

A Culture of Development:  
Supporting the Development of New Canadian Musicals Through Cultural Policy

**Abstract**

*With musical theatre becoming increasingly relevant in the international theatrical conversation, questions emerge regarding Canada's place in the global musical theatre industry and how best to support the development of original Canadian works. Through a comparison of current literature on the Canadian musical theatre scene and cultural policy regulations surrounding Canadian content, and an interview with Mitchell Marcus, an industry professional working in the development of new musicals in Canada, the paper argues for a three pronged policy approach including more specific funding opportunities, investment in specialized education programs and financial incentives for American producers as the most effective mechanism for supporting the growing Canadian musical theatre scene.*

Key Words: musical theatre, original works, content regulation, development pipeline, arts funding.

**Introduction**

Musical theatre has emerged as an internationally relevant genre within the global theatrical conversation (Savran, 2017). With musicals gaining in popularity internationally as well as locally (Ingaraham, 2007) questions arise surrounding how best to support the Canadian musical theatre industry. In the United States, the development of new musicals is supported by both the public and private sectors, and a culture of development fuels a new musical's multi-production journey from inception to the launch of a first-class production on Broadway (Moore, 2009; Nevin, 2004). Each year, dozens of original American musicals open on Broadway, and are subsequently licensed to an international audience and performed by theatre companies all over the world (International Broadway

Database, 2020; Concord Theatricals, 2020; Musical Theatre International, 2020). Canadian musicals, on the other hand, struggle to exit the development phase, or ever find a second production beyond their initial premiere (Marcus and Wong 2017; Dauncey et al, 2017). How can Canada establish a similar approach to that system that would allow for our original musicals to have similarly long and successful lifespans? This paper examines the current Canadian musical theatre industry with respects to the development of new original works of Canadian musical theatre in comparison with the developmental process for new works in the United States as a means of examining the gaps in the current Canadian musical theatre industry that render the development of new Canadian works challenging relative to the development of American works.]It also explores what kinds of governmental policies might be enacted that could support the development of a thriving scene for original Canadian musicals through a comparison of existing literature, and an original interview with a current Canadian musical theatre professional and producer of original Canadian musical theatre works.

## **Literature Review**

For the purposes of this research, the literature review covers both Canadian and American musical theatre development, as well as current trends in Canadian cultural policy surrounding content regulation.

Broadway theatre itself is becoming an increasingly globalized brand, with the idea of a Broadway musical no longer being equated to a purely American sensibility (Savran, 2017). Broadway's *The Lion King* became the highest internationally grossing musical in 2014, grossing more than *Avatar*, the highest grossing film at the time (Savran, 2017). As Broadway musicals enter the non-English speaking world, the term "musical" is adopted into other languages, and the musical theatre canon begins to have a significant impact on the international theatrical scene, much in the same way that German operettas (an original form of musical theatre) had a significant impact on theatrical thinkers

such as Brecht (Savran, 2017). In this way, musical theatre is becoming as significant to the international theatrical conversation as Ibsen or Chekov (Savran, 2017).

Musical theatre is gaining popularity in the Canadian theatre conversation. There has been a steady increase in Canadian “staged dramatic music”, with the most recent decade seeing a spike in the number of new works of “staged dramatic music” being created by Canadians (Ingaraham, 2007). In spite of this, new Canadian musicals struggle to make it beyond the premiere production due to the “premiere-itis” or desire of Canadian theatre companies to premiere new works rather than develop ones that are in mid-process (Marcus and Wong, 2017). Without having the ability to work through multiple productions, Canadian musicals aren’t able to properly develop and grow in front of an audience, causing them to feel pushed to a polished state too early in the development process which results in an unfinished show that feels as finalized (Marcus and Wong, 2017).

The challenge however is the significant cost of the development process. This includes numerous readings, public and private performances and revisions over the course of several years, something which most Canadian theatres are not currently able to afford on their already limited budgets (Brazier and Michailidis, 2017). The few developmental spaces that do exist, such as the Toronto Fringe Festival are treated by both the public and critics with similar levels of expectation as fully developed works, resulting in undeveloped works being deemed unworkable before they’ve gotten the chance to undergo revisions (Dauncey et al, 2017).

Another challenge is that Canadian audiences are not accustomed to a culture of development for two main reasons. First, they tend to favour material they are familiar with over new material (Brazier and Michailidis, 2017). Second, they expect material to be polished or ‘finished’ when they attend a production (Marcus and Wong, 2017). In order to support the development of Canadian musical theatre, industry professionals and academics agree that safe developmental spaces to mount multiple

productions between the premiere production and final iteration need to exist. In order for those spaces to exist, Canadian theatre needs to have access to increased funding, whether through public or private channels to fund the developmental runs of Canadian musicals that will allow them to grow into a final finished piece (Dauncey et al., 2017; Brazier and Michailidis, 2017; Marcus and Wong, 2017).

In comparison, in the United States this development system is common, with non-profit theatres often mounting pre-Broadway runs of productions to allow them to develop before their “First Class Productions” (Nevin, 2004). While historically these productions often occur in major cities outside of New York to allow for revisions based on audience response without the New York critics negatively reviewing the show and negatively impacting sales before it was finished, the emergence of the internet and online chat boards have destroyed that safety from critical eyes, making many mistakes made at out of town tryouts result in a negative impact once the show arrives in New York (Moore, 2009). Even workshop performances have gained enough popularity that they have significant press coverage, making them no longer a safe space to take risks with the writing and fail. (Moore, 2009). As a result, many musical theatre composers and writers in the United States are turning to university theatre programs as developmental labs, using multiple staged readings and smaller scale productions as an initial developmental step prior to a workshop or an out of town tryout (Moore, 2009). Regardless of the chosen developmental path, it is agreed by industry professionals that musicals need time to develop, through multiple productions in front of multiple audiences before they are able to reach their final form (Moore, 2009; Brazier and Michailidis, 2017; Marcus and Wong, 2017).

