

FROM BROADWAY TO COMMUNITY,
THE JOB OF A MUSIC DIRECTOR FOR MUSICAL THEATRE.

By

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From Community to Broadway, the Job of a Music Director for Musical Theater

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What in the world do music directors do? Despite musical theater being a billion dollar industry, the backbone of these productions, the music director, is often unknown and even less so understood within the theatre industry. In this study I interviewed nineteen music directors from across the professional and educational spectrum in search of crystallizing a common set of best practices that can be utilized by new musical directors, but more importantly, can be used by non-music directors in the industry to improve their working relationships with music directors, in order to create more musical theater in meaningful and creative ways.

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I. INTRODUCTION

What does every music director wish actors and directors understood about their role in a musical theatre production? There is a mystique around music directors that eludes professionals and amateurs alike in the industry, including music directors themselves upon embarking on this career path. To start, let us define the scope we are exploring in regard to music directors and musical direction. For the purposes of this paper, when referring to music directors, I am referring to the professionals who guide the music learning, technique, and aesthetic choices within a theatrical piece, those responsible for the totality of the music product within a stage musical. Particularly, my interest is in regional, educational, and community theater, informed by best practices already present in Broadway musical theater productions. According to prominent Broadway music director Joseph Church¹, Music directors are “like the captains of the ship, you're the pilot ... and the stage manager is the captain... [people] don't understand how big that ship is and how easily it can go off course”. If a music director does not understand their role as that captain, the importance of steering the show’s course, then the quality of musical theater productions suffer. This work may reference, or have similarities to practices and expectations within Opera or instrumental ensembles such as symphony orchestras, however, it is intended to share the expertise and inform the work of professionals within musical theater specifically.

In this work I will be taking information from a series of interviews, conducted in the summer and fall of 2021. Using that collective expertise, coupled with my own experiences, I am seeking to distill best practices, key skills necessary for music direction, and to

¹ “Joseph Church (born November 25, 1957) is an American music director, composer, pianist, arranger, orchestrator, and author. He is best known for his music direction of the musicals *The Who's Tommy* and *The Lion King on Broadway*” (Joseph Church).

recommendations to industry professionals for how to better support this aspect of theater making.

This attempt to identify and codify the role of music direction is extremely important. Musical theater is a billion dollar industry and the professionals in charge of the music product within the production are a sizable professional group all on their own. This is in addition to the importance of their role in keeping the show on course, “steering the ship” so to speak, as was quoted above. Stage directors have a clear path to directorship with many training programs and an abundance of resources for their practice. Choreographers also have a clear path to choreographing a show, with a number of iconic and historic practitioners to learn techniques from and study. However, music directors do not have the same resources or educational opportunities. In these interviews with music directors from across the country and one from the UK, I am seeking to find a clearer path for music directors in order to have more consistent and quality musical theater work.

Thesis Overview

First we will review the available literature and better lay the groundwork for why this study and thesis work is needed in the scholarly world of music and theater education. The next section will outline how this research was conducted, the demographics of those interviewed, how data was managed, and what themes began to emerge throughout the course of this interview process. The final section will attempt to crystalize the most important information found in these interviews into a set of observations and best practices. This summation is aimed at discovering what we can learn from this information and how we can create better working environments to expand our creativity in every market musical theater inhabits, but primarily my

focus is on how we can improve regional, community, and educational theater spaces with this information.

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Author Background

I come to this work as one of those music directors who was thrown into a show with minimal knowledge of what a music director's job actually entailed, particularly in a professional setting. I personally remember Googling, "What do music directors do?" and coming up relatively empty handed. So, I channeled everything I had learned from teaching, directing, running choirs, playing in high school band, performing on stage, playing piano, and singing in choirs myself, and gave my first professional music director job a shot. During my interviews with other music directors, I quickly discovered that my experience was not unique. Many of us have found ourselves in these jobs and had to use our past experiences to make an attempt at success. Nearly every participant interviewed shared a similar experience, no matter if they went on to be in Broadway pits or stayed in community theater, it is a career most people appear to fall into rather than particularly aspiring to achieve.

In my case, I was fairly lucky to have had years of piano training, conducting lessons, and the opportunity to learn a variety of instruments from strings to woodwinds among numerous other experiences from my youth and higher education. Not all professionals who find themselves in the position of music director have these skills walking in the room, and because of the lack of resources and guidance available to music directors, they do not realize their shortcomings until it is too late, or worse case scenario, they never realize their weaknesses and continue to produce subpar musical theater experiences for audiences around the country. Without proper training or a more robust pool of resources and best practices for music directors

to learn from, performers and theater companies are missing out on the best performances possible and potentially losing revenue, audience members, or even talent because of a music director who does not know what they are doing, resulting in low quality work, or possibly, a toxic working environment.

This research is personally important to me as someone working in regional, community and educational theater. I have spent the last ten years learning, and discovering this career, having music directed a wide range of theatrical works all the way from *Annie*² to original devised³ musicals. In my work as a music director, I have faced unique challenges being a female presenting individual, I also have spent a great deal of time working to find ways of dismantling the structures that keep men, particularly white men, at the top of these production team ladders. I also acknowledge that as a white woman, I have access to privilege that has certainly enabled me to take up space and have a voice where a person of color, let alone another woman, likely would not have the same opportunity. As part of my work and as an answer to the disparities present in musical theater storytelling, I started a new musical festival with the expressed mission of lifting up untold stories and authors from underrepresented identities. In production of selected pieces I am actively aware of who is directing and music directing and every year working to make the process both more educational and equitable. The themes and ideas that have crystallized as a result of this research will directly impact future operations for that festival as well as my music director work moving forward.

² “Based on the popular comic strip by Harold Gray about an orphan during the great depression, *Annie* was the winner of seven Tony Awards, including Best Musical. Book and score by Tony Award winners, Thomas Meehan, Charles Strouse and Martin Chamin.

³ Devising is a process of collaborative creation, it is a process of creating new work as a collective based on personal stories, experiences, and the needs of a particular cast or audience.

I am seeking here to offer a clear picture of what music direction actually is as practiced by music directors in the industry, ranging from midwestern educators to Broadway pits. In this effort, I am working to demystify this industry for those new to the job, and for those who work in proximity to the job, so that we can elevate this art form, particularly in educational, community, and regional settings, in order to create better working relationships that result in beautiful musical storytelling on stage.

“View From the Podium” Review

In the beginning of my research into this topic it became increasingly clear how little scholarship exists to define or codify this all important job within a musical theater production. In recent years, some masters programs have been developed and at least one undergrad program exists at the time of this writing. There are two major books published to date that address this subject area, *So You're the New Music Director* by James H. Laster and *Music Director for the Stage - A View From the Podium* by Joseph Church. In Church's introduction he states of the lengthiness of his book, that there is a,

“...dearth of existing literature on music direction. The profession is as undocumented as it is often unnoticed... Besides a few basic handbooks, there is virtually no scholarly inquiry into the subject, and at present music direction is part of only a few college or university curricula. There are a few anecdotal writings... One of the most important scholars of the musical theater, and a music director by trade, Lehman Engel, wrote several books about songs and lyrics for the musical theater and a handbook on producing musicals that included a chapter on music direction. Steven Suskin's marvelous *The Sound of Broadway Music* includes a few brief but very informative biographies of music directors...” (Church 6-7).

His findings from 2015 are echoed in my search for scholarly sources for this thesis work. I too, found very little offered in the way of scholarly work on music direction, particularly as it applied to musical theater. A similar observation is shared in the beginning of Laster's book written in 2001, whose opening to the preface reads,

“So... you’ve been asked to be the musical director for an upcoming stage production. And, your background, training, and experience leave a bit to be desired. Well, you’re not the only person to have been put into this position! It has happened to many of us. We were trained to play the trumpet, to play the piano, or studied Italian art songs... but to be a musical director for a theatrical production? Never!” (Laster vii).

Laster’s book is designed to be a pocket manual for the music director who is new and it certainly covers quite a bit of ground and offers practical down to earth advice accessible to any community or educational theater company. Whereas, in Church’s book, he goes into excruciating detail with techniques and methodology accompanied by wonderful examples. His work is primarily focused on Broadway and does not speak as loudly to those who are working in community, regional, and educational theater settings who are often lacking the resources and privileges that accompanies this facet of the industry in New York. This is an area where my interviews and research seeks to fill in some blanks, both taking stock of those non-Broadway settings but also learning from the Broadway model and exploring how it can be paired down.

An example of each author’s perspective is in their approach to cuts and arrangements, Laster addresses the practical and acceptable practices when working with rented materials and provides concrete information on licensing and permissions, whereas in Church’s chapter on arranging he spends significant time explaining some compositional/arranging rules like the importance of preserving genre, serving the story, and part writing theory to name a few. The level of work he is discussing with part writing and arranging would be far too large of an ask for any community or educational theater music director because the show is most likely not their full time job and the production likely does not have the funds to hire a copyist or arranger, (it also is not typical from my experience and evidenced in my interviews for a music director at this level to have an assistant music director who could assist). This is also assuming they have

the proper permissions and it is not a new work where that level of edit and orchestration could be expected.

All of that to say, both of these books, among those mentioned by Church, are a good start to the scholarly conversation on music direction that is far overdue, however they are some important perspectives missing, that of non-Broadway music directors, in addition to a lack of female or non-binary voices and folks of color. This ignores the unique positions these underrepresented groups face, whether it is lack of funding, experience, support, or just plain respect because the typical theatrical production team is made up of older white men.

Need for Study

Due to this lack of scholarly sources or research, it seemed most appropriate to take the steps needed to go directly to the source of knowledge and conduct a study, interviewing nineteen music directors from around the United States⁴, and one from the United Kingdom, on what this job actually entails, the skills required, and what theater professionals need to know about music directors for effective collaborative environments.

As I mentioned in above, a recurring theme in these interviews, (which is also echoed in the quotes from the books above) was how they became music directors; they played piano or were a good musician or singer, and someone in their network was putting on a musical and needed a musical director. They all jumped in because they possessed at least some of the skills a music director needs, but they learned on the job with little or no guidance. With each job their confidence grew, with every experience in a pit, on stage, singing in an ensemble, or leading a rehearsal they learned the necessary skills to become successful music directors with the

⁴ A complete list of those interviewed is available in the Appendix, including some of their credential information. Included in the Appendix are also some larger selections of transcript from two interviews, Joseph Church & Marci Shegogue.

expertise and ability to define this work in a way that has only begun to be meaningfully done within academia.

