



# Unfinished Show Business: Broadway Musicals as Works-in-Process (Theater in the Americas)

*Bruce Kirle*

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**Unfinished Show Business: Broadway Musicals as Works-in-Process (Theater in the Americas)** Bruce Kirle

In this fresh approach to musical theatre history, Bruce Kirle challenges the commonly understood trajectory of the genre. Drawing on the notion that the world of the author stays fixed while the world of the audience is ever-changing, Kirle suggests that musicals are open, fluid products of the particular cultural moment in which they are performed. Incomplete as printed texts and scores, musicals take on unpredictable lives of their own in the complex transformation from page to stage.

Using lenses borrowed from performance studies, cultural studies, queer studies, and ethnoracial studies, *Unfinished Show Business: Broadway Musicals as Works-in-Process* argues that musicals are as interesting for the provocative issues they raise about shifting attitudes toward American identity as for their show-stopping song-and-dance numbers and conveniently happy endings. Kirle illustrates how performers such as Ed Wynn, Fanny Brice, and the Marx Brothers used their charismatic personalities and quirkiness to provide insights into the struggle of marginalized ethnoracial groups to assimilate. Using examples from favorites including *Oklahoma!*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *A Chorus Line*, and *Les Misérables*, Kirle demonstrates Broadway's ability to bridge seemingly insoluble tensions in society, from economic and political anxiety surrounding World War II to generational conflict and youth counterculture to corporate America and the "me" generation. Enlivened by a gallery of some of Broadway's most memorable moments—and some amusing, obscure ones as well—this study will appeal to students, scholars, and lifelong musical theatre enthusiasts.

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