

**CAMERON MACKINTOSH AND THE MCDONALDIZATION OF  
MUSICAL THEATRE MARKETING**

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## ABSTRACT

The emergence of the megamusical format- stage presentations such as *Cats*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *The Lion King* and *Mamma Mia!* that have rapidly developed into globalized products- has not only led to a dramatic escalation in production costs but has also, arguably, resulted in the rapid commodification of the genre. A defining feature of this development has been the increasing centrality of marketing within the overall production process. Marketing strategies and techniques displaying features that reflect the basic principles of George Ritzer's McDonaldization theory superficially seem to have become pre-requisites for producers wishing to achieve high levels of product awareness in an increasingly saturated marketplace.

This thesis will consider the ways in which the marketing of the genre has developed since the early 1980s, and will assess the degree to which marketing has been infused with McDonaldized principles. This thesis will also consider the effects that this commodified approach has had on the genre itself, and will attempt to demonstrate that substantial increases in production costs, which are a direct result of the corporatisation of the musical theatre industry, have restricted market entry for independent producers and have, as a result, contributed to the increasingly homogenized quality of musical theatre products.

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## CHAPTER 1

### ARGUMENTS AND METHODS

#### 1.1 Arguments

In an interview with the Dramatists Guild of America in 1974 (Guernsey, 1974, p. 131-2), Jerry Herman stated:

The musical is the American Theater's major claim to fame. We are masters of the musical. Possibly we're behind in drama, or in set design, but constructing a musical is what we do better than anyone else in the world. This is America's own art form, this is not what we have copied from anybody else, this is *ours*.

While such an assessment of musical theatre production may have been appropriate in 1974, when the genre was dominated by American production methods and subject matter, Herman did not anticipate the influence that British producers such as Cameron Mackintosh and Andrew Lloyd Webber would have on the musical genre in the 1980s.

*Cats*, originally co-produced in the West End in 1981 by Mackintosh's production company, Cameron Mackintosh Limited (CML), and by Lloyd-Webber's Really Useful Group (RUG), was the first of a string of productions that would finally loosen the stranglehold that Broadway had held over the genre.<sup>1</sup> American themes, locations and subject matter would no longer dominate Broadway and the West End, as they

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<sup>1</sup> There had been other major British successes in the field of musical theatre before, most notably in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and British comic operas such as those of Gilbert and Sullivan had successfully transferred to the New York stage and had dominated both British and American stages for forty years. However, while the scripts for these shows had been marketed in every English-speaking country, the productions themselves had been much more limited in scope, and none were developed as global products in the manner of, for example, *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Mamma Mia!*

had since the 1940s, but a globalized 'megamusical'<sup>2</sup> product, exported world-wide like any other commodity, would become a dominant format.<sup>3</sup> Like later CML and RUG productions, *Cats* was aggressively marketed, especially in America, and, when taking into account the show's emphasis on visual spectacle, which inevitably increased its capitalisation costs still further, it is perhaps not surprising that the success of *Cats* had an effect on the spiralling costs that were a feature of musical theatre production from the mid 1980s onwards.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The exact origin of the term 'megamusical' is unclear. Various media commentators in the late 1980s such as Fetherston (1988) began to describe Cameron Mackintosh's productions as 'megamusical' productions, although the term was not clearly defined. Burston (1998: 9), however, managed to define the term in a concise and eminently appropriate manner, suggesting that megamusicals 'share a number of criteria which set them apart from other stage musical productions, big or small,' concluding that their globally standardized processes of production have been characteristic of only a 'select and specific group of highly capitalised, globally competent and now even transnational players.' Following this definition, a show such as *Mamma Mia!* qualifies as a 'megamusical', despite its relatively modest budget and technical simplicity, on account of its rapid expansion into global markets and the standardization of its production process. The defining feature of a particular production that qualifies it to be termed as a 'megamusical' is therefore not its technical complexity or the size of its budget when it was originally produced, but its rapid development into a globally replicated product whose methods of production are standardized and strictly controlled to ensure exact replication in a wide range of international markets.

<sup>3</sup> In the eyes of some critics, Cameron Mackintosh ushered in the era of the visually spectacular but aesthetically bland and homogenized product that could be exported on a global scale, and whose commercial success depended more on brand marketing and saturation advertising than on the quality of its songs, libretto and book. Mackintosh was by no means the first to be criticised for adopting a wholly commercial approach to the production of musical theatre. Twenty years earlier, for example, Dudar (1960: 32) had written of David Merrick: 'Merrick has made theatrical producing a big business by employing the methods of big business. The theater was the last small island left where individual creative effort was still feasible, the one place where mass methods...hadn't completely taken over. Merrick has brought in the assembly line, the pre-packaged show with a big star, a name director and a name-this and name-that...There's less and less room for the fresh, original and medium-sized...Merrick is a mover of goods- he's the Lincoln warehouse of the theater.' Such criticism of his highly commercial approach to the marketing of his theatre productions was unlikely to offend Merrick, as he himself had strongly criticised the lack of business sense that he considered had generally pervaded theatre production for a number of years, stating that 'no business in the world is run with less business intelligence than the theater' (Dudar 1960: 32).

<sup>4</sup> Gerald Schoenfeld, who co-produced *Cats* on Broadway, noted that there was such a dramatic increase in the overall costs of producing a musical on Broadway after *Cats* had opened there in October 1982, that capitalisation levels soon dwarfed the budgets of shows that had been produced just ten years earlier: 'In 1983-84, the cost of producing a large musical is between three and five million dollars; the cost of producing a small musical is between one and one and one-half million dollars, and the cost of producing a small play is between five hundred and eight hundred thousand dollars. The operation of theaters has become vastly more costly and economically more risky so that there is practically no relationship between 1984 costs and those of 1974' (Schoenfeld 1983). As a point of comparison, *Follies* (1971) had capitalised at around \$750,000, while *Pippin* (1972) had cost just \$450,000. Rosenberg and Harburg (1993:18) suggest that production budgets increased so dramatically in the early 1980s that *Pippin* would have cost in the region of \$4.5 and *Follies* in excess of \$5million if the shows had been produced ten years later. The inflation index over this period can only account for a 78% increase in capitalisation costs.

In order to analyse and assess the effect of the megamusical format on the musical theatre genre and the ways in which it is marketed, it is necessary to consider how the musical has developed since the West End production of *Cats* in 1981. However, in order to provide a full picture of marketing strategy, it is also necessary to consider the development of the genre before the advent of the megamusical, and to assess the contribution of earlier producers, whose approach to the production of musical theatre had a formative influence on the production methods later adopted and developed by producers such as CML, RUG and Disney. These earlier producers include Richard D'Oyly Carte, who was keenly aware of the importance of retaining control over the Gilbert and Sullivan brand, and Florenz Ziegfeld and the Shuberts, whose productions not only featured theatrical spectacle but also provided early examples of standardized methods of production.<sup>5</sup> Later major influences include Robert Stigwood, whose productions included *Hair* in the West End and on national tour, and *Jesus Christ Superstar*. *Hair* had a dramatic influence, not only on the generic style and content of musical theatre, but also on changes in the demographic profile of the audience and, as a result, the ways in which productions were marketed. Stigwood's production of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, which built upon the marketing model established by *Hair*, was particularly influential on later Mackintosh productions, since *Superstar* provided early indications that musical theatre could be developed as a genuinely global product, a development that will be analysed in chapter 4. In promotional and marketing terms, however, one of the most influential producers was David Merrick, whose application of modern business practices to the

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<sup>5</sup> As will be demonstrated in Chapter 3, visual spectacle has been a feature of musical theatre since *The Black Crook* was produced on Broadway in 1867. Although Cameron Mackintosh's megamusical productions became renowned for their elements of spectacle, many early twentieth century American extravaganzas were considerably more spectacular in their staging.

production of musical theatre would provide an example for Mackintosh's own ruthless exploitation of the genre's commercial potential.<sup>6</sup> By assessing the influence of these producers on Cameron Mackintosh's own production style, and by analysing the effect that Mackintosh himself has had on the production process, this thesis will assess the role that Mackintosh has played in the overall development of the musical theatre genre.

Considering that musical theatre, in purely commercial terms, has become the foremost form of popular theatre in the major centres of cultural production in the English speaking world,<sup>7</sup> it is remarkable that so little space in academic studies of popular culture has been devoted to the analysis of how musical theatre productions are marketed. In *Fast Food, Fast Talk: Service Work and the Routinization of Everyday Life*, for example, Leidner considers ways in which patterns of cultural consumption have become rationalized, using McDonald's as his exemplary case study. Leidner not only draws attention to the fact that the McDonald's corporation spends considerable sums on advertising and promotion, to the extent that by 1990, according to *Advertising Age* (1 January 1990, p.6) it had become the most advertised brand in the world, but he also acknowledges that the rationalized nature of McDonald's is intricately linked to the ways in which the company is marketed:

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<sup>6</sup> Tee Hesketh, Mackintosh's Personal Assistant, suggested to me that Merrick had acted as a role model in this respect and that Mackintosh had been influenced more by Merrick than by any other producer. Merrick's influence on Mackintosh will be assessed in detail in Chapter 3.

<sup>7</sup> The Society of London Theatre Box Office Data Reports show that by 1992, just over ten years after *Cats* opened in the West End, musical theatre productions accounted for 59% of audience share in the West End, with modern drama being the next most popular genre with only 10%. By 1996, the gap had become even more pronounced, with musicals attracting 63% of audience share and modern drama only 5%. This steady increase in audience share for musicals is largely a reflection of the steadily increasing number of musicals being produced in the West End. Charles Spencer (2007) reported: 'In 1954 there were six musicals running in the West End, two revues and 28 straight plays. In 1974 there were eight musicals, one revue and 27 straight plays. In 1994 we had 16 musicals and 24 plays. In 2004, there were 21 musicals and 18 plays. At present [May 2007] there are 26 musicals and only 13 plays.'

The extreme standardization of McDonald's products, and its workers, is closely tied to its marketing. The company advertises on a massive scale- in 1989, McDonald's spent \$1.1 billion system-wide on advertising and promotions (*McDonald's Annual Report*, 1989, p.32). In fact, McDonald's is the single most advertised brand in the world.

Yet despite confirming that marketing occupies a central role within the process of standardization that he suggests is a defining feature of McDonald's, Leidner devotes less than half a page of his book to any form of analysis of how the corporation's marketing strategy has evolved and how it has become integral to its production process. Such an omission needs to be addressed if a more thorough understanding of the process of rationalization is to be achieved, and before an analysis of developments within musical theatre marketing can be undertaken.

The first time that I became aware of any connection being made between musical theatre and the McDonald's model of fast food production was in 1995, when an edition of BBC2's *The Business*, entitled 'The McDonald's of Musicals', suggested that there were similarities between the processes adopted by Andrew Lloyd Webber and the McDonald's Corporation. In the words of the programme, 'Andrew Lloyd Webber is very akin to the McDonald's fast food syndrome...his material can be consumed anywhere in Europe, anywhere in the world, and is a product of which everybody knows the quality.'<sup>8</sup> Dr. Chris Higson, lecturer at the London Business School, suggests that there is a clear similarity between McDonald's and The Really Useful Group, in the way that both companies promise consumers an experience that is of a predictable nature:

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<sup>8</sup> Jeremy Gerard, New York Editor of *Variety*, during an interview for the programme, disparagingly refers to Lloyd Webber's musicals as 'junk food for the brain', while the programme itself expands on this idea by suggesting that they are 'essentially shows that are comforting to audiences: they are familiar, they are told in mostly sentimental terms and [audiences] have a pretty good idea of what they are going to get for their dollar or their yen or their pound.'

When one walks into a McDonald's outlet one knows that the product's going to taste the same, in Tokyo or Timbuktu, and that's very much the case with Really Useful Group musicals... I suspect that is an important element in their great success.<sup>9</sup>

The programme developed this idea further, observing that a defining feature of the McDonald's model of production is its concentration on the consistency of its core product's quality. The suggestion was made that 'McDonald's asset is the Big Mac, the Really Useful Group's is Andrew Lloyd Webber,' and that while 'McDonald's ensures the Big Mac is of consistent quality around the world, the Really Useful Group does the same with Andrew Lloyd Webber musicals.'

The programme concluded that 'Andrew Lloyd Webber's business empire has emulated the success of McDonald's by mass marketing a familiar brand.' Such a broad assertion was not able to be properly assessed or tested in a thirty minute television documentary, but the suggestion that the commercial success of Andrew Lloyd Webber was, to some extent, attributable to his adoption of a McDonaldized model of production, whereby products could be developed as branded entities that could be mass produced and then promoted to a global audience by the application of mass marketing techniques, seemed to deserve further, more detailed analysis.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Although Higson's comments could arguably be applied to all megamusicals that have followed the RUG/CML model of standardized production, such as those of Disney Theatricals, it should be noted that various commentators adopt a more sceptical view concerning the success of Taylorism and the American model of production. Locke (1996: 53), for example, contends that 'no triumph of American management can be proved', concluding (1996: 171) that the 'mystique' of American management 'mostly vanished in the late 1970s and early 1980s.'

<sup>10</sup> Having been broadcast in 1995, the programme was unable to reflect on the fact that every Lloyd Webber production since *Sunset Boulevard* has failed to achieve commercial success. *Whistle Down the Wind* (1998), *The Beautiful Game* (2000), and *The Woman in White* (2005) all closed after disappointing runs of between twelve and eighteen months in the West End. Only the 2006 RUG/Live Nation revival of *The Sound of Music* and the 2007 RUG revival of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* have become box office successes, and this has owed a great deal to the

However, it was the programme's brief analysis of the strategies adopted by RUG to market its products, and its focus on the company's attempts to establish its own brand identity, that seemed to suggest an area that was particularly worthy of more rigorous academic research. Describing RUG as a 'global business, that was 'mass-producing musicals', the programme suggested that 'Andrew Lloyd Webber's name is a brand, which pulls in the crowds and, like any other consumer product, it needs to be constantly and expensively promoted.' Peter Harlock, Managing Director of Hardsell, developed this idea further, focusing particularly on the 'control' that RUG exerts over the marketing of its shows and hinting at the importance of a branded logo within an overall marketing strategy. Harlock also pointed out, quite correctly, that Lloyd Webber's two major successes in the 1980s, *Cats* and *The Phantom of the Opera*, were actually jointly produced by RUG and Cameron Mackintosh Ltd., and that it was Cameron Mackintosh who was instrumental in the creation of the Lloyd Webber brand. Mackintosh's achievement, we also learn, was due in no small part to the way in which he was prepared to protect his brand, and the programme commented that 'if you are going to nurture or exploit a valuable brand or a valuable piece of intellectual property, you have to fight off marauders, as there will always be people who want to appropriate some of the value you have created.' It was Robert Stigwood, the programme suggests, who influenced Mackintosh in this area of production, since Stigwood had fiercely protected his own products, *Jesus Christ Superstar* and, later, *Evita*, by strictly enforcing his copyright and 'stamping out the

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innovative way in which they were promoted by means of the televised talent shows, *How Do You Solve a Problem like Maria* and *Any Dream Will Do* respectively. The success of the latter show was such that the 2007 West End revival of *Joseph* was able to build up a £10million advance. The viewing figures for the final episodes of both *How Do You Solve a Problem Like Maria?* (8.2 million on 17 September 2006) and *Any Dream Will Do* (8.28 million on 10 June 2007, just a month before the show opened), were remarkable and led Brian May, co-producer of *We Will Rock You*, to voice the opinion of many producers that the RUG productions gained an unfair advantage through their free television exposure: 'It's really the influence of TV-promoted shows. *The Sound Of Music* and *Joseph* both gained disproportionate advances, primarily because they had weeks of free advertising on TV. It's insane and incredible that the BBC didn't get paid for it.'

copycats which would devalue the brand.’<sup>11</sup> Stigwood also provided a ‘blueprint’ for Mackintosh to develop, by ensuring that ‘audiences around the world saw exactly the same show, the same sets, the same costumes and the same dance steps: Everywhere [*Evita*] was a licensed replica of the original.’

The brief comments offered in ‘The McDonald’s of Musicals’ about the ways in which the production process of musical theatre had changed in a relatively short period seemed to be worthy of more detailed analysis, but there was another interesting and associated idea that was also raised: that ‘a distinguishing feature of Andrew Lloyd Webber’s shows is the sheer spectacle’, and that a show such as *Cats* was able to succeed on a global scale because, aided by its familiar cats’ eyes logo, ‘it transcended cultural and language barriers.’ Tim Rice, interviewed for the programme, supported this suggestion, stating that *Cats* was a landmark musical that introduced an era in which an emphasis on visual elements greatly enhanced a production’s potential for global replication and commercial exploitation, a belief that is reflected in the commercial standing of RUG, whose profits increased substantially from £2.5 million in 1985 to £10million by the late 1980s:

The thing about *Cats* is that it’s as much a visual thing as an oral thing and it doesn’t have a language barrier really. You can enjoy *Cats* enormously without really understanding it, because it is so much dance; it is an enormously popular show and it’s a lot bigger than anything that’s gone before, so [it is] a kind of watershed maybe.