In the absence of discussions of regulation in the Canadian musical theatre industry, we turn to the CanCon regulations in the Canadian commercial music industry as an exemplar for how regulation of Canadian vs non-Canadian content can impact the prevalence of Canadian artists in both the local and global conversations.

Canadian Cultural Policy, according to the literature, places an emphasis on both the protection of Canadian content, and the promotion of Canadian artists on an international stage (Creative Canada, 2017). CanCon legislation was created with the intent of protecting Canadian talent from being overtaken by American and other cultural influences, as well as ensuring that Canadian talent is promoted both within Canada and on an international stage (Bannerman, 2020). In the commercial music world, the increase of CanCon regulations has allowed for a national identity to form surrounding Canadian music and for Canadian musicians to gain notoriety both within and outside of Canada's borders (Henderson, 2008). While there is still an implicit sense that success is defined by an artist's being successful in the American market, CanCon regulations have created opportunities for investment in infrastructure, studio spaces, and development of Canadian talent that has allowed a thriving Canadian music scene to emerge (Henderson, 2008). This music scene has reached the point where Canadian artists are successful not in spite of being Canadian, but because of it, and where the national origin of the music is no longer considered an incredibly relevant part of the discourse surrounding the artist, allowing Canadian artists to be successful in international markets (Henderson, 2008).

The literature determines that Canadian creative cultural policy emphasizes the importance of protecting Canadian artists from American cultural overflow as well as fostering the kind of international success Henderson (2008) references by promoting Canadian talent both to Canadians and beyond. As Henderson (2008) discusses, the CanCon regulations are significant in the Canadian music scene in accomplishing this, and the investment in Canadian talent and infrastructure as a result has fostered a thriving Canadian music scene. As Savran (2017) points out, the Broadway musical is becoming a decentralized brand, no longer inherently connected to American culture, but having a larger cultural impact on the international theatre conversation. This seems to align with the findings of Ingaraham (2007) suggesting an increase in the creation of staged dramatic music in Canada.

However, as Marcus and Wong (2017), Brazier and Michailidis (2017) and Dauncey et al. (2017) remark, Canadian musical theatre writers currently lack the infrastructure needed to develop their work enough to have it be competitive on an international stage in the way that the music scene described by Henderson is. A system mirroring the American system of university workshops, nonprofit out-of-town tryouts (a developmental run of a musical in a major city that isn't New York to allow for revisions to be made based on audience reception without having to have the show reviewed by New York theatre critics before it is fully developed) and workshopped developmental runs described by Moore (2009) and Nevin (2004) is required in order for Canadian musicals to achieve the level of success Henderson describes for Canadian music. However, as Marcus and Wong (2017) and Brazier and Michailidis (2017) remark, the funding does not currently exist in the Canadian theatre system to accomplish this. If the Canadian creative cultural policy goals extend to musical theatre works, a change in policy is required to elevate Canadian musicals to the level of success of the Canadian music scene.

This begs the question: What kind of policy change will be most effective in supporting the development of the Canadian musical theatre industry? While there are certainly suggestions including increased funding (Brazier and Michailidis, 2017), further investment in educational opportunities (Dauncey et al., 2017), and some kind of content regulation policy (Henderson, 2008), the literature has not come to a clear consensus on the pathways forward towards a healthy Canadian musical theatre scene from a policymaking perspective. It is this question that I brought forward in my original research interview.

### **Original Research (Interview)**

Mitchell Marcus is both the founder and the Artistic and Managing Director of Canada's largest not-for-profit musical theatre company: The Musical Stage Company (Musical Stage Company, 2020). As one of Canada's largest incubators for new musical theatre works (Musical Stage Company, 2020),

Marcus is well versed with the unique challenges surrounding the development of new musical theatre works in Canada, and a fantastic source for gaining further insight into pathways forwards for the industry from a policymaking stance. I had the pleasure of sitting down with him via Zoom on Monday November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020 at 12pm EST to discuss the Canadian musical theatre scene and what policymakers might be able to do to better support it. The interview lasted approximately 25 minutes and included open ended questions surrounding the strengths and challenges of the Canadian musical theatre scene, audience preferences and government support including policy and funding.

When asked “What, in your opinion is the biggest challenge facing the development of new musical theater works in Canada and why?” Marcus said that the largest challenge for the development of new Canadian musicals is the lack of a sufficient development pipeline to allow for new works to be financially worthwhile for artists to create there. There are several reasons for this. First federal granting programs do not differentiate between musicals and plays. This poses a significant challenge for writers and producers of new musicals in Canada, as musicals often take longer to write and involve more collaborators than plays, and frequently require more resources to produce. As a result, treating plays and musicals equally in the granting arena does not account for the additional costs associated with working on musicals rather than plays. This results in musical writers and producers being unable to access sufficient resources to create and produce original musical theatre works in the way that writers and producers of straight plays are under the same granting programs. This is particularly problematic as “in Canada, if a musical got one or two productions, you've had a successful Canadian musical, but that's not going to encourage anybody to keep writing musicals because there's just not enough financial incentive for the writers to have it be worth their time”.

