

POETRY in MUSIC



Class 6: March 27, 2023

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Class 6: Words for Music

*Words written specifically to be set to music, whether by a close collaborator or the lyricists themselves. Among many possibilities, we can distinguish between songs in which the music dominates and those in which the words do. I will devote the first hour to **Songs of Fantasy**, dealing with loss, yearning, and escape. The second hour, by contrast, will concentrate on **Songs of Life**, that have dealt with contemporary conditions throughout history. rb.*

A. Gilbert & Sullivan

The works of WILLIAM SCHWENCK GILBERT (1836–1911) and ARTHUR SEYMOUR SULLIVAN (1842–1900) used remote and unreal settings to criticize the *mores* of Victorian society. We look at their approach to two different types of song.

- ***I've got a little list.*** Song of the executioner Ko Ko in *The Mikado* (1885), sung in the traditional D'Oyly Carte production by John Reed, and in Jonathan Miller's updated version for the English National Opera by Richard Stuart.
- ***The sun whose rays.*** Yum Yum's song in *The Mikado*, sung in the D'Oyly Carte production by Valerie Masterson, and at the ENO by Lesley Garrett.
- ***The modern major-general.*** Major General Stanley's patter song in *The Pirates of Penzance* (1879), sung by George Rose in the 1983 film.

B. Longing & Regret

A gentle deconstruction of three American songs from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth, each of which became a best-seller. Was it because of their music or their words?

- ***After the ball is over.*** 1891 song by CHARLES K. HARRIS (1867–1930), sung by the composer, and by Rebecca Baxter as quoted in Kern's *Show Boat*.
- ***Somewhere over the rainbow.*** Opening song of *The Wizard of Oz* (1939); music by HAROLD ARLEN (1905–86) and words by YIP HARBURG (1896–1981). Sung by Judy Garland then played on the cello by Yo-Yo Ma.

- **Moon River.** Song with words by JOHNNY MERCER (1909–76) and music by HENRY MANCINI (1924–94). Sung by Audrey Hepburn in the 1961 movie *Breakfast at Tiffany's*.

C. Send in the Clowns

Continuing in a similar vein, we look at a song by STEPHEN SONDHEIM (1930–2021) that became the hit of his show *A Little Night Music* in 1973.

- **Send in the clowns.** Explained by the composer then sung by Judi Dench.

D. History in Song

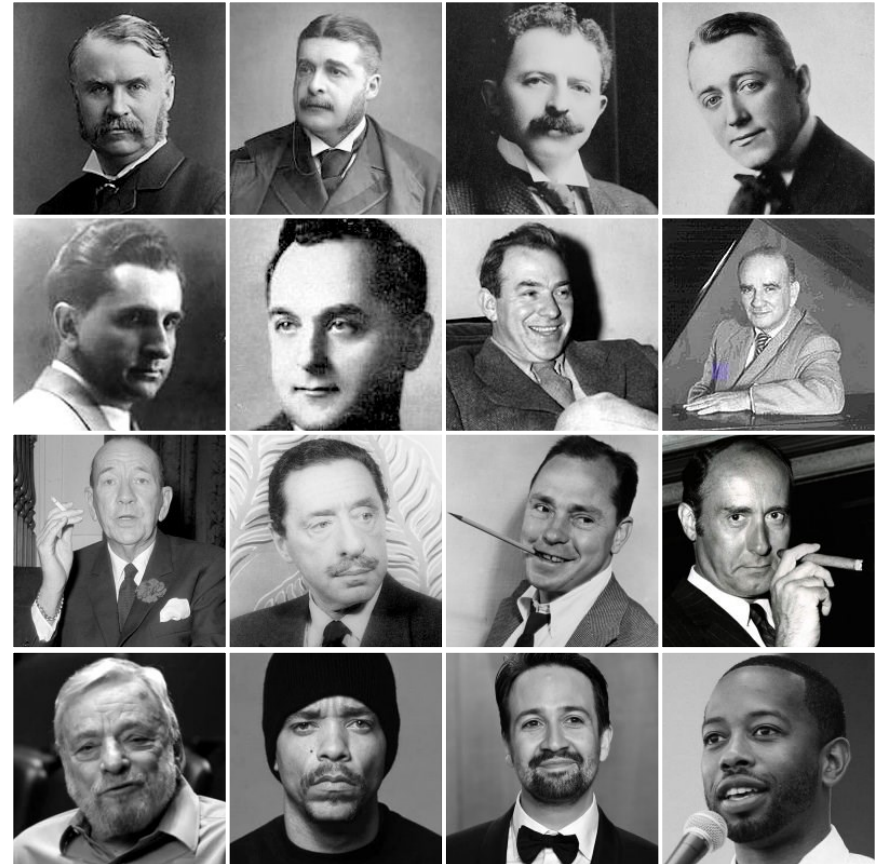
Three songs that encapsulate moments in 20th-century American history, together with a satirical pendant from across the pond.

- **Over there.** WW1 recruiting song by GEORGE M. COHAN (1878–1942). Portrayed by James Cagney in the 1942 film *Yankee Doodle Dandy*.
- **Brother, can you spare a dime?** Song by YIP HARBURG and JAY GORNEY (1896–1990) reflecting a proud American brought down by the Depression. Sung in a modern cover video by Bruce Hearn.
- **Happy days are here again.** Song by JACK YELLEN (1892–1991) and MILTON AGER (1893–1979). Written for the 1929 movie musical *Chasing Rainbows*, it was pulled into the real world when used by FDR for his 1932 convention. Performed in a modern re-enactment video by the Belgian group The Army Stars, and sung in a very different style by the young Barbra Streisand.
- **There are bad times just around the corner.** 1952 song by NOEL COWARD (1899–1973), wittily combining the moods of the two previous songs.

E. The (almost) Spoken Word

A very brief excursion into **rap**, a contemporary urban art-form that begins with verse, sometimes feeding into melody but always built on rhythm.

- **Adrenalin rush.** Poetry slam performance by RUDY FRANCISCO (1982–) about a young black man's fear of getting pulled over by the police.
- **I'm your pusher.** Rap video by ICE-T (Lauren Morrow, 1958–) ostensibly about drug dealing, but really about selling bootleg tapes (or vice-versa).
- **My shot.** Dialogue and ensemble from Act I of *Hamilton* (2015), written, composed by, and starring LIN-MANUEL MIRANDA (1980–).



Writers, chronologically by rows: Gilbert, Sullivan, Harris, Cohan
Yellen, Ager, Harburg, Gorney
Coward, Arlen, Mercer, Mancini
Sondheim, Ice-T, Miranda, Francisco

Thank you all for being part of this course. Details of all classes at:

<https://brunyate.com/poetry-music/>

And do feel free to write: rogerbrunyate@gmail.com