 and 2019 is as follows, from the highest to the lowest percentages: Screen (40%, n = 8), original (30%, n = 6), literature (15%, n = 3), play (5%, n = 1), real people or events (5%, n = 1), jukebox musical (5%, n = 1, revue (0%, n = 0), other musicals (0%, n = 0), opera (0%, n = 0), and comic (0%, n = 0) (see Table 2). Furthermore, the assessment of source materials for all 82 musicals nominated for but not awarded the ‘Best Musical’ Tony Award between the years 2000 and 2019 is as follows, from the highest to the lowest percentages: Screen (41.5%, n = 34), original (19.5%, n = 16), literature (13.4%, n = 11), jukebox musical (12.2%, n = 10), revue (0%, n = 0), real people or events (5%, n = 7), play (2.4%, n = 2), other musicals (0%, n = 0), opera (0%, n = 0), and comic (0%, n = 0) (see Table 2).

Table 2. Comparative overall statistics of source materials (2000–2019).

Assessed Source Materials	Total Wins	Percentage of Total Winners	Total Nominees	Percentage of Total Nominees
Literature	3	15%	11	13.4%
Screen	8 (All Film)	40%	34 (33 Film/1 TV)	41.5% (40.2% Film/1.2% TV)
Original	6	30%	16	19.5%
Play	1	5%	2	2.4%
Real People or Events	1	5%	7	8.5%
Revue	0	0%	2	2.4%
Jukebox Musical	1	5%	10	12.2%
Other Musical	0	0%	0	0%
Opera	0	0%	0	0%
Comic	0	0%	0	0%
TOTAL	20	100%	82	100%

5. Original Broadway Run Lengths of 21st-Century ‘Best Musical’ Tony Award Winners and Nominees

The scope of this article’s survey consists of all 82 Broadway musicals that have won or were nominated for the ‘Best Musical’ Tony Award during their original Broadway runs between the years 2000 and 2019. It should be noted that only the initial Broadway runs of each discussed musical were considered, meaning that Broadway revivals of musicals were not regarded. For example, both *The Color Purple* and *Spring Awakening* had subsequent revivals on Broadway, but only their original Broadway runs before closure were counted. Moreover, since this article focuses on the impacts of the Tony Awards on a Broadway musical’s initial run, each production’s “run” is measured in the length preceding its eligible Tony Award ceremony.

So far, during the 20th century (2000–2019), 82 musicals were nominated for the ‘Best Musical’ Tony Award, with 20 of those nominees winning the award. Each musical’s Broadway run length preceding the corresponding Tony Awards ceremony is charted (see Table 3).

The statistical comparison of the lengths of original Broadway runs after corresponding Tony Awards ceremonies for ‘Best Musical’ Tony Award winners and nominees (non-winners) between the years 2000 and 2019 is categorized by month ranges (see Table 4).

Table 3. ‘Best Musical’ Tony Award winners and nominees by year (2000–2019).