III. METHODOLOGY

Purpose & Scope of Study

In my research of the available literature and from my personal experience in the field, there are a variety of misunderstandings associated with the role of a music director within the scope of a musical theater production. Particularly on the part of those also involved in the production. At the beginning of this study there did not appear to be an exhaustive list of music director skills or qualifications, there also appears to be little documented understanding of the collaborative nature of directing musical theater between both directors and music directors. There is a fundamental misunderstanding of what a music director should be doing on both the part of directors and actors. Often even music directors (particularly those new to the job) do not understand what they should be doing, what they could be doing, and how their role contributes to the storytelling happening on stage. It appears that most people fall into the career with little or no training and tend to develop the necessary skills over time with trial and error.

This is where human research became important. There is a vast, collective knowledge held inside the heads of professional music directors across the country and abroad. That knowledge presently if shared, is passed down as part of an oral tradition on the part of mentors and colleagues. I could not seem to find any academic work where anyone has tapped into that incredible resource to give theater makers a better understanding of music direction as a field. Collecting their experiences and expertise here is an attempt to add to existing knowledge by codefying and recording the collective knowledge in a meaningful way so that those new to the

field or working with music directors can have a better understanding of expectations and preempt the common misconceptions.

How Research was Conducted & Demographics

The data I collected are stories and opinions based on participant's professional experience and training about what music direction entails within a theatrical production. All research was conducted through interviews via Zoom. Participants were recruited through invitations and postings in professional networks online, in addition to personalized invitations to known professionals. The criteria for interview selection was if they had worked as a music director, as long as they had been a credited music director on at least one musical, I wanted to talk to them. As I conducted these interviews I was looking for common themes in professional practices and common misconceptions. By collecting and organizing this information in a meaningful way, I seek to better understand the function of a music director's role in a musical theatre production, particularly as it can apply to regional, community, and educational theater.

I interviewed nineteen music directors. The sample size is relatively small, because of the nature of the interviews being conducted. These are in depth, personalized conversations to really get into the nuance of musical theater direction. Each interview I conducted was between thirty minutes and an hour in length. The field, generally speaking, is also relatively small. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, there were 48,100 people employed as musical directors and composers in 2021. It is interesting to note that music directors here are combined with composers, as often composers music direct and vice versa. But there are plenty of people who music direct and do not compose. This was briefly addressed in some of these interviews as my final question was asking music directors to talk about the job's connection to composition. I also assume this number from the Bureau includes church music directors, as well as orchestral

and operatic music directors which are not a part of my research. This also likely does not account for music directors who have other day jobs such as teachers or professors like myself. All this is to say that while this number does demonstrate how small the field is, it far from accurately reflects how many people actually do the work I am specifically speaking to in this research.

My objective was to conduct enough interviews that I could look at the responses and begin to establish patterns and commonalities, what are these music directors agreeing on, what are some of the similar struggles or similar techniques? These interviews were conducted from May to October, 2021. Some of the questions asked of music directors were:

How did you come to music direction as a career?
What do you wish actors and directors understood about music directors?
What is the biggest misunderstanding about music directorship in theater?⁵

As the conversation developed I would ask appropriate follow up questions that got into the specifics of their experiences and training, as well as their personal philosophies on the work and in many cases on teaching how to do this work.

A common theme that came up in many interviews was this idea of speaking the same language as each group of artists we are working with, in the interest of maintaining a common language and level of understanding here, a list of terms and my definitions are available in the appendix.

Demographic Breakdown

The demographics of those interviewed broke down as follows, eleven men, seven women, and one trans/non-binary individual, all were white or white presenting. All but one of those interviewed have at minimum five to ten years of experience in the musical theater

⁵ A complete list of initial interview questions is available in the Appendix, as well as selections of transcript from two interviews.

industry. About half of those interviewed have spent time in Broadway pits in some capacity. I acknowledge the lack of ethnically diverse voices in this interview series, the issue became apparent late in the interview process and due to time constraints could not be meaningfully remedied in the time available. This is an area where more scholarship is desperately needed.

Data Management & Emerging Themes

The data for these interviews took two different forms, these Zoom interviews were recorded, and for all but two interviews, a transcript was generated from the recording utilizing Zoom's transcription program. I was present for all interviews facilitating and engaging with these professionals about their work. As I did these interviews, I started hearing some of the same ideas popping up, same kinds of answers to the same questions. There was very little discrepancy from person to person on what was important for a successful music director. Some interviewees had more detailed answers than others, and there were a number of responses that were similar along demographic lines, older music directors often had similar thoughts, nearly every woman touched on their gender being a struggle at times, those with time on Broadway shared similar experiences that were not present in the responses of those who had exclusively worked in regional, community or educational settings.

To briefly touch on the nature of regional, community and educational theater music direction; these jobs take on a wide variety of forms. On Broadway and in larger union houses, music direction can be a full time job, though those music directors often will still teach at universities or do private instruction. For regional, community, and educational productions, the music directors are most often there as part time professionals and likely music direct for multiple organizations, getting paid a variety of different rates. In some cases, especially early on in their careers, music directors will work as a volunteer or intern (some may also work as

assistant music directors early on, but this appears to be more common with bigger organizations). Being a music director is a highly entrepreneurial career, and often music direction is just a chunk of a person's forty hours a week. The remaining time may be spent teaching, accompanying, working in churches, working with orchestras, doing private lessons, or doing work completely unrelated to music and performing arts. One of my interviewees crystallized this idea while talking about his personal journey in the performing arts industry, "I kind of thought I'll teach school to have like a day job and then, I'll music direct school shows and I'll do summer stock... because I knew quite a few people who did that kind of thing" (Cannon).

From listening and engaging in these interviews I distilled five core ideas important to music direction work; People Skills, Musicianship, Research, Teaching & Collaboration, and Wearing Many Hats. This is my subjective summary of the research collected in these interviews. To attempt to gain a more objective view, I took the written transcripts generated from Zoom, (six hundred pages) and formatted them to generate a word cloud of the most commonly used words in these interviews. Due to Zoom's formatting, in order to get what I actually needed, I had to go through the document deleting names and numerical codes, I also had to tell the word cloud processor to exclude common words and filler like, "a", "um", "hey", "the" etc. The process of creating this word cloud was such that I would edit the doc, generate a cloud, look it over, and when I would find an irrelevant word, I would then go back and include that word to be excised, and repeat. From this process, the final list of words (besides names and Zoom's coding) that were not included is available in the appendix.

The final cloud (Table 1, Also available with further information in Appendix A) yielded some interesting parallels to the list of core ideas I created from listening and conducting the

interviews.⁶ The larger and darker the word, the more it was used in the interviews, the small numbers in parenthesis next to each word is how many times it was used in the interviews.

Figure 1

Word Cloud



Obviously “music” and “director” were the most common words, as that is the focus of this work, but all the other terms relate to or speak to the nature of the core ideas I distilled prior to this word clouding process. Below, Table 2 (also available in Appendix B)), is a chart sorting some of these terms into those five categories, many of which overlap or have multiple meanings based on context. I have bolded the ones most prominent in the word cloud, and put an asterisk next to the ones I feel are the most important to the category based on my own work, being present in the interviews, and knowing the context under which many of these words were said.

⁶ As I edited two of my interviews to be included in the appendix, I discovered that zoom had misheard some of the words interviewers had said, including important words and phrases like “music direction”. It would be entirely too tedious and time consuming to edit all of the interviews to fix and account for these errors as it would require listening to the recordings, but it is worth noting that those errors mean some of these words likely occurred more often in the interviews and that some important words might not have made it into the cloud.

Table 1

Core Ideas and Word Cloud Chart

People Skills,	Musicianship	Research	Teaching & Collaboration	Wearing Many Hats
<p>*Actors, Assistant, *Cast, Ensemble, *Feel, Friend, Fun, *Give, Hard, *Hear, Help, *Listen, Love, *People, Sense, *Skills, Together</p>	<p>*Band, Coach, *Composer, *Conducting, Conductor, Degree, Direction, Director, *Hear, *Keyboard, Level, *Listen, *Looking, *Music, Musicians, Notes, Orchestra/Orche stral, *Pianist/Piano, Pit, Play/Player, *Read, *Score, *Sense, *Sing/Singer, Song, Sound, *Training, Vocal/Voice</p>	<p>Best, *Broadway, *Change, College, *Community, Company, Course, Degree, *Design, Different, *Experience, *Idea, Important, *Interesting, Looking, Notes, *Original, *People, *Performance, Piece, *Process, *Read, Realize, Remember, Speak, *Story, World, Write/Wrote.</p>	<p>*Actors, *Assistant, *Band, *Cast, *Choreographer, *Coach, *Collaboration, College, Community, Company, *Composer, *Director, *Ensemble, Experience, Feel, Help, Hire, Issue, Job, Knew/Knowing, Learn, Love, Musicians, Notes, Orchestra, *People, *Production, *Professional, *Producer, *Rehearsal, Singer, *Teach/Teacher, *Together, *Training, Understand, *Wish, Wonderful, Work</p>	<p>Acting, *Assistant, *Coach, *Collaboration, *Community, Company, *Composer, *Conductor, *Design, *Director Direction, *Hire, Job, Kids, Knowing, Learn, *Listen, Look, *Music, *Notes *People, *Performance, *Pianist, *Player, *Producer, *Role, *Singer, *Skills, Speak, Stage, *Story, Students, *Teacher, *Together, *Work.</p>

IV. RESULTS & ANALYSIS

People Skills

Looking within the larger word cluster, as organized above, there are a number of terms that relate to a music director's all important need to be good with people (Actors, Assistant, Cast, Ensemble, Feel, Friend, Fun, Give, Hard, Hear, Help, Listen, Love, People, Sense, Skills, Together.) Each of these terms either refers to a person or collection of people within the production such as actors or ensemble, or they refer to how one might treat those around them, such as give, help, or listen.

