

Frequently Asked Questions Musical Theatre Syllabus 2023

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Musical Theatre Syllabus 2023

When does the new musical theatre syllabus start?

At the launch of the new syllabus Summer Session 2023. This means that the current [music theatre syllabus for 2019-2021](#) will remain in effect until December 2024.

Music Theatre or Musical Theatre?

The structure of the syllabus has a narrative and progression that runs through the entire syllabus from Steps to Diploma. The introduction of acting out the song of choice from the Repertoire list is a vital aspect of the new syllabus aimed at securing a deeper understanding of the lyric as a story to be told through actions and spoken word as well as the sung voice.

There is a presumption that this LCME syllabus was devised as a singing exam to partner up with our classical singing and Pop Vocal syllabi. This is not the case, and it was recognised that there was a need to offer a genuine musical theatre syllabus. Hence, a name change of the syllabus title from Music Theatre to Musical Theatre.

Musical theatre is an acting-based subject. Music theatre is driven by music.

Why have the requirements for each grade changed?

They haven't. The two syllabi (1) Music Theatre 2019-2021 and (2) Musical Theatre 2023 expect the same number of songs to be performed, except for Grade 6, which requires only three songs because of the creative demands and the nature of the work to be completed. Each grade requires greater performance opportunities for the candidate, including two, three, or four songs plus an additional acting monologue from the song chosen from the set repertoire list.

Own-choice material for each grade will be a sung performance. The main difference is that the lyric from the song chosen from the set repertoire list will be the text of the monologue. The acting out of the monologue will engage the tutor and students in dialogue about the content and inform the storyline to create a dynamic personal connection with the lyric. This will also enhance the potential and relevance of the discussion component for those candidates offering that route of graded qualification.

Steps 1 and 2 examinations encourage repertoire similar to the previous Music Theatre syllabus 2019-2021. Steps 1 and 2 follow on from the Early Learning programme; students have the opportunity to express and develop their ideas in speech and music. The ability to inhabit a character in the nursery rhyme or present the story as a narrator is exciting and rewarding for students to explore in the early stages of performing musical theatre. Consider the potential of the simple lyric of 'This Little Light of Mine' for a 5yr old or a 55yr old. The additional choice can be from any musical and should offer a contrast with the set repertoire choice.

How does the musical theatre syllabus encourage diversity, equality and inclusion?

The pathway to the door of musical theatre is vast and varied and should be open to everyone. This syllabus engages with all abilities and offers everyone a realistic opportunity to explore the world of musical theatre in an effective and positive atmosphere and learning environment. All songs in the set lists can be sung in any context devised by any candidate rather than a facsimile performance copied from the musical or a YouTube performance. This will encourage all students to explore and create work of a unique and individual status and produce a meaningful performance in which the performer and audience can engage effectively.

How many options are there for candidates to take musical theatre-graded examinations?

The musical theatre examination has broadened its scope to encompass students with a variety of needs and abilities at all levels. This new syllabus has three graded qualifications – Recital, Concert and Cabaret. LCME has all graded qualifications available for online performances as well as face-to-face. There are opportunities for all to offer three different options for graded examinations. There must be parity of experience between the online examination experience and that of the face-to-face.

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What is the most significant change in the musical theatre syllabus?

This assessment considers the acting to be at the centre of the work. Rather than the presentation of the song, it is now the performance skills in each song that will be assessed.

Why should we purchase Handbooks?

Unfortunately, the exam will create additional expenditure to proceed with Handbooks for these musical theatre examinations. However, the Handbook selection at each grade engages with at least ten songs, roughly costing approx. £2.50 for each song if purchased separately from Hal Leonard.

Why have set musical theatre repertoire at each grade and diploma?

The set repertoire at each grade enables examiners and students to offer parity of performance experience at each grade and for assessment to be regulated appropriately. Consistency and parity across the entire syllabus are essential. The set repertoire at each grade is chosen to reflect a set of emotional and narrative journeys that will be interesting to explore. The number of Guided Hours (GH) and Total Qualification Time (TQT), in line with the accrediting bodies, are also specified for each grade.

The object of the repertoire at each grade is to offer songs as a starting point and to reinvent the song to suit the creative and emotional journey of the candidate. A young adult tackling Grade 1 will be able to find at least one song out of the repertoire list suited to their needs and work on the lyric to create an original interpretation that might, in turn, inspire the sung performance.