Year	‘Best Musical’ Tony Award Nominees	Closed	Run Length after Tony Awards before Closing
2000 (Tony Awards 06-04-2000)	* <i>Contact</i>	05-10-2003	2 years, 11 months
	<i>James Joyce’s The Dead</i>	04-16-2000	Closed before
	<i>Swing!</i>	01-14-2001	7 months
	<i>The Wild Party</i>	06-11-2000	Less than 1 month
2001 (Tony Awards 06-03-2001)	* <i>The Producers</i>	04-22-2007	5 years, 10 months
	<i>A Class Act</i>	06-10-2001	Less than 1 month
	<i>The Full Monty</i>	09-01-2002	1 year, 3 months
	<i>Jane Eyre</i>	05-20-2001	Closed before
2002 (Tony Awards 06-02-2002)	* <i>Thoroughly Modern Millie</i>	06-20-2004	2 years
	<i>Mamma Mia!</i>	09-05-2015	13 years, 3 months
	<i>Sweet Smell of Success</i>	06-15-2002	Less than 1 month
	<i>Urinetown</i>	01-18-2004	1 year, 7 months
2003 (Tony Awards 06-08-2003)	* <i>Hairspray</i>	01-04-2009	5 years, 7 months
	<i>Amour</i>	11-03-2002	Closed before
	<i>A Year with Frog and Toad</i>	06-15-2003	Less than 1 month
	<i>Movin’ Out</i>	12-11-2005	1 year, 6 months
2004 (Tony Awards 06-06-2004)	* <i>Avenue Q</i>	09-13-2009	5 years, 3 months
	<i>Caroline, or Change</i>	08-29-2004	2 months
	<i>The Boy from Oz</i>	09-12-2004	3 months
	+ <i>Wicked</i>	Still open	Still open
2005 (Tony Awards 06-05-2005)	* <i>Monty Python’s Spamalot</i>	01-18-2009	3 years, 7 months
	<i>Dirty Rotten Scoundrels</i>	09-03-2006	1 year, 3 months
	<i>The Light in the Piazza</i>	07-02-2006	1 year, 1 month
	<i>The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee</i>	01-20-2008	2 years, 7 months
2006 (Tony Awards 06-11-2006)	* <i>Jersey Boys</i>	01-15-2017	10 years, 7 months
	<i>The Color Purple</i>	02-24-2008	1 year, 8 months
	<i>The Drowsy Chaperone</i>	12-30-2007	1 year, 6 months
	<i>The Wedding Singer</i>	12-31-2006	6 months
2007 (Tony Awards 06-10-2007)	* <i>Spring Awakening</i>	01-18-2009	1 year, 7 months
	<i>Curtains</i>	06-29-2008	1 year
	<i>Grey Gardens</i>	07-29-2007	1 month
	<i>Mary Poppins</i>	03-13-2013	5 years, 9 months
2008 (Tony Awards 06-15-2008)	* <i>In the Heights</i>	01-09-2011	2 years, 7 months
	<i>Cry Baby</i>	06-22-2008	Less than 1 month
	<i>Passing Strange</i>	07-20-2008	1 month
	<i>Xanadu</i>	09-28-2008	3 months
2009 (Tony Awards 06-07-2009)	* <i>Billy Elliot</i>	01-08-2012	2 years, 7 months
	<i>Next to Normal</i>	01-16-2011	1 year, 7 months
	<i>Rock of Ages</i>	01-18-2015	4 years, 7 months
	<i>Shrek The Musical</i>	01-03-2010	7 months
2010 (Tony Awards 06-13-2010)	* <i>Memphis</i>	08-05-2012	2 years, 2 months
	<i>American Idiot</i>	04-24-2011	10 months
	<i>Fela!</i>	01-02-2011	7 months
	<i>Million Dollar Quartet</i>	06-12-2011	1 year
2011 (Tony Awards 06-12-2011)	* + <i>The Book of Mormon</i>	Still open	Still open
	<i>Catch Me If You Can</i>	09-11-2011	3 months
	<i>The Scottsboro Boys</i>	12-12-2010	Closed before
	<i>Sister Act</i>	08-26-2012	1 year, 2 months

Table 3. Cont.

