Chinese American musical theater

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world (see Table 1). Ethnic theater traditions existed in at least 34 states and the District of Columbia. Their collective experience over a century of activity was substantial and several hundreds of thousands of performances must have been given.

Many of the experiences that immigrants and their families actually lived through were represented in song on the ethnic musical stage: the befuddlement of the Greenhorn newly arrived at Ellis Island, the sadness of the parent left behind in Europe, the joy at the promise of a better life in the new world, the fond thoughts of the old homeland, disillusionment about conditions in the new homeland. Every ethnic theater tradition in the United States that created a new musical theater repertory based on the immigrant experience represented these and other themes on stage. Solomon Smulewitz's Yiddish theater song "A Brivele der Mamen" (A Little Letter to Mother), provides a touching example. It tells the story of the mother forgotten by the son who has left for America, where he has become rich. She only asks him to write her a little letter, but he will not even do that. Before she dies, in poverty, she writes again asking that he say Kaddish (prayers for the dead) for her. Smulewitz's still well-known song tapped into a well of deep feeling about the sense of loss that many immigrants felt.

Performance spaces used for ethnic theater varied considerably, and could be modest or luxurious. Many groups had their own theaters, such as the German Pabst Theater in Milwaukee, built by Frederick Pabst (of the Pabst Brewery) in 1895, which became a theatrical jewel of the Midwest (and is still in use as a theater). Detroit's Fredro Theater, which opened in 1913, was intended solely for Polish-language productions. For special occasions, some groups rented large theaters that catered primarily to English-speaking audiences. Others performed on particular days of the week in "American" theaters when not in use by the regular company. Halls owned by social and civic organizations, such as Swedish American Hall in San Francisco and Dana Hall in Minneapolis, usually included spaces for theatrical performances. Civic and town halls and courthouses also provided performance space. Roman Catholic "national" (i.e., non-English-language) parishes often had halls that provided space for amateur and itinerant theatrical companies.

Immigrants and their descendants maintained interest in the theatrical and musical impulses of their individual cultures. But they also attended American musicals, vaudeville, and films. For many recent immigrants television musical programs, music videos, and other forms of popular mass entertainment take the place of live musical theater. While numerous musical programs are imported today from Korea, China, or Japan, many non-English-language television programs are also produced in the United States. Thus the dichotomy between the immigrant-themed and transplanted European live theater of an earlier age is mirrored in contemporary popular culture in many recent immigrant groups—Vietnamese, Indian, Filipino, and others. Many of the issues faced by recent immigrant groups and their connections to and engagement with popular theatrical and musical culture are repeating processes that were experienced by earlier immigrant groups. The languages and homelands may change, but the principal themes of migration, cultural maintenance, conflict, assimilation, and accommodation do not.

12. CHINESE AMERICAN MUSICAL THEATER. Chinese opera theaters constituted a significant social space in Chinese communities of the United States from the mid-19th century to the late 1930s. They offered performances of Cantonese opera, the genre of Chinese opera popular in the Pearl River Delta, from which most Chinese immigrated during this period, and became important settings for gathering and enacting cultural traditions through song, instrumental music, poetry, drama, acrobatic spectacles, and ritual performances. Hong Fook Tong (1852) was the first troupe to stage a full-scale professional performance, while Hing Chuen Yuen (Royal Chinese Theater) built the first Chinese theater on Jackson Street in San Francisco in 1868. Many Chinese theaters subsequently appeared in San Francisco, some of which existed under different names into the early 20th century: Yun Henn Choy (Royal Chinese Theater, c1874, Jackson Street), Look Sun Fung (Peacock Theater, c1877, Washington Street), Quan San Yoke (Gem of Mount Quan, 1878, Jackson Street), Dam Quai Yuen (c1878, Washington Street), Yee Quan Ying (Grand Theater, c1879, Washington Street), and Wing Ti Ping Company (c1879). New York City likewise founded its own Chinese Theater (1893, Doyer Street). In addition, Chinese theaters were featured prominently in world fairs, including the Columbian Exposition (1893), Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition (1909), and Panama-Pacific Exposition (1915), which introduced the art to a broader American audience.

