

Broadway: Overture to Finale

Course Outline

Introductory Session: What is Broadway?

Chapter One: *Overtures and Opening Numbers*

The overture serves as a transition from the audience's day to day life into the world of the show. It should set the mood, introduce themes and generate excitement for what is to come.

The opening numbers must tell the audience what they are about to see. It might introduce characters, background situations or the overall theme of a show. Opening numbers can make or break a show.

Chapters Two & Three: *Exposition Songs, Production Numbers and Star Turns*

These numbers tell the audience about the characters' hopes and desires or can lay out the challenges that lay ahead in the story for the main characters. The first act will also often include large production numbers and can include comedy numbers and solos by the show's stars.

First Act Finales: The plot pieces have begun to fall into place and the conflicts have come to a head. The first act finale is often the emotional high point of the show and should send the audience into intermission wanting more.

Chapter Four: *Second Act Openings, Dances and Star Turns*

The audience has just taken a break and needs to be pulled back into the story of the show. A strong second act opening will put the audience on track for a rewarding second act, even if the content of the number is not essential to the plot.

In the Golden Age the second act often featured a "dream ballet" Broadway audiences want to see their stars shine once more and that opportunity often arises as the plot pieces fall into place in the second act.

Chapter Five: *11 O'clock Numbers and Finales*

In the Golden Age" of Broadway shows typically began at 8:30 PM and ran up to three hours. Often a number was needed late in the second act to give the audience an extra jolt of adrenalin to get them through to the finale. Sometimes these numbers had little to do with plot itself.

At the finale, all the plot pieces come together, all the conflicts are hopefully resolved, for better or worse, and the audience needs to be sent off feeling fulfilled. Reprises of earlier songs often bring all the plot pieces back together. Finales are often big affairs with the whole cast on stage but they can also be dramatic solo moments for the star.

Tom Powderly (BS, MPS) is a native New Yorker who has been regularly attending shows on Broadway, the West End and “on the road” for over 50 years. Hundreds of performances, books and cast albums have given him an educated layman’s perspective on this uniquely American art form.