My observations from conducting these interviews were that each director in some way stressed the vital importance of kindness, diplomacy and people skills. Many interviewees referenced how Music directors are one of the only production staff involved in the production from day one to closing night. Directors, producers, choreographers all leave the process at some point, but music directors are actively involved in each performance whether they are conducting, pressing play on tracks, or playing piano in the pit. Music directors, alongside stage managers, hold a ton of power to make or break a production during a performance. One interviewee put it so poetically, "...when the day comes, it's you out there. And you're the one who faces the darkness every night, you know, it's not the choreographer, it's not the director, it's not the designers, [it's just you and your company]" (Levenson).

Another observation I made through these interviews was various explanations of a music director's need to navigate a level of professionalism and authority that must be diplomatically paired with coaching and creative collaboration (which I also put into its own subsection to be discussed below). There must be flexibility to go from being in charge, to being approachable, to being a creator and support structure. Many spoke of a music director's need to speak the

languages of directors, choreographers, sound technicians, instrumentalists and every level of actor. One interviewee said the following about a music director's balancing act between teaching and combating potentially toxic environments,

...if you're collaborating with someone you're both on the same side. If you're just teaching someone how to do something or telling them how to do it, then that necessarily is going to have some adversarial aspect to it because then they don't get to use their own ideas. If there's a toxic environment, and this is not something I'm good at, if there's a toxic environment, say something... there is more than one way to do something right. And that's where it goes back again to my whole idea about teaching [actors] where the choices are. And I think that's more effective than telling them what to do, because if you tell them where the choices are, you're giving them space to experiment (Shore).

Being a leader who is kind, diplomatic, and approachable is important to the show's success, if an actor is too intimidated to ask a music question or share their character's important backstory, the show will suffer from the communication breakdown. Another interviewee, put it this way, kindness is the job:

One of the traits for a music Director has to be kind[ness]... You have to be patient and flexible and kind and non judgmental and all of that is what gets you, what makes you successful as music director. But it also makes you reputable and higher level... It was interesting that people from all ages, all walks of life, all have this one thing in common and just saying this is what a music director is, it's a skill, it's a talent, it's a job, it's a career, all those things... But the main thing you have to have is kindness, period, and I thought that was such a cool thing (Shegogue).

Musicianship

The second category I identified from within the word cloud and from interview observations is the aspect of musicianship (Band, Coach, Composer, Conducting, Conductor, Degree, Direction, Director, Hear, Keyboard, Level, Listen, Looking, Music, Musicians, Notes, Orchestra/Orchestral, Pianist/Piano, Pit, Play/Player, Read, Score, Sense, Sing/Singer, Song, Sound, Training, Vocal/Voice). In order to effectively music direct, interviewees agreed that there

is an important set of tangible skills that is required, those of musicianship and music theory (this idea is also echoed in the books mentioned in the literature review).

What is music theory? For those reading who would not call themselves musicians, music theory is everything that goes into reading sheet music and interpreting it into performance. Music theory ranges from the most basic understanding of clefs, note naming, and solfege, all the way up to understanding chord progressions, musical form, and counterpointal composition. Knowing (and teaching) how to look at a score and understanding who sings when, how high or low the notes are, and comprehending the complexity of a rhythmic section, are the first steps for effective communication between production team members, cast and ensemble. Music directors should be able to break down complex musical ideas into simple terms for those who only have a basic understanding of music theory. Then, music directors should use their advanced knowledge of form, style, chord progressions, composition, counterpoint, arranging, and instrumentation to inform their directorial choices. One of the interviewees put this idea into words talking about the rehearsal process;

As a composer I know... there's so much more than what's on the printed page, there's the storytelling, there's the deeper storytelling and I hate when a director says, 'okay. Music, you have the first three days of rehearsals, teach them the music and then we're moving on.' Okay, but then in two weeks, I need to revisit it. And I need to see the storytelling you put around it. We need to fix things. I can teach anybody a part by counting single notes on a piano, but that's not the story, that's not the relationship, that's not the Community, that's where I think people miss the point of music directing is that. Because it's written on a piece of paper and we quantify it with shapes and sizes and tempos and length; that's only the beginning of the story. That would be like saying that to a director, 'well just have them memorize the lines' (Samu).

Examples of this in action could include, structuring a rehearsal where you go over the shows main musical themes as a group before putting them into context. This is an effective rehearsal technique for shows that structurally have many repeated, reprises, or clear motifs that

show up throughout the show. Another example could be appropriately revoicing a passage of harmonies within the ensemble to best fit the voices in the cast. In order to do this effectively and maintain the integrity of the piece, a music director needs to understand chord inversions, counterpoint, and compositional techniques such as what notes are appropriate to double within a chord, what the lowest note sounding needs to be to maintain the inversion, and understanding the importance in preserving any compositional techniques used.

A common subject within these interviews was the methodology associated with the preservation of the composer's original intent. There are varying degrees of thought on this particular point. Some interviewed believed that a music director's job is that of the composer's advocate, that if it is on the page it is there for a reason and must be performed as such. Others interviewed believed that the composer's work is a reflection of the original production and can be subject to interpretation. There is also a school of thought represented in those interviewed that believed both to be true and that preservation was appropriate for certain pieces and creative interpretation is welcome for other works. Regardless of which approach is taken by a music director, having an understanding of composition and advanced theory enables you to either be that advocate in explaining why the composer likely made the choice they did, or to make a creative interpretation that is grounded in the original intent and can be defended by principals of theory present within the context of the work.

The next tangible skill those interviewed agreed upon was the importance of piano skills. In speaking with older music directors, working for ten or more years, they emphasized that a music director does not need to be a pianist, but should have enough piano skills to play voice parts, plunk out a simple melody, and perhaps be able to do a simplified version of the accompaniment. In older theaters and those with large budgets, it is normal to have a dedicated

piano accompanist who plays for all rehearsals and the show, while the music director runs rehearsals, conducts, etc. However, in more recent years, newer shows have combined these two roles into a piano conductor position. The music is actually written in such a way that the piano conductor can keep playing with their right hand, drop out their left (covered then in the bass guitar part or other bass instrument) and conduct or cue as needed. This limits who can music direct those particular shows to only music directors with advanced piano skills. The conclusion here being, if you are a music director whose main instrument is not piano, it is in your best interest to continue to work those skills and be as independent as possible. Selling a small theater on hiring two people to do the job when there might be one person who can do it all is difficult, especially when more modern shows are written for that particular piano conductor model.

One of the challenges music directors face with this current piano conductor trend is the issue of ensemble experience. Typically a musician who plays flute, or trumpet, or violin learned their instrument in an ensemble setting. They learned how to follow a conductor, count measures of rest, look for cues, and fit their sound into a large group. Whereas individuals whose primary instrument is piano, learned how to be soloists in most cases, rarely if ever playing in an ensemble setting. It is for this reason that many of those interviewed said that a good music director will have spent some time playing in a band or orchestra in order to really understand what those pit musicians they are leading are going through under their direction.

In this same vein of ensemble experience is that of conducting skills. There are really three styles of conducting that can apply to musical theater:

Stick Conducting - A conductor on a podium with a baton, just like in a band or orchestra setting. Often denoted by clear strong down beats, can be emotional to invoke a particular energy upon the ensemble.

Hand Conducting - A conductor in front of an ensemble conducting with their hands, most commonly used in choir settings, often associated with more emotional conducting, less structured and clear downbeats. Hand conducting is also common in marching band, but has clear patterns and downbeats with no emotional affect.

Piano Conducting - A pianist who is leading the pit orchestra from behind the piano, they often will count into a piece verbally, give cues via head nods or whole body motions. Occasionally they will drop out a hand, typically the left, to pattern conduct, cue or cut off as needed.

It is important for all music directors to understand the differences between these styles of conducting and to understand each one's benefits and pitfalls.

Conducting as a skill has been well defined within western music. Basic conducting is a required course for all music majors in undergraduate degree programs. What basic conducting teaches a musician is how to use their knowledge of meter, time signatures, and tempo, and translate it to leading an ensemble with particular hand gestures. There is a regimented pattern for how to conduct in 4/4 time, all patterns have the same gesture for beat one, or the downbeat of each bar. Basic conducting teaches that larger gestures signal to musicians to get louder, whereas smaller gestures indicate a call to get quieter in dynamic volume. There are prescribed ways to communicate cues to musicians, as well as when to start and stop playing. All of this is generally understood by musicians, but there are some fundamental differences in the function of conducting as well as the actual practice of conducting within certain groups.

As I mentioned above, stick conducting is typical for orchestras and bands, and typically is very clear and structured closely to the fundamentals of basic conducting. So when working with or conducting a pit orchestra full of musicians who learned in that tradition, it is important

to give clear downbeats, stick to the patterns, and to be sure you are communicating clearly in their language of ensemble practice. This may change when you start working with the ensemble of actors and singers, those folks will more likely have learned their craft in a choir setting, where emotive, less structured hand conducting is more common. Oftentimes that style of conducting is meant to elicit emotion more than it is to keep clear time. Understanding this difference in communication enables directors to effectively speak to both types of ensembles with authority, garner respect, and be able to lead the show in whichever conducting style best suits the piece and performers.

The last aspect of musicianship that is all important to a musical director is being familiar with all things surrounding vocal sound production. The best music directors will have some experience both singing in a choral setting and as a soloist. They will have the technical knowledge to be able to explain sound production, teach and talk on healthy singing technique, and speak with authority on how technique impacts style. That last point, understanding how to teach technique that will support stylistic choices is incredibly important to a musical production. The style of a golden era musical like *Oklahoma*⁷ requires different singing techniques than a modern musical like *Avenue Q*⁸. Another important aspect of the technique conversation is achieving appropriate tone quality and projection for the piece as well as the space the show is being performed in. As a music director in a musical theater piece, many of those interviewed stressed the importance of being the performer's advocate. That means collaborating and having open lines of communication with the costumers, designers, director, and choreographer, to make

⁷ Tony award winning American musical written by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II in 1942, about a small town in Oklahoma before the formation of the state.