Suitability of graded repertoire?

Critics suggest that specific songs set for a particular grade (particularly in the early grades) are not suitable or appropriate. In the same breath, these same critics suggest that the identified repertoire choices offer little opportunity for various ages and abilities. LCME believes that it has done both in offering songs developing in narrative and emotional complexity as the basis of the work is on acting the text through spoken and sung words. Unlike other boards that offer over 250 songs between Grades 1 and 3, LCME has restricted this choice to a maximum of ten songs enabling the tutor to choose an additional song of their own choice to contrast with the prescribed work.

The set repertoire at each grade has been carefully chosen to reflect an emotional journey rather than a musical one. Once the playing of a character from the musical has been separated from the process, this will enable candidates of any age, embracing these early grades, to bring something unique, creative and magical to the exciting world of musical theatre. It is agreed that some pieces may appear easier than others too, but this will always be part of the journey of discovery in choosing the song from the set repertoire appropriate for the student. For example, a candidate of any age acting and singing the simple lyric 'This Little Light of Mine' has a vast creative performance they can explore.

Why speak a song lyric as a monologue?

To speak the song lyric as a monologue is an essential skill for any musical theatre performer. This skill enables the performer to meet the truth head-on and communicate the lyric when sung with a genuine sense of belief and conviction. Song lyrics are short, concise, self-contained stories to be communicated with truth to an audience. The fact that the lyric becomes sung is because the situation in the drama can no longer be spoken because of the heightened tension in the character's emotional journey.

The structure of each song lyric required to be performed as a monologue has already been considered and appears in the Musical Theatre Handbook for each grade. The reading and performance of the lyric and being able to communicate as a monologue is at the heart of performing musical theatre.

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What about repetitive song lyrics?

The lyrics have been carefully chosen for their narrative and situational context and are all contained in the Musical Theatre Handbook. If you don't purchase the Handbook, you'll still need to consider the song's lyrics in as much detail as possible. The entire lyric will be required to be performed as the entire narrative journey of the song should be studied in detail. Remember that the lyric must be handed to the examiner before the start of the exam.

Too much emphasis is put on repetitive lyrics, so the lyric as a monologue is boring and uneventful. This is far from the truth. Repetitive thoughts are a multidimensional structure which can make the individual stay in the same frame of mind or move forwards depending on how the thought is driven. Sometimes it is beneficial to understand that there are two ways to have or speak the same thought.

How important is the word 'repetition' in understanding musical theatre?

The word repetition has been used in various critical thoughts regarding the work required for this new syllabus. Worth noting that the French word 'répétition' realises the rehearsal – an essential activity in understanding a song.

Repeating ideas and phrases in a song creates a significant power in interpreting the lyric and helps the performer move towards a goal of achievement. Thinking about what you want and believing in the truth of the situation is encouraged by having a free interpretation of the song lyric. Each song has its world to investigate. Often a song lyric persuades the singer to remain in control of their emotions no matter what is happening around them. In the opening of *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens suggests this when he uses repetition effectively to contrast both the negative and the positive: "It was the best of times., it was the worst of times." A repetition is a powerful tool in the performer's work for many reasons, including some of the ideas mentioned above.

Further thoughts on the use of repetition in musical theatre?

Consider singing a song like crossing the road at the same junction you go to work daily. We cross the road at the same time and place daily, but the circumstances will always differ. One day lots of traffic, the next day, none, the following day, a cyclist... So, it is with the lyric of a song. We repeat a thought, but the circumstance has probably changed because we are repeating it! Repetition is reinforcement.

Consider the following examples of repetition:

Thatcher's: "Education, education, education..." Each word was spoken with even more drive than the first.

Macbeth speaks the thoughts: "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow..." Why does he repeat these words? There is purpose in repetition. This is the same in musical theatre.

Annie when sings: "Tomorrow, tomorrow, I love ya Tomorrow...". How does she feel about each repetition of tomorrow?

The spiritual "This little light of mine" is repeated three times (Steps repertoire). How can this possibly work as a dramatic monologue? I hear you ask. It is suggested that each time the line is spoken, the thought can be different and even more determined or contradictory as the performer decides how they feel about the situation being explored as they repeat the exact words repeatedly.

Why write out the lyric by hand?

