



▲ Harrison Chad, Christine Baranski and Emily Skinner in the Kennedy Center's production of *Mame*.

Musical Theater: The Re-Making of *Mame*

Thursday, January 11, 2007
11 a.m. – 12 p.m. ET
Grades 7-12

When viewing *Musical Theater: The Re-Making of Mame* and participating in this guide's suggested activities, the following National Standards will be addressed: Music 1, 6, 7, 8, and Theater 2, 7.

About the Program

Reviving a Musical Theater Classic

Mame is best described as a classic feel-good musical comedy. The story of a free-spirited, can-do aunt who takes her orphaned nephew under her wing charmed audiences in 1966 and garnered three Tony Awards®, Broadway's highest honor. Based on the beloved book and play, *Auntie Mame*, the story follows Mame Dennis's exploits as she raises young Patrick Dennis and teaches him to experience life to its fullest. Her spunk and charm help her navigate life's ups and downs, including poverty, marriage, and widowhood, all the while guiding and inspiring Patrick, and eventually, his son. Last year, Christine Baranski played the title role in a highly anticipated revival at the Kennedy Center.

Performing in Musical Theater

The effortlessness that audiences see on stage belies the scope of the work and talent involved. Bringing a musical like *Mame* to life night after night requires the work of many people: the director, the stagehands, the designers, and the musicians. But the spotlight always shines the brightest on the actors and actresses, who must have drive and discipline to win their roles and ultimately perform them. Musical theater roles demand that the actors have the versatility to be able to break into a song in the middle of a dialogue. And the ability to be both verbally and physically funny as needed. And the agility and coordination to sing and dance, all the while revealing their characters to the audience. Performing in musical theater can be both terrifying and exhilarating.

Telling a Story Through Song and Dance

The idea of telling a story through song and dance—an American invention—grew out of various entertainments—skits, songs, dances, and comedy routines—found on vaudeville stages and music halls at the beginning of the 20th century. Eventually, they evolved into one cohesive performance. Musicals have changed over the years in the way they put the songs and story together and what kinds of stories they try to tell, but at their core remain a comprehensive American entertainment experience—one that captures the hearts and minds of both the people drawn to perform it and the people drawn to see it.

Meet the Cast of *Mame*

In this intimate studio session, students will meet cast members Harriet Harris, Alan Muraoka, Parker Esse, and 13-year-old Harrison Chad as they discuss their roles and methods of preparation for the Kennedy Center's production of *Mame*, and offer students insights into the professional world of musical theater. American University Professor of Theater, Caleen Sinnette Jennings, moderates this program that provides a unique perspective on reviving a cornerstone of American musical theater.

Instructional Activities

Songs with a Purpose

Musicals often vary the types of songs they include to keep the audience interested and to serve different purposes. The four main types of songs most commonly used in musicals are:

- Ballads or Love Songs (often sung to or about another person)
- Charming Songs (songs to help the audience get to know and love a character)
- Funny Songs (sung for laughs)
- Dialogue or Scene Songs (songs that blend dialogue and singing to move the story forward)

Listen to the original Broadway cast recording of *Mame*, and match the songs (listed below) to the category above. Some songs might apply to more than one category. See whether your answers match those of your classmates and discuss any disagreements. Try to come up with one class list.

Songs from *Mame*

1. "St. Bridget"
2. "It's Today"
3. "Open a New Window"
4. "The Man in the Moon"
5. "My Best Girl"
6. "We Need a Little Christmas"
7. "Mame"
8. "The Letter"
9. "Bosom Buddies"
10. "Gooch's Song"
11. "That's How Young I Feel"
12. "If He Walked into My Life"

Re-imagine

Why revive an old musical or movie? Choose a movie, play, or musical that you think might be worth reviving. Write a brief proposal to a producer explaining why the piece should be revived and would be enjoyed today. Explain what you would keep or change and whom you would cast in the leading roles. Give reasons for your casting decisions.

Resources

Internet

pbs.org/wnet/broadway/musicals101.com
mainstage-mgmt.com/shows/mame/mame.html
pbs.org/newshour/bb/entertainment/july-dec02/sondheim_7-03.html

Print

Bordman, Gerald. *American Musical Theater: A Chronicle, Third Edition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Dennis, Patrick. *Auntie Mame*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1994.

Recordings

Mame, 1966 Original Broadway Cast Recording. Sony #60959, 1999.

DVD

Broadway, The American Musical. (PBS Series, DVD) Paramount Home Video, 2004.