⁸ Tony award winning modern American musical from 2003 about a group of twenty somethings seeking meaning to their lives in the big city featuring puppets and live actors, with music and lyrics by Robert Lopez and Jeff Marx and book by Jeff Whitty.

sure that the sound you are working to create is being supported in those other elements instead of being infringed upon. By being able to empathize with performers, their needs can be anticipated and then appropriately communicated before any issues may arise. An example of this may be that a treble voiced singer has to hit a particularly high note, but the blocking or choreography has the performer sitting or hunched over, this would severely impact the quality of the sound and it would be the music director's prerogative to educate the director or choreographer that the performer needs to be in a better position to support proper vocal sound production.

If a music director is well versed in vocal technique with some experience putting those techniques into practice, then they will be able to offer tips, tricks, and guidance to performers to get the final product exactly how a music director wants it. This can include understanding how choral parts fit together to efficiently rehearse them in such a way that it supports the performers in their learning and listening process, or giving guidance on what to listen for to find a starting pitch whether it is within the ensemble or for a soloist. This also includes an understanding of the differences between choral singing and solo singing. Within an ensemble, matching and blending are key, whereas for a soloist their individuality and characterization can be prominent in the sound being produced. It is so important to understand this nuance and be able to help performers strike that perfect balance between solo and ensemble singing performance in order to support the musical theater story being performed. One interviewee put this beautifully into words:

A good music director can make a mediocre show great, a bad music director can make a mediocre show bad if they hired the wrong people... You can always judge a music director by the sound of the ensemble so if your ensemble sound is tight and your harmonies are good, your diction is good ... you've got a good music director.

You expect leads to be good, you expect the musicians, (who are hired to be good, because you're paying them to be good) But if you hear a really strong ensemble you know you've got a good music director, if you hear a crappy ensemble. You know that they might be a good musician but a bad vocal coach and a bad ensemble director... (Weinstein).

Research

The third category identified is that of research, (Best, Broadway, Change, College, Community, Company, Course, Degree, Design, Different, Experience, Idea, Important, Interesting, Looking, Notes, Original, People, Performance, Piece, Process, Read, Realize, Remember, Speak, *Story, World, Write/Wrote.) As I conducted these interviews, it was brought up numerous times, that there is a level of stewardship within direction, that you have a responsibility to a show to appropriately perform the piece according to the licensing agreement, as well as any potential cultural expectations of the piece.

Within those interviewed there emerged two distinct viewpoints on a music directors job in regards to recreating the music for a show. The first opinion is that a music director is the advocate for the composer and should perform it exactly as it is on the page, with very little to no creative interpretation. The second opinion is that as music director you are given the sheet music as a guide, and that there is room for creative license with tempos, dynamics, keys, instrumentation, style and articulation. A handful of music directors interviewed said that both opinions are true and that it depends on the specific piece and likely audience expectations. For example, shows that are particularly well known generate a sound or type of performance that becomes expected from other performers, for example *Wicked*⁹. The character and vocal choices

⁹ Tony award winning musical from 2003, with music and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz and book by Winnie Holzman. The show is based on Gregory Maguire's 1995 novel *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West*, whose characters and setting are based on the classic 1900 novel, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum and the 1939 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer film *The Wizard of Oz*.

Kristen Chenoweth made when she originated the role have become expected of Glinda no matter who performs the role. Whereas a show like *Suessical*¹⁰ does not have an iconic or particular “voice” for a character, which opens up some possibilities for the music director and performer. The first camp of thought finds its roots within classical music traditions and opera, whereas the second camp is viewing the issue through a much more modern lens, and those who take it case by case are trying to find the best of both worlds. Regardless of which camp a music director finds themselves in, research is an important part of the work that needs to be done prior to the start of rehearsals.

Another aspect of research interviewees brought up was the importance of looking at the genre and history of the show, and fully understanding the storytelling. There are a number of quotes from interviewees about storytelling, each one captures a different nuance of this important part of the work. Here is an interviewee's response to what he wishes people knew about music directors which nicely speaks to this issue,

I wish they know that we are more than just a metronome or tracks. I wish that they knew that we do a lot of research into story, because we all have to be storytellers together... We put a lot of time into making sure that we continue to tell the story, as the singers are singing and the orchestras playing... The orchestra is a character. Unless maybe you're doing a show where the orchestra is in another building but it's still a character. You know, sound wise it's a character (Pederson).

Music directors need to spend the time understanding the function of each piece within the show; how does each song move the plot forward or convey an emotion? What themes and motifs recur throughout the piece, what do they represent? How do the harmonies work within the piece, are there parts that are doubled in octaves or any parts that carry important notes within a chord that will need to be brought out in performance? These are just a few of the

¹⁰ American musical based on the works of Dr. Suess, namely the stories of *Horton Hears a Who*, *Gertrude McFuzz*, and *Horton Hatches the Egg* from 2000, written by Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty.

questions a music director should consider as they prep the show prior to rehearsals.

Understanding these stylistic and compositional elements enable a director to make assumptions about their function in the piece and assists a music director in either being a faithful advocate for the composer or making creative choices about a fresh interpretation of the piece.

Some of those choices can be informed by understanding techniques appropriate to the style or genre. In addition, it is important to assess any performance strategies or technology that could be important to, or at least enhance, the performance. The most prevalent style element that has made its way into many modern musicals is the vocal riff, which finds its origins in spirituals and gospel music. As a music director it would be very important to keep that history in mind as it could impact casting, story telling, or the balance within a piece. A fantastic example of this can be found in the song “Pitiful Children” from the musical *Be More Chill*¹¹. The role of Jenna needs to be played by someone with a strong gospel belt and ability to riff. The role of Jenna unfortunately tends to be a bit of a throw away because in the plot she is not terribly important, more of a comedic relief. However in that song, as well as a handful of others throughout the show, she is expected to heft a powerful vocal load to make those pieces larger than life, despite not being the center of attention. If a music director is not aware of that draw on the character vocally, and casts someone without a strong belt in their upper register, then those pieces within the show will musically suffer. With this particular vocal style there can also be cultural implications. Is important to think about how the actual ethnic background of an actor gives subtext to their performance, potentially enhancing or detracting from the storytelling, especially when utilizing a vocal technique that is rooted in Black American heritage.

¹¹ Tony award winning modern sci-fi musical from 2015 about the struggles of being a teenager, with original music and lyrics by Joe Iconis, and book by Joe Tracz, based on the 2004 novel by Ned Vizzini.

Just like stage directors guide actors to move the story forward, so do musical directors. It is important to sit down with the script and deeply understand how each song moves the plot forward. Have conversations with actors about who their character is, what emotional moment is being expressed through song, what important plot elements need to come through to the audience in each song? There is a particularly important moment in the show *In the Heights*¹², where Abuela reveals a major plot point at the end of an emotional and nostalgic piece. It would be incredibly important as a music director to have an actor walk through that emotional journey and find those beats, just like a performer would with a monologue, and have a discussion about how the music supports that journey in order to tug at the audience's heart strings. A music director should push for, and make time for, a kind of table work that links a performer's character choices with the musical expression of their song as vital storytelling.

Teacher/Collaborator

The fourth area identified, is that of a music director's role as both teacher and collaborator, (Actors, Assistant, Band, Cast, Choreographer, Coach, Collaboration, College, Community, Company, Composer, Director, Ensemble, Experience, Feel, Help, Hire, Issue, Job, Knew/Knowing, Learn, Love, Musicians, Notes, Orchestra, People, Production, Professional, Producer, Rehearsal, Singer, Teach/Teacher, Together, Training, Understand, Wish, Wonderful, Work). As an educator myself, I would make the argument that directors, choreographers, and music directors all should have good teaching skills, however, my research is looking only at music directors and in their case, according to those interviewed, teaching and collaboration are vital skills to the success of a show.

¹² Tony award winning modern musical about Latin American immigrant families living in Washington Heights, from 2005 by Lin-Manuel Miranda, with book by Quiara Alegria Hudes.

Many of those interviewed for this project are also teachers or professors in addition to being music directors. Short of being a working music director on tour or in New York there are not many full time jobs just being a music director for theatrical works. Most who do this work fill their forty hours a week music directing a show as well as other related work, that quite often includes teaching private music lessons, accompanying or performing (often for churches), playing in ensembles or bands, classroom teaching both at the k-12 and university level, as well as workshop teaching. It came up numerous times the importance for a music director to have an understanding of teaching strategies.

For example, classroom management techniques enable a music director to effectively run a rehearsal with an ensemble no matter what age of performer. Classroom management strategies are human psychology, waiting to speak until a room is quiet for example, is as effective for a room full of kindergarteners as it is for a room full of adults. Once that silence is achieved, then effective relaying of information can occur. A music director has to understand the material well enough to be able to explain concepts and teach as needed to performers at all levels. This is exactly what is demanded of teachers in all subject areas, we must know the material so well, inside out and backwards that we can explain it to a young child at their level, then also explain it to a professional musician at their level. Time management and transitions are a huge part of teaching, an effective teacher can engage a room full of students for ninety minutes and get meaningful learning outcomes at the end. For a music director, that same skill of managing time and transitions can take a music rehearsal from being a boring chore of plunking out notes to an effective and engaging experience that helps actors be more successful on stage. Nearly ever interviewee touched on teaching, but all of them just passed by the specifics of the skill, never breaking it down, it was just assumed that teaching was inherent to the role. This is

one of the few things people assume about music directors, the surface level role and skill. Here is one music director's take on his first impressions with music direction as a working actor in his teenage years:

I found my way into theatre, first by performing... I was a sort of as a young person and as a teenager and child I was an actor and did lots of youth theatre and local theater and then some of the kind of equity and higher level stuff [like the] national Shakespeare festival, National opera and theater companies in Nashville... through those experiences I was exposed to a music director for the first time, and my understanding of it as a teenager performing, was this is the person that teaches us the music and then they either lead the band or play the piano or they push play on the tracks if it's something that's you're using (Cannon).

Another important nuance to point out from speaking with these interviewees is that a music director has some fluidity in their role, they are a teacher in a rehearsal space, but then immediately have to be able to switch to being a creative collaborator or facilitator the next. Even once the show is up a music director becomes a collaborator and peer, performing with the actors, but then in notes or clean up rehearsals they are again teacher or coach. There is this constant motion between teaching, or in more advanced groups a kind of facilitating, and then collaborating and performing as a unit. It is a unique partnership unlike most anything else in musical theater, rivaled only by that of a stage manager. As one interviewee put it, "the music director needs to be pretty tight with the stage manager. Because again, the stage manager is the one who also is [there] from beginning to end" (Weinstein). The work of a music director during a performance is both conducting the performers in conjunction with the orchestra, but also following and supporting the performer while communicating active changes to the band and adapting as needed. The only other person doing a similar live balancing act is that of the stage manager (that is given the assumption that they are in a more traditional setting where they are in charge of the show as well as calling all of the cues during each performance.)

