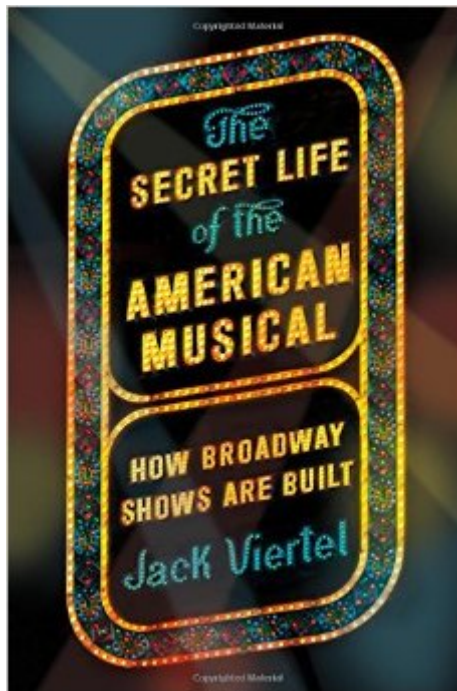


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# The Secret Life Of The American Musical: How Broadway Shows Are Built



## Synopsis

A New York Times Bestseller For almost a century, Americans have been losing their hearts and losing their minds in an insatiable love affair with the American musical. It often begins in childhood in a darkened theater, grows into something more serious for high school actors, and reaches its passionate zenith when it comes time for love, marriage, and children, who will start the cycle all over again. Americans love musicals. Americans invented musicals. Americans perfected musicals. But what, exactly, is a musical? In *The Secret Life of the American Musical*, Jack Viertel takes them apart, puts them back together, sings their praises, marvels at their unflagging inventiveness, and occasionally despairs over their more embarrassing shortcomings. In the process, he invites us to fall in love all over again by showing us how musicals happen, what makes them work, how they captivate audiences, and how one landmark show leads to the next—by design or by accident, by emulation or by rebellion—from *Oklahoma!* to *Hamilton* and onward. Structured like a musical, *The Secret Life of the American Musical* begins with an overture and concludes with a curtain call, with stops in between for “I Want” songs, “conditional” love songs, production numbers, star turns, and finales. The ultimate insider, Viertel has spent three decades on Broadway, working on dozens of shows old and new as a conceiver, producer, dramaturg, and general creative force; he has his own unique way of looking at the process and at the people who collaborate to make musicals a reality. He shows us patterns in the architecture of classic shows and charts the inevitable evolution that has taken place in musical theater as America itself has evolved socially and politically. *The Secret Life of the American Musical* makes you feel as though you’ve been there in the rehearsal room, in the front row of the theater, and in the working offices of theater owners and producers as they pursue their own love affair with that rare and elusive beast—the Broadway hit.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Jack Viertel's new book, "The Secret Life of the American Musical" is a stunningly informative book about the structure and success (or lack thereof) of modern day musicals. In a compelling style, the author takes us through a performance from "Overture" to "Curtain Call" and describes in great detail how every aspect of a musical works. His experience in the world of musicals gives him credence that few other writers would be able to claim. The book is set in a chronological order of a performance and being just a few years younger than Viertel, he helped me relive moments of musicals from my childhood. He particularly enjoys certain ones.... "Guys and Dolls", "Gypsy" and "Fiddler", to name just three, but what makes Viertel's knowledge so wonderful is that he ably relates how musicals are set up and executed. I was especially fond of three chapters.... "If I Loved You", "Intermission" and "Clambake", particularly enjoying his take on what was served at intermission a half-century ago. He also introduces the reader to things like the "11 o'clock number", a phrase about which I had never heard. His final chapter concerning recordings is a beautiful way to end the book. I must admit that my own experience of musicals is much more confined to those of the fifties, sixties and seventies, so when Viertel launches into musicals beginning thirty years ago to the present...well, those were quicker reads for me. Yet all in all, "The Secret Life of the American Musical" is comprehensive with an nicely produced narrative. It's a must read for those who enjoy and want to know more about the American musical experience.

I'm a big Broadway fan and go to theater often. The Secret Life of the American Musical was a great read. It's obvious that Mr. Viertel really knows and loves his subject matter. It's written in a conversational tone and I found myself having to limit myself to a chapter a day because when I first received the book I was afraid I would finish it in two-three days and I wanted to really savor it because I was enjoying it so much. In addition to being thoroughly entertaining, this book really helped me understand why some musicals work for me and some don't -- and gave me a vocabulary to talk about it. It inspired me to listen to 'new' soundtracks for shows I wasn't familiar with as well as re-listen to familiar soundtracks with a different ear. And I love that Mr. Viertel shares personal experiences with his decision making behind the scenes as well as looks at shows within

the context of the history of musical theatre. I've given this book as a gift to a few friends and they love it too. If you're a fan of musical theatre, you will love this book.

Excellent book, a really nice companion piece to *Razzle Dazzle: The Battle for Broadway* that I finished last week. Whereas the earlier book made me want to read more about theatre history. *The Secret Life..* made me want to listen to and/or go see some shows that I have missed. There were a few places where I felt that the conceit fell apart a little bit (the book is structured like the musical structure it is teaching), but overall it works. This is a textbook, and at times it reads like one, but overall a fun read and very informative. I really loved the recommend cast albums section at the end.

Inside almost every musical in the "Golden Age" (from about *Oklahoma* to *A Chorus Line*), there is a covert structure where each number plays a role, eg The Opening Number, The I Want Song, and the 11:00 o' clock number. The author of this book clearly knows his way around the dramaturgy of the musical. He shares his knowledge with us in the most delightful way. It was great to revisit so many shows and learn of this covert structure structure in which the numbers live. This is one of those great books that provide both enjoyment and learning. Enjoy! And learn!

*Secret Life* is a book for any theatre enthusiast to treasure. De-coding specific beats of the musical genre provides the reader with great insight into what I always assumed was alchemy - when it works, it works for mysterious reasons. But actually, it works for quite specific reasons which are illuminated with great verve and humor. It's the kind of book that makes you go "Aha!" a lot! It's like learning a beautiful language that you always enjoyed hearing but never understood. I now have a much better understanding and deeper appreciation of the American musical. A wonderful read!

Viertel's love of the musical theater comes across loud and clear. A more in-depth analysis of the actual music would have been helpful because he is after all, discussing musicals. I appreciated the sections on Frank Loesser, a major lyricist/composer (*Guys and Dolls*, *Most Happy Fella* and more) who should never be forgotten.

Any lover of the American musical theater, particularly of the golden age, the 40's - '70s can only cry hallelujah! Brilliant, insightful and more important suffused with the bright glow of the period, I didn't want it to end.

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