The inevitably superficial observations that were offered in ‘The McDonald’s of Musicals’ were provided with a more defined context by George Ritzer in 1996 with

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<sup>11</sup> Other ways in which Mackintosh was clearly influenced by Stigwood in the marketing of his products are examined in Chapter 3.

the publication of *The McDonaldization of Society*.<sup>12</sup> Ritzer developed Theodor Adorno's theories concerning the culture industry as a basis for his own theory that modes of cultural production were becoming progressively more rationalized. Heavily influenced by Max Weber's views about the process of rationalization, which suggested that society would ultimately become a 'seamless web of rational institutions' (quoted in Ritzer 1996: xviii), and that the result of this would be the implementation of an 'iron cage' of rationality from which there would be no escape, Ritzer proposed his own theory: that Weber's paradigm case of rationality, the bureaucratic structure, was destined to be replaced as a contemporary model for rationalization, the fast-food restaurant, particularly McDonald's, which, Ritzer asserts (1996: xvii), 'revolutionized not only the restaurant business, but also American society and, ultimately, the world.' Ritzer (200b: 11) identifies four 'alluring dimensions' that are the cornerstones of his theory, and suggests that McDonald's has become the foremost paradigm of cultural production because it offers the highest levels of 'Efficiency, Calculability, Predictability and Control', not only to its producers but also to its consumers. These fundamental elements of Ritzer's theory will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

While not specifically applying his 'McDonaldization' theory to the production of musical theatre in either *The McDonaldization of Society* (1996), or *The McDonaldization Thesis* (1998), the latter of which applied his original thesis to a broader range of cultural processes and explored the implications of increased rationalization for cultural production, it is clear that the marketing developments in musical theatre that had been hinted at in 'The McDonald's of Musicals' could be

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<sup>12</sup> Throughout this thesis I will use Ritzer's American spelling of 'McDonaldization,' 'rationalization,' 'standardization' and 'globalization.'

examined with specific reference to Ritzer's theories.<sup>13</sup> This belief seemed to be confirmed by other writers such as Münch who, in his essay 'McDonaldized Culture: The End of Communication', suggests that not only is the process of cultural production becoming standardized through the implementation of rigid controls, but the process of presenting and distributing cultural products is also becoming homogenized through the standardization of marketing procedures. Münch (1999: 138) cites Lloyd Webber as an example of this development in the production process, suggesting that Lloyd Webber markets his productions 'uniformly throughout the world.' However, later in the same essay (p.139) we are told that 'a product is adapted to the expectations of the consumers of the different markets through variation' and this apparent contradiction suggested a clear direction that my own research might take: whether the rationalized process of 'McDonaldization' identified by Ritzer really had affected the production of musical theatre; or whether, perhaps, even if *Cats* and the other megamusicals of the 1980s and early 1990s had exhibited McDonaldized features, later productions had either started to break free of the 'iron cage' imposed by the rigid controls that, Ritzer suggests, are necessarily imposed by the McDonaldization process. To assess the relevance of Ritzer's McDonaldization theory to musical theatre production, a range of different productions need to be considered. By analysing the ways in which marketing strategies have developed and by considering the promotional methods adopted by producers to exploit their markets, it will be possible to draw conclusions about

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<sup>13</sup> Although Ritzer provides a useful starting point for an examination of musical theatre production, his theories remain contentious and various commentators consider them to be too generalised or overstated. Miles (1998: 64), for example, insists: 'Ritzer's analysis glaringly overestimates the power of rationalization, simultaneously underestimating that role that individual agency can play in interpreting social structures. Ritzer's approach is simply not subtle enough to explain what Mark Alfino...calls 'the counter-measures of popular and local culture.'"

whether current marketing practices reflect the fundamental principles of Ritzer's McDonaldization theory.

This thesis will also assess the degree to which the production of musical theatre has changed, following the unprecedented commercial success of *Cats* and Cameron Mackintosh's other musicals in the 1980s and 1990s, and will focus on the marketing strategies that seem to have become an essential (but ever more expensive) component of the overall production process. I will also consider whether the system of production that seems to characterise Mackintosh's shows, has also influenced other producers hoping to achieve megamusical status with their own products.

The changes in patterns of cultural consumption that Ritzer attributes to the increasingly prevalent McDonaldization of society must also be seen in the context of developing marketing patterns. The commodification of many areas of the entertainment industry, particularly Hollywood, has ensured that marketing has assumed an ever-increasing prominence and importance in the overall production process.<sup>14</sup> Stephen Spielberg's *Jurassic Park*, for example, which was produced in 1993, had a production budget of \$63million, but the marketing and advertising costs in the US alone were reported to be 'in excess of \$68million' (Kilday). Musical theatre marketing costs have similarly increased rapidly: average annual marketing expenditure on Broadway, for example, rose sharply from a pre-1980 figure of

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<sup>14</sup> In Ritzer's view, a greatly increased emphasis on packaging and visual presentation, which is a central feature of the McDonaldization process, has, in turn, led to consumer expectations being defined by fast-food modes of consumption. Ritzer's theory, however, does not take into account other possible influences on cultural commodification. The emphasis on visual spectacle in the Hollywood films of Busby Berkley, for example, and other films from the 1920s and 1930s, could be seen as having a major effect not only on the film genre but also on wider cultural production and marketing.

between 5% and 10% of overall costs to between 15% and 25% by 1993.<sup>15</sup> With consumers having a progressively wider choice of entertainment opportunities, and with producers therefore having to concentrate their commercial efforts on maintaining their audiences, it is perhaps inevitable that marketing budgets have mushroomed, and corporate synergy, as espoused by producers such as the Disney corporation, has become the most effective means of spreading, and therefore controlling, marketing costs.

The dramatic increase in marketing budgets and the need to attract the attention of consumers in a progressively more competitive and commercialized market-place may also have resulted in the reduction of creative opportunities, since the lengthy runs of many musical productions has restricted the availability of theatres, particularly in the West End.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the increasing reliance on expensive elements of spectacle to market a production has increased the level of audience expectations when a long-runner is finally replaced by a new (or revived) production.<sup>17</sup> When I interviewed him in 2002, producer Rob Bettinson suggested

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<sup>15</sup> This trend was confirmed by the findings of the major statistical survey, *The Arts as an Industry: Their Economic Importance to the New York- New Jersey Metropolitan Region* (1993)

<sup>16</sup> As musicals have increasingly dominated in the West End, so fewer theatres have been available for 'legit' productions. Mark Shenton reported in *The Stage* (26 July 2007): '...More and more of what used to be playhouses are now being given over to [musicals], from the Lyric (*Cabaret*) and Queen's (*Les Misérables*) on Shaftesbury Avenue to the Garrick (soon to house *Bad Girls- the Musical*) and Playhouse (where *Footloose- the Musical* imminently makes a West End comeback), the phenomenon is stretching to the smallest houses such as the New Ambassadors (*Little Shop of Horrors*) and the Duchess (where *Buddy* has returned, albeit in physically shrunken form).'

<sup>17</sup> Some recent musical productions such as *Mamma Mia!* have been less dependent on visual spectacle, in the belief that the popularity of the songs would be enough to attract audiences. The success of *Mamma Mia!* however has not been replicated by other catalogue shows that have attempted to follow this approach: *Our House* (2002), for example, made use of relatively simple and inexpensive sets and was well received by newspaper critics, but failed to attract audiences in sufficient numbers to achieve commercial success. While more recent catalogue productions such as *All Shook Up* (Broadway, 2005) have returned to the high spectacle formula, other productions that have been successful on Broadway have not been reliant on visual spectacle. These include *Avenue Q* (2003), *Hairspray* (2002) and *The Drowsy Chaperone* (2006), although none of these three shows seem likely to attain megamusical status due to the relatively parochial nature of their content. Furthermore, *The Drowsy Chaperone* closed in the West End after only two months, while *Avenue Q*, in the face of heavy competition from large-scale musicals, has struggled to attract audiences in the West End and producer Cameron

that the emergence of the megamusical as a dominant form has not only made it much more difficult for new writers to break through, but has also had a homogenizing effect on the genre as a whole,<sup>18</sup> with highly technical and expensive visual effects becoming a central focus, and investors being unwilling to put money into a show that does not include this expensive ingredient.<sup>19</sup>

In conclusion, my thesis will assess the extent to which

- The process of musical theatre production, especially its marketing, has adopted features that conform to Ritzer's fundamental principles of McDonaldization.
- Visual spectacle has become an important marketing tool, not only as a means of attracting consumers to a particular production but also of establishing a production as a global entity.
- Commodification and globalization have encouraged producers to opt for productions that have broad appeal and that lack aesthetically challenging themes and content.
- The increasing involvement of corporate producers in musical theatre production has resulted in the dramatic increase of marketing costs that has made market entry for independent producers more difficult.
- The rapid rise in production costs has led to producers preferring to invest in 'pre-sold' material such as revivals or musicals of popular films, so that new work has become rarer, and creativity has, effectively, been stifled.

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Mackintosh was forced to discount ticket prices by 50% in 2007 in an attempt to keep the production afloat. It is too early to assess the West End performance of *Hairspray*, which opened in the West End in October 2007.

<sup>18</sup> Lyricist Anthony Drewe suggests (*Time* web-site, 24 August 1999): 'The blockbuster '80s musicals were as detrimental to the genre as they were boons to the producers' pockets. These same shows being reproduced internationally have stagnated the market. People expect to see clones of these shows on that scale and nothing else, and so the British musical has become amorphous and lost its sense of cultural identity.'

<sup>19</sup> My thesis will provide detailed analysis of Bettinson's assessment of musical theatre production in Chapter 5, and will consider whether there is any justification for his gloomy conclusions about the effects that long-running megamusicals have had on audience expectations.

## 1.2 Methods

Marketing is not an exact science, and while there may be a number of publications that suggest various strategies that may be used to market the arts successfully, and while ‘marketing has emerged as the most critical function in today’s international business climate,’<sup>20</sup> the range of external factors that may influence consumption patterns ensures that no marketing campaign, however carefully thought out and implemented, can guarantee that a production will be commercially successful in the marketplace.<sup>21</sup> Even if a musical theatre production receives ecstatic reviews from newspaper critics and wins major awards, and even if a producer adopts a similar marketing strategy to that which has helped other productions to achieve commercial success, the fickle nature of public taste can sometimes result in a disappointing box office performance.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, detailed information about capitalisation costs and marketing budgets are kept confidential by many producers and are off-limits even to bona-fide academic researchers, and this makes more difficult an assessment of the effect of specific components of an integrated marketing strategy on commercial performance. My research methods therefore involved making the best sense of the available evidence, comparing and contrasting information that was gathered from a range of sources, in order to be able to draw conclusions about commercial trends in the industry.

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<sup>20</sup> Bovée and Thill (1992: xix)

<sup>21</sup> Kotler and Scheff (1997: 38), for example, write: ‘A customer may be lured to attend a performance because of a two-for-one price offer, but, unless the product itself, the location and the total experience are satisfactory it is unlikely that the customer will return for another performance. Therefore, promotion must be considered as only one tool within the marketing field.’

<sup>22</sup> Mandelbaum (1991: 344-345) cites *The Golden Apple* as a show that was an inexplicable box office failure. Despite being ‘some sort of milestone in American musical theatre’ and ‘the best thing that has happened in and to the theatre in a very long time,’ and despite winning the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Musical, the show closed after four months, losing its entire investment. Mandelbaum suggests that the show was ‘perhaps the most neglected masterwork of American musical theatre,’ concluding that ‘the audience failed *The Golden Apple*...[because the show] was simply caviar to audiences more attuned to *The Pajama Game*, *Kismet* and *Can-Can*, all playing nearby.’

It became evident in the early stages of my research that various methods would need to be employed to obtain sufficient information to undertake a detailed analysis of the ways in which the musical theatre industry marketed its products and the ways in which marketing had developed since the advent of the megamusical format. The methods employed to gather information about marketing developments, and thereby find evidence that could support or refute the suggestion that the megamusical format was founded on rationalized principles of production that conformed to Ritzer's McDonaldization theory, can be roughly divided into three models of research: personal viewing of productions in different locations, analysis of printed publications, and interviews with production personnel and others employed within the musical theatre industry.

### 1.2.1 Sites and producers

To assess the impact of the megamusical format, this thesis has focused, in particular, on production practice in the two leading centres of musical theatre, London's West End and New York's Broadway.<sup>23</sup> Although the genre has strong American roots, British musical theatre developed its own indigenous productions and marketing strategies before the advent of Cameron Mackintosh and, from 1981 to the early 1990s, the focus of attention and influence noticeably shifted from New

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<sup>23</sup> Although I have focused on the West End and Broadway, during my period of research I also travelled to watch various musical productions in other cities, such as Las Vegas. As I will discuss in Chapter 5, Las Vegas is beginning to exert a powerful influence on many areas of cultural production, and it was therefore very useful to be able compare the ways in which musical theatre was being promoted and marketed in Las Vegas with the West End and Broadway. I was also able to see the latest version of *Mamma Mia!* in Las Vegas, which provided information for my second case study. Other cities that I visited included Berlin, where I was able to watch a performance of Disney's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. This show has so far not been reproduced elsewhere, although a greatly reduced version can be seen at each of the Disney theme parks. The Berlin production was therefore the only site where I could witness the dramatic projections and cinematic sequences that formed the backbone of the set design and which suggested an even closer link between the original Disney cartoon and its theatrical version than had been the case with, for example, Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Lion King*.

York to London. More recently, and particularly from the beginning of the new millennium, musical productions emanating from Broadway have again begun to dominate the genre, although, as will be demonstrated in the ensuing chapters of this thesis, these have been influenced by the megamusical format that emerged in the 1980s and have benefited from adopting the marketing strategies and techniques utilised and developed by Cameron Mackintosh for his own productions.

Attendance at a wide range of shows has helped to formulate an assessment of the ways in which the genre has developed. My visits have included seeing some of the same shows in various different theatres, in the West End and on tour, and on Broadway. This has enabled me to consider the level of exactness with which individual productions have been replicated, for example, and whether they therefore conform to Ritzer's McDonaldized principle of 'predictability.' In particular, close consideration has been given to the replication of visual elements such as set design, costumes and choreography, as well as the extent to which consumers in different locations could be said to have enjoyed the same experience. Useful insights into the exacting standards demanded by some producers with regard to the replication of their shows were also gained when informal interviews of production personnel were undertaken at different venues. The viewpoints expressed during such interviews were not 'controlled' by a respective producer and therefore provided useful perspectives on different shows, illustrating, for example, the importance attached by some producers to the enhancement of the consumer experience by the inclusion of visual spectacle in a production.

After some consideration, I decided to focus on the producers Cameron Mackintosh and Judy Craymer for my two case studies. Cameron Mackintosh, who was

responsible for initiating the megamusical format, has remained a major figure in musical theatre production since the early 1980s; he opened up markets across Europe, in particular, and his pioneering approach to global product marketing made him a particularly relevant choice for my first case study.<sup>24</sup> As a second case study I decided to analyse the marketing approach adopted by Judy Craymer, whose production of *Mamma Mia!* not only seemed to initiate the era of the ‘catalogue’ musical,<sup>25</sup> but also seemed to build on and develop the marketing strategy followed by Cameron Mackintosh. While perhaps lacking the visual spectacle of shows such as *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Miss Saigon*, Craymer’s *Mamma Mia!* has nevertheless rapidly developed into a genuinely global phenomenon that has opened up new markets at a pace that is unmatched by any other producer, including Mackintosh himself.

### 1.2.2 Print research

The main objective in consulting many types of published sources was to contextualise recent musical theatre, constructing a historical framework that would enable me to consider the ways in which the marketing of the genre has developed and, in this way, to begin to assess the possible influence of earlier producers on the megamusical format.

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<sup>24</sup> I will focus on Mackintosh’s productions of *Cats* (1981), *Les Misérables* (1985), *The Phantom of the Opera* (1986) and *Miss Saigon* (1989)

<sup>25</sup> A ‘catalogue’ musical is one that is based on the hit songs of a well-known popular music group or individual performer. Recent ‘catalogue’ shows include *Our House*, based on the songs of the pop group Madness and *We Will Rock You*, which is based round the songs of Queen. Other musicals before *Mamma Mia!* had included well-known songs, but these were generally either revues (e.g. *Smokey Joe’s Café* (1995), *Fosse* (1999)) or ‘bio-musicals’ (e.g. *Elvis- The Musical* (1978), *Buddy* (1995)). The latter format told the life-story of a particular performer and did not use the songs in an integrated fashion to develop the story.

Many of the books relating to musical theatre production provide little more than a brief historical account of when and where a particular show was produced, its number of performances and the names of its cast and production crew.<sup>26</sup> Only a limited number of writers (e.g. Berkowitz (1997), Rosenberg & Harburg (1993)) have considered in detail the variations in marketing approaches adopted by different producers, and detailed analysis of capitalisation costs and marketing budgets is, as a result, hard to find.<sup>27</sup> Other writers, such as Flinn (1997) and Steyn (1997), attempt to provide a more thorough analysis of production trends, but they approach their subject matter with preconceived ideas that consequently prevent them from drawing unbiased conclusions.<sup>28</sup>

A number of biographical accounts not only provide details of the marketing approaches adopted by a range of producers but also hint at the wider influence that these individuals have had on the musical genre. Such accounts were highly relevant to this thesis, since it soon became clear that the production of modern musical theatre needed to be viewed within a wider historical and cultural context if the influence that producers such as Cameron Mackintosh have exerted on the genre was to be assessed effectively.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Green (1980), Lamb (2000) and Mordden (2002) are three examples of these.

<sup>27</sup> The Society of London Theatre (SOLT) publishes annual reports that contain box office data from West End productions. This information is broken down by genre and, although no detailed information about income and expenditure for individual shows is provided, analysis of the statistical information provided in different reports can provide useful evidence of developing trends in patterns of consumption and production.

<sup>28</sup> Flinn makes it clear in his introduction to *Musical- A Grand Tour* that his book traces what he sees as the demise of the American musical, lamenting its passing and blaming the advent of the British megamusical in the 1980s, which he describes later (p.495) as 'heavy handed entertainment without substance, style or sense,' for the destruction of an all-American art-form. Steyn takes a similar viewpoint, insisting that the commercial success of Andrew Lloyd Webber and Cameron Mackintosh in the 1980s and 1990s has had a severely detrimental effect on the musical genre, and concluding, for example, without providing satisfactory evidence, that '[nowadays] you rarely feel that the music is a deeply personal, unconscious revelation of character, as you do in *Oklahoma!*' (1997: 103).

<sup>29</sup> Kissell's biography of David Merrick and Hirsch's biographical account of the lives of the Shuberts are two examples of works that I found particularly useful. The influence of Merrick on Cameron

Despite the fact that the majority of books written about the stage musical are studies of texts rather than analyses of the musical theatre industry, the published work of various writers is invaluable. Amongst these is Walsh (1997), whose writing not only provides a most detailed account of the work of Andrew Lloyd Webber, but also provides an overview of the genesis of the megamusical format.<sup>30</sup> More detailed analysis of musical theatre that focuses specifically on commercial aspects of production is harder to find, but Berkowitz (1997) and Rosenberg and Harburg (1993) provided valuable analysis of commercial trends in the 1980s and early 1990s, and make reference to some of the ways in which marketing has achieved an increased profile in the production process.<sup>31</sup>

Although marketing developments have begun to be analysed in a number of publications that assess the marketing of the arts in general, and although other cultural trends such as the changing demographics of theatre audiences have become a focus of academic attention,<sup>32</sup> marketing developments within musical theatre have

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Mackintosh, for example, to which Kissell (1993: 472) briefly refers, was an interesting assertion that I was able to consider in greater detail in chapter 3. Hirsch likewise suggested a number of areas that might be worthy of further research, such as his suggestion (p.6) that the Shubert brothers considered a high level of spectacle to be of much greater importance than a show's artistic or aesthetic value.