One of the things that became most apparent throughout all of the interviews is the importance of collaboration, not just with actors and band, but with directors, producers, choreographers, and even designers. From the very beginning of a production a music director and stage director should be sitting down and discussing vision as well as expectations for their partnership. Effective communication from the very beginning has a profound impact on a production. The whole production is working to serve a director's vision, the music director needs to know that vision and be able to effectively support it with their work, choices, and expertise. There are several different approaches to this relationship and hierarchy, here are the thoughts from an interviewee who has done this work extensively and has experience in both the regional/community world as well as the high level professional productions and tours.

I firmly believe that the director sits at the top of the totem pole and then the music director and choreographer sit next to each other, below the director. My job is to serve the storytelling of the director and the producer, it's not the other way around, and I don't care if you said, 'well, what if we're doing something like les mis which is 95% music?' It's still the director telling the story, and I have to serve the story and the director telling the story..." (Samu).

In talking with interviewees about the hierarchy of production leadership there was some debate between whether the stage director and music director are equal partners or if the stage director is slightly higher on that ladder. Regardless of which leadership structure you adhere to, it is important to understand the hierarchy and what a stage director or producer expects your role to include. In many cases, the music director may have to define their own role because the stage director does not realize or understand the impact a music director has on a musical theater production. This not only applies to musical theater but also to stage plays that are incorporating music. For these productions there may be a music director as well, in those productions clarity and collaboration are even more important. The stage director needs to make it clear to the music

director their desires for music within the production, for example, do they want original music, need their music director to teach actors to play instruments, need a band hired, they need a music director to arrange or rewrite music to make it fit the need within the play?

Then, the music director must make it clear what they need in order to achieve those goals, managing expectations for how much time any musical vision will take; for example teaching an actor to play ukelele will take some significant time that the director may not realize, or for composing original music, a director may not fully understand how long that process actually takes. Having open communication, clear expectations, and treating the stage director/music director relationship as a productive and important partnership are vital to the success of a show.

While the stage director partnership is the first priority, and arguably the most important collaborative piece of the production. It is also so important to have open lines of communication with other production staff, as the music within a musical can permeate nearly every aspect of the production. Nearly every interviewee talked about the working relationship with choreographers, it is so important that the choreographer understands some basic music theory, just as it is important for a music director to understand some basics of dance and movement, as well as how that movement can impact sound production. A music director often becomes the rehearsal pianist for choreography rehearsals, especially in the frequent cases where the original cast soundtrack does not match the given sheet music either in timing, tempo, or key. As a music director it is important that a choreographer understands when the track they are potentially working with is different from what the cast is actually learning. Conversations should be had about tempos, potential cuts, and aspects of the music that are challenging for the singers so that

the choreographer can be mindful in their work to respect those important aspects of the music being produced.

A common occurrence is a music director needing to have a conversation with a choreographer about movement and its impact on vocal quality and production. If a choreographer (or director) puts an actor facing upstage or bent over or sitting in an awkward position while trying to sing a challenging passage, it's important for the music director to advocate for the actor and point out the issue so that the music does not suffer for staging or choreography choices.

In one interview, a music director pointed out how valuable a relationship with the designers can be. She mentioned some lovely work she had gotten to do where she and the lighting designer worked together to create a beautiful set of cues that accompanied the music and what was happening in the score. I, too, have worked with lighting designers to create dynamic lighting that syncs with the music. It certainly helps for a music director to understand some basics of how lighting and cueing works, as well as for the lighting designer to have some understanding of how music is written down, at least some basic theory, enough to be able to follow along with a score as needed.

Other production staff members a music director likely will work with includes the stage manager, for timing transitions to music, and sound engineers, working closely for microphone placements, schedules and the balance of the show's sound. Understanding some fundamentals of their job helps open up lines of communication, particularly when issues with sound arise. It is so important that the music director is able to delineate the difference between issues with equipment, the performer, the band, or the board operator. Having a little bit of knowledge in all the different areas gives a music director credibility, as well as opens doors for relationship

building. Music directors, much like stage managers, can be the glue that holds the show together, so being humble, kind, and service oriented is vital to the collaborative process of creating a piece of musical theater.

Wearer of Many Hats

The final area identified is sort of a catch all, as one of the challenges of music direction, and possibly why there is not much scholarship on the subject, is that the job description is fluid. The cloud terms are broad, consisting of a variety of titles within a production (Acting, Assistant, Coach, Collaboration, Community, Company, Composer, Conductor, Design, Director/Direction, Hire, Job, Kids, Knowing, Learn, Listen, Look, *Music, Notes, People, Performance, Pianist, Player, Producer, Role, Singer, Skills, Speak, Stage, Story, Students, Teacher, Together, Work.) This is possibly part of why many people, even those who are involved in theater, cannot come up with a good description of what a music director does beyond teaching pitches and playing in, or conducting, the band. In this research, I have worked to narrow down the fundamentals of the position, to find the things that are consistent from job to job, but even with so many commonalities, it is vital to acknowledge the other roles interviewees mentioned a music director may need to take on as part of a specific production. In these interviews, it was stressed that these things should be considered extras, so either they should be completed by another person, an assistant music director, or the music director should have these extra responsibilities factored into the salary for their employment (as for how music directors are typically paid, this varies company by company and is of course different for larger theaters and union workers, but in my experience I have both been paid a stipend per production and an hourly rate for my time in rehearsals.) Directors and producers need to know ahead of time if any of these particular services are necessary for the show being produced, which should mean an in depth conversation

with the music director in order to make sure it is clear what their job is and what the expectations are for a particular production.

The first and one of the most common jobs a music director may be asked to take on is the role of arranger and/or copyist for either or both vocal and orchestral scores. This does not include needing to adjust harmonies on the fly, or adjust octaves within a piece to accommodate a vocalist or instrumentalist's ability level. What it does include is if a song needs to be transposed into a different key, or the full orchestration requires fifteen people and the company can only afford five musicians. These are real issues companies and music directors face daily and need to find creative solutions for.

Directors and producers must understand that changing keys or having to rewrite parts to turn a fifteen piece orchestra into two keyboards with a drum and bass, requires a significant amount of time outside of the rehearsal room to organize, write, proof, and distribute to performers. This is not to mention taking time and working with producers to check contracts with licensing companies, submit any documentation of changes, or submit for permissions to make those changes with the licensing house as needed depending on production and the extent to which things need to be rearranged. In large productions with the budget and infrastructure such as Broadway shows, the arranger and copyist are separate jobs and not performed by a music director or their assistant. This means if a small company needs these jobs performed they should be mindful of what exactly they are asking for, and also be aware that some music directors may not have the ability or resources to perform such tasks.

Another common job asked of music directors, particularly in regional and community theater is to be the rehearsal pianist, particularly for choreography and run throughs. In larger scale productions there are rehearsal pianists who just come in and play the show so that the

music director can move around and listen in order to give effective notes. They also typically have an assistant music director who can conduct for them if needed to give them even more flexibility. A music director is in charge of the whole musical sound product within a musical production. If they are unable to step back and hear it as the audience would hear it, then they are not fully able to do their job. It is extremely difficult to play piano, conduct a pit, and listen to performers and give everyone involved effective notes at the end.

For small theaters with limited budgets, based on what was suggested in a number of interviews, I would encourage producers to consider recruiting assistant music director interns. Go to the local colleges and high schools and find those awesome pianists who could be great future music directors and make your need for help their learning opportunity. In these smaller, lower budget contexts, that assistant music director can double as a rehearsal pianist and stand-in conductor. This simple change in structure would not only open up opportunities for better training for music directors, but also enable music directors to better do their jobs at a sustainable level of excellence.

The last extra role that was discussed by interviewees is a fairly unique to long running shows or tours, it is that of a Music Supervisor. Their role is to make sure that musical choices across a broad range of music contributors fit the productions given direction and specifications. If there is going to be multiple pianists or multiple casts, requiring more than one music director or a music director with any number of assistant music directors, and a handful of rehearsal pianists, a music supervisor role might make sense, and asking a music director to oversee all those extra moving parts while still doing their original job, is challenging and asking a lot of that person. It is worth recognizing the difference between a producer who is asking for a music director's role with some helpers or a music director with a staff that has extra moving parts and

responsibilities above that of a common regional or community musical theater production. It all comes back to communication, clear expectations, and a common understanding of what music directors fundamentally do.

V. CONCLUSION

From this study, these interviews provide a window into the real life practical world of music direction. From their words, and an attempt to sum up their ideas in both subjective and mostly objective ways, we find that there are common misconceptions of the job across levels, generations, and time zones. We also find there are so many commonalities, that when looking at the sum of their words we do find some tangible skills and best practices that can be utilized at any level, but can be of particular use to inform work at the regional, community and educational level.

Music directors wish actors and directors understood that they are valuable members of the team, more than just “note plunkers”, more than just accompanists, that music directors are creatives too. A great music director leaves their unique mark on a production just the same as any great stage director or choreographer. It is so important to acknowledge where a music director falls in the production team hierarchy, to manage those expectations, and bring effective collaboration to the entire production process. It is up to stage directors and producers to set the stage and open communication that enables a music director to effectively do their job.¹³

There should not be power struggles, conflict should be a call to problem solve as a team. Music directors are in the trenches from day one to closing, they move with precision from being a teacher, to director, to collaborator, to facilitator, to coach, to a peer, and back again depending

¹³ Included in the appendix are a collection of letters written to actors, directors/choreographers, producers and educators sharing this information in an actionable way tailored to each person and their role relative to that of a music director in a musical theater setting.

on the stage of rehearsal or performance. It is important to remember that as one moves between all of those roles, a music director still deserves the respect of being in leadership, while also working to maintain a level of approachability. Music directors should be peacemakers with impeccable people skills, they are the glue that holds a production together. Music directors make or break a show, if the ensemble sounds messy, out of tune and not in sync with the band, it is because a music director either has not done their job, or was not supported in the ways they needed in order to do their job well. It is called a musical for a reason, the music is important. That means it takes time, it takes expertise, it takes a skilled music director to deliver a complete musical product on stage that is the best it can be given the performers and budget. Great performances can happen regardless of money or ability level, and much of that comes back to the ability and expertise of a music director.