Second, while musical theatre writing programs are starting to develop in Canada, there is currently nowhere in the country where artists can train to direct musicals, become musical directors or

learn the intricacies of the “broadway polish” as Marcus dubs it, a specific style of theatre-making that is characteristic of the Broadway musical. Without these educational opportunities, Canadian artists must either apprentice with working artists, or seek educational opportunities outside of Canada. The challenge then becomes that without sufficient work opportunities in musical theatre, let alone working on projects using the “Broadway Polish” style, the artists don’t have an opportunity to practice their craft, making it incredibly difficult for them to achieve mastery and turn out exemplary work.

Finally, Canadian audiences lack a mindset towards new works. The Toronto theatre market values “Broadway” shows that arrive with polish and accolades. There is cachet in saying that you saw a “Tony winning Broadway musical” according to Marcus. In order for there to be a thriving scene for the development of any new work, Canadian or not, there has to be a mindset towards a cachet of seeing work in development before it achieves success. American markets are accustomed to this practice, and brag about how they saw “the hottest new show” before it arrived on Broadway or won the Tony award. In order for there to be a developmental pipeline in Canada, Canadian audiences must grow accustomed to this mindset and begin to value developmental works as much as their American counterparts.

The pathway to this, according to Marcus, is providing incentives to create and development new works in Canada, regardless of their origin. It is not that there is something fundamentally different about the tastes of American audiences, or the quality of American works, but rather that the United States has a history of new works, and new musical theatre works in particular, that Canada does not. In other words “Broadway doesn't care where the musical came from. It's just looking for good work”, work that Canada, at present, is not equipped to provide.

In order to create this history, Marcus recommends a government incentive for American producers to choose Canada as an out-of-town tryout location for their new works similar to how the film industry offers financial incentives to film producers to shoot in Canada using cash incentives and

tax credits. Marcus believes that incentivizing American producers to present new works in Canada will both assist in shifting audience mindsets, as Toronto would become a place where audiences could see Broadway works before they premiered, and offer the opportunity for American producers to see and potentially invest in Canadian works while being in Canada for a developmental run. This will increase the likelihood of further productions beyond what the Canadian market is currently able to provide, which would incentivize Canadian producers to invest money in smaller Canadian developmental projects as they would have the potential to be picked up for larger and more profitable runs.

While this policy shift would not necessarily immediately increase the amount of new Canadian works being produced in Canada, Marcus believes that bringing the American market into Canada is crucial, as it would allow for audiences to develop interest in new works, and for Canadian artists to have more work opportunities working with Broadway level budgets and styles, which would in turn create the potential for both the audience and talent pools needed for Canada to begin to build a musical theatre development system with the potential to create works with international potential. Once Canada has become a “hub for new musicals”, audiences will “understand why new is exciting” which opens the door to the “culture [...] and [the] pipelines to start shifting we like new musicals to [...] now let’s do our own”.

Marcus’s observations align with current research that highlights that the greatest issue plaguing the development of new Canadian musicals is a lack of infrastructure and funding. Additional investment into education and training programs is needed in order to support infrastructure development although the literature is more focused on education programs for musical theatre writers, and Marcus focuses more on directors, musical directors and technicians. Marcus contradicts the literature that supports content regulations as the strongest way of combatting American invasions into Canadian markets arguing that, in the case of the Canadian theatre scene, most Canadian theatre

companies already produce a majority of Canadian work as granting programs often include the support of Canadian works as an eligibility criteria. Imposing content regulations, according to Marcus, would not have much, effect on Canadian musical theatre development, suggesting that Henderson's observations about the Canadian music industry are less applicable to the musical theatre industry than originally hypothesized.

## **Conclusion**

Taking both the literature, and Marcus's observations into account, it would seem that the clearest path forwards towards developing policy to support the development of new Canadian musicals would a three-pronged approach. First, government granting programs ought to recognize the difference between the resource needs of musicals versus plays, either by determining funding maximums relative to the number of writers on a project, overall developmental budgetary requirements, or by creating musical theatre specific granting avenues that are designed towards the specific financial needs of musical theatre productions. Second, the government ought to invest in the inclusion of courses and training programs that specialize in musical theatre writing, direction, music direction, and technical skills to allow for Canadian talent to have access to the necessary training and skills to produce "Broadway Polish" style work within domestic borders. Last, government incentives for commercial musical theatre producers to use Canadian cities for developmental runs of new work ought to be implemented to begin the audience mindset shift that Marcus describes, and create opportunities for Canadian talent to connect and collaborate with established talent in the US. These three efforts, working in tandem, would allow Canada the funding, talent and audiences required to develop an infrastructure, or as Marcus calls it, a pipeline, that would allow for the development of new Canadian musicals that would have a greater chance of being produced on Broadway, and seeing longer production histories and licensing options.

As the musical theatre industry becomes an increasingly important part of the international musical theatre conversation, Canadian arts policy advocates and policymakers need to consider how they can best support the development of new Canadian musicals so that we might be able to one day see the “Canadian Invasion” (Marcus, 2020) of musicals on Broadway.

## Works Cited

"The Musical Stage Company." The Musical Stage Company. September 29, 2020. Accessed November 29, 2020. <https://musicalstagecompany.com/>.