<sup>30</sup> The significance of Walsh is further demonstrated by the fact that Tim Rice told me that he made substantial use of Walsh's early chapters when writing his own autobiography, *Oh What a Circus*. Moreover, Douglas Thomson, who ghosted Paul Nicholas autobiography, told me that he used Walsh's writing to provide essential details about the West End production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* in which Nicholas had played the lead role.

<sup>31</sup> *Rosenberg & Harburg* (1993) draw heavily on interviews with individuals involved in musical theatre production, but many of these interviews are unattributed and, as a result, have limited value. Berkowitz's book is well-researched, although it does not consider the implications of the development of the musical genre into a globalized product, preferring instead to focus, briefly, on the effect of increased corporatisation on Broadway as a centre of theatre production in general.

<sup>32</sup> *The Audience for Touring Broadway: A Demographic Study*, published in 1998 by The League of American Theatres and Producers is one of a growing number of publications that provides a demographic breakdown of audiences. Not only are the statistics broken down by age and gender, but also by income, ethnicity and education. Moreover, comparisons are made with results from previous surveys, so it is possible to draw conclusions about developing demographic patterns. Further information, such as 'Residence proximity to theatre' and 'Reasons for attendance' provide a valuable

received rather less attention. The nature of media coverage ensures that analysis of musical theatre production tends to be repetitive and superficial, providing limited historical detail, and seldom contextualising a production or providing thorough consideration of its process of production. Furthermore, various cultural commentators, as will be shown in chapter 2, are prone to making assertions about features of musical theatre production that lack detailed analysis or exemplification.<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, there are also a number of print sources that offer more detailed and useful information.<sup>34</sup> *Variety*, for example, regularly contains articles that focus specifically and in detail on commercial aspects of production, and the periodical is therefore an important primary source for musical theatre research.<sup>35</sup> Other publications, such as *The Economist*, while not specifically dedicated to the

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insight for academic research into changing demographic patterns of consumption and for evaluation of the effectiveness of marketing strategies.

<sup>33</sup> Even George Ritzer, who asserts (1999a: 241) that Lloyd Webber's musicals are 'excellent examples' of the way in which products that achieve commercial success on a global scale are necessarily 'standardized' or 'McDonaldized' in their production process, fails to provide either detailed evidence for this conclusion or detailed analysis to support his argument.

<sup>34</sup> An obstacle that needed to be overcome in the early stages of my research was accessing major articles that had been published in more obscure periodicals and that were not yet available on the internet through dedicated archival sites. Barbara Lee Horn's bio-bibliography of David Merrick, for example, provided a comprehensive list of almost all the articles that had been written about Merrick and his productions, but most of these were published only in America, the earliest in 1942, and I was concerned that I would only be able readily to access the most recent items. I was particularly fortunate, however, to find that a comprehensive collection of musical theatre clippings has been archived in the New York Public Library and these included not only almost all the Merrick items referred to by Horn, but also an enormous number of articles related to other producers. Even more important to my research was the unfettered access that I was allowed to the Cameron Mackintosh Archive in London, which not only includes almost all articles printed in Britain and America that relate to Mackintosh and his productions, but also contains more peripheral musical theatre pieces, including a comprehensive collection of articles relating to Andrew Lloyd Webber and RUG productions. The importance of the Mackintosh Archive as a source for academic research cannot be underestimated, particularly as it gathers together in one place not only newspaper and popular magazine articles, but also pieces from a huge range of different business and industry publications which, together, facilitate the detailed cross-referencing and amplification that is such a vital part of academic research into musical theatre production in general, and musical theatre marketing in particular.

<sup>35</sup> *Variety* is an essential point of reference for anyone undertaking research into commercial aspects of any area of the global entertainment industry, since it is published specifically for the entertainment industry rather than for consumers and is, for example, an important source of comprehensive box office statistics. *Variety* not only provides details of the weekly grosses for each Broadway production, but also records the number of seats sold and the percentage of capacity that this figure represents.

entertainment industry, is one of a number of media publications that contains articles and features that not only view musical theatre production in purely commercial terms,<sup>36</sup> but also consider musical theatre from a broader perspective by relating it to cultural production in general. In addition, important analysis of commercial performance is available from producers' guilds,<sup>37</sup> whose industry-wide figures are an invaluable source of information that help to corroborate information given during formal interviews.

To supplement interviews, some interviewees were also prepared to provide a range of printed material that provided details about the approaches adopted by a producer for the marketing of his show. Material ranged from theatre programmes and examples of worldwide print advertising to detailed and confidential breakdowns of marketing budgets, audience surveys, in-house memoranda and policy documents. This provided evidence of the ways in which an individual producer often refocused his marketing strategy for a show in order to ensure that it continued to appeal to a particular market segment or take into account changing social or political conditions.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> An article published in the 13 February 1993 edition of *The Economist*, for example, entitled 'Broadway v The West End', provided an interesting analysis of the effect of Broadway marketing strategy on the production of musical theatre in the West End.

<sup>37</sup> The League of American Theatres and Producers, for example, produces a wide range of important statistical data that is invaluable to anyone undertaking research into the musical theatre genre. This data includes the box office grosses of individual shows, as well as the average price of tickets and the percentage of available seats sold. However, the League also publishes for its members other detailed statistical analysis such as the changing demographics of audiences and group sales activity for Broadway shows. Even statistical analysis of Disney's commercial performance on Broadway, various details of which I found Disney Corporation officials somewhat reluctant to divulge during interviews, is now made available to academic researchers. Furthermore, statistical data is now archived, so comparisons can be made between the commercial performances of different shows at different times.

<sup>38</sup> It is useful for research purposes to be able to compare the print advertisements used to promote particular shows over a period of time. Advertisements for *The Phantom of the Opera*, for example, which for many years had featured only the Phantom mask logo, had been modified after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre: a rose was introduced alongside the mask on all advertising material in order to emphasise the romantic and uplifting nature of the show.

### 1.2.3 Interviews

In addition to printed sources, personal interviews formed an important part of research for this thesis into developments in musical theatre marketing.<sup>39</sup> Responses by interviewees to prepared questions (see Appendix 1) not only complemented the information that had been gained through research into published texts, providing a range of personal perspectives that were of immediate relevance to the historical and cultural contextualisation of musical theatre, but they also offered specific insights into the ways that the marketing of the genre was continuing to develop into the twenty first century. Interviews were conducted with individuals who were involved, directly or indirectly, not only in the specifically commercial sphere of musical production, but also in the technical and creative spheres.<sup>40</sup>

The interviewees could be roughly divided into four categories:

- **Commercial:** Producers (e.g. Goucher, Craymer, Bettinson, Nicholas), marketing personnel (e.g. McCabe, Chiavetta, Thomas) and other individuals predominantly involved in the commercial sphere of production (e.g. Grady, Allott, McCallum)
- **Creative:** Directors (e.g. Lloyd, Masterson, Lyddiard), writers (e.g. Russell, Johnson) lyricists (e.g. Rice, Drewe) and choreographers (e.g. Reinking), responsible for shows from the earliest stages of production
- **Technical:** Individuals employed during a show's run to attend to its technical requirements (e.g. Napier, Asher)

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<sup>39</sup> In my analysis of modern production practice I have been fortunate to have gained access to individuals who have had a significant influence on the globalization of the musical genre, especially those who have instrumental in the development and adoption of its marketing strategies. The personal perspectives of these key marketing personnel have provided a unique insight into the ways in which producers market their products and have enabled me to assess the degree to which a McDonaldized system has become pervasive in the production of musical theatre productions in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

<sup>40</sup> Although the majority of my interviews were with producers and production marketers, who were inevitably in a position to provide the most accurate assessment and reflection on current trends in musical theatre marketing, I was also keen to talk to other individuals outside the marketing field whenever there seemed to be an opportunity of gaining an added insight into the marketing approach adopted by a producer for a particular show.

- **Industrial:** Those involved with the musical theatre industry but not directly employed by a particular producer or directly answerable to him; for example, senior executives at producers' guilds (e.g. Svendsen, Millan), senior personnel at ticketing companies (e.g. Rieger, Villiers), and publicists (Walton, Erlick, Risley)<sup>41</sup>

Interviews with individuals in each category had different objectives. Producers and others individuals in the first category of interviewees, who formed the largest group, were asked a range of questions in the early stages of interviews that related to their own productions. The objective was to build up as detailed a picture as possible of current marketing practice and developments, so questions focused on the marketing expenditure involved in particular shows, seeking to establish where marketing funds were being directed and the percentage of capitalisation and running costs that were involved. The aim was also to explore Ritzer's assertion that the McDonaldized system of production has led to a greatly increased focus on elements of spectacle, and necessitated much higher levels of control within the production process in order to achieve standardization. In addition, interviews in this first category attempted to discover what methods were being adopted to market and promote specific productions, before interviewees were asked to comment on developing marketing patterns within the industry as a whole.

Interviews with those in the second category began with questions that related to the individuals' own creative responsibilities. The objective was to discover whether any of their creative decisions had been influenced, directly or indirectly, by marketing imperatives, and questions therefore encouraged interviewees to provide a detailed account of their working processes and their relationship with other members of the

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<sup>41</sup> The names mentioned here do not include all those who were interviewed. The complete list is in the third section of References.

creative team, especially their producers. In order to keep an overall sense of perspective, individuals in this second category were also encouraged to be as reflective as possible,<sup>42</sup> and if they had been involved in a range of different productions they were asked to assess the ways in which their creative responsibilities might have changed and developed.

The third category of interviews tended to be conducted on a more informal basis and were often much shorter and focused on individual aspects of a production with which the interviewees were involved. The intention was to balance the views and opinions expressed by those in more senior positions with the personal perspectives provided by individuals employed in less influential roles. Despite the informal nature and the brevity of these exchanges, at times invaluable insights were gained and tangible evidence was received, for example, of the measures implemented by some producers to ensure that they exerted strict levels of control over all aspects of the production process.<sup>43</sup>

Even before the interview process began, it was clear that ways would need to be found of critiquing some of the views and opinions that were expressed by interviewees in the first three categories of interview subjects. For this reason, when an interviewee gave a response that was generalised or seemed to lack specific insight, clarification was requested and, where relevant, specific details that would

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<sup>42</sup> When, for example, Catherine Johnson told me that she considered that the book was extremely important to the success of *Mamma Mia!*, and that ‘the story and the songs fitted together so well it was as if the songs had been written for this book,’ I asked her to consider what the primary reasons were for audiences choosing to buy tickets to see the show. She concluded that the ABBA brand and the ABBA songs were the most valuable assets of the show, and that the show’s broad appeal was more significant in the production’s success than the quality of her book.

<sup>43</sup> An example of the valuable insights that could be gained from some of these brief exchanges was the conversation that I had with John Asher, sound operator for the touring production of *Miss Saigon*. Asher gave me specific examples of how Cameron Mackintosh exerted creative control over all aspects of his productions (see Chapter 5, note 315)

help to exemplify the interviewee's original response.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, personnel who are contracted to an individual producer can sometimes provide 'prepared' answers that portray a producer or a production in a favourable light.<sup>45</sup> The primary objective, therefore, in selecting individuals from the fourth category was to obtain a broader perspective and balance from those who had high levels of expertise and experience inside and outside the field of musical theatre marketing but who were not beholden to individual producers. Representatives of producers' guilds and senior members of organisations such as the Arts Council of England, for example, were therefore approached, as well as a range of 'big picture' individuals who had significant

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<sup>44</sup> For example, in answer to my question about how Disney enhanced product identity for its various musical theatre productions, Carol Chiavetta, Head of Marketing at Disney Theatricals, replied that, amongst other strategies, Disney worked hard to ensure that a particular show's songs were familiar to potential audiences. When I pressed her for details of exactly how this familiarity was achieved, she provided me with details of a range of marketing initiatives that had been used to promote *Aida*.

We have done a lot of promotions where you get a free CD with purchase so that because I think it breeds, you know, it makes people hear 'What's that? That is Aida.' So we have done a lot of those, like in Bloomingdales in a Lancome perfume promotion, and they have been very successful.

<sup>45</sup> Modern producers are aware that unguarded comments can sometimes have an adverse effect on the commercial performance of a particular product, and it was clear in many media articles that musical theatre producers were happy to regurgitate the same 'safe' facts that portrayed them and their products in a totally favourable light and were unlikely to undermine in any way their commercial prospects. During my research I frequently came across examples in the media not only of producers, but also other individuals working in the commercial and creative spheres of musical theatre production, putting a 'spin' on production decisions in order to try to protect their commercial interests. When, for example, *The Scarlet Pimpernel* closed at the Minskoff Theatre on Broadway in May 1999 and then reopened at the Neil Simon Theatre some weeks later, having scaled back its cast by twelve and its orchestra by four and having simplified some of its scenery, Director Robert Longbottom went out of his way to stress that the show had actually been improved by its transfer and that audiences would actually enjoy the theatrical experience more than before: 'It plays better in an intimate space...It's substantially less people on stage, but it doesn't feel that way...Because of the house that it's in, it looks just as big to me' (*NYT*, 19 September 1999). Referring to the replacement of a full stage elevator that simulated a ship by a much smaller scissor lift, Longbottom commented rather implausibly: 'It's a low-tech version of it. But it's absolutely as graceful and as magical.' Similarly, Tom Shumacher was keen to play down changes in the production of Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* when it transferred from the Palace Theatre to the Lunt-Fontanne Theatre, suggesting (*Ibid*) that the obvious downsizing was 'little more than the kind of polishing that is always done with a show,' and reassuring potential audiences that Disney would never compromise the quality of the show for economic expediency since 'it's the quality of the show that matters.' Other producers such as Cameron Mackintosh have for a long time recognised the value of maintaining consumer confidence in their products by tightly controlling interviews in the media and by responding unequivocally to any negative comments. When Andrew Lloyd Webber suggested in July 1996 that the time of the blockbuster musical was coming to an end, Nick Allott, executive producer of CML, categorically denied Lloyd Webber's suggestion, insisting that he confidently expected the new CML production of *Martin Guerre* to recoup its costs 'in about 40 weeks' (*The Guardian*, 3 July 1996, p.6). Six months later, when Lloyd Webber suggested that new blockbuster musicals would be unlikely to flourish (*Sunday Times, Business Section*, 26 January 1997, p.9), Cameron Mackintosh himself, fearing that such comments might further undermine confidence in *Martin Guerre*, responded personally to Lloyd Webber's assertions and ensured that his fierce rebuttal appeared in every British broadsheet.

experience of marketing a variety of entertainment products on a global scale. The responses that were received from these individuals and the views that they expressed not only helped to contextualise the opinions that had been expressed in other interviews and gave them a broader commercial perspective, but also often helped either to give greater credence to the responses that had been received elsewhere, or to contradict them.<sup>46</sup> It was important to talk to people who had achieved varying levels of commercial success, assessing and comparing their approaches to the marketing of their shows. In this way it would be possible to draw more pertinent conclusions about the possible reasons for commercial success or failure in musical theatre productions, and the effect of marketing on a production's commercial performance. Detailed interviews were therefore conducted not only with a number of producers whose productions had been commercially significant on a global scale, but also other producers whose productions had not yet achieved success on the scale of a megamusical but who had produced shows that had achieved more modest levels of success. In this way an attempt was made to discover the degree to which the marketing practices of the latter had been influenced by the production strategy adopted by the former.

This thesis aimed to discover whether the success of the megamusical format had influenced the style and content of other shows that producers had subsequently chosen to produce, but in the early stages of research it became clear that the questions would need to be put to interviewees in such a way that they elicited useful relevant information, and that time was not wasted on lengthy responses that were

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<sup>46</sup> Cross referencing was an important method of ensuring that information received from, and views expressed by, an interviewee were relevant and objective. By keeping as closely as possible to my pre-prepared series of questions, I was able to test the responses that I received from different interviewees and, in this way, analyse patterns of production practice that emerged.

largely inconsequential or irrelevant. This was particularly important in view of the fact that access to some interviewees was only granted for a relatively short period of time, sometimes between twenty minutes and half an hour.<sup>47</sup>

Interviews were not just confined to senior production personnel at CML Productions and Littlestar Services who were associated with the case studies of this thesis: information was deliberately gathered from those with lower levels of responsibility, and interviewees therefore ranged from heads of marketing departments, for example, to those with more modest roles in the production process, in order to place the findings in as broad a context as possible. It was found at an early stage in the research process that producers and senior production personnel were often unwilling to contribute information about their own shows, especially when those shows were in pre-production or had recently opened, unless they could be convinced that such information would not become public knowledge, and it was almost always necessary to provide evidence of my academic credentials before an interview could proceed. Some interviewees required written confirmation that their contributions would not be

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<sup>47</sup> Wherever possible, interviews were conducted on a face-to-face basis, as I found that interviewees tended to be more open and forthcoming when I was able to put them at their ease and when the interview took place in more relaxed surroundings or without the time constraints that telephone conversations tended to impose. When, for example, I was granted a half-hour telephone interview, the conversation was seldom able to continue much beyond the allotted time before the interviewee was called away by a Personal Assistant to attend to some other business. Telephone interviews had the additional disadvantage of often developing into question and answer sessions, especially when they were with individuals whom I had not previously met or with whom I had absolutely no personal connection. Person to person interviews, however, rarely had this time constriction placed upon them, and I often found myself continuing a conversation well after the allotted time had expired. On occasion, I had to resort to e-mails to obtain responses to my questions and, although this was my least favourite means of obtaining responses to my questions, it was sometimes the only means of gaining access to an individual, either on account of that individual's hectic schedule or simply because some interviewees were unwilling to respond to questions for which they had not been able to prepare considered answers. Some individuals were nervous about being led into saying anything that might contradict the views of the powerful producers who paid their salaries, and it is true that on a number of occasions when I was conducting face to face interviews some of my interviewees made statements or provided views about their experiences in musical theatre production that they did not wish to be made public. I was able to reassure such individuals that their opinions would be used only for the purposes of my own academic research and that, if they so wished, their responses to certain subjects would remain unattributed in the text of my thesis.

quoted in any publication other than in this thesis, and almost all required repeated verbal reassurance that the sole purpose of interviews was for academic research.<sup>48</sup>

### 1.2.3.1 Interview Technique

It became clear during the research process that it would be necessary to undertake a number of supplementary interviews with industry professionals on both sides of the Atlantic<sup>49</sup> who were not associated with CML or Littlestar Services. These would help to set the case studies of this thesis in a broader context, enabling the comments and opinions of those individuals who were directly involved with *Mamma Mia!* or CML productions to be challenged, and providing the opportunity for the validity of comments that had been made about the production process and the current state of the musical theatre industry to be assessed. The viewpoints and opinions of other members of the creative teams who were involved in the creation of musical theatre were sought, to discover, for example, whether lyricists or directors considered that their work was influenced or guided by specific marketing objectives that helped to shape a particular product. A number of questions therefore involved asking individuals about the degree to which their respective producers had

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<sup>48</sup> I found that American interviewees were more used to being approached by interviewers from academic institutions and, as a result, once my academic credentials had been clearly established, tended to be more open in the early stages of interviews and were more immediately willing to provide a critique of production methods. American interviewees also tended to be more forthcoming when it came to providing personal insights into developments in musical theatre marketing, particularly when the seriousness of my intentions was confirmed by the fact that I was prepared to make regular visits to New York to conduct the interviews that were so germane to my research.