The 1882 US Chinese Exclusion Act had a devastating effect on Chinese theaters: Chinese opera singers were no longer allowed to enter the country and performances dwindled. After San Francisco's 1906 fire burned down its Chinatown, regular performances stopped, and a 16-year void of professional Chinatown theater activity followed. In 1922, spurred by the success of Chinatown theaters in Havana and Vancouver as well as successful negotiation with immigration services, merchants were allowed again to bring performers and troupes into the United States.

The 1920s witnessed the renaissance of Chinatown opera theaters, despite the government's close control. The Mandarin Theater and Great China Theater were established in San Francisco, each with its own modern new theater building, and offered nightly performances. In New York City two theaters—Le Qian Qiu and Jock Min On—opened within a year of each other. In Honolulu, a theater sponsored by Kue Hing Company busied with visiting performers on their trans-Pacific voyages. The network of Cantonese opera performances grew, as did the mobility of individuals and groups of itinerant performers. Chinese theaters also appeared in Boston, Chicago, Portland, Seattle, and Los Angeles. Performers were particularly busy in the Pacific Northwest.
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Performance spaces used for ethnic theater varied considerably, and could be modest or luxurious. Many groups had their own theaters, such as the German Pabst Theater in Milwaukee, built by Frederick Pabst (of the Pabst Brewery) in 1895, which became a theatrical jewel of the Midwest (and is still in use as a theater). Detroit's Fredro Theater, which opened in 1913, was intended solely for Polish-language productions. For special occasions, some groups rented large theaters that catered primarily to English-speaking audiences. Other performance days of the week in 'American' theaters when not in use by the regular company. Halls owned by social and civic organizations, such as Swedish American Hall in San Francisco and Danza Hall in Minneapolis, usually included spaces for theatrical performances. Civic and town halls and courthouses also provided performance space. Roman Catholic "national" (i.e., non-English-language) parishes often had halls that provided space for amateur and touring theater troupes.

Immigrants and their descendants maintained interest in the theatrical and musical impulses of their individual cultures, and also attended American musicals, vaudeville, and films. For many recent immigrants television musical programs, music videos, and other forms of popular mass entertainment take the place of live musical theater. While numerous musical programs are exported today from Korea, China, or Japan, many newcomer television programs are also produced in the United States. Thus the dichotomy between the immigrant-themed and transplanted European theater of an earlier age is now reflected in contemporary popular culture. In many recent immigrant groups—Vietnamese, Indian, Filipino, and others. Many of the issues faced by recent immigrant groups and their connections to and engagement with popular theatrical and musical culture are repeating processes that were experienced by earlier immigrant groups. The languages and homelands may change, but the principal themes, migration, cultural conflict, assimilation, and accommodation do not.

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The use of Chinatown's Cottonon Art had a devastating effect on Chinese theaters: Chinese opera singers were no longer allowed to enter the country and performances were forbidden. After San Francisco's 1894 fire burned down its Chinatown, regular performances stopped, and a 36-year void of professional Chinatown theater activity followed. In 1922, spurred by the success of the Chinese Theater in Havana and Vancouver as well as successful negotiation with immigration services, merchants were allowed again to bring performers and troupes into the United States. The 1920s witnessed the resurgence of Chinatown opera troupes throughout the United States. The Mandarin Theater and Great China Theater were established in San Francisco, each with its own modern new theater building, and offered nightly performances. In New York City two theaters—Le Quan Qiu and Jocky Min On—opened within a year of each other. In Honolulu a theater founded by Xue Hing Company staffed with visiting performers on their trans-Pacific voyages was a significant development in Chinatown opera performances as well. The repertoire was multifarious, mostly based on familiar stories, rituals, and myths. In the 1920s and 1930s, an influx of professional artists, along with popular stories and characters, the theaters could easily accommodate itinerant performers and offer a different opera style every evening. Because the operatic performance of these stories relied heavily on improvisation, the pluralism of opera titles and variants were endless. Nevertheless, certain key elements and characteristic plots or figures were retained and easily recognizable. Through more stable elements such as face painting, costumes, and role types, opera performances came to embody the standard representation of known figures, deities, or legends. The musical, dramatic, and sometimes ritualistic performances in Chinatown opera theaters offered the opportunity for the community to share in this vast repertoire, which included Legend of White Snake, Journey to the West, Romance of the Three Kingdoms, Outlaws of the Marsh, Exile of Su Wu, Dream of the Red Chamber, among others, as well as to negotiate their own perspectives in recontextualizing the works.

