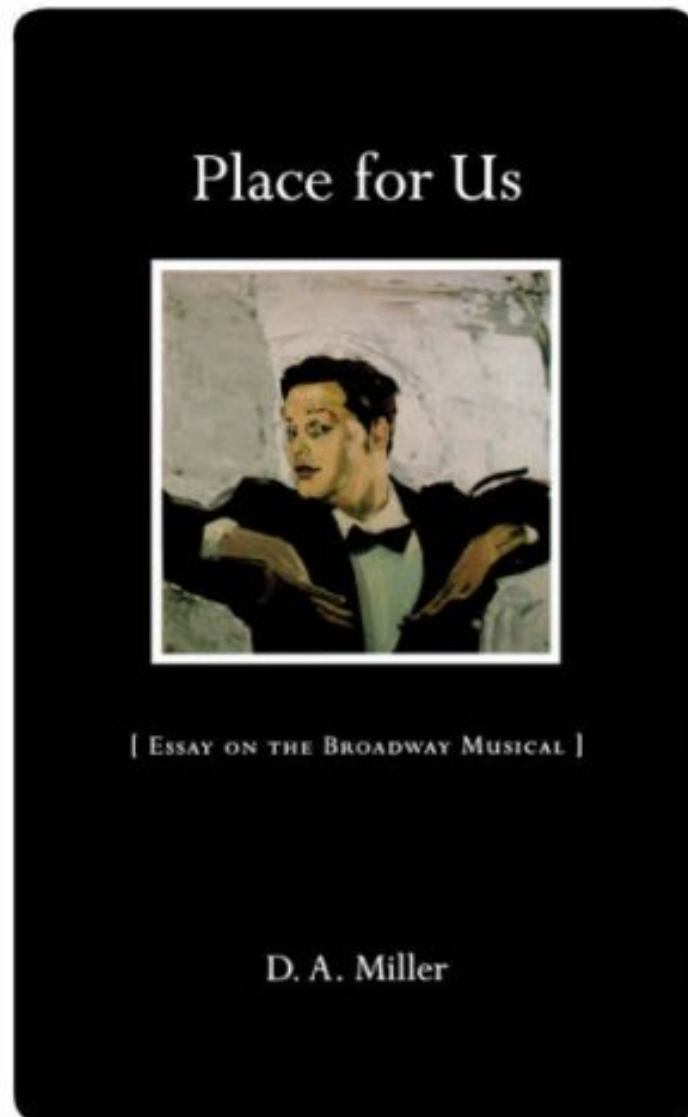


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## Place for Us: Essay on the Broadway Musical

*D. A. Miller*

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**D. A. Miller : Place for Us: Essay on the Broadway Musical** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Place for Us: Essay on the Broadway Musical:

8 of 21 people found the following review helpful. Rambling Pretentious, and Occasionally Insulting By Scott E. Miller If you want to read the work of someone who's more in love with his own prose than concerned with making any point or sense, this is the book for you. His writing is thick and messy, his conclusions highly insulting to this gay