<sup>49</sup> I was indebted to Susan Lee for helping to open up channels of communication in the United States. Susan Lee has been at the forefront of musical theatre marketing for twenty years and, as senior executive of The League of American Theatres and Producers, she developed a number of marketing initiatives for Broadway theatre; she is currently Director of New Business Development at Serino Coyne Inc., the leading theatrical marketing firm in America. Susan Lee personally introduced me to a number of individuals in the field of musical theatre marketing who would otherwise have been much more difficult to reach. She even went as far as setting up interviews for me and making pertinent suggestions about who might be able to provide the most useful material for my research. As a result of Susan Lee's support and encouragement, a number of producers and marketers provided me with confidential information that was not only of importance to any detailed analysis of developments in the field of musical theatre marketing but that would also have been almost impossible to obtain under other circumstances.

influenced their creative output, requesting that they might give specific examples of occasions when they had felt any degree of pressure to conform to their producers' creative viewpoint. In this way conclusions were able to be drawn about the degree to which individual creative impulses were necessarily controlled by the marketing imperatives of their respective producers.

Formal interviews were semi-structured,<sup>50</sup> and were developed from a series of pre-arranged questions.<sup>51</sup> Time limitations meant that it was usually not possible to ask all the questions on the list,<sup>52</sup> and it was therefore necessary during certain interviews to focus on specific aspects of the production process in order to obtain appropriately honest responses.<sup>53</sup> In early interviews it was also found that following a rigid interview structure did not help an interviewee to relax, and responses were consequently less detailed and insightful. In short, rigidly pre-prepared questions produced pre-prepared answers. A less regimented approach was therefore adopted, ensuring that, wherever possible, questions developed naturally from an interviewee's responses and became more of a natural part of an informal discussion, rather than a formal interview.<sup>54</sup> Since production personnel are in the habit of 'talking up' the productions with which they are involved and their own contribution to them, it was important to try to ensure that responses and opinions given during interviews helped

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<sup>50</sup> Despite their format, I was always careful to ensure that my formal interviews were never so regimented that they did not allow those whom I interviewed to digress into discussion about areas of production practice that might not in the first instance have appeared to be germane to my research, but which later might be found to have had significance owing to the different perspective on marketing developments that they provided.

<sup>51</sup> See Appendix A

<sup>52</sup> The amount of time granted by interviewees varied enormously. While a few were prepared to talk at length and gave generously of their time, most were limited to between twenty and forty minutes.

<sup>53</sup> Time constraints were such that it was sometimes necessary during an individual interview for my questions to focus on a specific area of an interviewee's expertise and experience. However, taking my interviews as a whole, my intention was to elicit a range of responses to all the different questions on my prepared list.

<sup>54</sup> For this reason, my questions did not necessarily follow a specific order, as a discussion with an interviewee often developed in a manner that could not be anticipated, but which yielded useful information, and I was therefore keen not to constrain too much the responses that I received by sticking too rigidly to an inflexible series of questions.

to provide a broad picture of production practice, but were not influenced by an individual's current involvement with a particular show and were therefore less likely to be biased.<sup>55</sup> Direct questions about an individual's personal experience on a particular production were therefore mixed with questions that were intended to elicit

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<sup>55</sup> During the period of my research I was fortunate to have been able to attend a number of major theatre industry conferences. *Theatre 2001: Future Directions*, a theatre industry conference organised by the Society of London Theatre, the Theatrical Management Association and the Independent Theatre Council, for example, was a valuable networking opportunity that enabled me to meet and arrange interviews with various leading producers and marketing personnel, such as Julius Green and Martin McCallum. Since such conferences are organised for the benefit of industry professionals, they provide opportunities to gain insights into theatrical production that might otherwise prove elusive. I was always booked into such conferences as 'Artistic Director of the Hunt Theatre,' my professional title, rather than as an academic researcher, since the former title could in no way be seen as a threat to other conference delegates who were, as a result, more honest and open with me than they might otherwise have been when I began to converse informally with them outside the main conference chamber. My own interest in developments in marketing techniques was originally kindled at the inaugural New Musicals Alliance conference in London in June 2000, and it was at this time that I became aware of the negligible level of academic research that had been undertaken in the area. This particular conference, entitled 'Catalysts to Creativity- After the Helicopter' was initiated in order to examine the apparent dearth of new writing and the inherent difficulties in developing products that did not have the backing or other involvement of corporate or financially independent producers such as Disney and Cameron Mackintosh Limited (CML). Since the conference had been organised specifically for industry professionals and was attended by high powered representatives of major American and British producers and production companies, it was clear from the very beginning that opinions were expressed in a forthright and open manner and responses from the floor to the main speakers were generally more revealing than I had sometimes found when conducting my own interviews, since viewpoints were not fettered by public relations considerations. Moreover, the conference was intended to discuss possible strategies for achieving a common goal, ensuring the future welfare of the musical genre through the development of new writing, and individual contributors were often unusually candid as a result, and provided me with a wealth of material that could readily enhance, clarify and even adjust the perspectives that I gained through the ongoing interview process. Added to this was the fact that the conference attracted independent marketing consultants and professionals who had first hand experience of working with major British and American producers and production companies and who were therefore in a position to provide analytical detail that was less likely to suffer from being 'canned' responses. Susan Lee, for example, whose wealth of varied experience in the field of musical theatre marketing is unsurpassed on either side of the Atlantic and who, at that time, was about assume the role of one of the directors of the newly formed Broadway Television Network, provided a detailed analysis of developments in musical theatre marketing since the 1980s and outlined the direction that producers would need to follow if they were to be able to compete with the burgeoning forms and styles of entertainment media in the new millennium. The conference attracted speakers from both sides of the Atlantic, including such major figures as Michael Rose, whose production company, Michael Rose Limited, would co-produce *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* in the West End in 2002 and on Broadway in 2005, and Stewart Slater, Chief Executive of the American Musical Theatre of San José. The formal proceedings, which I was allowed to record, were both interesting and useful, but the conference also provided me with the chance to approach informally a range of individuals who were directly or indirectly involved with the marketing of musical theatre; I was able to gain invaluable insights during informal conversation, but the relaxed and unrestricted atmosphere also facilitated a priceless networking opportunity, and a number of individuals agreed to meet me in the following days and weeks to discuss points raised and to answer my questions in more detail.

a more reflective response about changes in commercial, aesthetic and managerial practices and the ways in which these had affected their own working lives.

Different interviews often had different objectives that were dependent on the category of individual being interviewed. When, for example, interviews were conducted with personnel who were directly involved in the sphere of commercial management, the information gained was intended to contribute to a coherent understanding of the ways in which patterns of expenditure had been affected by the advent of the megamusical format. Interviews with those involved in the technical and creative spheres of production aimed, amongst other objectives, to assess the level of control exerted by commercial imperatives over aesthetic considerations. Interviews with theatre critics and others with wide experience of the changing face of musical theatre were conducted with the objective of constructing a coherent history of production practice and the changing conditions of the industry, against which the production practices of Cameron Mackintosh, for example, could be compared and measured. The overall objective was to gain a balanced overall picture of modern production practice that was founded on considered responses from interviewees who were willing to critique the musical genre and its production process, rather than providing biased or generalised views and opinions that simply reflected an 'official' line of thinking. To this end, in order to encourage the most thoughtful responses, the interviewees with whom it was possible to conduct an interview in a relaxed and friendly manner were regularly challenged, and were asked to provide further detailed information or examples that might support their comments. In many cases it was possible in this way, not only to tease out a more informed and pertinent assessment of an individual's role in the production process, but also to gain more reflective

responses to my enquiries about developments and trends in the marketing of musical theatre. A generalised answer to a question, which might otherwise be considered to be of limited use or relevance, could therefore be developed productively by an improvised response or a request for further evidence or exemplification to be provided. Moreover, where an interviewee was unwilling or unable to provide more in-depth analysis, any significant gaps were able to be filled in through interviews with other members of the same production team, and corroborative testimony obtained that expanded on and substantiated the more general personal assessments and perspectives that had already been offered.

In this way, as far as possible, collusion was avoided, realising the importance of keeping my own opinions to myself as far as possible so that an interviewee would not be encouraged to give a response that he felt was being sought. On occasion, especially when an interviewee was expressing considerable anger or frustration, or even despondency, at the direction that he/she felt musical theatre was taking, it became necessary to offer a sympathetic response rather than a totally objective or critical one, as adopting a conflicting standpoint might have curtailed or obstructed discussion. Such an approach engendered a feeling of trust between interviewer and interviewee and often led to more interesting and relevant information being divulged.

It was clear that interviews, if they were to make an effective contribution to research for this thesis, needed to avoid the anecdotal generalisations that seem to be a regular feature of newspaper interviews with producers and other major figures in the

production process.<sup>56</sup> The overriding aim was therefore to record judgments of key figures in the production process that were as self-reflective as possible and that were neither guided by my own viewpoints nor influenced by my own opinions. Questions (Appendix 1) were therefore open-ended and carefully worded<sup>57</sup> to ensure that, as far as possible, each individual's responses were a reflection of his or her own feelings or beliefs, knowledge or experience about a particular area of the production process. Only in the latter stages of an interview were interviewees invited to respond to views voiced by cultural commentators such as George Ritzer, and this was usually only when other avenues of conversation had been exhausted, or when an interviewee's responses had lacked a degree of insight. On such occasions it became necessary both to reinvigorate the individual concerned and provide a starting point for attempting to generate a more detailed analysis of marketing trends from the interviewee's own perspective.

While interviews can provide first hand evidence of developments in marketing practice and can offer valuable insights into the possible direction that the musical genre might be taking, individual interviews cannot necessarily be relied on to provide unbiased and even accurate information, however carefully an interviewer structures his questions. In his essay on effective methods of research in television drama, Newcomb (1991: 101) argues that while interviews may be an effective means

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<sup>56</sup> Interviews with modern musical theatre producers generally include few detailed insights into the production process, preferring instead to focus on generalised comments about the producer's shows or the state of the musical theatre industry. In *The Sydney Morning Herald* (4 August 1997), for example, Cameron Mackintosh provides readers with comments such as: 'People don't go to a musical because it is a big or a little show; they go if it is good, if it is original,' and: 'There might be wonderful music, there might be great dancing, but in the end it is the story that matters. Good musical theatre always tells a good story...human beings, the world over, love a good story.'

<sup>57</sup> In an attempt to discover the effect of corporatisation on the industry, for example, I asked a number of interviewees (e.g. Grady, Bettinson) whether they considered that market entry had become more difficult. I was careful to use words that encouraged a personal reflective response rather than posing a more direct question such as 'Why has market entry become more difficult?' which would have been more likely to produce an answer that took the difficulties of market entry for granted.

of acquiring knowledge and understanding of production practice, uncorroborated interviews should not be relied upon to produce a detailed analytical picture.<sup>58</sup> It therefore became clear that, while a broad range of interviews would be essential to research for this thesis, it was vital to ensure that interviewees' responses were not automatically accepted as factual and unbiased accounts, but rather that they were challenged and cross referenced wherever possible, to enable as accurate an analysis as possible of marketing developments within the musical theatre genre to be formulated.<sup>59</sup> Responses from different interviewees were therefore compared in detail, to allow analysis of inconsistencies, omissions or even contradictions in responses.

In conclusion, the methodological approach to research for this thesis was largely qualitative and relied on personal perceptions. Quantitative surveys alone would have been of limited use, and information was therefore gathered from a wide range of different sources (published work, media articles, personal interviews and industry conferences), in order that interpretation of developments in the marketing of musical theatre could be made.

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<sup>58</sup> Newcombe rightly suggests that there is an implicit danger for any researcher relying too heavily on uncorroborated interview responses: answers may simply conform to an 'approved' view that is sanctioned by a producer or may be heavily influenced by the need to satisfy a particular public relations objective. Other answers, Newcomb suggests, may be coloured by a respondent's desire for an element of the production process, or an individual concerned with it, to be depicted in a favourable light.

<sup>59</sup> Some figures, such as the commercial performance of individual Broadway shows, could be cross-checked by referring to the box office statistics published, for example, in *Variety*. Other figures that were provided by individual interviewees, such as weekly marketing expenditure, running costs and audience demographics, were sometimes more difficult to confirm, although comparison with other shows' figures, which appeared in various confidential in-house publications, and to which I was given access, generally validated the accuracy of interviewees' quoted figures. Other general information was often relatively simple to check; an analysis of the different ways in which promotional material was used to market a show, for example, was made easier by the fact that most interviewees willingly provided sample promotional items, including print advertisements and promotional videos/DVDs. These provided valuable information about the tourist market, for example, which enhanced the brief comments that had been made during interviews with marketing personnel at Littlestar Services and CML.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURES

#### 2.1 Introduction

Theodor Adorno's Marxist theory of culture asserts that the culture industry as a whole is a capitalist tool that is utilised as a means of achieving social domination, suggesting that we live in a world where markets respond to the problem of overproduction by creating needs whose satisfaction is portrayed as a necessary objective. Adorno concludes that art has become commodified to the extent that the aesthetic gratification of the consumer is no longer the primary objective; value has come to be defined by image, packaging and advertising, and the role of marketing has therefore attained much greater significance as art works have progressively begun to be treated as commodities in a consumer-dominated society.

Such a view of the commodification of art and the consequent emphasis on marketing has obvious significance in any analysis of developments in marketing strategies for musical theatre. Moreover, Adorno's reflections on cultural homogeneity<sup>60</sup> seem to have a particular relevance to the apparent standardization of musical theatre production and its attendant marketing approaches, and his writing on the dominance of advertising and the importance of brand recognition within a mass culture environment<sup>61</sup> suggests a possible starting point for an analysis of the musical theatre industry.

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<sup>60</sup> See, for example, *Gesammelte Schriften III. Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1991)

<sup>61</sup> *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (p.73-4)

George Ritzer builds on Adorno's theories to construct his own theory of the McDonaldization of culture. For Ritzer (1996: 1), the process of McDonaldization, 'by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as of the rest of the world,' seems to have permeated every area of society, and its inexorable progress has helped to shape the framework of cultural production in general and of musical theatre in particular. In Ritzer's eyes, McDonald's becomes a cultural paradigm for global marketing and product development. This process of rationalization results in systems that emphasize a need for predictability, and in such a McDonaldized society, where consumers expect the quality of a particular product to be uniformly predictable, the production processes themselves become rationalized. this thesis will also explore apparent weaknesses in Ritzer's work and will address the criticism that his McDonaldization theory does not account for variety in cultural production or the prevalence of niche marketing as a means of targeting specific groups of consumers.<sup>62</sup>

## **2.2 Adorno and the theoretical framework of mass production and marketing**

Adorno's critique of the culture industry provides a framework for the theoretical analysis of both cultural production and cultural consumption. His essays repeatedly suggest that in a capitalist system all production is for the market, and that goods are not produced to 'meet human needs and desires, but for the sake of profit,

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<sup>62</sup> Wood considers that Ritzer's McDonaldization theory is undermined by its intransigence. Ritzer, he considers (1998: 90), 'attributes too much importance to the role of scientific management, Taylorism, in the rationalization and degradation of work, and is reluctant to accept the possibility of counter-tendencies to deskilling.' Supporting the conclusion of Lyon, Taylor and Smith (1994, 1995), Wood asserts: 'Ritzer...imbues the process of rationalization with an unjustifiable omnipotence...Product differentiation and mass customisation are manifestly contradictory processes which undermine McDonaldized production and service.'

for the sake of acquiring capital' (Adorno 1991: 4). The industrialisation of cultural production, which Adorno contends is the inevitable result of capitalism, has led to the homogenization of cultural forms and styles, so that 'culture now impresses the same stamp on everything- films, radio and magazines make up a system which is uniform as a whole and in every part' (1973: 120).<sup>63</sup> In an attempt to prove his theory, Adorno provides a series of examples, ranging from Western films that 'are familiar to every movie-goer' to television advertising.<sup>64</sup>

As products of mass culture dominate the market-place and real choice has been restricted by an overall process of leveling down,<sup>65</sup> and as both consumers and producers alike are swept along by the irresistible tide that mass culture generates, so advertising becomes all-pervasive and products become distinguishable simply by their branding and packaging. For Adorno, in a world where 'cultural production is an integrated component of the capitalist economy as a whole' (1991: 8), branding

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<sup>63</sup> Piore & Sabel (1984: 190-1) accept that standardization results in greater homogenization and the constraint of consumer choice: 'In the world of mass production, consumers accepted standard goods; their acceptance facilitated the extension of the market and the reduction of prices, through increasing economies of scale; and the growing gap between the price of mass-produced goods and that of customised goods further encouraged the clustering of demand around homogenous products.' However, like other commentators (for example, Locke, Taylor, Smith and Lyon), they contend that the mass production model has such severe limitations in the postmodern economy that a new paradigm, termed 'mass customization' by Stan Davies (1987), has emerged. Pine (1993: 44) writes that this process focuses on the creation of 'variety and customization through flexibility and quick responsiveness.' The goal of mass customization is 'developing, producing, marketing and delivering affordable goods and services with enough variety and customization that nearly everyone finds exactly what they want.' As a result of increasing market fragmentation, there has been an identifiable shift away from the Fordist production model: 'The recent advancements in technology and the advanced management approaches it underpins, allow us to realise the 'impossibility' of customized products on a mass basis. Mass customization- which is really the combination of two Japanese systems- the adaptable marketing system and the flexible manufacturing system or lean production- is ultimately an umbrella for a large number of other elements. These include, for example, new business 'strategies' such as kanban, kaizen, total quality management, empowerment, internal marketing, supply chain management, electronic data exchange, information technology-linked network organisations, and business process re-engineering. Mass customization is the product of the interplay and mutual reinforcement of many such elements' (Taylor Smith and Lyon (1998: 109)).