Bannerman, Sara. "Broadcasting Regulation." In *Canadian Communication Policy & Law*. Canadian Scholars. Toronto, Canada. October, 2020. Pg. 189-225.

Brazier, Adam, and Tracy Michailidis. "In Development: The Joys and Challenges of Fostering New Musicals." *Canadian Theatre Review 171* (2017): 8-13. [muse.jhu.edu/article/669061](http://muse.jhu.edu/article/669061).

Concord Theatricals. Accessed October 19, 2020. <https://www.concordtheatricals.com/>. *Creative Canada Policy Framework*. Report. Ottawa, ON: Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, 2017.

Dauncey, Colleen, Anika Johnson, Britta Johnson, and Barb Johnston. "Good Pain and Bad Pain: Talking About Writing Musicals (in Canada)." *Canadian Theatre Review 171* (2017): 35-41. [muse.jhu.edu/article/669066](http://muse.jhu.edu/article/669066).

Henderson, Scott. "Canadian Content Regulations and the Formation of a National Scene." *Popular Music 27*, no. 2 (2008): 307-15. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40212382>.

Ingraham, Mary I. "Something to Sing about: A Preliminary List of Canadian Staged Dramatic Music since 1867." *Intersections 28*, no. 1 (2007): 14-77. <http://myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F1361717%3Faccountid%3D14771>.

League, The Broadway. "IBDB.com." *IBDB*. Accessed October 19, 2020. <https://www.ibdb.com/>.

Marcus, Mitchell and Kevin Wong. "Developing New Musicals & Supporting New Writers." *Canadian Theatre Review* 171 (2017): 14-21. <https://ctr-utpjournals-press.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/doi/10.3138/ctr.171.003>

Mitchell Marcus (Founder and Artistic Managing Director of Musicals Stage Co) in discussion with the author, November 2020. Transcript attached as appendix.

Moore, Tracey. "The out-of-town tryout goes back to school", *Studies in Musical Theatre* 3, no. 3 (December 2009): 303-309. <https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/intellect/smt/2009/00000003/00000003/art00008>

Music Theatre International. Accessed October 19, 2020. <http://www.mtishows.com/>.

Nevin, Douglas M. "No Business Like Show Business: Copyright Law, the Theatre Industry, and the Dilemma of Rewarding Collaboration," *Emory Law Journal* 53, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 1533-1570. <https://heinonline-org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/emlj53&div=48&id=&page=&collection=journals>

Savran, David. "Broadway as a Global Brand". *Journal of Contemporary Drama in English* (2017). Vol 5, Issue 1. pg 1-9.

## APPENDIX A: Interview Transcript

Colette Richardson ([00:01](#)):

Um, fantastic. And then we'll just get started. Perfect. Awesome. Um, so my first question is what, in your opinion is the biggest challenge facing the development of new musical theater works in Canada and why?

Mitchell Marcus ([00:12](#)):

Great. And remind me, this is this specifically, this is not specifically pandemic relevant, right?

Colette Richardson ([00:17](#)):

Just in general. I'm I'm trying to sort of see what kind of policy could be enacted that could help strengthen the development of new Canadian musicals.

Mitchell Marcus ([00:28](#)):

Gotcha. Okay. So what do I think is the biggest challenge facing Canadian musicals? So, um, I think that the main challenge is that we don't have a pipeline. So the challenge with musicals is that they take a really, really long time to write. And they're really so well, and they're really expensive to do, but the main thing on that takes a lot, Oh, sorry. It takes her a long time to write. And there are multiple writers who are writing them. So if you imagine being like Hannah Moscovitch writing for the Tarragon, it's possible that it could be worth her while to write a show for one production. Because ultimately if the Tarragon gives her like, you know, a commission and a royalty and everything like that, she's not sharing it with anybody. It's entirely her royalty. They have a big enough audience that like, and it only

took her probably a year to write the play. So she gets like a, if she makes like, you know, \$30,000, like it's not great money, but that might be sufficient for her to, um, write the play.

For a musical. If the if we made the same \$30,000, number one, it's going to get split between three writers. And it probably took them like five years to do so. Suddenly each writer got like \$10,000 for five years of work. It's terrible. So musicals only make sense once there's lots and lots of productions. And that's the model of the American musical is when you get to Broadway, you have such a huge volume of people coming, high ticket prices, long run, that the writers recoup, and when a show goes to licensing and every high school in the country is doing Guys and Dolls, that's also volume and then the writers recoup. So I think the biggest problem is like in Canada, if a musical got one or two productions, you've had a successful Canadian musical, but that's not going to encourage anybody to keep writing musicals because there's just not enough financial incentive for the writers to have it be worth their time.

Colette Richardson ([02:12](#)):

Interesting. Very cool. Thank you. Um, and what support, um, currently exists from government granting councils, and do you feel that is sufficient or insufficient to properly support the development of musical theater in Canada?