man, and his analyses of shows ridiculous and ignorant. It seems he knows even less about his topic than he does about writing clearly. If this guy's an English professor, I pity his students...7 of 9 people found the following review helpful. How'd you like them eggrolls, Mr. Goldstone?By A CustomerThis book is short but densely compacted with original and genuinely imaginative arguments as D.A. Miller proceeds to demystify the attraction and allure of Broadway musicals. Previously, books about this subject too often descended into nostalgic reminiscences of their authors' favourite shows and their most beloved divas; it was as though their love of musicals disarmed their ability to develop sustained critical interpretations of them. But Miller ingeniously builds his own nostalgia into a successful attempt to theorize contemporary attitudes to musical theatre. He takes the old cliché that the biggest fans of Broadway shows tend to be gay, and turns it on its head. He argues that gay men, like him, have not only responded enthusiasitically to musical theatre but have also shaped and influenced its trends, diversions, and vagaries. He demonstrates this argument by recounting his personal history, from childhood (when he would sneak downstairs to a secluded part of his family home to listen to the latest cast recordings of shows such as 'Damn, Yankees!') to adulthood (when his relocation to New York City enabled him to frequent gay piano bars, where he joined other men in rousing renditions of showtunes). This autobiographical argumentation is strange enough; but rather than alienate his readers, Miller engages them by presenting his personal details as evidence of a wider cultural phenomenon - a phenomenon in which his own love of theatre is intimately bound up with his sexuality, his maturation, and his gradual coming-out of the closet. All this crescendos into a soaring, extended critical analysis of Miller's favourite musical, 'Gypsy', enveloping his interpretation with poetic, self-deprecatory, incisive prose while he simultaneously dissects his own responses - including his inclination towards not merely praising the originary divas such as Ethel Merman, but wishing to be them. Along the way, readers learn why Miller dislikes 'new' musicals such as 'La Cage Aux Folles' and 'Les Miserables'; how musicals are examples of 'pop culture' even though they are no longer 'popular' in mainstream society; and why Miller agrees with Ethel Merman's famous pronouncement that the big finale in 'Gypsy' - 'Rose's Turn' - is no less than a 'goddamn aria!'. Just as that showstopper is an 'aria', this book is an aromatic bouquet thrown in earnest praise of a much maligned art form.3 of 5 people found the following review helpful. You Gotta Get A GimmickBy A CustomerRoland Barthes: Mademoiselle Lee, is not the most erotic portion of a body where the garment gapes?Gypsy Rose Lee: But Monsieur Barthes, I'm not a stripper - at these prices, I'm an ecdysiast!D.A. Miller spends more than a bit of his book, *A Place for Us, Essay on the Broadway Musical*, musing on Mama Rose from *Gypsy*, but the muse of his book is none other than Gypsy Rose Lee, famous for putting the tease in strip-tease, revealing little, but doing it with finesse and elegance. While admiring Dr. Miller's turns of phrase, when I finished the book I wondered what exactly I had just read. Though enthralled by the swirl of feathers and witty patter, I had hoped to have seen more. Call me a vulgarian or worse a pornographer, but a little more flesh would have been nice. The relationship between gay men and the musical is a rich one and a more meaty analysis with less post-structuralist/queer theory gimmickry would have been far more satisfying to this reader. But as Miss Electra, of the trio of advice-giving strippers in *Gypsy*, says: "I'm electrifyin, and I ain't even tryin, I never have to sweat to get paid, cos' when you got a gimmick Gypsy girl you got it made..." Despite Dr. Miller's electric brilliance, the difficult nature of his prose is designed to conceal rather than reveal. Some day, hold your hats and hallelujah, he'll let down his guard and the gimmicks, stop playing to the academic vaudeville circuit (vaudeville IS dead), and strike out on his own to speak in his own voice, which there is too little of in this book. As another former student and avid reader of Dr. Miller's other books and papers, I know "this people's got it and this people should be spreadin' it around...."

It used to be a secret that, in its postwar heyday, the Broadway musical recruited a massive underground following of gay men. But though this once silent social fact currently spawns jokes that every sitcom viewer is presumed to be in on, it has not necessarily become better understood. In *Place for Us*, D. A. Miller probes what all the jokes laugh off: the embarrassingly mutual affinity between a "general" cultural form and the despised "minority" that was in fact that form's implicit audience. In a style that is in turn novelistic, memorial, autobiographical, and critical, the author restores to their historical density the main modes of reception that so many gay men developed to answer the musical's call: the early private communion with original cast albums, the later camping of show tunes in piano bars, the still later reformatting of these same songs at the post-Stonewall disco. In addition, through an extended reading of *Gypsy*, Miller specifies the nature of the call itself, which he locates in the postwar musical's most basic conventions: the contradictory relation between the show and the book, the mimetic tendency of the musical number, the centrality of the female star. If the postwar musical may be called a "gay" genre, Miller demonstrates, this is because its regular but unpublicized work has been to indulge men in the spectacular thrills of a femininity become their own.

.com Everybody "knows" that gay men love show tunes; as D.A. Miller writes in one self-mockingly academic passage of *Place for Us*, the original cast albums "were used, scholars now believe, in a puberty rite that, though it was conducted by single individuals in secrecy and shame, was nonetheless so widely diffused as to remain, for several generations, as practically normative for gay men and it was almost unknown for straight ones." Miller's elaborate pondering of the intersection of homosexuality and Broadway shifts between critical exegesis of shows like *Gypsy* and