<sup>64</sup> Adorno is justifiably criticised by some writers for his failure to provide a satisfactory level of evidence to support his theories. Burston, for example concludes (p.49) that Adorno's methodology 'often eschewed any substantial empirical demonstration of his theoretical claims.'

<sup>65</sup> Other contemporary cultural theorists include F.R.Leavis and D.Thompson who come to a similar conclusion about the effect of industrialisation on cultural production (1933: 3), suggesting that it has resulted in 'standardization and levelling down outside the realm of mere material goods.'

inevitably assumes a critical level of importance for producers who need to differentiate their products to attract consumers:

Advertising becomes information when there is no longer anything to choose from, when the recognition of brand names has taken the place of choice, when at the same time the totality forces everyone who wishes to survive into unconsciously going along with the process. This is what happens under monopolistic mass culture (1991: 73).

The emergence and consequent emphasis on advertising and marketing within this commodified culture that is so clearly suggested by Adorno (1973) is made explicit by Huyssen (1986); but where, for Adorno, Odysseus's encounter with the Sirens became an allegorical anticipation of the role of art in modernity, for Huyssen (1986: 21) the encounter has become an allegorical reality:

Just as art works become commodities and are enjoyed as such, the commodity itself in consumer society has become image, representation, spectacle. Use value has been replaced by packaging and advertising. The commodification of art ends up in the aestheticization of the commodity. The siren song of the commodity has displaced the *promesse de bonheur* once held by bourgeois art, and consumer Odysseus blissfully plunges into the sea of commodities, hoping to find gratification but finding none.

Value is therefore defined by commercial rather than aesthetic considerations and, in the eyes of critics such as Adorno and Huyssen, the culture industry fosters vacuity and banality and promotes high levels of conformity, rather than championing aesthetic substance and individuality. As a result, commodified art works become formulaic in content, even if they are marketed in a way that stresses their individuality.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Adorno suggests (1973: 87), for example, that the Hollywood star system, which 'propagates supposedly great personalities and operates with heart throbs' is a means whereby producers may attribute 'an air of individuality' to products that are standardized and dehumanised in content.

Adorno suggests that the adaptive character of mass culture results in a leveling down process that encourages adaptations of earlier cultural artifacts, concluding that mass culture relies totally on adaptation and, through its relentless monopolistic nature, suffocates individuality and innovation. In 'On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening' Adorno proposes that the gradual suppression of individuality and artistic adventure within music composition and production is symptomatic of a wider cultural standardization and increasing blandness that will progressively permeate other areas of cultural production, in which public taste is manipulated as a matter of course. The star principle is dominant, and any expression of individuality is artificial:

The liquidation of the individual is the real signature of the new musical situation...The differences in the reception of official classical music and light music no longer have any real significance. They are only still manipulated for reasons of marketability. The reactions of the listeners appear to have no relation to the playing of the music, while the star principle has become totalitarian...The sacrifice of individuality, which accommodates itself to the regularity of the successful, the doing of what everybody does, follows from the basic fact that in broad areas the same thing is offered to everybody by the standardized production of consumption goods. But the commercial necessity of connecting this identity leads to the manipulation of taste and the official culture's pretence of individualism which necessarily increases in proportion to the liquidation of the individual (Adorno 1991: 35).

Adorno's ideas about the standardization of cultural production and the effect of market forces on the cultural product are developed still further in his essay 'Das Schema der Massenkultur.' Here, his framework for a critique of mass culture, on the surface at least, seem to be of immediate relevance to a consideration of developments within the specific area of modern musical theatre:

The self-reflection of culture brings a leveling down process in its wake. Inasmuch as any and every product refers back to what has already been preformed, the mechanism of adjustment towards which business interest

drives it anyway is imposed upon it once again. Whatever is to pass muster must already have been handled, manipulated and approved by hundreds of thousands of people before anyone can enjoy it. (Adorno T. *Gesammelte Schriften III. Dialektik der Aufklärung*, 1981: 58)

In Adorno's eyes, the adaptive character of the cultural product which affects both product and consumer is exemplified by the marketing approach of the film industry, whereby a film is likely to be championed for its similarity to earlier successful cinematic releases rather than for its own individual or idiosyncratic strengths:

The average film now boasts of its similarity with the successful prototype rather than trying to conceal the fact. All mass culture is fundamentally adaptation. However, this adaptive character, the monopolistic filter which protects it from any external rays of influence which have not already been safely accommodated within its reified schema, represents an adjustment to the consumers as well. The pre-digested quality of the product prevails, justifies itself and establishes itself all the more firmly in so far as it constantly refers to those who cannot digest anything not already pre-digested. It is baby food: permanent self-reflection based upon the infantile compulsion towards the repetition of needs which it creates in the first place (Adorno 1991: 58)

Adorno acknowledges that cultural artifacts have always been commodities that could be brought to the market place by those who produced them, and he is aware that artistic achievement could result, albeit indirectly, in commercial success. However, he asserts that the culture industry has gradually developed into one whose very existence is justified by its commercial potential rather than its artistic values, an industry in which a desire for profit has now become the dominant feature, indeed its very *raison d'être*:

The entire practice of the culture industry transfers the profit motive naked onto cultural forms. Ever since these cultural forms first began to earn a living for their creators as commodities in the market-place they had already possessed something of this quality. But then they sought after profit only indirectly, over and above this autonomous essence. New on the part of the culture industry is the direct and undisguised primacy of a precisely and thoroughly calculated efficacy in its most typical products (1991: 86).

Such observations provide a useful starting point for the analysis of marketing developments within the musical theatre industry. Moreover, Adorno's conviction that the relentless commodification of the cultural industry will result in the inevitable 'leveling down' of the cultural artifacts that it produces, together with his assertion that this process will result in the primacy of advertising and product branding, provide a powerful stimulus for a detailed analysis of the developing role of product marketing, specifically within musical theatre production, as it pertains to the framework of Adorno's critique. However, although Adorno's theories at first glance seem to suggest a relevant starting point for an analysis of musical theatre production, there are inherent weaknesses in a theory that focuses so closely on the production of mass culture and does not, for example, take into account the rapid growth of niche markets. Moreover, modern cultural theorists often question the validity of Adorno's essentially pessimistic critique of mass culture. He is seen by some as being too generalised in his approach (Gendron 1986; Middleton 1990), focusing too closely on a limited number of cultural products that he considers to have 'aesthetic value' and being too willing to dismiss other styles and forms that do not match his paradigm. Middleton argues (1990: 38) that the validity of Adorno's cultural theory is undermined by the fact that he does not pay sufficient attention to the 'specificity of cultural goods', citing the example that 'music can never be *just* a product (an exchange value), even in its rawest commodity form.' Others, such as Longhurst (1995), suggest that Adorno is too constrained by his historical and social context and his theories, formulated in the mid-twentieth century, are unable to provide a rigorous critique of the infinite variety of cultural production and consumption patterns that characterise life in the late twentieth century and beyond. In particular, Longhurst suggests that, while popular music in the late 1930s and early 1940s may have

seemed to be standardized, Adorno's theories seem to be less immediately relevant to the wide variety of popular musical forms and styles that currently exist. Like other writers, Longhurst is also critical of Adorno's unspecific and generalised analysis of consumption patterns, suggesting (1995: 12) that this is seldom supported by any level of substantive evidence, and concluding that his work is 'so general that it constrains detailed analysis of the specific nature of musical production, textual variation and consumption' (1995: 14). The relevance of Adorno's theory as a framework for cultural analysis is therefore undermined by its failure to provide anything other than generalised observations about varying patterns of cultural consumption, and its failure to analyse, for example, the 'different sorts of pleasure' (Longhurst 1995: 13) that are part of the consumption process.

Adorno makes a wide range of provocative assertions about the process of cultural production in a capitalist system and, although his descent into what often seems to resemble polemical rant too often seems to lack the level of detachment for his Marxist viewpoint to be convincing as socio-cultural theory, his ideas nevertheless encourage more detailed analysis of specific forms of cultural production. Therefore, while Adorno's theories may be applicable in the broadest terms to the production of musical theatre,<sup>67</sup> the immediate relevance of his critique is undermined by a Marxist determination to prove that patterns of production and consumption are necessarily standardized in a capitalist society where consumer taste is strictly controlled by a capitalist elite. An analysis of patterns of commodity consumption, and the ways in which a variety of approaches to consumer marketing interrelate with these patterns, will serve to exemplify the validity of Adorno's cultural framework in general terms.

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<sup>67</sup> Burston, while acknowledging Adorno's limitations, considers (p.49) that his 'overarching assessment of [the drive] toward standardization and homogenization...continues to resonate with the contemporary experience of many producers working in the cultural industries.'

However, to provide a clearer picture of both the direction that the musical theatre genre has followed since its earliest beginnings and to provide a rationale for future developments, I will now consider briefly the theories of other cultural analysts which will now briefly be considered, in order to decide whether they offer more specific and detailed relevance to the formulation of a critical framework that is applicable to the production of musical theatre.

## **2.3 Mass Culture and the Growth of Cultural Imperialism**

### **2.3.1 Globalization and McDonaldization**

As modern industrial techniques of commercial marketing began to be applied to the production of musical theatre, and as the genre began to become commodified and reproduced on an increasingly global scale, so some critics began to question the aesthetic integrity of the musical as it gradually seemed to evolve into a mass culture product.<sup>68</sup> In his attempts to define mass culture in simple terms, Strinati reflects the essence of Adorno's cultural theory, suggesting that the products of mass culture are the result of industrial-scale production, and that marketing methods have the sole objective of generating financial profit from the mass market at which they are aimed:

Mass culture is popular culture which is produced by mass production industrial techniques and is marketed for a profit to a mass public of consumers. It is commercial culture, mass-produced for a mass market. Its growth means that there is less room for any culture which cannot make money, which cannot be produced for a mass market (Strinati 1995: 10).

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<sup>68</sup> Flinn (1997) and Eyre (2000) reflect the many writers who consider that musical theatre has been debased by its development into a global product. Flinn suggests (p.474) that 'the mass-merchandising of art for the sake of commerce has caused a decline in the quality of American culture,' and concludes that Andrew Lloyd Webber has 'created scarce melodies for abysmal librettos and expensive, dismally choreographed extravaganzas.' Eyre is equally dismissive, writing (p.346) that Cameron Mackintosh's commodified approach to musical theatre production paved the way for productions such as *Disney's Beauty and the Beast* that have 'all the liveliness of a wax museum and the charm of a yawning grave.'

Strinati also reiterates Adorno's concern that the quality of artistic production may be irredeemably affected by the pernicious influence of commercialisation, and assesses the possible consequences of commercialisation and industrialisation upon modern culture. Strinati's conclusions, however, like those of Adorno, are seriously undermined by his preconceptions about exactly what constitutes 'quality', and he seems unwilling for the most part to provide any level of rigorous analysis, choosing instead to make generalised assertions, without providing detailed evidence to support them:

Does the emergence of culture in commodity forms mean that criteria of profitability and marketability take precedence over quality, artistry, integrity and intellectual challenge? Or does the increasingly universal market for popular culture ensure that it is truly popular because it makes available commodities people actually want? What wins out when popular culture is manufactured industrially and sold according to the criteria of marketability and profitability- commerce or quality? (Strinati 1995: 3).<sup>69</sup>

MacDonald pursues a similar line, but suggests that mass culture has an even more destructive influence and poses an even more serious threat to the artistic quality of cultural products because of the way in which it is able to undermine so insidiously the distinctions between elite and popular culture. In Macdonald's eyes, mass culture is a serious threat, not only because of its homogeneity, but also because of its irresistible capacity to 'level down' and 'debase' the artistic quality and value of culture production as a whole:

[Mass culture] is a dynamic, revolutionary force, breaking down the old barriers of class, tradition, taste, and dissolving all cultural distinctions. It

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<sup>69</sup> Commentators such as Levitt (1972, 1976), whose *Production-line Approach to Service* (1972) drew extensively on the working practices of McDonald's, insist that the 'industrialization of service' does not necessarily result in a reduction in quality; rather, Levitt suggests, it can radically improve the quality of many services.

mixes and scrambles everything together, producing what might be called homogenized culture. It thus destroys all values, since value judgments imply discrimination. Mass culture is very, very democratic: it absolutely refuses to discriminate against, or between, anything or anybody (Macdonald 1957: 62)

Macdonald's position of cultural pessimism insists (1957: 61) that 'bad stuff drives out the good, since it is more easily understood and enjoyed,' an accusation that in more recent times has been leveled at megamusical productions, such as those of Cameron Mackintosh.<sup>70</sup> These productions have been criticised not just by those who might be considered to be adopting the position of critics of mass culture. Postmodern theorists such as Harvey consider that in a postmodern world 'images dominate narrative' (Harvey 1989: 347), implying that consumers are provided with superficial images and signs for their consumption at the expense of aesthetic value or substance.<sup>71</sup> Richard Eyre suggests that such a conclusion is immediately applicable to modern musical theatre since marketing strategies now dominate the production process and images and logos can be found in every major city around the world, a feature of theatre marketing practice that, he considers, has been strongly influenced by Cameron Mackintosh's approach to the packaging of his own products.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Richard Eyre is one of a number of writers who suggests that the megamusical genre has had a 'levelling down' effect on theatrical production in general, suggesting (2000: 340) that, as a result of the increasing dominance of the megamusical, subsidised theatre has been compelled by commercial pressure to widen its constituency, a move that has resulted in the 'convergence' of subsidised and commercial theatre.

<sup>71</sup> Strinati concludes (1995: 225) that the dominance of signs and images in the postmodern world has resulted in a process of 'dumbing down' that has been instigated by the increasing prevalence of mass cultural products: 'If popular cultural signs and media images are taking over in defining our sense of reality for us, and if this means that style takes precedence over content, then it becomes more difficult to maintain a meaningful distinction between art and popular culture. There are no longer any agreed and inviolable criteria which can serve to differentiate art from popular culture.'

<sup>72</sup> Eyre's admiration for Cameron Mackintosh (2000: 343) as 'probably the most effective' producer in British theatre is counterbalanced by his scathing view of Mackintosh's products. Eyre suggests that the supremacy of the brand image in musical theatre marketing, which was initiated on a global scale by Mackintosh and Lloyd Webber with their co-production of *Cats*, has resulted in the championing of artificial emotion and superficial characterisation and storyline. He concludes that Mackintosh's success has led to the inexorable rise of 'Disneyfication', and the dehumanisation of musical theatre. Eyre's scathing comments are somewhat ironic in the light of the fact that he readily agreed to direct the Mackintosh/Disney co-production of *Mary Poppins* in 2005.

Following the emergence of the megamusical format in the 1980s, musical theatre production has achieved a global significance, and consideration must therefore be given to the relationship between the musical theatre product and the wider process of globalization. Held (et al.) suggest that globalization involves a limitation of national politics:

Globalization reflects a widespread perception that the world is rapidly being moulded into a shared social space by economics and technological forces and that developments in one region of the world can have profound consequences for the life chances of individuals and communities on the other side of the globe. For many, globalization is also associated with a sense of political fatalism and chronic insecurity in that the sheer scale of contemporary social and economic change appears to outstrip the capacity of national governments or citizens to control, contest or resist that change (1999: 1).

A Marxist socio-economic perspective might therefore view globalization as the extension of monopoly capitalist imperialism, and the way in which economies increasingly seem to be transcending traditional national borders has resulted in a reduction in the overall influence of national governments, and a redefinition of their economic and political role:

Economic globalization is bringing about a 'denationalization' of economies through the establishment of transnational networks of production, trade and finance. In this 'borderless' economy, national governments are relegated to little more than transmission belts for global capital or, ultimately, simple intermediate institutions sandwiched between increasingly powerful local, regional and global mechanisms of governance (Held 1999: 3).

Strange (1996: 4), similarly suggests that globalization is weakening the grip of nation states over economic markets that have developed a global dimension:

The impersonal forces of world markets... are now more powerful than the states to whom ultimate political authority over society and economy is supposed to belong...the declining authority of states is reflected in a growing

diffusion of authority to other institutions and associations, and to local and regional bodies.

The development of global markets, however, together with the consequent transcending of national boundaries, has arguably resulted in a world economy that is characterised by examples of increasing economic inequality, rather than equal opportunity for all trading partners: as some nation states have reaped the benefits of a dramatic increase in economic trade and investment, so others have become marginalized and even excluded from a global market-place in which the power of multinational companies has become predominant. Consequently, while the result of a truly globalized economy may ultimately be the homogenization of social, political and cultural patterns, the emerging paradigm will be a Western one that will dominate and then extinguish the contributions of 'Third World' states who are unable to compete against the multinational muscle of Western economies,<sup>73</sup> leading Carr to suggest (1981: 87) that 'international order and international solidarity will always be slogans of those who feel strongly enough to impose them on others.'