Year	'Best Musical' Tony Award Nominees	Closed	Run Length after Tony Awards before Closing
2012 (Tony Awards 06-10-2012)	* <i>Once</i>	01-04-2015	2 years, 7 months
	<i>Leap of Faith</i>	05-13-2012	Closed before
	<i>Newsies</i>	08-24-2014	2 years, 2 months
	<i>Nice Work If You Can Get It</i>	06-15-2013	1 year
2013 (Tony Awards 06-09-2013)	* <i>Kinky Boots</i>	04-07-2019	5 years, 10 months
	<i>Bring It On</i>	12-30-2012	Closed before
	<i>A Christmas Story</i>	12-30-2012	Closed before
	<i>Matilda</i>	01-01-2017	3 years, 7 years
2014 (Tony Awards 06-08-2014)	* <i>A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder</i>	01-17-2016	1 year, 7 months
	<i>After Midnight</i>	06-29-2014	Less than 1 month
	+ <i>Aladdin</i>	Still open	Still open
	<i>Beautiful-The Carol King Musical</i>	10-29-2019	5 years, 4 months
2015 (Tony Awards 06-07-2015)	* <i>Fun Home</i>	09-10-2016	1 year, 3 months
	<i>An American in Paris</i>	10-09-2016	1 year, 4 months
	<i>Something Rotten!</i>	01-01-2017	2 years, 7 months
	<i>The Visit</i>	06-14-2015	Less than 1 month
2016 (Tony Awards 06-12-2016)	* + <i>Hamilton</i>	Still open	Still open
	<i>Bright Star</i>	06-26-2016	Less than 1 month
	<i>School of Rock</i>	01-20-2019	2 years, 7 months
	<i>Shuffle Along</i>	07-24-2016	1 month
	<i>Waitress</i>	01-05-2020	3 years, 7 months
2017 (Tony Awards 06-11-2017)	* + <i>Dear Evan Hansen</i>	Still open	Still open
	+ <i>Come From Away</i>	Still open	Still open
	<i>Groundhog Day</i>	09-17-2017	3 months
	<i>Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812</i>	09-03-2017	3 months
2018 (Tony Awards 06-10-2018)	* <i>The Band's Visit</i>	04-07-2019	10 months
	+ <i>Frozen</i>	Still open	Still open
	+ <i>Mean Girls</i>	Still open	Still open
	<i>SpongeBob SquarePants</i>	09-16-2018	3 months
2019 (Tony Awards 06-09-2019)	* + <i>Hadestown</i>	Still open	Still open
	+ <i>Ain't Too Proud</i>	Still open	Still open
	++ <i>Beetlejuice</i>	06-06-2020	1 year
	<i>The Prom</i>	08-11-2019	2 months
	<i>Tootsie</i>	01-05-2020	7 months

* Indicates Award winners. + Musicals marked 'still open' are temporarily closed due to COVID-19-related restrictions, but announced every intention of reopening upon lifting of restrictions. ++ *Beetlejuice* was scheduled to close its Broadway run on 6 June 2020, but was forced to prematurely close on 12 March 2020 due to COVID-19-related restrictions.

Table 4. Comparative lengths of original Broadway runs (in months) for ‘Best Musical’ Tony Award winners and nominees (non-winners) after corresponding Tony Awards ceremonies (2000–2019).

Post Tony Awards Run Until Closing	Total Number of Winners	Total Percentage of Winners	Total Number of Nominees (Non-Winners)	Total Percentage of Nominees (Non-Winners)
Closed Before Awards	0	0%	7	11.3%
< 1 Month	0	0%	8	12.9%
1–3 Months	0	0%	11	17.4%
4–6 Months	0	0%	1	1.6%
7–9 Months	0	0%	5	8.1%
10–12 Months	1	5%	4	6.5%
13–15 Months	1	5%	4	6.5%
16–18 Months	0	0%	3	4.8%
19–21 Months	2	10%	3	4.8%
22–24 Months	1	5%	0	0%
25–27 Months	1	5%	1	1.6%
28–30 Months	0	0%	0	0%
31–33 Months	3	15%	3	4.8%
34–36 Months	1	5%	0	0%
37–39 Months	0	0%	0	0%
40–42 Months	0	0%	0	0%
43–45 Months	1	5%	2	3.2%
46–48 Months	0	0%	0	0%
49–51 Months	0	0%	0	0%
52–54 Months	0	0%	0	0%
55–57 Months	0	0%	1	1.6%
58–60 Months	0	0%	0	0%
> 60 Months	5	25%	3	4.8%
Still Open	4	20%	6	9.7%
TOTAL	20	100%	62	100%