By writing the lyric out by hand, you will contact the meaning of each word, and if you speak to them as you write, you will become even more aware of the secrets locked in each lyric. This will mean a greater connection with the text rather than just singing the words to the music from a CD performance.

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What has happened to the Discussion?

The discussion will remain Component 2 for **Recital: Steps and Graded examinations**. The discussion will focus on the actual performances undertaken in the performance of the grade entered. The discussion will be about the songs performed. Having worked on the set repertoire as both song and monologue, there will be plenty to discuss so that the discussion will be a natural part of the exam rather than a prepared and even 'rehearsed' event.

As noted in the comments about repetition, the dialogue between the tutor and student will interrogate why the line is repeated. The results of this discussion are currently unknown, but what transpires in the discussion will also be of some interest in the actual performance - even if it remains the same. At least the performer now understands that the intention of the repetition is precisely the same and why there is to be no change in the emotional response. This is as important as knowing why a repetitious thought should change.

What is Component 2 in Concert: Graded examinations?

Component 2 will be a short evaluative commentary by the examiner regarding the entire programme's success. This is an ideal opportunity for those who wish to receive an evaluative comment written by the examiner.

What is Component 2 in Cabaret: Graded examination?

This grade aims to allow a candidate to complete a cabaret-style performance linking a specific number of songs (see each grade) based on a theme or some other innovative device. This assessment allows singing an extra song of their choice. There is no component 2, as an additional song has replaced it.

What, no costumes?

This is a puzzling statement as it concerns many, but where does it say 'No costumes' in the syllabus? If you consider the previous three syllabi for Music Theatre, the information is as follows:

2013-2018

An 'impression' of costume (e.g. a hat, shawl, jacket, etc.) is expected to aid performance. Full costume, **although not a requirement of the examination**, is perfectly acceptable if the candidate wishes. Where costume is not employed, comfortable, **non-restrictive clothing (e.g. rehearsal 'blacks' or performance dress) is suggested**. Appropriate footwear (shoes, dance/jazz boots, not trainers) should be worn.

In the following syllabus (see below), a slight change in the examination requirements was noted.

2019-2021

An 'impression' of costume (a hat, shawl, jacket, etc.) is expected to aid performance. Where costume is not employed, comfortable, non-restrictive clothing (rehearsal blacks or performance dress) is suggested. Any props must be easily accessible and used to enhance the performance as appropriate. **Marks will not be deducted where costumes or props are not employed.**

Further development regarding the use of costumes following guidelines set out by Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) required the rubric to be slightly changed as follows:

2023

To maintain and create a safe environment in the examination room and safeguard the musical theatre performer's physical and creative skill when communicating contrasting characters, a minimum of loose-fitting neutral-coloured clothing (including footwear) that allows for ease of movement is required. Using simple props and a hint of a costume (such as a hat, shawl or jacket) should clarify the character identified in each performance. This will make the performance more significant and appropriate to the needs of the overall assessment. **Marks will not be deducted where costumes and props are not used.**

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Regarding matters of inclusion and equality, costumes are allowed but not appropriate to be assessed. These are performance exams which assess the quality performance outcomes of the individual and their response to varied material performed relating to different styles and genres. Nothing can stop a candidate from wearing a costume; simple hand properties should be considered. However, if worn, the costume must be appropriate for both performances, as little time is available to transition between performances.

Why no sight singing?

Sight singing is an essential aspect of the industry relating to commercial work and potential broadcasting and, of course, can still be taught to those who require it as part of their musical theatre training. However, it has been decided that this skill should not be assessed in musical theatre by LCME examinations. We aim to make opportunities available to explore unique and individual performances and allow students to be assessed in their performance skills and how they communicate ideas and stories to the audience and examiner. More importantly, all three LCME-graded qualifications (Recital, Concert and Cabaret), whether assessed face-to-face or digitally, offer the same opportunities to all candidates.

How are these different components in the graded examinations assessed?

The assessment criteria are clear for all grades. These are published in the syllabus and will be followed strictly when evaluating the performances. All three of the above-graded qualifications, whilst offering different pathways to assessment, are all Ofqual regulated, and UCAS points are available.

Why unknown contemporary musical theatre songs as set repertoire in Grade 6?