It is the job of every music director to manage expectations and educate those in this field what our job entails. It is the responsibility of every director, producer, and choreographer to listen to music directors, and become educated in what this job can and should be, then take it upon themselves to empower and educate music directors who are new to the field. From this research, my recommendation is that all theaters, whether they are explicitly educational or not, should build in structures and networks that facilitate learning for college and high school students who are interested in or show promise in music direction. Having an internship program that gives students or just very new music directors, a chance to assistant music direct and develop and flex those skills, would be a huge boon to the musical theater industry. With more robust internship and assistantship systems in place music directors, particularly those in regional and community theaters with limited budgets, would get the help they need and we as an industry would be working to develop a better system for generating a talent pool of competent

and qualified music directors. Having more music directors who are trained and have experience, as opposed to a musician who learns on the job, means better quality productions and the ability to have more musical theater, whether it is the old standbys or new musical works that often get ignored because there are not the pianists, music directors, or musicians skilled enough to make that new work happen. In the appendix, I have included letters to directors, choreographers, producers, and educators that sum up these findings and frame the information in a way that speaks to their work and priorities.

No matter our role in the theater industry we can support music directors and the work they do. By better educating ourselves, we can better educate others; leading to a meaningful understanding of musical direction and its impact on a theatrical production. We all need to know what to expect and how to communicate depending on our role within a production, and then it is time to go out and make art my friends, because it matters.

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Appendix

A. Figure 1 - Word Cloud & Words Excised From Inclusion in Word Cloud Generator



Excised Words:

“a, able, anything, around, asked, awesome, basically, better, biggest, bit, called, comes, cool, couple, definitely, done, else, end, enough, everybody, everything, figure, getting, going, group, guess, guy, hand, happen, hey, keep, lot, maybe, name, oh, okay, person, point, pretty, probably, question, really, room, sitting, somebody, someone, something, sometimes, sort, started, stuff, sure, taking, talk, thank, the, things, think, thought, times, um, wanted, way, week, whatever, whole, yeah, years.”

B. Table 1 - Core Ideas & Word Cloud Chart

People Skills,	Musicianship	Research	Teaching & Collaboration	Wearing Many Hats
<p>*Actors, Assistant, *Cast, Ensemble, *Feel, Friend, Fun, *Give, Hard, *Hear, Help, *Listen, Love, *People, Sense, *Skills, Together</p>	<p>*Band, Coach, *Composer, *Conducting, Conductor, Degree, Direction, Director, *Hear, *Keyboard, Level, *Listen, *Looking, *Music, Musicians, Notes, Orchestra/Orche stral, *Pianist/Piano, Pit, Play/Player, *Read, *Score, *Sense, *Sing/Singer, Song, Sound, *Training, Vocal/Voice</p>	<p>Best, *Broadway, *Change, College, *Community, Company, Course, Degree, *Design, Different, *Experience, *Idea, Important, *Interesting, Looking, Notes, *Original, *People, *Performance, Piece, *Process, *Read, Realize, Remember, Speak, *Story, World, Write/Wrote.</p>	<p>*Actors, *Assistant, *Band, *Cast, *Choreographer, *Coach, *Collaboration, College, Community, Company, *Composer, *Director, *Ensemble, Experience, Feel, Help, Hire, Issue, Job, Knew/Knowing, Learn, Love, Musicians, Notes, Orchestra, *People, *Production, *Professional, *Producer, *Rehearsal, Singer, *Teach/Teacher, *Together, *Training, Understand, *Wish, Wonderful, Work</p>	<p>Acting, *Assistant, *Coach, *Collaboration, *Community, Company, *Composer, *Conductor, *Design, *Director Direction, *Hire, Job, Kids, Knowing, Learn, *Listen, Look, *Music, *Notes *People, *Performance, *Pianist, *Player, *Producer, *Role, *Singer, *Skills, Speak, Stage, *Story, Students, *Teacher, *Together, *Work.</p>

C. Definition of Terms

- Music Product - This is a term intended to describe the culmination of a music director's work with a pit orchestra and the production's singing performers, as presented during the staged musical theater production.

- Music Director - The individual hired to be in charge of the music product within a musical theater production. This can include those in charge of live music for straight plays, but is not intended to include those who are in charge of the musical product within symphony orchestras, operas, or other areas of live music performance not related to theatrical storytelling.

- Choreographer - The individual hired to design and teach the movements likely set to music within a theatrical production.

- Director/Stage Director - The individual tasked with setting the vision for the production and coordinating all the moving parts to make the vision happen.

- Composer - The brain behind the music for the show, they have crafted the melodies, musical ideas, motifs, and the overall structure of the show musically. They may also be a lyricist or might have a separate person write the words for their music. They are the one tasked with creating the original musical material that will be worked out and ultimately performed in the production.

- Arranger - The arranger for a piece of music is the person who takes the original musical material from the composer and manipulates it to fit the production or composer's needs, this could include re-voicing singer's parts, moving chunks of music around, reordering musical ideas, and/or writing music to lift up and enhance the original musical material.

- Orchestrator - This could be the same person as the arranger, but they too take the original musical material from the composer, as well as the ideas/additions of the arranger and write out

the parts of all the singers, each instrument, and pins down each person's specific part and contribution to the musical product. They are actively making choices for what instruments and voices are sounding and when, crafting the orchestration (number of pit musicians, and what they play, number of vocal parts, etc.) to be used in all future performances.

- Copyist - This job is the least creative, a copyist's job is to take music from the composer, arranger, and/or orchestrator, and make it usable by the musicians who need it, this often means taking handwritten work, charts, diagrams, or roughly typed scores, and inputting the music into a music writing software like Sibelius or Finale and making sure it all reflects the ideas and vision of the composer, arranger, and/or orchestrator and that those ideas are readable by the performers. A copyist also may be in charge of re-writing pieces into new keys, or taking a part in the score and re-writing it to be playable by a different instrument than was originally intended in the orchestration.

- Theory - In this work, this will be in reference to music theory, which is the technical nuts and bolts of reading and composing music.

- Accompanist- These are the pianists tasked with playing the music that underscores and assists vocalists in performance, either in auditions or rehearsal rooms, this also could be the person playing the keyboard part within a show.

- Ensemble - This term here refers to either the group of vocalists or instrumentalists performing as part of a musical theater work. When used in reference to skills, it has to do with how well these musicians work together in performance to blend together, move the story or score forward, and follow the conductor.

- Producers - The folks writing the checks.

D. A Letter to Actors

Dear actors, from the moment you walk into an audition room, that pianist, whether they are the music director or not, is there to support you. They are your advocate, set them up for success so that they can set you up for success. Once you are cast in a show, start building a good relationship with your music director, they should not be on a pedestal. Respect them, they are an authority figure in the room, but they are there to help you be your best. When you have questions or concerns, bring them up and ask for help. A good music director will gladly help however they can, especially if you have already been working hard on your own and built a rapport with them.

If you are in a community production or regional production your music director might teach pitches, however, in higher level productions the expectation is that you have reviewed your part on your own or with a private vocal coach and know it well enough to start polishing and getting off book. The sooner you have your pitches learned the sooner the music director gets to really do their job of crafting a sound that is special and appropriate to the piece in a meaningful way.

Throughout the process please take a music director's notes just as seriously as any other directors. Write them down and make them happen. Once the show is on its feet, keep listening to your music director, keep working with them to get it better, just like you keep exploring your character and finding those new moments, the music should be the same way. Continually study, ask questions, run through the work, take warm ups seriously, and actively ask what you can improve on, and even if they say, "you are great", keep seeking feedback and working to make it better.

E. A Letter to Directors and Choreographers

We are a team, we are in this together to make art and share these musical stories. Everything each of us does can impact the other, so we need to have open lines of communication and relationships built on mutual trust and respect. I am more than a rehearsal pianist, I am more than a pitch pipe, I am a director and artist just the same as you. I might need more help or more staff, I also might need more time than you do if the show has a lot of music. I might need you to be open to changing something in order to better support an actor's sound production. I am here to tell the story and make art as a group effort.

Tell me your vision and what you need from me to support your vision, and then listen when I need to manage expectations based on reality. I am your teammate and collaborator, we are all here to tell a story together. Keep me in the loop, make sure I have space to give my notes and do the work I need to do. Re-running and re-rehearsing music without blocking or choreo is often necessary to get the show where it needs to be. If I am asking for more time, it is because actors need it, if I am addressing a piece of choreography or blocking, it is because it may potentially negatively impact sound production and as a team we need to troubleshoot and problem solve how to keep your artistic vision and the quality of the music performance at its best.

F. A Letter to Producers

Music direction can include many hats, it is important to be mindful which of those hats tend to be standard in music direction at various levels and what is asking “extra” of a music director in a given production. Here is the base level what all music directors should be expected to do:

- Research and inform cast on the genre, history, and context of the music for a show.
- Be sure actors know what parts they are singing, as well as what style, emotion, and dynamic level those are happening. They should also ensure that proper techniques appropriate to the show are being employed in performance. This can also include adjusting harmonies or parts to accommodate performer’s ability level.
- Give performers direction on how to tell the story, move the plot forward, and impart their character through song.
- Direct or conduct the band or press play on tracks. They may or may not be piano conductors, that should be established early on what the production needs and what the expectation will be for playing piano not only during performances, but during rehearsals as well.
- Support and enhance the director’s vision, work as a collaborative teammate with the stage director and choreographer.
- Be a competent musician versed in choral music, solo singing, ensemble performance, piano, conducting, and advanced music theory understanding, particularly associated with form, part writing, and arranging/compositional techniques. (This does not mean they are composers, or will need to write parts, but understanding how that process works and

what is standard helps a music director teach parts and assist performers with the reasoning for a particular voicing if they are struggling.)