Mitchell Marcus ([02:28](#)):

So there kind of isn't any. There's nothing that's musical theater specific. Um, the government granting agencies have lots of programs for writers, and there's no reason that a musical theater writer is ineligible to apply. So there are usually, there's like, to sort of simplify it there's usually two levels of grants that writers can apply for. One is kind of like research and exploration when they're in the very early phases of writing something, and those might range from like a thousand dollars to five, maybe 10, and then there's usually some funding for when you're a bit further along in the development of a piece. I

mean, maybe that goes up to 15. So similarly, because it's not musical theater specific, those are not great fees when you start sharing it. So you can't, one musical would have to apply for one of those grants and they'd have to share the fees amongst the writers and a musical doesn't develop in the way, same way as a play. So it's, it's one thing to say a playwright is interested in exploring an idea. We'll give them \$5,000, but in a musical, like until you can hear the music and sometimes hear other instruments or hear whatever, like it's not all of the funding bodies that are set up for single writers to go into a room at a typewriter and create something. And it's just not how musicals work. So it, it, it's not that the musical theater writers are ineligible from this funding. It's just that the funding isn't really conducive to giving them equality in terms of what the playwrights are getting for their plays. So there's a huge gaps in terms of programs specifically for musicals.

Colette Richardson ([03:59](#)):

So what do you feel that the government could do to better support the development of new Canadian musicals?

Mitchell Marcus ([04:06](#)):

First of all, it could recognize like the equity there that like, if you're going to give one playwright \$5,000 in their grant and it should be, that should be the maximum you can ask for per writer. So you should be able to write the musical theatre application and ask for \$15,000. So at least each writer can get that. The rest of it, that's the easy part. The rest of it's harder. Like if they had all the money in the world, it would be great if they had a musical theater specific granting stream. And it would be great if they recognize that it's just more expensive.

Cause even if you're a producer, you know, you can get \$10,000, I'm making up numbers a little bit, but you can get \$10,000 from the Ontario arts council for a workshop, like for a play. That's a really good

workshop for a musical, it's not enough. You need more time, you need more people, there's more bodies in the room, there's the whole musical component. Like you can't just do a table read of a new musical. Your people have to learn, you have to spend three days to get to a table read. So everything takes longer. So ideally there would be adjustments to recognize that, just to create that kind of parody, that to do a one-week workshop for play and a one week workshop for a musical, you have to have different amounts of money flowing out.

So it's not going to happen because they don't have any money, but if they did have money and they were interested in investing in musicals, they'd have to look at all their existing granting programs and rethink the assessment criteria and the amount of money you can get when it's a musical versus a non musical project.

Colette Richardson ([05:33](#)):

Awesome. Um, do you think that a regulation of producing companies similar to sort of, how Can Con regulates Canadian broadcasters would be helpful or harmful in ensuring more Canadian musicals?

Mitchell Marcus ([05:47](#)):

Uh, I don't actually think it would make any difference.

Colette Richardson ([05:50](#)):

Oh, interesting.

Mitchell Marcus ([05:55](#)):

Um, there isn't like a quota per se, but there is a sort of unwritten, like it is, it is already an assessment criteria from all three levels of government for funding, um, just about like, what's your commitment to

Canadian theatre, but it isn't musical specific. So what you will usually find, if you look at most regional theaters is the musical is serving a role of funding the rest of it. So they they're doing a ton of Canadian theatre, but they're they're one or two or three person plays. And then they do Mamma Mia and that helps to anchor their subscription to afford those one to two to 3 person plays. So the reality is even if the government said 50% of your season needs to be Canadian, most companies are already doing that and they would go. "Well, we're already doing it. We're not making it the musical because that's our whole operating model."

So it wouldn't make any enormous difference if they, if they somehow mandated like Stratford, Shaw, and Mirvish to do that, then it could make a difference, but they would, they they'd close. Like Stratford's model is based on, they need to sell millions of dollars to The Music Man so people will go see Pericles. And same thing, The Shaw Festival needs some millions of dollars to Gypsy so that people will go to whatever. Um, uh, so I don't think it would happen. And then Mirvish is a for-profit company, so it can really do whatever it wants.

So I don't think any kind of Cancon mandate would ch- would move the needle because I think most of the companies that applies to are already doing that ratio, like a lot of Canadian work. It's just that, because I get similarly because musicals are so expensive and they have to deliver a template, like if Tarragon does a musical, they almost can't afford the rest of their season. Like they can afford a 10 play season because they're hiring across the whole season, probably only like double, maybe even less than double what we have to hire on one project.

Colette Richardson ([07:42](#)):

Right.

Mitchell Marcus ([07:43](#)):

Um, so it's tricky. The system just isn't, we don't have, it's back to where I said the biggest challenge. We don't have a system where things can be commercialized, where there's commercial producers adding money, where things can transfer to a bigger venue. Like there's no incentive. If you can do a new Canadian play and your audience will be happy and you could do it on \$200,000, what is your incentive to spend 2 million? And if you have the same size theater and it's the same ticket prices and it's part of the same subscription, it just doesn't really make sense. Um, so I think that's the biggest barrier is like, there's no incentive the incentive isn't government, like, there's no incentive to prioritize musicals, to be anything other than like a cash cow to help the rest of what you want to do. Right.

Colette Richardson (14:18)

Um, and people are still producing musicals. Um, but they tend to be non-Canadian ones. Do you think audiences are drawn more towards non-Canadian musicals or do you think that has anything to do with anything?

Mitchell Marcus (14:32)

So I think the only reason that that is happening is because of the financial situation. Like I think they're, they're doing those non musicals to anchor their subscription. Like people will, if, if people see Mamma Mia on the subscription, they will also buy something they've never heard of. If they see a whole season of things they've never heard of, it's harder to get them to buy the subscription. So it's the, it's the same as Christmas Carol. Like it's the same reason that most, a lot of regional theaters do Christmas Carol. Musical and Christmas Carol get shoved into the like slot of shows. People know. Um, I think that it would do, I, I don't think the audience, you know, an audience is only aware of what they're aware of. So

genuinely an audience wants to see Mamma Mia. Like they just do, it's really popular and at Stratford like that audience wants to see Guys and Dolls.