6. Discussions of 21st-Century Tony Award Winners and Nominees

As with all artistic endeavors, popular musical theatre trends presented themselves as responses to the shifting cultures. Arguably the most observable 21st-century trend in Broadway musicals is the massive presence of film-based productions. From the end of the 20th century through the beginning of the 21st century, the percentage of Broadway musicals based on literature or an original concept decreased, while the percentage of Broadway musicals based on films increased (Davenport 2015). By the early 2000s, Broadway was seemingly breaking new heights on the backs of popular films, leading to a 2002 New York Times article entitled “If It’s a Musical, It Was Probably a Movie” (Marks 2002). Consequently, the drastic rise of Broadway movie-based musicals increased recognition of screen source materials by the Tony Awards, and, by the 21st century, musicals based on films became the leading percentage of musicals awarded the prestigious ‘Best Musical’ Tony Award (see Sections 5 and 6).

The data presented in this article regarding source material and recognition by the Tony Awards display patterns of audiences often desiring insurance of familiarity or critical approval before paying the expensive ticket prices attached to Broadway musicals. Musical adaptations from screen source materials (films and television programs) hold a strong lead over the other source material categories for both the nominees (41.5%) and winners (40%) of the ‘Best Musical’ Tony Award during the 21st century. These data assist as at least a partial validation of the industry notion that Broadway has overwhelmingly gone Hollywood in the 21st century, releasing an ever-evolving carousel of film adaptations—sometimes coined “movieicals”—meant to take advantage of familiar movie titles to draw in new Broadway audiences (Jones 2019; Hollander 2015). The artistry-versus-business debate of constant film-based musicals is an ongoing discussion among the Broadway industry and fans. Those who defend the increase of film-based musicals point out that “musical theatre has always been a genre that favors adaptations,” while those who lament the popular trend argue that adapting

a famous movie into a musical is “safe”, “easy”, and turning Broadway into “a film festival” (Jones 2019; Marks 2002).

During an expensive and crowded 21st-century Broadway world, there are still no guarantees for financial or cultural success. Although musicals based on popular films make up the most significant percentage of 21st-century musicals recognized by the Tony Awards for the ‘Best Musical’ award, a familiar title on the marquee does not guarantee award recognition. Highly publicized 21st-century movies-turned-musicals such as *Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark*, *King Kong*, *Amélie*, *Ghost*, *Anastasia*, and *Pretty Woman* did not receive nominations for the ‘Best Musical’ Tony Award.⁶ Similarly, earning a ‘Best Musical’ Tony Award nomination does not ensure elongated runs when considering that 44% of all 21st-century ‘Best Musical’ award non-winning nominees closed in less than six months after their corresponding Tony Award ceremonies (including 11% of the non-winning nominees that closed before their corresponding Tony Award ceremonies even took place).

Alternatively, sometimes 21st-century musicals not related to popular Hollywood titles or franchises can run the Broadway race and ultimately beat the competition. Take the 2018 ‘Best Musical’ Tony Award winning show *The Band’s Visit* as an example. *The Band’s Visit* is a musical based on an Israeli film largely unknown to American audiences. In the 2018 Tony Awards ceremony, *The Band’s Visit* was nominated in the ‘Best Musical’ category against three blockbuster musicals based on massively popular Hollywood franchises: *Frozen*, *Mean Girls*, and *SpongeBob SquarePants*. Critics considered *The Band’s Visit*’s win to be deserved, yet surprising, viewing the show as a “sleeper hit” against three “nostalgia-appealing” shows in a David-versus-Goliath-esque Broadway showdown (Gregory 2019; Real 2018). This recent win proved that there are no true guaranteed formulas of success in the Broadway industry and its accompanying award system.