Based on the research presented in this paper, these should be considered the base standards for a music director no matter the level. Below is a list of duties a production may need that goes above and beyond these base level duties and for smaller companies it should be a conversation what your music director can do off of this list if the performance calls for it.

- Re-arranging, re-keying, re-orchestrating, adding in harmonies or composing music for a production.
- Contacting licensing houses to ask for changes, or to submit documentation of changes within a show.
- Copyist work, where you are re-writing instrument parts or vocal lines, this typically requires a music writing software and a significant amount of time.
- Rehearsal pianist - it is common in regional and community settings to have the music director also be the rehearsal pianist, but it is important to establish this expectation early, as not all great music directors are strong pianists. Work with music directors to enable them some flexibility to be able to step into the house to listen, this might mean bringing in a rehearsal pianist for a handful of rehearsals or recruiting a volunteer or intern to be an assistant music director that can be those ears in the house, or step in to play or conduct as needed.
- Music supervisor, this role really only applies to big productions with lots of moving parts. If there is more than one music director, or multiple assistants, several rehearsal pianists, a copyist, an arranger etc. Understanding who is supervising all of this is

important, and if a music director is supervising as well as trying to music direct, it may be extremely difficult to do both.

Music directors are vital parts of the team who are intimately involved from the beginning of a show all the way to the end. They should be equal to, or near equal to the director in level of respect, recognition, and payment. Putting up a musical is a team effort, and a good music director can make or break a show.

G. Letter to Educators

Defining music direction and cultivating this career field starts with educators, not just in universities but in high schools and middle schools. In this series of interviews it was a recurring theme that those who stumbled into this profession got some of their experiences and skills in high school. Programs that gave them the opportunity to play in a pit orchestra, conduct an ensemble, be section leaders, or be a rehearsal pianist for the choir teacher enabled these future musical directors to have some of the skills they needed when they found themselves in the position of being the music director for a musical theater production.

Personally, as a high school student, I did not realize that musical direction was a job, let alone a potential and viable career path. It is important to educate students that in a musical there is both a stage director and a music director, acknowledge where your school program is similar to professional productions and where it is different. Especially if the choir and band teacher have basically split up the music directorial role. Give students the opportunity to learn piano skills no matter their instrument, and give students no matter their instrument opportunities to conduct, to make creative choices, to sing as a soloist as well as in a choir, to guide an ensemble, and to accompany a vocalist. Find places to give students experiences that touch on all the vital skills identified in this research.

For your musicals, consider having assistant music directors, encourage students who are interested in, or show promise, to reach out to local theaters and offer to be assistant music directors as volunteer interns. They will learn valuable skills, network, and could be a huge help to a local theater company that has no budget but could certainly use the extra help in the musical rehearsal room.

H. Interview Questions

How did you come to music direction as a career?

What do you wish actors and directors understood about music directors?

How did you learn how to music direct?

What is the biggest misunderstanding about music directorship in theater?

What experiences/training do you think is most beneficial for a music director?

What are the parameters of a music director's role in a production? What is not enough, just right and too far?

How does collaboration play a role in music directorship?

What has been your biggest issue to overcome as a music director?

What piece of advice would you give someone who aspires to be or finds themselves in a position to be a music director?

Do you think there is a connection between the original composer and music direction? Is that the origins of the job? When you're not the composer, how does that role change?

I. Transcribed Interview Selections

**Joseph Church, author of View From the Podium. October 20th, 2021 via Zoom.
Transcribed by Zoom and selection edited by Kelly Bidstrup Graham.**

Kelly Bidstrup Graham: So what would you I guess in these years since it's been published, you know, have there been significant changes that you've noticed, or like I don't know what has happened since your book came out and like what what does that look like.

Joseph Church: Well, I certainly don't think my book had any effect on the profession, I think a lot of people use it as a reference, in the profession and that's kind of what it was intended for and I found that out midway while writing it.

With the editor I mean, I was fighting with Oxford at all times about the length and then we finally decided it just wasn't it couldn't be any shorter so let's approach it in a different way. And we did and I think it works and a lot of these characters thankfully that you value it and I think it is a good lesson.

Is it also gives a lot of points of view on the same situation but.,
above all, the music directors point of view but it's very important for music directors.

To take into account everyone else's point of view and that's sort of one of the main philosophies of the book and it's a collaboration and you're part of a bigger collaboration and it tries to educate you on that, and that also, below to the book, because all of a sudden, we had to describe all these other professions that you are related to.

And again, I think that's sort of the importance of it, I don't think we've really affected the music direction world, in fact I think there's been a greater separation in the profession between at least in the Broadway level.

Between supervisor and music director, and it really has some of the higher functions that I described in the book are very much now the province of a music supervisor. And the music director is much more functionary in the sense of verse in the cast, partially receive the orchestra and conducting the orchestra night tonight and so it's really boiling down to that which is probably interestingly, what the most kind of basic functions of music direction are especially when you're doing repertory showing you're not working on something new or revising a tremendously, you're pretty much reproducing another performance in your reading it, as you would a classical score.

Teaching it to people collaborating with others on the design and stuff like that, but still treating it like an existing piece of music so, I think that's the biggest change, at least at the higher echelons and I couldn't speak properly to university and semi pro and community and all the other forms of theatre that are out there in the world. Because I just don't do them very much and I don't see them very much, I see the academic world, I don't think I've ever had much of an effect on the academic world, either, although again a lot of people music directing. In the colleges and universities, who have not done it before you know I get a lot of calls and a lot of thank yous and and people, you know the book sells as well, as you know, any sort of book of that kind would in a tiny little market so yeah I mean it's every music director, I know has a copy, which is great. We keep them to remind people it exists, though, even five years later. People have kind of like you know what about what's didn't come out this year, so what so you know it's We live in a fast moving world right.

Kelly Bidstrup Graham - If somebody wanted to go into music direction, what would you feel would be a good undergrad to then do as a Grad?

Joseph Church: It doesn't really matter. People come to it from a lot of directions from general music degrees, from piano degrees, from conducting degrees. I don't think it really matters again, because music direction is such a compendium of skills and not one single skill and it also kind of requires a certain experienced or savvy in just other things, like drama, like understanding drama, like understanding people and psychology and relating to others that again, it's a position that's much better done when a person has a little bit more experience under their belt in multiple areas. So that let's say I mean just your ear training alone, you know I teach a lot of really good music students at NYU, but they can't take dictation yet. Not fluently. And you have to, to be a music director, you absolutely have to, you have to do it instantaneously. So. yeah so that's sort of thing that's, so I think at the Masters level it's a great thing to pursue and there are actually five or six maybe seven, now masters programs in the US and I keep popping up they're all really small, they're all really I mean and which is again right there aren't that many gigs for people in that like if you know two graduate students, while they're only going to be two or three. musicals that year at the school, so you can only have so many projects and things like that so yeah.

Marci Shegogue, August 30th, 2021 via Zoom. Transcribed by Zoom and selection edited by Kelly Bidstrup Graham.

Kelly Bidstrup Graham: What is something you wish actors and directors understood about music directing?

Marci Shegogue: I wish they understood that In a musical it is the music director who is the most integral part because we're pulling together the the music, the story, the skills, that each person brings the table. We're coordinating it, you know, even with the choreographer doing the dance, the music is the central part.

The music is the meat of the whole thing, so if the person, that is, that is working with that music is central, and I feel like the only time that that has been.

The good relationships that I've had with directors and choreographers and musicians and producers is when they understand and respect that, in a musical, the music is the biggest part. And that they put the trust into the music director to make choices, you know as a collaborator not as an individual person. We never you know, none of us work in a vacuum, but, the difference between working with a group, where the director says, "what I say goes period", versus, "let's figure it out together and and consider all of the aspects of scene," where music is in a musical music is [Important] I've worked with people that don't get it and will never get it and I work with people that that they totally get it and there's a huge difference in how, it's a huge difference in the success of the show and then telling the story.

But when people are open to having a collaboration and understanding, that everybody brings something to the table and that you can't just operate, you know the directors is not, the director should not be the only. voice in the room. I guess the main thing, the collaborative death, but I wish that they would know that collaboration is going to make their job so much better and then

trusting the people around them and we'll make their job easier and make it make the story telling a bigger part of the show. You know. I think that's my biggest pet peeve, I mean that's, it must be 40 years now, yeah, about 40 something years of music directing that's my takeaway. That when you're treated well... yeah.

Kelly Bidstrup Graham: nope, I feel that, feel that that's awesome um do is there anything you want factor, why is like what you wish actors understood.

Marci Shegogue: Oh yeah they're actors, I feel like.

I want them to understand that we're on their side we're not judging it's not a matter of judging, I if i'm giving notes in a musical sense, it's not a judgment thing it's it's, about

the good of the show and the good of the actor so it's like,

I'm not the enemy, I'm not trying to whip you into shape or make you do something that's uncomfortable. I want the actor to understand that I am there for them. I'm trying to make their job easier and to make the story of the show go well and help the communication. I just feel like, the times that I've had really good relationships with actors have been when they trust and understand that I am there to help them.

And that's where the whole kindness thing comes in, is like when you are walking in the room, if you come as a music director, if you come in with the air of you know I know this stuff and I'm just going to tell you how to do it you're not winning any friends.

You know you're not going to get what you want, if you're not working with the person and alongside them and trusting each other in the process...

Kelly Bidstrup Graham: What do you think is the biggest misunderstanding about music directors in theater as a broader area.

Marci Shegogue: Biggest misunderstanding, I think, is that, I think along the same lines where the misunderstanding is that we only deal with the music that we don't, It's like if we're, we're part of the storytelling, we're part of the experience, we're part of the character, we're part of the acting, we're part of the dancing, it's not a separate entity and when people do understand that the music, like i'm saying like the music is integral to all of it and the communication about, around the music, is it's not a matter of like you know I've had people that go well I'll just tell the music director what we're going to do it's like that's not helpful because in the end, you can tell me, but if you give me no conversation about no chance to like talk about it you're not going to get the full effect of what you are aiming for, so if you come to if you know if somebody came and said, "You know I want to change, you know just just cut that scene change music" it's like okay wait, No i'm speaking up for the music, but I'm also, it's not about this piece of music that you can just like chop and throw away like there's not a reason it's there, there's a reason that it, you know makes sense in the context, there's a reason that the composer wrote it, I mean, and there's a reason that the actors may need it, so most of the time when people say, can we just cut the scene change music I'm like let's just wait.