With new work you don't know what you're going to see until you've seen it. So you have to build a culture of an audience being excited about new work fundamentally. It's a real, real shift in perspective that we don't have a history of. And again, there's no big theaters doing it. Like when you think about why, when you go to New York, why might somebody go see? Well, I was going to say Moulin Rouge, but that's the name of the movie. Why might somebody go see Hadestown instead of, um, Wicked? Probably because word of mouth has spread that it's really good, probably because the media there is like really focused on, you know, you want us to be the next hottest thing, there's the Tony awards, and so like... Wicked's not going to win the Tony Award. You can't come home and say, I saw this, I saw the hottest new musical. Like it's been there for 20 years. So there's incentive. So here, if I am in theater, like if I'm at Theatre Calgary, I'd have to build a culture where the audience understands that because it's not going to be as good. It's going to be messy, the new musical. It's going to need lots of development.

So like La Jolla Playhouse does this very well, but they've done years and years and years and years of shows happening there before Broadway and the audience...Like I w- I was there last year and we saw Diana, which is a terrible musical. The people around me loved it, but they were so generous. Like it was just an a- it was terrible, but the audience was so... They can hang their hat on, like we saw Jersey Boys before it went to Broadway. We saw, you know, I don't know what the last one was Escape to Margaritaville. We saw Diana, like, there's so many musicals that have gone through La Jolla to Broadway that they're conditioned to realize that it's not that they're seeing a perfectly, like its the opposite mindset of Toronto. Toronto is the mindset of, "Oh, we get to go see a Broadway show. And so we want to see a show that has won Tonys", that, you know, whatever. Their mindset is we're going to go see a show that's going to go to Broadway.

And so *Come From Away* was the first crack open that started to do that. And people were so proud to have seen *Come From Away*. But unless you start doing that regularly and you have that, back to my first point of the biggest challenge, if you don't have the pipeline to get there, and people are just seeing one-off musicals that aren't really finished and need more work and they never hear from them again, they're very quickly going to go back to *Mamma Mia* because it's just more of a sure thing. And so you've got to create a sure thing out of new work. You have to be, you have to create a Broadway buzz around that you are seeing it first. And we just don't because there's no pipeline, people can't justifiably pitch that and expect audiences to be on board. So it's very challenging, very tricky.

Colette Richardson ([12:09](#)):

Do you think that there's any kind of policy shift that might begin to create that kind of a pipeline?

Mitchell Marcus ([12:15](#)):

I think that you need you, and I think that it would be, um, it might be something along the lines of what, I don't know what this would look like, so I'm not familiar enough with it, but maybe something along the lines of what happens to the film companies. Like where there's incentive to film in Canada. We need a way, this was, it was happening 40, 30 years ago with Live Ent, right, like Garth was bringing up, you know, *Ragtime*: you could see it here before Broadway. *Showboat*: you could see it here before Broadway. Like this was happening regularly. *Fosse*: you could see it here before Broadway. So if there could be some incentive, because it's going to happen at the big level, like it's going to be like, nobody's going to come and bring their pre Broadway show to the Berkeley Street Theater necessarily. It's going to be more at a Mirvish scale and Mirvish can't afford to lose the money on a not sure bet.

So if there was some incentive for the American producers, to start coming to Toronto for the tryout, big and small, so that the audience then starts to like, cause then it's all about relationship building. You

know, if we've, if, if the American producers are constantly in Toronto, it's also easier to invite them to come and see a new Canadian musical that we have going on. Like then I have a case to make for why Musical Stage might have a path to Broadway. Then Mirvish, maybe will put something in their season and that's a new, a new...

Now, again, this isn't necessarily new Canadian. This is just a new musical. But I think I we've got to hit that first. Like first we've got to be a hub for new musicals, so people understand, Canadian, American otherwise. So people start to understand why new is exciting. And then I think you've started to open the culture and the possibility and the pipelines to start shifting "We like new musicals" to being, "We like new now let's do our own", you know,

Colette Richardson ([13:57](#)):

Interesting.

Mitchell Marcus ([13:59](#)):

So for me, that would be the policy changes, whether it's a tax incentive or a financial incentive, something that gets people to look to Toronto again, instead of Boston, Chicago, like La Jolla, like how do we compete with La Jolla? What is it that they have that we don't? Um, so we, I think we'd have to start building that possibility.

Colette Richardson ([14:18](#)):

Absolutely. Um, so there was an argument that some people make that musical theater is inherently an American art form, and that's why Americans tend to do better with it. Um, so what place do you think Canadian musicals have in the international musical theater conversation?

Mitchell Marcus ([14:32](#)):

I mean, I don't, you know, I think that's, I don't agree with that argument. Like it's, um, what's true in that argument is musical theater has been in the American. It is, it has been an American art form. It is, it is The American art form. And they've just got a lot more time and more money on us. Like they've had a hundred years of investing in that art form where we haven't. So it's not surprising that more often than not a great new musical is going to come out of the US and then the UK has, also had a longer history than us. So we're just behind, but there's nothing fundamentally... What's kind of great is America, Americans, like I don't care where the musical came from. Broadway doesn't care where the musical came from. It's just looking for good work. Um, everybody was equally as happy with Come From Away as they were with Wicked, as they were equally as happy with Les Mis as they were with Ragtime. It kind of doesn't matter.