Similarly, the data presented in this article regarding the ‘Best Musical’ Tony Award display patterns of longevity for 21st-century musicals nominated for the coveted award, with even longer initial Broadway runs for musicals that win the award, thus validating a substantial boost in impact from a ‘Best Musical’ Award win over a mere nomination. Of the 21st-century musicals that won the ‘Best Musical’ Tony Award, 100% remained open for at least 10–12 months after their corresponding Tony Award ceremonies before closing, while only 58% of the non-winning nominees remained open for at least the same length of time. Moreover, 25% of 21st-century ‘Best Musical’ winners had at least a five-year run after their corresponding Tony Award ceremonies before closing, while only 5% of the non-winning nominees remained opened for at least five years before closing. Furthermore, 20% of 21st-century ‘Best Musical’ winners are still open, while only 20% of non-winning nominees are still open.

Another noticeable trend of ‘Best Musical’ Tony Award winners involves genre. The genres of popular Broadway musicals often reflect the cultures of their time. ‘Golden Age Musicals’ during the 1940s and early 1960s offered stories of fantasy and the American Dream during the period immediately following the ending of World War II. The proceeding ‘Rock Musicals’ reflected the loud outcry of younger generations protesting social injustice, judgmental moralism, and the Vietnam War. Starting in the 1980s, ‘Mega Musicals’ mirrored Hollywood’s rise of expensive blockbusters filled with visual spectacles.

As Broadway entered the 21st century, comedies became popular for their comforting distraction in the aftermath of the 9-11-2001 terrorist attacks. Almost all of the ‘Best Musical’ Tony Award winners at the start of the 21st century were flamboyant comedies. Winners such as *The Producers*, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, *Hairspray*, *Avenue Q*, and *Monty Python’s Spamalot* displayed the desired levity Broadway audiences sought during America’s mental recovery from the unprecedented terrorist attack upon New York City (Jones 2018). In the second decade of Broadway’s new century, ‘Best Musical’ Tony

⁶ It should be noted that *Amélie* and *Ghost* were nominated for the ‘Best Musical’ Olivier Award (London’s West End equivalent to the Tony Awards) (Olivier 2020).

Award winners consisted of more dramas and genre-bending shows. Despite overtly comedic winners such as *The Book of Mormon* and *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder*, 'Best Musical' winners such as *Memphis*, *Fun Home*, *Hamilton*, *Dear Evan Hansen*, *The Band's Visit*, and *Hadestown* are dramas or tragicomedies, trading in slapstick humor for stories lined with emotional complexities.

These trends in genre were also accompanied by patterns in musical stylings. The early 21st century comedic 'Best Musical' winners in the immediate aftermath years following the 9-11 terrorist attacks offered popular traditional musical theatre styles of singing (often referred to as 'belt' singing) over song arrangements reminiscent of Broadway showtunes (Jones 2015). These musical stylings paired well with the overt comedies in offering audiences a sense of nostalgia, predictability, and comfortability during a time of chaos and shock from the historic terrorist attack in Broadway's home city and its resulting war. As the later 'Best Musical' winners began bending genres, so did their musical stylings. The award-winning dramas and tragicomedies utilized fusions of musical genres to create eclectic scores that introduced Broadway audiences to styles and sounds not historically heard in traditional Broadway musicals, reflecting the broader cultural 21st-century movement of fracturing and breaking down musical genres (Ross 2018).