Now, can you see here's a couple reasons why you might not want to cut it, but we can you know, in the end we'll work on it. I guess I just don't know I don't like being told what to do.

J. Interviewee Information - Table 2

Beth Everett	<p>“Visiting Assistant Professor of Music with an emphasis in choral music at Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas where she conducts the Southwestern University Chorale, Southwestern University Singers, and teaches courses in conducting and music literature. In addition to her love for choral music, Dr. Everett has an extensive list of opera and musical theater productions in her conducting repertoire ranging from La Traviata to A Chorus Line, from Godspell to Carousel and Into the Woods.”</p> <p>"Beth Everett • Maestra." Maestra. November 17, 2020. Accessed January 17, 2022. https://maestramusic.org/profile/beth-everett/.</p>
Cherie Rosen	<p>“Music director, conductor, pianist, wrote, mother, baker. Currently: Associate Conductor at the Lion King (Broadway) since 2005. Other Bway credits: Man of La Mancha, King and I, The Life, Annie Get Your Gun, Tommy. Many years touring, subbing, traveling, living.”</p> <p>"Cherie Rosen • Maestra." Maestra. May 19, 2019. Accessed January 17, 2022. https://maestramusic.org/profile/cherie-rosen/#:~:text=Music director, conductor, pianist,,, subbing, traveling, living.</p>
David Cody	<p>“David Cody, is very active in the opera and concert scene of the intermountain west as a tenor soloist, musical director, stage director, and clinician. He has sung many leading and supporting operatic roles with such companies as The Opera Theater of St. Louis, The Ohio Light Opera, Intermountain Opera, Rimrock Opera, Nevada Opera Theater and Montana Lyric Opera.”</p> <p>David Cody (Tenor) - Short Biography. Accessed January 17, 2022. https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Bio/Cody-David.htm#:~:text=David Cody, is very active,The Opera Theater of St.</p>
David Nehls	<p>“David Nehls (born 28 April 1964) is an American actor, singer, composer and lyricist who, with Betsy Kelso, wrote The Great American Trailer Park Musical. Among other appearances he originated the role of Riff Raff in the 1996-2000 European tour of The Rocky Horror Show. Today he works as a Musical Director for various theatres across the United States.”</p> <p>"David Nehls." Wikipedia. November 05, 2021. Accessed January 17, 2022.</p>

	<p>https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Nehls#:~:text=As a Musical Director Nehls,2009, 2011, 2013).</p>
Denes Van Parys	<p>“Opera Conductor with regional companies Musical Director of National Tours and in New York City Opera and Musical Theatre Educator (Professionally and at the University Level) Church Musician (AGO Organist and Choir Director)” Van Parys, Denes. "Denes Van Parys." LinkedIn. Accessed January 16, 2022. https://www.linkedin.com/in/denes-van-parys-ba03088/.</p>
Diane Milowici	<p>Pittsburgh based community music director.</p>
DJ Himstedt	<p>“The lawyer-turned-investigator re-started his musical career by accompanying on the piano for some of his daughters’ shows at Prelude to Evergreen Children’s Chorale and Evergreen High School’s “Madrigal.” He then began helping out with the EHS choir department by substituting for the full-time accompanist. But in 2008, when the accompanist left, D.J. took the job. Since then, he has taken on even more musical roles in the community, becoming an active member of the Evergreen Chorale. If he’s not performing on stage in shows like “Carousel” or “An Evening with Disney,” he’s helping out by playing piano at rehearsals or assistant directing. He also sits on the Chorale’s Board of Directors. D.J. continues to lend his talents on the piano whenever needed to the Chorale, to the Stagedoor theater in Conifer, and, of course, as EHS’s full-time accompanist.” Gartside, Nicole. "Meet D.J. Himstedt." Just Around Here. Accessed January 17, 2022. https://justaroundhere.com/index.php/all-sections/names-faces/it-s-nice-to-know-you/203-meet-d-j-himstedt.</p>
Eric Weinstein	<p>“Eric has had a long and diverse career in performing arts, including over 30 years as a professional musician, actor, arranger, songwriter, and composer. He feels so fortunate and lucky to have had amazing opportunities to be in hundreds of different shows, music reviews, cabarets, and even tribute bands... Eric carved out a unique niche for himself in the theatrical community as a diverse performer who can sing, act, move, and play a variety of instruments on stage. He has recently transitioned into composing and recording for film and theatrical projects in the Denver and Los Angeles markets.”</p>

	Weinstein, Eric. "About Eric J Weinstein." Eric J Weinstein. Accessed January 17, 2022. https://ericweinstein.com/about .
Jake Cannon	<p>“Music Director, Pianist, Conductor New York, New York, United States - Music Director - Pianist/Accompanist (Audition Pianist) - Conductor - Vocal Coach - Arranger”</p> <p>Cannon, Jake. "Jake Cannon." LinkedIn. Accessed January 16, 2022. https://www.linkedin.com/in/jake-cannon-50b193b7/.</p>
Joseph Church	<p>“Joseph Church (born November 25, 1957) is an American music director, composer, pianist, arranger, orchestrator, and author.[1] He is best known for his music direction of the musicals The Who's Tommy and The Lion King on Broadway.”</p> <p>"Joseph Church." Wikipedia. July 21, 2021. Accessed January 17, 2022. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Church#:~:text=Joseph%20Church%20(born%20November%202025,The%20Lion%20King%20on%20Broadway.</p>
Julie Danielson	<p>“Julie Danielson currently serves as the Artistic Director and Resident Music Director for Music Theatre Kansas City (MTKC). She has her own private vocal coaching studio and works as a professional musician. In New York, she was the Broadway music assistant for Bring it On and played for Spring Awakening, Legally Blonde and Smash. She worked for Telsey+Co Casting in NY and also coached for Broadway Evolved and the Broadway Artists Alliance. She has music directed over 80 shows and has played for over 100. Education: CCM.”</p> <p>"Julie Danielson • Maestra." Maestra. March 15, 2019. Accessed January 17, 2022. https://maestramusic.org/profile/julie-danielson/#:~:text=Julie%20Danielson%20currently%20serves%20as,works%20as%20a%20professional%20musician.</p>
Keith Levenson	<p>“In any capacity – conductor, arranger or music director, Keith Levenson stands at the tip of the multi-tasking elite. He has a wealth of experience in every aspect of the art and the business of music. Fluent in scoring, instrumentation, sound design, and everything in between.</p>

	<p>Keith's career has run the gamut from Broadway's Annie to Meatloaf, from the London Symphony Orchestra to The Who. He is equally at home in a regional shed, Broadway theatre or a large arena.”</p> <p>Levenson, Keith. "About Keith Levenson." Keithlevenson. Accessed January 17, 2022. https://www.keithlevenson.net/bio.</p>
<p>Marci Shegogue</p>	<p>“Marci Shegogue (music director) has music directed hundreds of professional, community and educational productions over the past 40 years. She is president and music director of The Free Theatre, a tuition-free student-led teen theatre company and resident music director for Free Range Humans. Marci has worked extensively with educational theatre and music programs, including Montgomery County Public Schools, Imagination Stage, Act Two and BlackRock Center for the Arts. As a UMD theatre alumna, she is excited to return to the community where her music directing career began. Marci is a collaborative accompanist, audition coach and freelance musician.”</p> <p>"Little Women: The Broadway Musical." The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center. Accessed January 17, 2022. https://theclarice.umd.edu/events/2021/little-women-the-broadway-musical#:~:text=Marci Shegogue (music director) has,director for Free Range Humans.</p>
<p>Mitch Samu</p>	<p>“Mitch Samu is a professional Music Director, Conductor, Composer, and Accompanist. He has over 300 production credits as a music director. Mitch is the music director at Columbine United Church. He is the composer of several major choral works and musicals.”</p> <p>"Mitch Samu." Front Range Theatre Company *. Accessed January 17, 2022. http://www.frontrangetheatre.org/mitch-samu.html#:~:text=Mitch Samu is a professional,major choral works and musicals.</p>
<p>Patrice Le Blanc</p>	<p>“Patrice has established herself an accomplished vocalist and pianist as a soloist and with other bands. She caters each performance to the crowd and adds the right ambiance to any event. Patrice covers a variety of music styles including Jazz, Blues, Rock, Broadway, Folk and Classical genres. Patrice offers quality</p>

	entertainment where each performance is unique and memorable.” "Patrice LeBlanc." About. Accessed January 17, 2022. https://patriceleblanc.com/about .
Richard Shore	“Equally at home in both the classical and musical theatre repertoires, award winner Richard Shore has long been active as a performer and educator. He has appeared throughout the United States and in Europe. He has premiered new works on the concert and theatrical stages, and has worked with many well-known artists.” "Richard Shore Music." HOME: Richard-shore-music3. Accessed January 17, 2022. https://www.richardshoremusic.com/ .
Rob Parish	UK Based music director, grew up in music and as a performer. Fell into the profession, started in community/regional theater.
Susan Finnigan	“Experienced Accompanist with a demonstrated history of working in the higher education industry. Skilled in Musical Theatre, Music Composition, Arts Administration, Theatre, and Chamber Music. Strong arts and design professional with a BM focused in Applied Voice/Piano from University of Houston.” Finnigan, Susan. "Susan Finnigan." LinkedIn. Accessed January 16, 2022. https://www.linkedin.com/in/susan-finnigan-b9a7a942/ .
Thomas Pedersen	“Pedersen has music directed for many well-known television stars including Gary Sandy (WKRP in Cincinnati), John McCook (The Bold and the Beautiful), David Canary (All My Children), Barbara Eden (I Dream of Jeannie), Shari Lewis and Lamb Chop, and Broadway star Rebecca Luker. As Artistic Director of Theatre Ten Ten, New York's oldest Off-off-Broadway Theater, he produced and music directed more than 20 productions, and has been Music Director at the Long Beach Civic Light Opera in Long Beach, Calif., the Library Theater in Warren, Pa. and the University of Michigan Opera Theatre.” "N. Thomas Pedersen." N. Thomas Pedersen. Accessed January 17, 2022. http://www.nthomaspedersen.com/ .