So there's nothing about the art form that is inherently American. It's not like American stories sell better. It just, most of the stories are coming out of the US and so most of them have a US setting, but time and again, the, the, you know, the whole British musical phenomenon, and then things like Come From Away have really proven that it's just not true. You just need to have a good story. And, you know, you gotta have a good piece.

I don't think Come From Away could have been Come From Away if it hadn't gone to the U S at some point, because this is back to again, we don't have the pipeline. So the elevation of production quality, the elevation of orchestration, the, it, it has a Broadway Polish that we don't know how to do here yet, but we could know how to do here. We could know in the future. And we could also just work together. Like it is ultimately a great Canadian, Canadian and American story, but it's through the lens of two Canadian artists. And so, yeah, I don't think there's any, we, if we can, if we can have great quality stories, there's, we could have, you know, the Canadian invasion on Broadway and the way that there

has been the American one. There's very little, we need, except people to listen to those stories, Believe they're good, and then invest the money in them. Yeah. I don't see any other obstacle.

Colette Richardson ([16:43](#)):

So you talk about us, um, not knowing how to do the Broadway Polish yet. Do you think there's sufficient education opportunities and development opportunities for Canadian musical theater writers at the moment?

Mitchell Marcus ([16:53](#)):

No. I mean, it's getting better, like 10 years ago there was absolutely nothing. Now there, now there's at least some stuff, but, um, it's not some of, it's not really about the writers. Like some of it is, but there, you know, you can't, there's nowhere in this country, you could go to do a course or a course or training on directing musicals. It doesn't exist. There's no one in the country to learn what a music director does, except by apprenticing with existing music directors and apprenticing with existing directors. And then again, you're going to learn how to do the craft that you're exposed to. So if you are exposed to doing theater with a \$3 set budget in a 200 seat theater, and that's how you learned your directing chops, that's what you know.

So it's, it's all connected. If you don't have the opportunity to work on that Broadway scale to understand, like, how do you make lighting cues pop at the end of numbers to really go home in that way, if you don't have the chance to work with a lighting budget of that scale, you're never going to get the chance. So Stratford and Shaw again might be the closest. Um, but there aren't really formal programs for people to learn. And then even after you mentor, you could sit in a room with Donna Fiore and see how she does it, but at some point you have to do it yourself.

Colette Richardson ([18:09](#)):

Right.

Mitchell Marcus ([18:10](#)):

Theaters here, aren't producing those kind of musicals. You never get the chance to show your hand. You never get the chance... So that's just true of everybody. I think the Broadway brand, it's about money and it's about a certain style and I'm not even sure it's the best style, but it is the style that is warranting thousands of people a night to fill theaters at \$200 a ticket, which is the financial model which makes us all work. So I don't think we have any training. I think there would need to be some kind of, and it probably would have to be a cross border training program for Canadian artists to get exposure and get to work on and then come back. But if there's nothing for them to come back to, like it all has to move together. We have to have the shows, the money, the theaters, the talent, and that all kind of has to happen together. Or we have to go the Come From Away route where we go, we're really good at telling stories, we're going to work on the story.

Colette Richardson ([19:00](#)):

Right.

Mitchell Marcus ([19:01](#)):

And then we're going to get people excited about it in places that have the money and the Polish and everything. And that's, that's the path Come From Away took. That's the path we've been exploring for things like Life After, that's the path Ride The Cyclone took. Like that's just almost proving easier because of how many things would have to change here in order for the Canada to have the entirety of the pipeline.

Colette Richardson ([19:21](#)):

Right. Um, what do you think makes musical Canadian?

Mitchell Marcus ([19:26](#)):

For me, it just means the writer. Like, I think, I think the writer, a writer is Canadian and then I think it's Canadian and I don't think it means it has to be about, you know, uh, the Vancouver farming crisis of whatever year. Like, you know, I think a lot of... It could be set here or not. Um, when I think of my very few of my favorite musicals really have a sense of place necessarily. Like, uh, I mean, Hamilton is a very, very much a musical with a sense of place, but other ones, you know, I think about like Hadestown is a Greek myth that takes place anywhere. Fun Home does take place in Pennsylvania, but it doesn't have that's...that is where the true, the story of a true, it's not about Pennsylvania at all. You know, Dear Evan Hansen takes place somewhere. I don't know where, but it could potentially be anywhere.

So I think we're seeing the stories that matter now, are universal stories about humanity and sure, if one feels they want to have it set in Toronto or they want it set wherever, like but it doesn't really matter, I think we're telling human stories and they will, they will naturally be told through a Canadian lens if it is Canadian writers. But I think that's what makes them Canadian is, you know, they are not necessarily being about Canada, but they are...

You know, what's Canadian music? Like being Canadian music is Leonard Cohen, Joni Mitchell, Neil Young. But even when Joni Mitchell was singing about California, I think that's Canadian, you know, that's great, California is a great Canadian song. So I think it's just about who's who's, um, who's lens and, and that they came from this culture, they came from this, you know, with these traditions. And I think the writing will reflect that.

Colette Richardson ([21:05](#)):

Absolutely. And what do you think is the greatest strength of the current Canadian musical theater scene?