Adorno would probably argue that the emergence of the global musical product exemplifies his theory that the adoption of capitalist principles in cultural production results in increasing levels of cultural imperialism which, in turn, inevitably lead to increased homogenization and a reduction in consumer choice. Theorists such as

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<sup>73</sup> Some might argue that countries such as China or Japan have the economic potential to have a significant effect on the emergence of a dominant cultural paradigm. Locke (1996: 161), for example, points out that the USA's share of the world's industrial output decreased from 50% in 1950 to 21% by the mid-1980s, while imports of manufactured products rose from 5% of domestic production in 1960 to 23% of domestic production in 1986, concluding that these figures are a clear indication that traditional models of American management and production have declined in influence. Locke's insistence that German and Japanese management structures have overtaken traditional American models may well be valid, but while English continues to be the preferred global language of commerce and communication, and while American signs and images continue to maintain a dominant presence in globalized culture, a Western paradigm seems to be likely to dominate cultural forms in the foreseeable future.

Strinati would be likely to develop this position, dismissing musicals that have developed into global entities as products 'mass-produced for a mass market' that prioritise marketability over aesthetic value. Again, however, such a response seems too unspecific to provide anything more than a starting point for the analysis of the implications of globalization for the marketing of musical theatre. While the musical product has undoubtedly gained a global perspective, it is too simplistic to assume that it is, in consequence, necessarily being universally produced and marketed wholly as a mass production model along Fordist lines.

### **2.3.2 Fordism, Consumer Culture and Commodity Consumption**

The marketing strategies that were initiated to promote megamusicals were symptomatic of a broader cultural shift that had inevitably been developing over a prolonged period but which became a major feature of cultural consumption from the 1980s onwards. The postmodern view of cultural forms being dominated by signs rather than substance and by images rather than value, seemed unequivocally to be realised by the central position that marketing was assuming within cultural production, a position that seemed to epitomise the radical shift in cultural and social policy represented by the new Thatcherite (and Reaganite) approach to economics. Musical theatre would reflect this shift in the cultural paradigm, as marketing strategy became not only a dominant feature of cultural production but also an essential element in the targeting of new audiences to offset the spiralling production costs that increased marketing budgets themselves helped to create. Slater (1997: 10) notes that the apparent shift from Fordist mass consumption to a different form of consumer culture founded on niche marketing reflected the free-market economics and postmodern approach that Thatcherism engendered:

The 1980s also heralded the subordination of production to consumption in the form of marketing: design, retailing, advertising and the product concept were ascendant, reflected in postmodern theory as the triumph of the sign and the aestheticization of everyday life. Much-publicised claims about the reorganisation of capitalist production and its relation to the state (post-Fordism, disorganised capitalism, flexible accumulation) all argued that Fordist mass consumption- the pioneer of consumer culture- was giving way or giving birth to a newer and truer consumer culture of target or niche marketing, in which the forging of personal identity would be firmly and pleasurably disentangled from the worlds of both work and politics and would be carried out in a world of plural, malleable, playful consumer identities, a process ruled over by the play of image, style, desire and signs.

The Fordist model of production, by which products could be mass-produced for a mass consumer market, was able to develop organically as markets expanded. Musical theatre, the production of which had gradually developed from a national to an international scale, seemed from the 1980s onwards to become a globalized product. Moreover, as a range of factors, particularly the rapid improvement in communication technology, reduced and ultimately broke down barriers between markets, so marketing assumed an ever-greater importance in ensuring that products were able to be achieve commercial success on a global scale. Slater (1999: 14) identifies how the Fordist model was able to expand into a global framework, citing the relevance of ‘new transport and communications infrastructures’, the ‘concentration of markets in larger cities’ and ‘the development of multi-divisional corporations’ to the economic success of this global expansion. He also rightly observes that marketing becomes a central pillar of global economic strategy:

The goods are sold across geographically and socially wider markets- regional, national, global- whose formation is made possible...by the integration of markets through *marketing*, using such new techniques as branding and packaging, national sales forces, advertising, point of sale materials and industrial design- all designed to unify product identity across socially and geographically dispersed markets (Slater 1999: 14)

The Fordist model of industrial production, together with the ideal of mass consumption that is its economic objective, is therefore, in part, achieved by marketing to a mass market, and by employing strategies that will be effective on a global scale. However, mass marketing, while still a defining feature of some productions, has in many cases become more focused, and a post-Fordist marketing approach has therefore become apparent. Markets have been disaggregated and consumers have been segmented into a range of social groups which can be targeted both individually and collectively, so while product branding and other mass marketing techniques continue to be pervasive in a post-Fordist world, producers have become increasingly aware of the commercial relevance of niche or target marketing within their overall marketing strategies, and sophisticated market research into lifestyle and demographic patterns has therefore become a feature of the production process. This is particularly evident in musical theatre production, and producers such as Judy Craymer and Cameron Mackintosh seem to have demonstrated that musical theatre products that follow a standardized process of production have the potential to become global brands and can thus achieve commercial success on a global scale. However, they have also demonstrated that while their products may have mass appeal, they need to target their marketing spend effectively, so detailed analysis of different markets needs to be coordinated and niche marketing approaches are becoming increasingly apparent within a globalized and highly competitive marketplace.

#### **2.4 Ritzer's theory of McDonaldization as a model for musical theatre marketing analysis**

Ray Kroc, the founder of the McDonald's global operation, believed that the secret to gaining a position of global dominance in the food industry lay in instilling

in his customers a confidence that they could enjoy the same product and the same familiar consumer experience wherever in the world they found themselves.<sup>74</sup> This approach led to the establishment of a brand image for his McDonald's hamburgers and restaurants that suggested consistency of both product quality and operational standards and, in short, an overall eating experience that was predictable in its ability to deliver consumer satisfaction.

However, even Ray Kroc could surely not have anticipated either the speed with which McDonald's would become a truly global corporation or the influence that the McDonald's paradigm would exert on industrial and cultural production from the late twentieth century onwards. Having begun to franchise his operation in the United States in 1955, by 1991 McDonald's was opening more restaurants abroad than in the United States itself, and in early 1995 around half of the corporation's profits were generated by its overseas operations. The company has been particularly successful in its overall approach to product marketing, and it has deliberately developed a wide range of commercials and advertising strategies in order to target a variety of markets. The McDonald's logo has become a globally recognised symbol, while its other trademarked signs and characters have become embedded in the human consciousness in a way that few others have managed. In a poll of school children in the mid 1980s, for example, Ronald McDonald was second only to Santa Claus in terms of name recognition (Greenhouse, 1986: 1); the golden arches, meanwhile,

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<sup>74</sup> The original McDonald's restaurant was opened in 1937 by two brothers, Mac and Dick McDonald, who based their restaurant operation on the principles of high speed, large volume and low price. However, while the McDonald brothers took the lead in the development of the rationalized 'fast-food factory' (Love p.68), it was Ray Kroc who made the decision to expand the business by franchising it.

have become more instantly recognisable by more people around the world than even the Christian cross.<sup>75</sup>

For George Ritzer, McDonald's has become a cultural paradigm for global marketing and product development, and the process of McDonaldization, 'by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American culture as well as of the rest of the world,' (Ritzer 1996: 1) seems to have permeated every area of society, and its inexorable<sup>76</sup> progress has helped to shape the framework of cultural production in general and, some cultural theorists have suggested, of musical theatre in particular.<sup>77</sup> The McDonald's model has succeeded to such an unprecedented degree because, Ritzer suggests, it offers 'efficiency, calculability, predictability and control' (Ritzer 1996: 9). Production within McDonaldized systems is organised and regulated by a rigid paradigm that ensures that consumers obtain products and services whose standardized quality can be guaranteed. Ritzer owes a great deal in this respect to German sociologist Max Weber who theorised (1921) that the world was becoming progressively more rationalized through the increasing use of non-human technology and structures. For Weber, the paradigm of formal rationality was the bureaucracy, which, through its

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<sup>75</sup> Barry Smart (1999: 14) suggests that this level of brand awareness has been achieved as a direct result of over \$20,000 million being spent by the corporation on marketing and promotion during the 1980s and 1990s.

<sup>76</sup> Commentators such as Taylor, Smith and Lyon (1998: 106) take issue with Ritzer's contention that the McDonaldization process is 'inexorable', concluding: '[Ritzer] claims that 'we confront a future of accelerating McDonaldization' (Ritzer 1993: 158). For Ritzer this process is the vanguard to the advent of an increasingly rational world. His point is starkly made, but there are grounds for believing that this process could never run its course in this way. Ever-increasing rationalization seldom works out the way intended because of the complexity of human needs and the markets that serve them.'

<sup>77</sup> Gockelböhner (1994) suggests that standardization in the production of musical theatre has enabled consumer expectations to be satisfied at the same time as maximising the potential for generating profits. Munch (1999: 138) makes a specific link between Ritzer's McDonaldization theory and the production methods of Andrew Lloyd Webber, suggesting that both McDonald's and Lloyd Webber market their products 'uniformly throughout the world.' Ritzer himself (1999a: 241) asserts that cultural products 'must be standardized' if global profits are to be maximised. Like Munch, he considers that Lloyd Webber's musicals are an 'excellent example' of this standardization.

rules, regulations and controls, achieved optimal efficiency; for Ritzer ‘the fast-food restaurant is the paradigm of McDonaldization’ (Ritzer 1996: 18). As other writers reflect,<sup>78</sup> Weber’s focus on the predictability of the bureaucratic system is of relevance to any analysis of a McDonaldized system of cultural production, but while Weber provides a useful starting point for an examination of the globalization of musical theatre production, Weber’s early twentieth century theories are limited by their generality, so that while his writing ‘can provoke thought and may capture significant aspects of contemporary practice’ (Longhurst 1995: 20), Ritzer’s McDonaldization theory seems, at least superficially, to have a greater immediacy and relevance to an analysis of musical theatre marketing practice in the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries.<sup>79</sup>

Ritzer considers that the process of rationalization results in systems that emphasize a need for ‘predictability’, so that consumers expect products and services whose quality is consistent and predictable and which are therefore able to offer a familiar consumption experience:

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<sup>78</sup> Burston, for example, examines the dehumanising effect that results from a rigid control mechanism being applied to any form of cultural production, but specifically the megamusical (p.299 *et passim*); he also considers (p.138) the way in which non-human technologies have increased the level of rationalization within the culture industry, together with the ways in which these have affected human resources and work practices.

<sup>79</sup> Ritzer’s theoretical writing seems to be more immediately relevant to modern musical theatre research than the writing of theorists such as Weber, not only because Ritzer’s work was published in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries and is therefore able to provide a wholly contemporary account of cultural production, but also because it offers in later volumes detailed analysis of critical responses to the central McDonaldization theory. Ritzer reflects on his own theory and is quite prepared to accept that the McDonald’s paradigm of cultural production may develop over time into modified paradigms that require further analysis. He considers, for example, that Bryman’s Disneyization theory, while incorporating McDonaldized principles, seems to suggest that a new paradigm of production and marketing is beginning to emerge. Nevertheless, while cultural commentators such as Miles (1998: 65) consider that the limitations of Weber’s theories can be excused on the grounds that ‘the society he analyzed was very different from the one in which we live today,’ the weaknesses of Ritzer’s McDonaldization theories cannot be overlooked. Miles concludes: ‘Ritzer cannot be forgiven for presenting a theory which misunderstands a consumer society in which the complexities of structure and agency are played out and negotiated by consumers throughout the course of their everyday lives.’

A rationalized society therefore emphasises such things as discipline, order, systematization, formalization, routine, consistency, and methodical operation. In such a society, people prefer to know what to expect in most settings and at most times. They neither desire nor expect surprises (Ritzer 1996: 9).<sup>80</sup>

In such a McDonaldized society, where consumers expect the quality of a particular product to be uniformly predictable, the production processes themselves become rationalized, as Leidner observes:

The heart of McDonald's success is its uniformity, predictability and relentless standardization... The object is to look for new innovative ways to create an experience that is exactly the same no matter what McDonald's you walk into, no matter where it is in the world (Leidner 1993: 45,54)

This guarantee of predictability, and the satisfaction of the consumer's desire for uniformity of both product and service, is encapsulated in an instantly recognisable logo, whereby 'replicated colour and symbol, mile after mile, city after city, act as a tacit promise of predictability and stability' (King 1980: 46). Although the McDonald's product may, in reality, vary slightly at its numerous points of delivery, consumers will be reassured about its quality as a result of its identical packaging, the standardization of which will imply that the product itself is similarly standardized. The relevance of instantly identifiable packaging to the commercial success of McDonaldized industries cannot therefore be underestimated, when consumers choose to purchase on the basis of their familiarity with a particular product or

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<sup>80</sup> Ritzer suggests that even the thriller film genre, which would seem by its very nature to champion surprise and unpredictability, conforms in various ways to his own theory. He cites the many successful films that have spawned sequels (and even prequels) as examples of products that appeal to consumers' desire for predictability, suggesting that audiences 'enjoy the comfort of encountering favourite characters played by familiar actors who find themselves in accustomed settings' (Ritzer, 2000b: 97). He also suggests that the movie rating system allows audiences 'to predict the amount of violence, nudity and objectionable language they will see and hear' (Ibid). Ritzer might have added that many recent original horror and thriller films, particularly those with substantial production budgets, have included familiar stars in the lead roles (Nicole Kidman and George Clooney in *The Peacemaker*), have been remakes of earlier films (*War of the Worlds*, *King Kong*) or have been based on popular television shows (*Mission Impossible*) in order to appeal to consumers' desire for predictability.

service, and when a desire for diversity and originality has been supplanted by a craving for predictability and uniformity. In this respect, Weber's vision of economic interests in capitalist societies resulting in relentless rationalization seems apposite.

Ritzer suggests that predictability has become a key ingredient in the commercial success of the McDonaldized system of production and has resulted in increased levels of homogenization, so that McDonaldization has a close affinity to the precepts of Fordism:

Fordism...involves the mass production of homogenous products and the growth of a market for mass-produced items, which causes the homogenization of consumption patterns... Though elements of post-Fordism have emerged in the modern world, it is equally clear that elements of Fordism persist and show no signs of disappearing: there has been no clear historical break with Fordism. In fact, 'McDonaldism', a phenomenon that clearly has many things in common with Fordism, is growing at an astounding pace in contemporary society... Among the things McDonaldism shares with Fordism are homogenous products, rigid technologies, standardized work routines, deskilling, homogenization of labor (and customer), the mass worker, and homogenization of consumption... Homogenous products dominate a McDonaldized world, [and] what is consumed and how it is consumed are homogenized by McDonaldization (Ritzer 2001: 206-208).

Nevertheless, McDonaldization is more than a mere development of Fordism: it is linked to various phenomena that can be identified with modernism and Fordism, but it should ultimately be viewed from a postmodernist perspective. Cultural theorist Fredric Jameson suggests (1984: 81) that the new cultural logic of postmodernism is simply the 'late' phase of capitalism, and draws attention to 'a prodigious expansion of capital into hitherto uncommodified areas.' In his view, modern capitalism is defined by its multinational and even global character, whereby the range of products being transformed into commodities has been greatly increased, and even aesthetic cultural products have become commodified to a significant degree. As

commodification has become more widespread, so the rationalization of cultural production has led to increased homogenization. Writing in the early 1960s, Francis Williams suggested that this process of standardization, which he considered to be a predominantly American phenomenon, would inevitably have an adverse effect on the production of aesthetic cultural products:

If the pressures of standardization- standardization of production, standardization of consumption, standardization of executive and administrative practices- are permitted to gain too great a hold on society, then it is exactly such an intrusion into intellectual and emotional life that is to be feared. You come to a stage where, if you want all that a completely unfettered deployment of the resources of modern civilization can offer in the satisfaction of material appetites, you must be prepared to pay the price. (Williams 1962: 146)

The McDonaldized system champions predictability and standardization in order to achieve its commercial aims, and the degree to which such a system is now able to exploit markets on a global scale ensures that consumer choice is gradually reduced, as individual producers of cultural products exert a progressively dominating influence. To remain competitive, Ritzer (1998: 128) suggests, other producers are encouraged by commercial imperatives to adopt the McDonaldized system of production, leading to an increase in the overall level of standardization and a reduction in consumer choice:

Our ostensibly free choice of food is constrained by the fact that fast-food restaurants are driving the alternatives out of business. The differences they appear to offer turn out to be, at best, superficial...The fast-food restaurant and the other new means of consumption constrain us, limit our choices, in many other ways. Thus as the various fast-food restaurants drive local cafés out of business, our choice is progressively reduced to which chain we are going to patronize on a given day.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Critics such as Taylor, Smith and Lyon take issue with Ritzer's conclusion (1993: 138) that the McDonaldization process has a totally detrimental effect on the quality of cultural artefacts and is inevitably destructive because it eliminates diversity and choice: 'Overlooked in [Ritzer's] gloomy

Since standardization results in products becoming progressively less easy to distinguish from each other, advertising and marketing have made a vital contribution to the commercial exploitation of particular products, as producers strive to achieve a position of pre-eminence over their competitors by attempting to establish a brand image in the minds of consumers. Elaborate advertising campaigns, together with sophisticated (and costly) marketing strategies, help to establish a brand on a local and then national scale, at which point international and even global possibilities can be contemplated. Ritzer (1996: 147) concludes that the growth of the mass media has ensured that products can be marketed on a global scale and that the rapid expansion of a huge range of McDonaldized products has consequently ensued:

The increasing influence of the mass media also contributes to the success of fast-food restaurants. Without saturation advertising and the ubiquitous influence of television and other mass media, fast-food restaurants would not have succeeded as well as they have.<sup>82</sup>

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prognosis is the possibility that the fast-food restaurant is actually providing a product/service that customers want. Millions of people use them, and unless one believes that there are no alternatives or that people are brainwashed to the point where 'the craving for diversity is being supplanted by the desire for uniformity and predictability' (Ritzer 1993: 138), they cannot all be wrong about the advantages.' It should be noted that Ritzer himself admits that his original theory may have been overstated, acknowledging that the McDonaldization process has led to 'numerous positive changes...that benefit society' (2002: 19). Ritzer's list of specific examples of 'the advantages of McDonaldization' (2003: 19-20) confirms the limitations of his original theory.