autobiographical reflections written in a curiously distancing (and, at times, generalizing) third-person voice. Although some will be put off by the academic tone, there are treasures to be found sprinkled throughout these pages, such as the black-and-white reproductions of Michael Perelman's Broadway-inspired oil paintings. Or Miller's description of an ironic piano-bar singer, "like a third-rate magician who, thinking to take advantage of his inferior talent for illusionism, devises a novelty act in which he gives away the familiar tricks of his betters ... out to betray the habitual prestidigitation of the whole enormous population of gay composers, lyricists, librettists, choreographers, and others" who coyly cloaked their sexuality in misdirection and innuendo. --Ron Hogan Place for Us takes the protective colorations of the Broadway musical--its happy-as-the-day-is-long heterosexuality, its promise that wouldn't-it-be-loverly? cravings for happiness will always be satisfied--and strips them away to reveal the gay world that lies beneath, rife with fascinating sublimations and subtexts. The shape of D.A. Miller's argument and the passions that impel it are in perfect accord, which is just what we ask of the best kinds of musical numbers. This book is like a musical score that the genre has yet to catch up with. (Margo Jefferson New York Times)Place For Us...explores the ways that [the Broadway musical] medium managed to provide a secret language of emotion for a growing underground of gay men. (New Yorker)Could it be that since the Broadway musical is now safely dead--record ticket sales and Disney extravaganzas notwithstanding--it's finally safe to cast a historical and critical eye on this peculiar American art form? Miller rises to the task with an awe-inspiring exuberance--let's just say that by the time one reaches the end of this 143-page tour de force, one feels as audience must have back when they were first steamrolled by Ethel Merman as Rose in 1959's Gypsy (an epochal performance that Miller here dissects at length). At the heart of this extended essay is the complex relationship between gay men and the Broadway show, which began in many an American basement during the 1950s and 60s, where solitary boys would perform along with their cast albums, and ends with a chorus of aging show queens singing along in a piano bar. Miller explores the creative tension that allowed the musical to both acknowledge and deny its gay audience and shows how the performance of show tunes by a generation of homosexuals became a ritual reenactment of the central dilemmas of gay identity...[This is an] entirely fascinating read. (Tom Beer Out Magazine)[This book] anatomizes a sentimental and cliché-ridden mass-cultural form that Miller frankly admits no politically savvy individual would willingly embrace. Instead, he argues, the classic Broadway musical chooses its audience, selecting, as a tigress does the slowest antelope in the herd, gay men as the easiest prey...Miller has a knack for making good points with good jokes...But Miller's humor here shouldn't surprise us. Given the compromises required of a professor writing about such an abasing medium as Broadway, he carries the show with a bravura worthy of Merman herself. And like La Merm, he compels us at the same time to take his song and dance in earnest. (Michael Trask Lingua Franca)Like Kleist on marionettes, like Rilke on dolls, like Baudelaire on toys, Miller on the Broadway musical takes a beloved object in danger of being left on the playroom floor and turns it into a ravishing treatise on aesthetics. (Elaine Scarry author of The Body in Pain)D. A. Miller has looked long and hard into the glorious, dangerous, and falsely flattering mirror that is the Broadway musical. This self-portrait of a man who measures out his life in show tunes is obsessively well-informed, thrillingly provocative, and deeply felt; this is one queen who sure knows how to deliver her tune. Magnificent. (Neil Bartlett, author of the musical Night after Night and Artistic Director of the Lyric Theatre Hammersmith)Through this autobiographical-analytical meditation on what is specifically 'gay' about the Broadway musical and the pleasures of not explicitly knowing it, D. A. Miller has written the words to an exquisite Proustian musical sung by post-Stonewall man to his own juvenile self. Miller doesn't just 'know the words': in this brilliant and moving evocation of 'the unconsolated relations to want,' it could be said that the words know him. (Barbara Johnson, author of The Feminist Difference)Place for Us shows that a gay male investment in musicals, whether closeted or disclosed in a piano bar, is solicited and phobically concealed by musicals themselves. The analysis, exceptional for its sensitivity to both the form of the musical and the culture of its reception, culminates in a reading of Gypsy that is a tour de force if ever there was one. But there's more: the essay's own form and style are endlessly surprising, combining rigor with personal reflection in a way reminiscent of Barthes by Barthes or Minima Moralia. Miller has written a book that is movingly personal without ever being merely so. It is a model of cultural analysis, a witty and beautiful masterpiece of queer criticism. (Michael Warner, author of Letters of the Republic)D. A. Miller's essay is a poetic, personal, idiosyncratic, erotic, and political reverie on gay men's relationship to the Broadway musical...Place for Us, with wit and not a little pain, teases out the contradictions of late twentieth-century gay male identity in relation to this 'frankly interruptive,' 'vulgar' form. Miller is entirely of his text, yet also anthropologically curious about the rituals of gay male culture. (Stacy Wolf Theatre Journal) D. A. Miller has looked long and hard into the glorious, dangerous, and falsely flattering mirror that is the Broadway musical. This self-portrait of a man who measures out his life in show tunes is obsessively well-informed, thrillingly provocative, and deeply felt; this is one queen who sure knows how to deliver her tune. Magnificent. (Neil Bartlett, author of the musical Night after Night and Artistic Director of the Lyric Theatre Hammersmith)