Further discussions of Tony Award winners and nominees center on diversity. The Tony Awards have been praised for having a more substantial presence of diversity and inclusiveness than the Academy Awards (Drake 1998), but equal representation is still far from achieved, even in the 21st century. Although recent Broadway seasons saw record numbers of Tony nominations going to people of color, the overwhelming majority of winners—including the 'Best Director of a Musical' Award—consists of Caucasians and males (Low 2016). During the 21st century, the Tony Awards, have seen slow but important milestones for diverse and inclusive recognition among creative teams of Broadway musicals. From a gender perspective, only seven women have won the Tony Award for 'Best Original Score', with five being 21st-century winners. Furthermore, four of the five 21st-century female winners won the award without a male writing partner. Similarly, only four women have won the Tony Award for 'Best Direction of a Musical', with three being 21st-century winners. When looking at those same award categories through a lens of race, only one person of color has won the 'Best Director of a Musical' Tony Award (in 1992), and only one person of color has won the 'Best Original Score' Tony Award (in 1975). Though the fight for accurate equal representation of diversity is still far from over, 21st-century Broadway is celebrating new bars of achievement. The massive success of *Hamilton* as a "game changer" set a new precedent for "non-Caucasian theatre" (Johnson 2015). During the 2015–2016 Broadway season, the Tony-Award-nominated revival of *Spring Awakening* featured a cast of both deaf and hearing performers and became the first Broadway production to offer interpretation for deaf/blind audiences (Hollander 2015). Additional new precedents were set in the most recent 2019 Tony Awards, with Ali Stroker becoming the first actor in a wheelchair to win a Tony, and the victorious musical *Hadestown* winning several awards for its female-driven creative team (the musical was written, directed, composed, and produced by women) (Noveck 2019).

7. COVID-19 Closures

With discussions focused on 21st-century Broadway musicals up to the present day, this article must discuss the unprecedented period the state of Broadway currently finds itself in at this particular time in history in response to the Coronavirus pandemic. On 12 March 2020, Broadway closed its theatres for an undetermined amount of time due to New York's becoming the epicenter of the virus in the United States. Initially, a return date of 13 April was announced, but that date is now postponed to at least 7 June, with some major producers speculating its postponement until early 2021 (Jacobs 2020; McPhee 2020; BBC 2020). Although this is not the first time Broadway shows went 'dark' (an industry term meaning to be closed), it is by far the longest hiatus in Broadway's history. Broadway theatres have been forced to shut down numerous times in the past as reactions to several union protests, power outages, and the 9-11-2001 terrorist attacks. However, most of these shutdowns—including the

9-11 related shutdown—only lasted mere days or, at most, a few weeks (the longest being the 1975 musicians' strike, which led to a 25 day shutdown) (Russo 2020).

Even worse, these 2020 closures are happening during Broadway's typically busiest time of the year—the springtime—where several new productions open right before the Tony Awards nomination deadline (Drell 2020). At the time of the announced closures, there were still 16 shows scheduled to open during this 2019–2020 Broadway season (Green and Brantley 2020). Moreover, productions in their early stages of previews had to announce permanent closures due to projected financial losses (Paulson 2020). Furthermore, other shows that were already mid-run are unsure if they can resume after such a long hiatus.

The highly commercial and lucrative musicals that are current staples in Broadway, such as *Hamilton*, *Wicked*, *The Book of Mormon*, and Disney's *Frozen*, *Aladdin*, and *The Lion King*, are all projected to survive the temporary closing, although the predicted disastrous decline of international tourists in the immediate future may eventually cripple these Broadway megahits (since foreign tourism is crucial for a Broadway musical's longevity) (Harris 2020). However, other smaller shows without extensive corporate backing may struggle to keep a Broadway presence without “the economic resources to be able to continue paying theatre owners, cast, and crew through this still-undefined closure period” (Paulson 2020). An additional byproduct of this unprecedented era of Broadway closures is the postponement of the Tony Awards. The Tony Awards Production publicly released a company statement on March 25, 2020, announcing that the 74th Tony Awards would be postponed until Broadway reopens (Tony 2020; Jacobs 2020). In the time of publication of this article (May 2020), there is currently no update on what changes, if any, will be made to the eligibility requirements for the various award categories, leading theatre critics and fans to speculate how the Tony Awards will reward an abbreviated season consisting of premature closings and canceled openings (Green and Brantley 2020).

