

COLLEGE OF MUSICAL ARTS

FACULTY SCHOLAR SERIES

Presentations by

DR. GREG DECKER

**Two Topical-Interpretive Strategies in
American Musical Theatre**

DR. LISA MARTIN

**Contemplative Pedagogies:
Applications in Music Teaching and
Learning**

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2017

8:00 P.M.

BRYAN RECITAL HALL

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PRESENTATIONS

Two Topical-Interpretive Strategies in American Musical Theatre

by Dr. Greg Decker

Although it is often identified with a particular “sound,” the Broadway musical has frequently been a site for mixing musical styles and genres (Everett and Laird 2008, 27–28). Indeed, this stylistic mixture is at the heart of the musical’s semiotics (see, for example, T. Decker 2013 and Knapp et al. 2011), and signification can occur in ways similar to the eighteenth-century musical topic. But while topics in the eighteenth century are often understood as suggesting specific dramatic interpretation via immediate cross-domain oppositions (see Allanbrook 1983 and Hatten 1994), this “referential music” in Broadway musicals does not always interact with the drama explicitly; in many cases, topical signification is broader, suggesting time, place, or mood to the listener as opposed to calling forth specific associations that substantially differentiate characterization or enhance the drama. Put another way, topics may *generalize* instead of *particularize*. Thus, stylistic references, while similar in semiotic structure to eighteenth-century topics, are not always analogous in hermeneutic spirit.

I will explore the interpretive differences between “generalizing” and “particularizing” topics in musical theatre by examining the almost exclusive use of each in two shows: *The Secret Garden* (1991) and *Sweeney Todd* (1979). In *The Secret Garden*, the use of oppositional musical styles reflects broadly whether characters are emotionally closed or open, creating a kind of metanarrative that supports the story’s central allegory. *Sweeney Todd*, in contrast, uses musical topics in strategic ways for individual situations and characters.

Contemplative Pedagogies: Applications in Music Teaching and Learning

by Dr. Lisa Martin

The art of contemplation is characterized by attentiveness, open awareness, and connectivity, and contemplative experience has long been practiced and developed in a variety of religions, cultures, and traditions. In recent years, educators have cultivated an interest in contemplative habits of mind, applying these principles in secular classrooms. Teaching strategies embodying such practices are known as *contemplative pedagogies*, and they support numerous educational goals. For example, researchers have connected contemplative pedagogy with improved focus, increased cognition, and deepened compassion. Contemplative pedagogies include a variety of practices, including those focused upon movement and stillness, activism, creation, and relational activities.

Some researchers express concern when contemplative pedagogies are embraced and applied specifically due to their utilitarian purposes in the classroom. More specifically, because attention is an increasingly scarce resource in a society saturated with

stimulation, and as psychosomatic symptoms associated with stress and anxiety become more prevalent, teachers might embrace contemplative practices for their functionality and, in some cases, fad. It is important to consider whether contemplative practices are applied primarily as a tool to capture attention or to relieve psychosomatic pressures, and if so, does that application authentically reflect the intent of contemplative practice? Moreover, how might surface-level application and exploration of contemplative practice influence students’ perceptions and understanding of this sphere of human experience? In this talk, I will address these concerns as I explore key elements of contemplative pedagogies, particularly as they might apply to music teaching and learning.

BIOGRAPHIES

Greg Decker is Associate Professor of Music Theory at Bowling Green State University. He holds the M.M. and Ph.D. in music theory from Florida State University and was the winner of the National Opera Association’s biennial dissertation prize. His research focuses broadly on the semiotics of musical topics and other music-cultural associations in texted music from Italian madrigals to Baroque opera seria to Broadway musicals. He has presented research at numerous regional, national, and international meetings, and his publications can be found in *Music Theory Online*, *The Opera Journal*, *Intégral*, and the collected volume *A Cole Porter Companion* (from the University of Illinois Press). He is currently collecting and editing a volume of essays on semiotics and opera analysis with Matthew Shaftel for Oxford University Press.

Dr. Lisa Martin currently serves as Assistant Professor of Music Education at Bowling Green State University, where she teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in music education. She holds a bachelors degree in music education from the University of Illinois, and she earned both MME and Ph.D degrees from the University of Colorado Boulder. Prior to her appointment at BGSU, she served as a graduate instructor at the University of Colorado. She also spent nine years teaching band and orchestra in Illinois and Colorado, specializing in instruction at the middle school level. Her research interests include music teacher identity development, assessment practices in music education, and music teacher evaluation. She has presented locally, nationally, and internationally, publishing her work in the *Journal of Music Teacher Education*, *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education*, *Music Educators Journal*, and *Music Education Research*. In addition, she has written regularly for *The Instrumentalist*. Dr. Martin is a member of the Pi Kappa Lambda National Music Honor Society, and she maintains an active membership in various professional organizations.