Mitchell Marcus ([21:09](#)):

I think I'm going to, so funnily it's the same answer as to what the greatest weakness is. So the greatest strength of the Canadian musical theater scene is that we have no infrastructure. And so the cause the, cause the biggest weakness of the American musical theater is that it starts, it's very formulaic. So there are, there are writing programs and people are like, this is how you write a musical. And this is an AABA song and this is where it has to rhyme this way. And it has to, you need an, I want song at this moment and you need your love song here. Like you can read... Because it's their art form there are like textbooks that are like, this is how you write a musical. And inevitably, when you read American new musicals, most of them are terrible and they sound like musicals. You've already seen the ones that breakthrough kind of were original in some sort of way. And sometimes they still followed the rules, but usually there's like just this original voice to them. And I think we're freed from all of that.

So Canadian musical theater writers, because they haven't studied the rules. Like the unfortunate thing is there's no system to put them through, but because there's no system to put them through. They they're just like, screw it. This is what I want to write about. And you get like, *Come From Away* does not work based on the standards of American musical theater. There's no precedent for it. *A Chorus Line* is the closest thing to *Come From Away* in terms of structure, even then. It's not exactly that.

Um, I don't think that musical would have ever been written in the U S and I don't think it could have been written without being like pretty awful because they would've gotten trapped in some of the things that they've been told forever and ever, and ever, and David and Irene just went, "Well this is the story.

This is how it needs to be told. Like, we're just gonna do it. Like, it doesn't matter that there's not a character we're following. It doesn't matter that there's no, I want song. It doesn't matter. Like we're just gonna go step by step and write the piece we want to write." And so I think the originality of our voice and being freed from preconceptions and being able to just create what we want to create. Um, I think that's our great strength.

Colette Richardson ([22:59](#)):

Absolutely. Well, that's all the questions I have. Thank you so much. I really, really appreciate your time.

## **APPENDIX B – Interview Questions**

1. What, in your opinion, is the biggest challenge facing the development of new musical theatre works in Canada and why?
2. What support exists from government granting councils for the development of new Canadian musicals? Is that support sufficient or insufficient in your opinion to properly support the development of a musical theatre scene in Canada?
3. What is the benefit of having new Canadian musicals?
4. Do you think regulation of Canadian theatre companies similar to how CanCon regulates Canadian broadcasters would be helpful or harmful in ensuring the development of Canadian musical theatre?
5. In your opinion, what actions could the government take to better support the development of new musicals in Canada?
6. There is an argument that musical theatre is an inherently American art form – do you think Canadian musicals have a place in the international musical theatre conversation? To what extent?
7. What makes a musical Canadian?
8. Do you think there are sufficient education opportunities for Canadian musical theatre writers in Canada?
9. Do you think Canadian audiences are drawn towards Canadian musicals? Why or why not?
10. What is the greatest strength of Canada's current musical theatre scene?

## **APPENDIX C – Interview Waiver**

As part of my VPAC15 course: Cultural Policy, I have been learning how to understand why cultural policy has been produced and to analyze how cultural policy is developed and assessed. In a draft essay, I have conducted an analysis of the development process of Canadian musical theatre, and whether it can benefit from content regulations similar to the CanCon regulations for broadcasting through industry and scholarly reports to identify the key elements required to produce successful and measurable cultural policy outcomes. I am now interested in interviewing someone in the field to compare my findings with real-life experiences in the field.

I have developed a short list of questions and invite you to participate in a short (15-30 minute) interview about your experience in the field. The information I collect will not be identified by name unless you explicitly consent to using your name. The information will only be used for course discussions and in my individual essay. I will compare and combine my results with my previous research and present my findings in-class or on a Quercus discussion forum. I will then incorporate my final version of my results in my own individual essay about the development of Canadian musical theatre and what cultural policy might be the most efficient in supporting it.

If you have any concerns about the project or your rights as a participant, please feel free to contact my course instructor, Dr. MaryElizabeth Luka (maryelizabeth.luka@utoronto.ca), and/or the Research Oversight and Compliance Office – Human Research Ethics Program at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

It will take about 15-30 minutes to go through the questions with me. We will have a phone or online conversation. I may record the conversation, only so that I can refer to it for accuracy afterwards. All the information gathered will be kept in confidence and destroyed at the end of the course (December 2020). There should be no foreseeable risks, harms or inconveniences to you, but you may find that you discover something valuable about your own likes and dislikes. Your participation is voluntary; i.e. you can decline to participate, or withdraw at any time, or decline to answer any question or participate in any part of the discussion, all without negative consequences. There is no compensation for participation. Once you have answered the questions, I will anonymize your responses (unless you consent to your real name being used).

The University of Toronto research ethics office may have confidential access to the data collected to help ensure participant protection procedures are followed in this study.

Please select all of the relevant options below:

I consent to participating in an interview.

I consent to the conversation being recorded for reference and accuracy.

I consent to being identified by name as well as type of position.

I would like to receive a copy of your paper to confirm factual information and quotations.

By signing below, I understand the I have not waived my legal rights in event of harm.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Mitchell M. Jones", written over a horizontal line.

Interviewee signature

Date:

November 23, 2020

Student researcher signature

Date:

---

Supervisor signature (Dr. MaryElizabeth Luka)

Date:

APPENDIX D - TCPS-2 CORE tutorial certificate

PANEL ON  
RESEARCH ETHICS

*Navigating the ethics of human research*

TCPS 2: CORE



## *Certificate of Completion*

*This document certifies that*

**Colette Richardson**

*has completed the Tri-Council Policy Statement:  
Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans  
Course on Research Ethics (TCPS 2: CORE)*

Date of Issue: **29 November, 2020**