8. Conclusions and Predictions

The findings of this article aim to contribute to the existing scope of research among nominees and winners of the 'Best Musical' Tony Award and to further dialogues on possible predictable patterns among theatre's most prestigious award system. Since every step of birthing a Broadway musical comes with high risk, data from the first two decades of the 21st century appear to prove that being nominated for—and, especially, winning—the 'Best Musical' Tony Award is highly impactful for an elongated Broadway run, which, in turn, increases the chance of a musical becoming an industry and cultural 'success'. With only around 25% of Broadway shows becoming profitable in the 21st century, it seems that a musical's profitability is often either one extreme or the other, turning into a disappointing loss or “an ATM machine for investors” (Long 2016). According to Broadway producer Kimberly Loren Eaton: “The old adage about Broadway is in many ways true, ‘You can't make a living, but you can make a killing’” (Long 2016).

Only time will tell when and how Broadway can recover from this historic hiatus and return to its normalcy and stability. Producers and reporters are already predicting unavoidable outcomes and reactions to the 2020 pandemic crippling New York City's economy. Inevitably, several Broadway productions will close due to the inability to recover from the economic hit of this unprecedented hiatus; at least three Broadway productions have already permanently closed due to the COVID-19 financial impact, with predictably more closures to come (the financial aftermath of the 9-11 terrorist attacks led to at least five Broadway closures) (Geier 2020; Jones 2018). Broadway will most likely see drastic cuts in ticket prices, theatres selling only a fraction of their seats, and cheaper productions being more attractive for investors (Harris 2020).

Further speculations about post-pandemic Broadway musicals include predictions of genre and marketability. During the foreseeable upcoming dark time for post-COVID-19 Americans and international tourists who begin slowly venturing out towards public and crowded entertainment events, one could predict that audiences will gravitate towards levity and seek comedic or family-friendly

shows that provide escapism—in ways similar to the fact that audiences immediately following the 9-11 shutdown attended shows that allowed “laughing through your pain” and “might make everyone in the family smile” (Jones 2018). The demographics of Broadway marketing may also be reflected in post-COVID-19 Broadway. For the first two decades of the 21st century, the average age of the Broadway theatregoer stayed between 40 and 45 years old (The Broadway League 2020). Since younger people are the demographic most likely to show initial resilience in returning to large social gatherings, it could be speculated that Broadway musicals marketing towards younger audiences earn deeper investments.

Moreover, the level of importance that the Tony Awards reach during the Broadway seasons of the immediate future is up for speculation. During a slow reopening of the economy, one that will hurt Broadway for upcoming seasons, the Tony Awards may have an even stronger impact in funneling audiences towards specific shows. If musicals remain the dominant Broadway attractions and audiences have greater hesitations towards purchasing admission tickets and sitting in tightly-crowded spaces for hours surrounded by strangers, winning or being nominated for the ‘Best Musical’ Tony Award may very well become even more crucial for a musical’s survival; likewise, not earning a nomination or winning the ‘Best Musical’ award may become an even stronger deterrent for hesitant theatregoers.

As Broadway enters the third decade of the 21st century, the uncertainty of tourism and theatregoers in a post-pandemic world remains difficult to predict—especially in New York City, which became a coronavirus epicenter. Consequently, the impact of The Tonys and the prestigious ‘Best Musical’ award may rise to new heights as cautious audiences with tighter finances hesitantly begin venturing out to large-group entertainment events. As research reflects back on the past to observe the historical intertwinement of Broadway musicals and the Tony Awards, looking towards the future may find a new decade of newer trends and unprecedented impacts.

Each year, numerous new musicals make their Broadway debuts with hopes of receiving passionate adoration from paying audiences and validating recognition from the Tony Awards. Some shows will be considered moderate successes, some will be viewed as bombing failures, and perhaps a lucky few may achieve Broadway gold status and eventually become iconic. The term ‘show business’ itself reflects the duality of Broadway musicals—the creative artistry of a show tied to a relentless business. Broadway musicals of the 21st century must consistently tread the fine line of an artistic heart and a business mind, with paying audiences and a highly competitive award system demanding excellence on both sides of that fine line. As Irving Berlin appropriately penned nearly a century ago, there really is “no business like show business.”

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