



Mercury Musical Developments
nurturing new musical theatre writing
mercurymusicals.com

How to get the most out of MMD and how to get produced!

WHY BE PART OF MMD? THE SHORT ANSWER!

What can you do with MMD's help?

- ◆ **Contact and meet** other writers of musicals: to collaborate, to exchange ideas, to compare yourself.
- ◆ **Get better** at writing musical theatre through conversations with experienced writers and guidance on craft.
- ◆ **Improve your shows** through workshops with actors, peer-feedback sessions and our reading service.
- ◆ **Meet useful people** through our Facebook groups, like MDs, directors and other musical theatre professionals.

What does MMD not offer?

- ◆ **We're not a promoter or agent.** We don't promote associates' shows to producers (but we do our best to facilitate connections so the right people can hear about each other – it's a long and tricky process, not an overnight one!)
- ◆ **We're not a producer.** We don't stage associates' shows (but we do feed associates all the latest information about opportunities to platform their work at festivals and elsewhere).
- ◆ **We're not a quick path to fortune and fame!** Good musical theatre is hard and takes a long time to get good at. Musical theatre needs people who are willing to undertake that journey step by step.

What do you need in order to get the most out of MMD?

People start with MMD from all sorts of positions, with all sorts of development needs, but here are some characteristics of the people who do well in this industry. Successful writers of musical theatre:

- ◆ **Are ready to collaborate.** Even for those who write all three of book, music and lyrics, musical theatre is still a highly collaborative artform, requiring the ability to work as part of a team with directors, producers and performers and, usually, other writers.
- ◆ **Have more than one show in them.** It's not just about writing a show, it's about being able to write enough shows that one will succeed.
- ◆ **Devote lots of time and energy to writing.** To succeed at a professional level, your development and writing have to become priorities.
- ◆ **Are self-critical.** It's a competitive business and it helps if you can identify and address your own flaws before someone else does.
- ◆ **Can take critique from others.** Lots of people will take a view on your work, and you need to be able to deal with that.
- ◆ **Love re-drafting.** The old saying is that musicals aren't written; they're re-written.
- ◆ **Are self-starters.** Other people can only help you get so far. You should expect to do most of the hard work, and to take responsibility for your own development.
- ◆ **Consider the practicalities.** Writers who write easy-to-produce shows are more likely to get produced!

HOW TO USE MMD: THE LONG ANSWER!

Decide which opportunities to pursue via MMD by taking an audit of your strengths and weaknesses in terms of skills or experience.

Here are some of the important aspects of developing as a musical theatre writer. Which have you already covered, and what should your next step be?

BASIC CRAFT

Do you know about:

How to structure a story?	NO or NOT SURE? Then check out the Book Craft section of the MMD backstage website: http://www.mercurymusicals.com/13513251819/bookcraft.html	YES! Then get some critique on your outline from a fellow writer, or try to book one of the annual dramaturgy sessions offered by John Sparks.
How to structure a lyric?	NO or NOT SURE? Then check out the lyric craft section of the MMD backstage website: http://www.mercurymusicals.com/13513251819/lyriccraft.html	} YES! Then bring a song along to a Writing Lab for critique and refinement. These happen all year round. Check newsletters for details. For more rigorous criticism, you could compete to join a series of sessions with the Writing Lab Xtreme programme.
How to write effective musical theatre music?	NO or NOT SURE? Then check out the music craft section of the website: http://www.mercurymusicals.com/13513251819/musiccraft.html	
How to make words scan?	NO or NOT SURE? Google the word "scansion" and find out more about making words fit the rhythm of the music. We hope to have a resource on this soon.	

DEVELOPING PROJECTS

Have you:

Found a collaborator?	NO? You need to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Join the collaboration mailing list at http://mercurymusicals.com/collaboration, and read the tips on how to write an attractive post.• Look at the MMD associate lists, and make some personal approaches.• Join the Facebook groups to get more information about who's out there and who's looking.• Always consider before making an approach what is in it for the other person! If your offer wouldn't tempt you in their position, then it's the wrong offer.	YES! Congratulations. If you're setting out together on a formal professional project, you might want to think about an agreement: http://www.mercurymusicals.com/13513251819/collabagree.html
Written more than one complete musical?	NO? Then start thinking about what your next show could be, and how you could give it the best chance from the start by developing it via the opportunities offered by MMD.	YES! This is great. You could take your best musical so far to our reading service for feedback from a professional. http://www.mercurymusicals.com/reading.html