The stories presented on the opera stages collectively supported the formation of musical and cultural memory for the Chinese American community. Because many stories are associated with holidays and festivals,
youngsters would often watch the performances and hear about them during the appropriate months. Mythological and legendary figures or deities, as interpreted through the operas, likewise helped shape the cultural imagination of Chinese Americans for generations.

Chinese opera themes appear in fiction and plays by Chinese American writers such as Amy Tan, Maxine Hong Kingston, David Henry Hwang, and so on. In significantly original ways, Kingston's Tripmaster Monkey and Woman Warrior weave in and rework Chinese opera stories and characters. Their works construct the retelling and remaking of Chinese operas, in whole, in partial aspects, or in spirit. Furthermore, contemporary operas written by Asian Americans draw heavily on elements of the Chinese opera tradition, such as Fred Ho's Journey Beyond the West: New Adventures of Monkey (1995), Jason Hwang's The Floating Box (2001), Tan Dun's The Tea: a Mirror of Soul (2002), Stewart Wallace and Amy Tan's The Bonesetter's Daughter (2008), and Zhou Long's Pulitzer Prize-winning Madame White Snake (2010).

13. GERMAN AMERICAN MUSICAL THEATER. The German theater flourished throughout the United States for about a century beginning in the late 1830s, with an interruption during World War I, until the mid-1930s. Like all other immigrant stages, a strong amateur dramatic component was continually present, but unlike many other traditions, the German American theater had assumed a fully professional existence by the 1850s. While the cities with the greatest amount of activity were New York, Milwaukee, Philadelphia, St. Louis, and Chicago, many American cities had German theater of some sort. While most of the operas, comic operas, operettas, musical comedies, and Possen (farces) and Volksstücke (folk plays) with extensive music were imported from Germany and Austria, several German American theater composers and playwrights made significant contributions with original Volksstücke based on the immigrant experience, in addition to newly composed European-themed operettas.

Chief among them was the actor-singer-composer-playwright-director-manager Adolf Philipp (1864–1936), author and star of numerous New York German American Volksstücke (which in Philipp's case can be considered musical comedies) and German operettas. His list of more than 100 theatrical works includes such immigrant-themed musicals as Der Corner Grocer aus der Avenue A (1895), Der Pawnbroker von der Eastside (1894), Der New Yorker Brauer und seine Familie (The New York Brewer and His Family, 1894), and New York bei Nacht (New York at Night, 1896). In addition to Philipp, a succession of other performer-manager-impressarios helped determine the direction of New York's German American stage just as they did in other American (and German) cities.

14. MEXICAN AMERICAN MUSICAL THEATER. After the American annexation of the US Southwest in 1848, a professional theater designed for Spanish speakers developed gradually in cities such as Los Angeles, Albuquerque, Tucson, and San Antonio. While Spanish speakers attended theatrical productions in their own language, including performances of Spanish zarzuela given by touring companies from Mexico and Spain, they also patronized theaters presenting works in English and other languages, including opera and operetta. The Aracaz Grand Spanish Opera Company (from Mexico City) toured throughout southern California in 1892 performing operetta, opera, and zarzuela. The theatrical family troupe led by Spanish-born composer, singer, and manager Manuel Areu (1845–1942) appeared throughout the Southwest during the late-19th and early-20th centuries. Mexican forms of musical and theatrical entertainments performed in the Southwest including tandas (short variety shows), revistas (musical revues), musical comedies, variety acts such as the maromas (tightrope walkers), and carpas (tent shows), as well as the American circus, vaudeville, and cinema, also attracted working-class Mexican Americans.