<sup>82</sup> Ritzer's theory does not seem to take into account the emergence of prestige commodities and 'designer' products. In their advertising, companies such as Versace, Dior and Cartier emphasise the exclusivity of their products, and the global success of such companies suggests that many consumers are still prepared to pay a premium for goods that seem to be of a higher quality than those that are available through traditional retail outlets. The popularity of 'designer' products, on the surface at least, suggests a widespread reaction against the process of McDonaldization that involves providing standardized products to mass markets. This cultural development may, however, not be quite as simple as it appears and it is possible that more detailed investigation of the phenomenon may leave Ritzer's theory largely unscathed. The fact that many consumers will readily purchase fake designer goods that closely match the appearance of the genuine articles but are, at the same time, obviously inferior in terms of manufacturing quality, suggests that product quality is of limited significance to the many consumers for whom brand image carries a great deal more weight. Prestige products have come to symbolise a lifestyle experience, and the purchase of such products, whether real or fake, suggests that consumption patterns are heavily influenced by the perceived experience that such products offer. Ritzer would argue that the proliferation of fake designer products reflects his own McDonaldization theory since it is simply another example of 'simulated worlds selling simulated products' (1998: 123).

## 2.5 Globalization and the advent of the global musical product

The marketing of musical theatre has developed rapidly since the 1980s, and carefully-crafted marketing strategies have become an essential (but ever more expensive) component of the overall production process. Garfield (1994: 25) concludes that 'modern musicals are all about marketing: logos, ticket deals, coach parties, advertising strategies. Ideally, the entire show is built around a pre-released album: audiences should go in humming the tunes. A musical is not just a plot with songs but an Event planned months in advance.'<sup>83</sup>

The McDonaldized approach to the production and marketing of musical theatre, however, needs also to be seen in a broader context. Other producers may have been influenced by Cameron Mackintosh's model of marketing,<sup>84</sup> which displays a range of McDonaldized features such as its focus on the predictability of a product's quality and its familiarity with consumers,<sup>85</sup> but Ritzer implies that apparent changes in the

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<sup>83</sup> Despite Garfield's conclusion, many recent musicals have not, in fact, relied on a pre-released album to familiarise audiences with a show's music and songs, since the promotion of an album necessitates the allocation of substantial additional marketing funds that many producers cannot afford. Instead, many musicals have made use of songs that are already familiar to audiences (*Mamma Mia!*, *We Will Rock You*, *Mary Poppins*), while others make the maximum possible use of brand names that are already associated with them. Pre-opening publicity for *Billy Elliott*, for example, repeatedly reminded potential consumers of the fact that the show was based on the highly successful and well-known film of the same name and that the music was composed by Elton John, while the producers of *Spamalot* ensured that the 'Monty Python' name appeared very prominently on all advertisements for the show, and instantly recognisable Terry Gilliam graphics were used in all of the show's promotional material.

<sup>84</sup> Almost every producer that I interviewed suggested not only that the musical theatre genre had been affected significantly by Cameron Mackintosh's approach to product marketing, but also that they had attempted to replicate elements of Mackintosh's strategy for their own productions. Only Carol Chiavetta, Director of Marketing for Disney Theatricals, was begrudging in her assessment of Mackintosh's influence, claiming, for example, that Disney had employed 'combo' advertising, whereby more than one show is advertised at the same time, as a means of strengthening the Disney brand; Disney was therefore not strictly imitating an initiative introduced by Mackintosh who, Chiavetta argued, had introduced 'combo' advertising as means of limiting costs rather than promoting brand extension.

<sup>85</sup> Even Andrew Lloyd Webber (2002: A7) himself admitted that leading producers were increasingly rejecting new products for production and were instead choosing material that had some form of built-in familiarity for audiences: 'The 2001 London music theatre scene was a competition between *Kiss Me, Kate*, *South Pacific* and *My Fair Lady*. Apart from the welcome arrival of Boy George's *Taboo* and David Yazbek's music and lyrics for *The Full Monty*, the 2002 season includes two compilation shows, Queen- *We Will Rock You*, Madness- *Our House*, plus more revivals such as Gershwin's *My*

marketing paradigm are merely part of a wider cultural development that is defined by changing patterns of consumption.<sup>86</sup> In an interview in February 1997, Ritzer suggested that the greatly increased emphasis on packaging and presentation that has resulted from the commodification of cultural artifacts has, in turn, led to consumer expectations being defined by fast-food modes of consumption:

I think that McDonald's has a profound effect on the way people do a lot of things- I mean, it leads people to want everything fast, so they have, you know, a limited attention span. That kind of thing spills over onto, let's say, television viewing or newspaper reading, and so you have a short attention span, you want everything fast: you don't have the patience to read the *New York Times*, and so you read McPaper, you read *USA Today*. You don't have the patience to watch a lengthy newscast on a particular issue, so you watch *CNN News*, and their little news 'McNugget' kinds of things. It creates a kind of mindset which seeks the same kind of thing in one setting after another. A generation...has been raised in a McDonaldized society- they want things fast...they don't want a sort of slow build-up of ideas, you've got to keep them amused, you've got to come in with the Ronald McDonald costume, or else they're going to turn you off.

The changes in patterns of cultural consumption that Ritzer attributes to the increasingly prevalent McDonaldization of culture must also be seen in the context of developing marketing patterns. The commodification of the entertainment industry in general, and the musical theatre industry in particular, has ensured that marketing has assumed an ever-increasing prominence and importance in the overall production

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*One and Only* and an adaptation of the movie of *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*. Increasingly familiarity with the material is the *raison d'être* for a production.'

<sup>86</sup> It has been argued (above) that the thriller film genre often combines a promise of surprise and innovation with the reassurance for consumers that a product will have aspects of familiarity. The same is true not only of the marketing of musicals but of the musicals themselves. Advance publicity for *Mary Poppins* that appeared in the press over twelve months before the show opened, for example, promised that the show would not replicate the content and mood of the Disney film but that a darker and more sophisticated central character would emerge in the stage version. At the same time, there was never any doubt that all the familiar songs from the Disney film would be included in the stage show. Tee Hesketh, Cameron Mackintosh's personal assistant, had told me three years before the show was conceived, that Mackintosh would not consider producing the show if he did not reach an agreement with Disney to use the original songs. She made it very clear to me that while Mackintosh wanted to produce a show that was innovative and original, at the same time he was determined to reassure audiences that familiar aspects of the original film would be faithfully reproduced on stage. For this reason the Disney brand name always appeared prominently on all advertising print, and the most well-known song titles regularly appeared alongside the show's logo.

process.<sup>87</sup> The significant advances made in satellite, cable and internet technology has resulted in a proliferation of home entertainment opportunities, and this progressively widening choice for consumers has compelled producers to concentrate their commercial efforts on maintaining their audience numbers in an increasingly competitive market-place.<sup>88</sup> The cost of marketing an entertainment product has therefore mushroomed, to the extent that some producers allocate as much as 50% of an overall production budget to the marketing of a particular product,<sup>89</sup> and Wolf (1999: 24-25) contends that such dramatic increases in marketing spend have encouraged producers to embrace corporate synergy as a means of reducing overall production costs:

[An accelerated rise in marketing costs] may be good for the overall economy, and it accounts for a lot of the growth of revenue attributable to entertainment within the economy. Still, the need to get the consumer's attention has shifted the balance between production and promotion. On any company's profit-and-loss statement those costs are a behemoth sitting on top of the bottom line. In some cases, advertising, promotion, and marketing outweigh pure production costs by 100%. The expensive mechanism it takes to attract audiences to ever more costly entertainment products has also accelerated the trend towards media consolidation.

The expansion of companies such as Disney and Live Nation (previously Clear Channel Entertainment) into the field of musical theatre production not only seems to support Wolf's contention, but also exemplifies Ritzer's McDonaldization theory

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<sup>87</sup> The studio system was developed in Hollywood as a means of industrialising the film making process. However, while the industrialised production of films facilitated their commodification and global distribution, musical theatre productions did not develop an industrialised approach to production until the advent of the megamusical format in the 1980s. As the global potential of musical theatre began to be realised, industrialised marketing practices assumed a central role in the production process.

<sup>88</sup> Wolf (1999: 24-25) notes that technological advances in entertainment distribution directly correlates to dramatic increases in marketing costs: 'Twenty years ago there were no VCRs. Five years ago there was no World Wide Web. Today we have endless choices, all clamoring for our attention. All of this invention and expansion has had a big impact on the entertainment business. Just to get noticed by consumers, every producer of entertainment products has had to increase advertising, marketing and promotional expenditures.'

<sup>89</sup> *Jurassic Park* (see above) is just one example of a recent film whose marketing budget in the US (\$68million) exceeded the rest of its production costs (\$63million)

which concludes that corporate synergy, although an effective response to escalating marketing costs, will result in increased homogenization of cultural production, since non-corporate producers will have insufficient funds to compete in a global marketplace.

## **2.6 Conclusions**

Building on Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism, Adorno develops his own theories about the culture industry, and thus provides a possible theoretical framework for an examination of musical theatre marketing. His conclusion that art has become commodified, to the extent that product marketing and the development of a branded image have attained much greater significance, seems to be of relevance, superficially at least, to this thesis. In addition, Adorno's theoretical writing about cultural homogeneity and standardization provide a starting point for the analysis of musical theatre production. However, the overall value of his theories is seriously undermined by the fact that Adorno seems unwilling to take into account that standardization and rationalization may not be the only processes of production at work in capitalist society.

Originally conceived in the latter stages of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, George Ritzer's McDonaldization theory has the advantage of being able to take into account the changes in cultural production that have been brought about by globalization. Ritzer develops and refocuses the rationalization theory of Max Weber in order to increase its relevance to a postmodern world, and offers a possible analytical framework for my own thesis, although his observations about musical theatre production are

generalised and superficial.<sup>90</sup> Ritzer's theory is also undermined by its lack of flexibility and does not consider, for example, the prevalence of niche marketing as a means of targeting specific groups of consumers.<sup>91</sup> Nor does it take into account the possibility that other processes may be working in parallel.<sup>92</sup> While Ritzer's theory has provided a useful starting point for research into the development of musical theatre marketing, this thesis will seek to provide a considerably more detailed analysis of marketing trends than Ritzer attempts, assessing the degree to which Ritzer's McDonaldization theory can be applied to musical theatre production in general, and to the megamusical model in particular, and considering whether any variants or developments of Ritzer's theory have a greater validity than Ritzer's original proposition.

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<sup>90</sup> Ritzer (1999a: 240) suggests, for example, that the productions of Andrew Lloyd Webber are an 'excellent example' of a McDonaldized cultural product, but he fails to offer any concrete evidence or detailed analysis to support this assertion.

<sup>91</sup> There are various other elements of Ritzer's theory, particularly concerning the organisation of management, that various writers (for example, Fruin, Locke, Kenney and Florida) demonstrate to be unsatisfactory. Kenney and Florida (1993: 9) suggest that the Japanese organisation of management, which uses production teams that are not based on hierarchical principles, are proving to be much more effective than the Taylorist mass production model: 'The underlying organizational feature [of Japanese management] is the self-managing work team that enhances the functional integration of tasks. The new shop floor thus integrates formerly distinct types of work- for example, R & D and factory production, thus making the production process very social. In doing so, the organisational forms of the new shop floor mobilizes...the collective intelligence of workers as a source of continuous improvement in products and processes, of increased productivity, and of value creation.'

<sup>92</sup> Bryman's theory of 'Disneyization' for example, which suggests that many areas of cultural production are being influenced by the paradigm of the Disney theme parks, is acknowledged by Ritzer (1999a: 246), as confirming the basic principles of his own McDonaldization theory, even though Bryman himself explicitly asserts that Disneyization, while paralleling Ritzer's theory, nevertheless has significantly different effects. Bryman insists, for example, that the Disneyized paradigm 'connects with a post-Fordist world of variety and choice in which consumers reign supreme,' (Bryman 2004: 5) rather than engendering the inevitable consequence of McDonaldization, that is 'a world of homogeneity and sameness' (Bryman 2004: 4). Ritzer, who stresses the demoralising effects of McDonaldization on employees (2000: 110-11), also fails to acknowledge the different model of management adopted by Japanese firms that concurrently 'stress customer satisfaction, [but] have not neglected the interests of employers and employees' (Locke 1998: 212).

## CHAPTER 3: COMMERCIAL LOGICS AND STRUCTURES

### 3.1 Introduction

Although Cameron Mackintosh adopted a marketing strategy that enabled his productions to be reproduced on a global scale, individual producers such as David Merrick and Robert Stigwood had already prepared the ground and set a course towards the commodification of the musical genre that Mackintosh himself would enthusiastically embrace. When analysing and assessing Mackintosh's legacy and his overall influence on the marketing of musical theatre, it is therefore imperative that detailed consideration is given to the marketing models provided by earlier producers and which Mackintosh inherited, and to consider the ways in which Mackintosh developed, changed and improved upon these.

This chapter will assess whether the basic principles of McDonaldization that are identified by Ritzer had an influence on the marketing of musical theatre from its early beginnings. In order to provide a historical framework, consideration will be given to the ways in which the musical was marketed before the advent of Cameron Mackintosh, focusing on producers who helped to shape the ways in which the genre is now produced and marketed. These producers include Richard D'Oyly Carte, who produced Gilbert and Sullivan productions on both side of the Atlantic, and Florenz Ziegfeld, whose long-running series of *Follies* productions was characterised by its theatrical spectacle and broad audience appeal, two of the dominant features of megamusical productions in the 1980s and 1990s. After Ziegfeld's death in 1932, the Shubert brothers presented their own version of the *Ziegfeld Follies*, closely

following Ziegfeld's original formula. David Merrick, on the other hand, made pioneering advances in approaches to the advertising and promotion of shows, as well as in the field of audience development, and his high-cost marketing strategies for expensive spectacular productions foreshadowed the Mackintosh era. Merrick was also one of the first producers to realise the value of product branding, and Mackintosh himself seems to have been influenced by Merrick's pioneering approach in the commercial exploitation of his products.

Robert Stigwood, whose production of *Hair* and *Jesus Christ Superstar* radically affected the demographic profile of future audiences, began the replication of a musical product for a world-wide market. Stigwood developed a rigid approach to the marketing of his West End production of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, creating a product that had broad audience appeal and then aggressively protecting its branded identity. This was achieved by introducing strict licensing procedures and by placing an uncompromising emphasis on the primacy of brand identity through the development of a globally recognised logo, an emphasis that Ritzer suggests is a defining feature of the McDonaldization process. In this way, Stigwood was able to maintain tight control over every aspect of production for every version of *Superstar* that was mounted, and thus provided a production paradigm for Mackintosh to follow.

### 3.2 Early Forms of the Musical Theatre Genre

Walsh, like many other commentators,<sup>93</sup> suggests that the 1866 production of *The Black Crook* was a 'watershed' in the development of American musical theatre

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<sup>93</sup> Green (1980: 1) suggests that, although there were many examples of dramas that included music and dancing, *The Black Crook* was 'the first truly successful venture in America to combine the two forms of entertainment.' Kislán (1995: 69) notes that *The Black Crook* 'became America's single most popular and financially successful musical theatre production of the nineteenth century.'

and, while the aesthetic and stylistic impact of *The Black Crook* may be questioned,<sup>94</sup> the production was a major step in the commercialisation of popular theatre in America. The producers invested a total of \$50,000, but the show grossed in excess of \$1million from its initial run and ran for 475 performances.<sup>95</sup> A major feature of the show was its spectacular staging. *The Black Crook* (1866) became famous for its level of technological sophistication that enabled the audience to wonder at spectacular scenes that included walls of mist in which silvery coaches, filled with beautiful and recumbent fairies, swung through the air. The latter part of the nineteenth century continued to be noted for the spectacular scenic effects that were a feature of many theatre productions, and shows such as *Around the World in Eighty Days* and *Excelsior* were popular largely as a result of their stage settings rather than the quality of their music.

*The Black Crook* demonstrated that there was a ready audience for spectacular entertainment that included music and comedy sequences. Terms such as ‘burlesque’,<sup>96</sup> ‘spectacle’ and ‘extravaganza’ were regularly used to publicise productions, and it was not uncommon for all three terms to be used together in publicity material,<sup>97</sup> even if spectacle and extravaganzas originally featured subject

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<sup>94</sup> Other commentators are more sceptical about the influence of the production. Bordman (1986: 20), for example, writes: ‘It can seriously be questioned whether *The Black Crook* was the beginning of musical comedy in America. Textually, the American ballad operas have as much claim. They, too, combined song, drama and, to a lesser extent, dance into a total evening’s entertainment. Nor did the more successful musicals that followed in the dozen or so years after *The Black Crook* opened seem significantly influenced by its style and tone.’

<sup>95</sup> Walsh (1996: 14) concludes that *The Black Crook* was a significant milestone in the history of the musical, since it involved the investment of huge sums in a show to produce a spectacular event which was advertised as such to create and capture an audience: ‘What now appears is the engineering, organising and marketing of the musical show in terms of a particular image and reputation to pull in the punters.’

<sup>96</sup> The American burlesque show generally featured a satirical comedy script that included scantily clad female performers.

<sup>97</sup> Publicity material for *The White Fawn*, for example, 1867 sequel to *The Black Crook* at Niblo’s Garden and Theatre, described the show as a ‘New Fairy Burlesque Spectacular Extravaganza.’ Similarly, the Calville Folly Company production of *Babes in the Wood or Who Killed Cock Robin?*

matter derived from mythology or fairy tales, rather than the satirical comedy that was at the centre of burlesque shows. The development of theatrical machinery that made possible a wide range of remarkable visual effects ensured that American extravaganzas attracted substantial audiences who wanted to be entertained by unchallenging material that offered high levels of visual spectacle.<sup>98</sup> The public's apparently insatiable desire for spectacular entertainment led to the opening in 1905 of the largest legitimate theatre in the world, the Hippodrome, which could accommodate over 5000 spectators at a single performance. In an auditorium so large, the majority of the audience would be unable to hear either the lyrics of the songs or the spoken dialogue, and most spectators could therefore only appreciate the remarkable spectacle that was on offer.<sup>99</sup>

This period also witnessed considerable changes in the profile of audiences that attended such theatrical productions: during the last twenty years of the nineteenth century, vaudeville shows became popular as the relentless industrialisation of American cities, especially New York, resulted in a rapidly increasing potential audience who wanted affordable entertainment on a regular basis. Since Grand Opera was expensive and the preferred entertainment of the well heeled, and since variety shows were generally unsuitable for a family audience, there was a need for a

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was marketed as a 'New, Grand and Glittering Pantomimic Burlesque Extravaganza,' in order to draw attention both to its light-weight comic content and its spectacular nature.