The new musical theatre syllabus celebrates the curation of new writing from composers currently working in the industry, such as John Cameron (orchestrations for *Les Misérables*) and the work of young composers currently working in musical theatre in the UK and New York supported by Musical Theatre Networks and other appropriate and important bodies that encourage and sponsor the world of musical theatre.

Studying at this grade with contemporary musical theatre allows candidates and teachers to explore how to create the character, establish context for performance, and offer an innovative, highly creative way of working relevant for future development. This firmly places our syllabus in the 21st century and moves candidates away from the more established commercial musical theatre they are all too familiar with, enabling students to engage, explore, and develop vital skills. It also supports the philosophy of this new syllabus, emphasising creating original and unique performances.

Grade 6 will challenge us all as it explores contemporary repertoire unheard of in the commercial market. This new material and approach to learning produce a creative environment where pure imagination and creativity come into play because there is no previous performance upon which to draw – a unique and refreshing experience. Each song has a backing track to support the rehearsal work. Following the performance of the lyric as a monologue, the exciting adventure of investigating the song will take place.

Why were teachers not consulted about the content of the new musical theatre syllabus?

Considerable work went into developing the musical theatre syllabus. Conferences were held with examiners, and practitioners, including theatre directors, musical directors, performers, teachers, writers, composers, coaches and students were part of every stage of the process representing the points of view of many.

What is the future of this syllabus?

LCME aims to provide for further thought and reflection regarding the syllabus content; candidates will find this syllabus challenging and rewarding as they perform with a greater and deeper understanding of the emotional and narrative content of their performed repertoire. It is envisaged that this syllabus offers a fresh, invigorating and different approach to other boards and prepares candidates by providing a solid background in processing the song and communicating the narrative to an audience.

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What has happened to the freedom of choice in the musical theatre syllabus?

Freedom of choice is sometimes difficult to handle when considering standards and graded qualifications – some even mention the Ofqual aspect of these qualifications. However, on the part of the new syllabus, I think you will find that every aspect of the syllabus has a complete set of assessment criteria which will meet the demands of Ofqual and any other such interested body. The option to have a set repertoire list is that each grade has a marker and standard and a means by which a student can then offer a contrasting choice of repertoire.

What will I learn about performance from taking these musical theatre qualifications?

In preparing for each graded assessment, you will

- develop acting techniques that will enhance and enable you to develop complex characters
- develop an understanding of specific circumstances for each song which will create a truthful performance
- become familiar with both music and text
- develop a clearer understanding of the story to be told
- begin to make strong acting choices in your performance
- inevitably communicate a compelling story

What are Guided Hours (GH) and Total Qualification Time (TQT)?

These are requirements attached to the accredited graded qualifications and prescribed by Ofqual as a minimum number of hours appropriate to prepare for these qualifications. The following table provides examples of what activities might count towards both GL (hours) and TQT:

Examples of Types of Activity	GLH	TQT
Acting through the song process and research	✓	✓
Assessment by tutor	✓	
Devising work		✓
Dialogue between tutor and student about the performance texts	✓	✓
Dress and technical rehearsal/s	✓	✓
Duo work		✓
Final performance	✓	✓
Improvisation work	✓	✓
Movement classes	✓	✓
Performance-based learning led by a tutor/director or specialist coach	✓	✓
Rehearsal work	✓	✓
Research - listening		✓
Research - reading		✓
Self-assessment		✓
Self-reflection		✓
Sight reading sessions	✓	✓
Theatre games	✓	✓
Understanding a lyric	✓	✓
Video work and assessment		✓
Voice work	✓	✓
Warm-up exercises	✓	✓
Watching and evaluating the performance work of others	✓	✓
Working Performer's Journal		✓
Working with accompaniment	✓	✓

It might be appropriate, but not a requirement, for the record of each individual to be kept in a working journal which could then easily be communicated in the required programme notes at each grade. A candidate's work should recognise the total qualification time allocated to each grade and be reflected in the performance quality at the assessment time.

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Click on this link: <https://lcme.uwl.ac.uk/our-exams/musical-theatre/musical-theatre>

What personal benefits are there in studying this musical theatre syllabus?

This syllabus facilitates the learner's understanding of essential elements to perform a song for musical theatre successfully. Knowing how the text and music work together to tell a story is essential to communicate the narrative and objective of the moment. Exploring the songs' lyrics and associated acting techniques will inevitably lead you to a truthful performance.