During the heyday of the Mexican American stage in the Southwest, from about 1910 and the beginning of the Mexican Revolution, to about 1940, performers and theatrical impresarios promoted a broad repertory of theatrical genres with music as a product for commercial consumption and artistic edification. Musical theater provided a means through which local Mexican working-class audiences could construct and reinforce a positive sense of ethnic self-identification and enjoy up-to-date popular entertainment. In their operettas, musical comedies, musical revues, and plays on local themes, such as Los Angeles al dia (Los Angeles Up-to-Date, 1922), Los Angeles, la ciudad de los extras (Los Angeles, the City of [Hollywood] Extras, 1922), Los emigrados (The Immigrants, 1928), and El precio de Hollywood (The Price of Hollywood, 1933), Los Angeles-based composers and playwrights such as Ernesto González Jiménez, Adalberto Elias González, and Gabriel Navarro used the sharp tools of parody, sentimentality, national pride, and political satire—along with dance and catchy, orchestrally accompanied songs and choruses—to explore the human condition, and to highlight the local Mexican community's engagement with and distinction from "mainstream" American life. The Depression and the forced repatriation of Mexican nationals and Mexican Americans with US citizenship caused a decline in the Mexican stage in the Southwest by the mid-to-late 1930s. Mexican musical films and variety acts filled this gap in the popular entertainment world for Mexican Americans in the Southwest.

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youngsters would often watch the performances and hear about the theatrical activities in the homes of the American ethnic groups. The Spanish-speaking community, particularly in the Southwest, had a thriving theatrical tradition from the early 19th century onward. Mexican Americans in the Southwest were often exposed to performances of Spanish zarzuelas, operettas, and operas, which helped shape the cultural heritage of the region. Furthermore, contemporary operas written by Asian Americans draw heavily on traditional Chinese operas, retelling them in whole, partial aspects, or in spirit.

During the heyday of the Mexican American stage in the Southwest, from about 1910 to the beginning of the 20th century, Mexican Americans performed theatrical imitations of local and national musical theatre in their native language. These performances were often given in local theaters and served as a means of cultural expression and identity for the Mexican American community. The musical theater provided a way for local Mexican American audiences to connect with their cultural heritage and express their experiences through music and storytelling. The shows often featured music inspired by traditional Mexican folk songs and rhythms, and they included elements of dance and drama that were closely tied to the cultural customs and traditions of the Mexican American community.

The musical theater in the Southwest was particularly popular among working-class Mexican Americans, who found a means of entertainment and social interaction in the theatrical performances. The shows often dealt with themes of immigration, family, and community, and they provided a platform for Mexican American actors and actresses to showcase their talents.

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**Musical theater dance**

A general term used to signify dances performed in book musicals and revues presented on the legitimate stage but sometimes extended to include dances performed in musical films and television productions. The kinds of dances performed in Hollywood films and television musicals are not essentially different from those performed on a Broadway stage, although choreography created for a movable camera on a large sound stage or studio can be quite different from that meant to be seen on the proscenium stage of a legitimate theater.

Early in the 20th century, the waltz was the most popular dance form in American musical theater. English versions of Viennese operettas such as The Gypsy Baron (1886; music by Johann Strauss) and The Merry Widow (1907; music by Franz Lehár) established the waltz operetta as a perennial favorite of American theatergoers. Works such as Naughty Marietta (1910; music by Victor Herbert), Rose-Marie (1924; music by Rudolf Friml and Herbert Stothart), The Student Prince (1924; music by Sigmund Romberg), The Great Waltz (1934; music by Johann Strauss), Carousel (1945; music by Richard Rodgers), and A Little Night Music (1973; music by Stephen Sondheim) attest to the enduring appeal of the genre, not to mention the three productions of Rodgers and Hammerstein's television musical Cinderella (1957, 1965, 1997) and no fewer