<p>Been through the experience of being performed?</p>	<p>NO? Then pursue this as soon as you can. Any experience of having your work performed is better than none. You could try:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • local amateur groups • schools/youth drama groups • a fringe performance you produce yourself • to get some actors along to read the script/sing the songs and offer feedback. 	<p>YES! Then consider what the next level is. Do you want to move from amateur performers to professionals? Do you want to try a different kind of musical based on your experience? Consider what sort of new project would enable you to try new, more difficult challenges as a writer, or to improve your existing approach.</p>
<p>Been performed by professionals?</p>	<p>NO? Then try to get to work with some pro actors or pros in training. Undertake the “Workshopping with Actors” workshop that comes around annually (and read the guideline at http://www.mercurymusicals.com/13513251819/archives/2006-03-carolmetcalfe.html), then apply for the RAM workshops or the Kitchen workshops at Central.</p>	<p>YES! Make notes about what went right and what went wrong in this experience, and consider what could make your next project more successful. Maybe you’re ready now to make an approach to a producer or director via the Facebook group.</p>
<p>Received feedback from other writers on your work?</p>	<p>NO? Then consider which pieces you need help on, and book a slot to present them in Writing Lab, so they can give you constructive critique.</p>	<p>YES! Make notes of all the points they made and run through them. What changes do you believe need to be made based on this feedback? Make time to make those changes! (It’s easy to forget!)</p>
<p>Received professional feedback on your work?</p>	<p>NO? Either bring some work to one of our Writing Labs, or perhaps put something in to our Professional Reading service.</p>	<p>YES! That means you will have lots of notes that you need to address in the next draft of your show/song. Or alternatively, you might decide to not continue the show, but you have lots of learning points to take forward to your next project.</p>
<p>Been published?</p>	<p>NO? If you feel you’re ready to be published, there are some companies you can approach, but you should have a performance of the work first for them to come and see. Check out the websites of Samuel French and Josef Weinberger as a start.</p>	<p>YES! Congratulations! You will want to stay in touch with your publisher on a reasonably regular basis to see if your work is selling and is therefore working for them, which will encourage them to publish more work in the future. Can they give you information about what sort of project you should consider next – one that they know would find an audience?</p>
<p>Been through a recognised course of formal training in writing musical theatre?</p>	<p>NO? Then you either need to sign up to one (such as the ones listed at http://www.mercurymusicals.com/joinpwa.html), or to substitute it with private study of the many books about writing musical theatre. Everyone would agree that the best way to learn is to do it, but formal courses can move you along faster.</p>	<p>YES! Then you’re eligible to become a Professional Writer Associate, and you probably need to start making contacts in the industry, such as directors and MDs. Get on to our facebook group and meet some people!</p>

PROFESSIONALISING

Are you:

About to be published?	NO? Check out what publishers might be looking for: http://www.mercurymusicals.com/13513251819/archives/2006-04-johnschofield.html	YES! Congratulations. Time to read the small print. Get help at: http://www.mercurymusicals.com/13513251819/stagepub.html
Up for a commission?	NO? Check the MMD newsletter for some paid opportunities, and also consider where you need your work to be seen in order to get a reputation.	YES! Congratulations. Check our advice on production deals: http://www.mercurymusicals.com/13513251819/production.html
Ready for an industry showcase?	NO? Then keep re-writing...	YES! You should consider submitting your completed show to The Works or NAMT (only a few shows are selected). Or you could check the newsletters for details about submissions of productions to festivals like Perfect Pitch (UK), NYMF, or NAMT (US) Unless you want to produce it yourself, you also need to network to find a good producer for your showcase.
Approaching agents?	NO? Lucky you.	YES! Then read some guidance here: http://www.mercurymusicals.com/13513251819/agents.html
Looking for the rights to adapt an existing work?	NO? That's nice! Original musicals are much needed!	YES! You need to know how and when to make the right approaches. Check out the guidance at http://www.mercurymusicals.com/13513251819/rights.html

HOW TO GET PRODUCED WHEN NOBODY KNOWS WHO YOU ARE...

Is your show likely to get done? Look at it from the producer's point of view.

A HARD TO PRODUCE SHOW...

Has a large cast

Requires specific sets, costume, lighting or technology to work

Requires very specific casting or rare skills that aren't already to hand

Has a writer who hands over the script/score and disappears

Has a writer who is a control freak and will not change a word or note

Has music that is very difficult to perform (longer rehearsal time)

Is not designed to attract a wide audience (more budgetary risk)

Has complex rights issues (e.g. adapts a book without prior permission)

Is too vague a concept for potential audience to understand

Has only one writer, meaning that there isn't enough capacity to do re-writes as fast as needed.

Starts rehearsal without a clear vision (nothing wrong with this in itself, but it can lengthen the time required and increase the expense)

Starts rehearsal without the whole script in place

AN EASY TO PRODUCE SHOW

Has a small cast (lower actor costs)

Requires a piano and a room, at minimum

Can work with any/most performers

Has a writer who is close by at rehearsals, and does rewrites on the spot if something doesn't work.

Has a writer who understands collaboration and compromise

Has music that strikes the right balance between being fresh/interesting and performable

Has something to say to everyone, and an attractive premise

Comes with all the relevant permissions sorted out ahead of time

Sells itself as a concept – can be summarised

Has collaborators who can go off and speed up the re-writes.

Has some clear ideas about the staging methods or aesthetic from the get-go

Has a complete draft script from the get-go, so that all the collaborators can understand the story and start to own it sooner.