<sup>98</sup> Bordman (1982: 85-91) notes that other producers such as Lew Fields responded to the public's desire for spectacle with productions that valued visual effects well above the quality of its music or book: 'Fields learned the value of spectacle...to bolster a limp score, [he inserted] an airship sailing across the stage...In *The Midnight Sons*...Fields began the show with a stunning effect that helped set the mood. The real audience found itself gazing at an imaginary audience in an imaginary theatre, with orchestra, balcony and boxes filled. Indeed, the actual audience found itself on an imaginary stage, with footlights shining out at them and performers giving not so much their all as their backs.'

<sup>99</sup> *A Yankee Circus on Mars*, which opened at the Hippodrome on 12 April 1905, was considerably grander and more ambitious than *The Black Crook*: 'Horses plunged into the theatre's giant tank; elephants pulled outsized automobiles' (Bordman, 1978: 210) and the show featured 280 female chorus dancers. The show also included a battleship-sized space travel vessel, designed by Arthur Voegtlin, who later designed spectacular onstage earthquakes and automobile races for Hippodrome productions.

different form of entertainment with a broader popular appeal. This need was first recognised by veteran performer Tony Pastor, who stipulated that productions in his theatre would be suitable for all sections of the population, particularly women and children. Other impresarios, such as Benjamin Franklin Keith and Edward F. Albee, soon followed Pastor's lead and variety houses began to spring up across the northeastern United States, with the emphasis always being on audience entertainment. The vaudeville stage also became a focal point for the most popular songs of the period, which espoused lilting melodies and wholesome family-friendly lyrics, and appealing to the broadest potential audience by producing unsophisticated, unchallenging and inoffensive material made sound commercial sense.

Walsh D. (1996: 3) notes that the American musical 'does not have a unified form but a number of different forms which are sometimes separate and sometimes combined in particular musicals: they are the revue, the musical comedy and the book musical...each of its forms have developed in different though interconnected ways, and have drawn upon European imports differently.' While the popularity of extravaganzas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with their emphasis on spectacle cannot be underestimated, other forms of the musical genre were also evolving and attracting audiences.

*Black Crook*-type extravaganza vied with French opéra-bouffe and vaudeville in America, but in Britain Gilbert and Sullivan established a format of musical theatre that would soon become enormously popular on both sides of the Atlantic. *Trial by Jury* marked the reawakening of English comic opera, and the show was popular in

the United States, where it was produced in ‘pirate’ productions.<sup>100</sup> The popularity of Gilbert and Sullivan works was such that *HMS Pinafore*, produced at the Opera Comique in London under the management of Richard D’Oyly Carte in 1878, was produced in unlicensed productions in over a hundred American theatres within twelve months. When Carte travelled to the United States to assess the quality of these pirated productions and to consider ways of combating them, he found that very few were able to compare with the original version, noting that the overwhelming majority of the American performers had ‘not the remotest idea of how to play the piece. The acting, costumes, time of music, etc. are too atrociously bad for words to express.’<sup>101</sup> Since international copyright protection was not available at the time,<sup>102</sup> D’Oyly Carte’s immediate response was to transfer to New York the ‘authentic’ London version of *HMS Pinafore* in December 1879. At the same time, *The Pirates of Penzance* was prepared for its premiere performance at the Fifth Avenue Theatre, in an attempt to thwart the production of pirated versions.<sup>103</sup> D’Oyly Carte also pursued pirate producers through the process of law, applying for court injunctions, and gradually managed to convince the theatre-going public that authorised versions were superior to anything that the imitators had to offer. The popularity of Gilbert and Sullivan shows in London was such that D’Oyly Carte was able to finance the

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<sup>100</sup> *Trial by Jury* opened in London in March 1875, but by October of the same year the show was being produced in unauthorised versions in Philadelphia in October and in New York in November. Since no international copyright agreement existed at the time, American producers were able to put on their own versions of Gilbert and Sullivan shows without permission and without having to make payment to the authors.

<sup>101</sup> Quoted in Bailey (1973: 58)

<sup>102</sup> While Carte was unable to control pirated productions overseas, and could not therefore benefit financially from such productions, he had the foresight to introduce a unique system of licensing amateur productions in Britain. The first licensed amateur version of *HMS Pinafore* was produced in Kingston-on Thames on 30 April 1879.

<sup>103</sup> In 1885, in a similar attempt to thwart the production of unauthorised versions of *The Mikado* in the United States, Carte transported across the Atlantic, in total secret, a complete pre-rehearsed theatrical company, and was therefore able to open his authorised production of *The Mikado* at the Fifth Avenue Theatre while the pirate versions were still in rehearsal. When pirate productions began to spring up, Carte responded by sending five more companies to tour the USA and Canada with his own authorised version of the show.

building of a new theatre, with 1,292 seats and electric light.<sup>104</sup> In addition, in his attempts to improve the whole consumer experience for his audiences, D'Oyly Carte also announced that the tipping of theatre attendants would be abolished and that programmes would be provided free. *Patience* transferred from the Opera Comique to the new Savoy Theatre in October 1881, and not only were the scenery and costumes redesigned for the new theatre, but the size of the chorus was substantially increased in order that the larger stage would be filled.

Having established the Savoy Theatre as a London base for his productions, D'Oyly Carte initiated the building of the new Savoy Hotel, which opened in 1889, and provided audience members with the opportunity of combining a visit to the theatre with an overnight stay in the capital. D'Oyly Carte can also be credited with introducing the concept of the after-theatre supper, and went to great lengths to ensure that the gastronomic standards of the cuisine at the Savoy Hotel not only rivalled those of the best hotels in London but also complemented the high artistic standards of his theatrical productions.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Carte claimed in a publicity flier (quoted in Bailey 1973: 71) that this was 'the first time it has been attempted to light any public building entirely by electricity. The greatest drawbacks to the enjoyment of the theatrical performances are, undoubtedly, the foul air and heat which pervades all theatres. As everyone knows, each gas-burner consumes as much oxygen as many people, and causes great heat besides. The incandescent lamps consume *no* oxygen, and cause no perceptible heat.'

<sup>105</sup> Cameron Mackintosh is sometimes credited as being the first producer to market theatre tickets as part of a combined package that might include accommodation, meals or visits to other tourist attractions. However, almost a hundred years before *Cats*, D'Oyly Carte had already clearly recognised the value of offering packages that would enhance the overall consumption experience.

### 3.3 Ziegfeld and the Shuberts

#### 3.3.1 Spectacle, mass audience appeal and the changing role of the producer

Ethan Morden (1983: 34) declared that the producer has only a limited, specific function in musical theatre production, and that it is the writers, musicians, directors, choreographers or even performers who endow a show with their own particular idiosyncratic style:

The producer is the least important element in a musical comedy production. He raises money, sees to the logistics of rehearsals, tryouts, and the run, hires and fires. He has opinions, and might exercise them to the point of improving or marring a piece. Still, he does not touch it in the way that its authors, staggers and performers do. One doesn't speak of many musicals as having the style of a given producer. There are Gershwin shows, or Rogers & Hart shows; or Merman or Astaire shows; or Robbins or De Mille shows. *Lady in the Dark* might be seen as a Gertrude Lawrence show, or a Kurt Weill show, or a Moss Hart show, or a Hassard Short show, depending on what aspects of its production is under scrutiny. But one would hardly speak of it as a Sam H. Harris show, though Harris was one of the best-known producers in the musical.

Morden's assertions now seem to be rather outdated when one is considering the creative input of a producer such as Cameron Mackintosh, but they also seem to equally inappropriate when assessing the influence on the productions of the flamboyant impresario and producer, Florenz Ziegfeld, whose name is synonymous with the spectacular revue. Between 1907 and 1931 Ziegfeld produced twenty-three different versions of his revue, with the *Follies* title of the show being changed to *The Ziegfeld Follies* in 1911, thus stamping the shows with the producer's own identity and individual style. The productions themselves combined theatrical spectacle and glamour, each act developing towards a spectacular climax, and featured major stars of the day, including Eddie Cantor, Fanny Brice and Marilyn Miller. Ziegfeld also

ensured that every new version was more sumptuous and visually impressive than the last, so that the end of the first Act of the 1927 production of *Ziegfeld Follies*, for example, included a sequence in which fourteen pianos and two orchestras were arranged on an enormous semi-circular staircase around a stage filled with a hundred beautiful female dancers all adorned in flowing white satin gowns. Production costs for these spectacular shows were high: the first edition of the *Ziegfeld Follies* (1907) cost \$13,000, while the cost of performers, stagehands, musicians and equipment for the 1921 *Follies* was reputedly in excess of a quarter of a million dollars, at a time when the average capitalisation of a musical production was in the region of \$50,000.<sup>106</sup> Visual spectacle and glamour was an essential ingredient in Ziegfeld's commercial success and, combined with the appearance of well-known stars, enabled Ziegfeld to continue annually to produce new versions of the formulaic *Follies* revue for over twenty years.

Ziegfeld was also a remarkably adept promoter and publicist, and managed to generate a regular supply of publicity for his productions, both before and after they had opened, to ensure that they remained on the front pages.<sup>107</sup> Moreover, he was willing to go to any lengths to retain complete artistic control over his products, and was quite prepared to resort to legal action if necessary to ensure that this control was

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<sup>106</sup> It is possible that Ziegfeld may have deliberately inflated the estimated costs of his shows, in an attempt to draw attention to the sumptuousness of their overall production values, but there is no doubt that they still cost many times the amount spent on other productions at the time. In 1917, when the average musical was costing between \$20,000 and \$30,000 on Broadway, Ziegfeld invested much more heavily in his *Follies* production of the same year: \$95,389.85 was spent on equipment, \$14,878.08 on Urban's sets and \$33,389.85 on costumes. Ten years later, the difference between expenditure on Ziegfeld's shows and those of other producers was equally pronounced: the 1927 edition of *Follies* had cost over \$280,000; in the same year, *Good News*, produced by Laurence Schwab and Frank Mandel, had cost just \$75,000.

<sup>107</sup> For his 1907 production of *The Soul Kiss*, Ziegfeld brought the dancer Adeline Genée from England to star in his show. He then capitalised on *The New York Times* description of her dancing as being like 'the flight of a bird,' by announcing to the press that he had insured Genée's feet for \$100,000 or, as he put it, 'ten thousand dollars a toe.'

not undermined in any way.<sup>108</sup> For a period of over twenty years, a growing audience that was seduced by the uncomplicated, easily accessible material that made up the various productions eagerly supported the *Follies* formula of visual spectacle, glamour, comedy sketches and star performers. By promising each year to adorn his shows with high levels of visual splendour and glamour,<sup>109</sup> Ziegfeld attracted an audience that was looking for straightforward entertainment rather than anything more esoteric. Although he may have been criticised by newspaper columnists, who regularly dismissed his *Follies* shows as shallow and lowbrow,<sup>110</sup> Ziegfeld was the

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<sup>108</sup> When a dispute over working conditions arose between Ziegfeld and Nora Bayes, Ziegfeld took Bayes to court. Ziegfeld alleged that Bayes had refused to sing certain verses of her songs; she herself admitted to the New York Supreme Court that she had refused to wear the exact costume that Ziegfeld had proscribed. After the court had ruled in his favour, Ziegfeld won a restraining order that prevented Bayes from acting or singing until her contract with him had expired. Richard and Paulette Ziegfeld (1992: 47) comment: 'This dispute provides insight into the circumstances that usually prompted Ziegfeld to take someone to court. He seldom sued over money; usually the issue was artistic control over the production. Ziegfeld seemed willing to brook differences of opinion from respected colleagues, so long as they were presented before or during rehearsals. Anyone who seriously believed, though, that this producer would tolerate defiance of his authority once his show opened was in for a rude shock.'

<sup>109</sup> In an interview in 1914, Ziegfeld stressed the importance of a producer's attention to detail and explained the effect that this policy had on an audience's perceptions of a show: 'Too many managers let their details run down after the first week or two of success. They think minor parts and little bits of business or costume don't matter...Details are what makes a show's 'personality.' I hunt for chances of putting in a laugh or taking out a slow bit. I keep the show combed, brushed, polished and groomed' (quoted in Ziegfeld (1992), p. 59). This attention to detail, coupled with Ziegfeld's innate artistic perception, ensured that glamorous costumes, for example, achieved the maximum impact: 'I have a natural knack of knowing what costume will be most becoming to each girl. I am able to design my own costumes and the girls learn that they attract more attention in my shows than some others' (Ibid).

<sup>110</sup> The *Chicago Tribune* described his 1907-8 production of *Follies*, for example, as 'just raw, common and noisy' (quoted in Ziegfeld (1992), p.43). Ziegfeld was by no means the first producer, however, to be criticized in this way. Nineteenth century shows like *Around the World in Eighty Days* and *Excelsior* were popular as a result of their stage settings, rather than the quality of their music, causing Phillip Ripley to write scathingly that plot development and textual sophistication were becoming subordinate to an audience desire for visual spectacle: 'To be sure, in the most profitable and popular plays that now hold the stage, the poverty of the plot is only surpassed by the trashiness of the text; but the play-going public, the people patronizing and paying for these plays, care nothing for the plot or text. [They want] gorgeous costumes, the accompanying songs and orchestral music, the wonderful effects resulting from the management of calcium and other lights; the whole linked together in the mind's eye by bewildering long lines of limbs' (Phillip Ripley, *Public Spirit Magazine*, 1868, quoted in Kislán, *The Musical*, p.77-78). The enormous popularity of these musical spectacles in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is reflected in the fact that The Hippodrome, which was able to accommodate 5,200 spectators, was just one of a number of new theatres to be built.

first producer-star,<sup>111</sup> whose name was able to generate audience interest in its own right and, to this extent, his shows became branded theatrical products.<sup>112</sup>

Ziegfeld, however, should not just be viewed as a producer of populist fare that was of limited artistic worth,<sup>113</sup> as he also made a variety of other vital contributions to the development of musical theatre as a genre. He fostered the talents of a wide range of performers, designers, composers and writers, for example, and provided commercial opportunities through which new and established talent might develop and flourish.<sup>114</sup>

Ziegfeld also made no secret of his desire to utilise the talent available to him, to ensure that each year the production standards of his new *Follies* show would be even

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<sup>111</sup> Various commentators have drawn comparisons between Ziegfeld's approach to production and that of Cameron Mackintosh in the 1980s. Eyre (p.343-4), for example, suggests that Ziegfeld was Mackintosh's 'spiritual ancestor' not only because his shows were replicated for touring while they were still playing on Broadway, but because he realised that a carefully formulated marketing plan was an essential part of a production strategy. Moreover, Eyre suggests that both producers adopted a similar approach to production by insisting that 'there were only two stars- the show and the producer.'

<sup>112</sup> The reflections of one of Ziegfeld's dancers reflect the pulling power that his name was able to exert: 'To be in a Ziegfeld production was to have reached the top. If I said 'I worked for Ziegfeld,' doors opened and people treated me differently' (Ziegfeld, 1992: 85).

<sup>113</sup> Ziegfeld was not only instrumental in opening up the spectacular revue format to a mass audience, but he was also the producer of the show that was to set new standards for musical theatre. *Show Boat* was the foremost critical and popular achievement of the 1920s and, although *Show Boat* was the only collaboration between Ziegfeld and Oscar Hammerstein II, the importance of Ziegfeld's contribution to the overall success of the show was considerable. Fordin, for example, comments: 'Whatever his deficiencies, Ziegfeld was probably the ideal producer for this musical play that Oscar felt was 'born big and wants to stay that way.' It overflowed with production opportunities that beckoned showmanship on a grand scale. Oscar later felt that Ziegfeld's opulent production was as essential to the play as the words and music and that any new production must be equally lavish' (*Getting to Know Him*, p. 86). Although Ziegfeld was clearly pessimistic about the commercial prospects of *Show Boat*, commenting that 'maybe the critics did like it, but the public won't' (quoted in Fordin, p.86), he approached this new production in much the same way that he had approached each of his annual *Ziegfeld Follies* shows, appointing Joseph Urban as designer and employing a large cast of nearly one hundred singers and dancers. Although equally appropriate to the revue format in which he excelled, the high production values that Ziegfeld lavished on *Show Boat* complimented perfectly the epic sweep of the story, while at the same time fulfilling the expectations of an audience that had become used to high standards of visual impact and artistry. It is, however, interesting to note that despite running for 575 performances, and although the production averaged a \$50,000 box-office gross per week (out of a box-office weekly maximum of \$55,000) Ziegfeld claimed that profits from the show were minimal as his weekly operating costs were just under \$48,000.

<sup>114</sup> For his revues he commissioned over five hundred songs from composers such as Jerome Kern, Victor Herbert and Irving Berlin. Joseph Urban designed sumptuous sets, with a high level of artistry being applied to set and costume design. The consistency in quality of Urban's designs provided Ziegfeld's shows with a predictability of quality, and audiences came to expect a high level of visual splendour from each new production, thus ensuring that the element of spectacle became an essential component of the shows and provided Ziegfeld with an important marketing opportunity.

higher than the previous versions, without allowing the shows either to lose their branded quality<sup>115</sup> or to lose sight of the fact that the audience wanted entertainment rather than high-brow art. He realised that such developments would result in the continued fulfilment of audience expectations, so that his products would maintain their commercial viability, but he was equally aware that he needed to provide his audiences with something different and original in each new version of *Follies* in order to maintain their interest:

The public's about fed up on the usual run of revues and, if we're not careful, they're going to fight shy of the *Follies*. We've got to give them something out of the ordinary- something on a little higher plane than formerly, but with enough snap and go to it to prevent the suspicion of being high-brow. We'll let Ben Ali Haggin stage a couple of his gorgeous tableaux, turn Joseph Urban loose with a ton of paint and a battery of colored lights, commission Victor Herbert to write some of his most tuneful music and then get Irving Berlin, Gene Buck, Dave Stamper, W.C.Fields, Van and Schenck, Ray Dooley and the rest of 'em to supply the jazz and the laughs. In that way we ought to secure a production which will remain within the province of the *Follies* and at the same time be unusual (Kislan 1995: 86).<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Ziegfeld's use of the same designer, Joseph Urban, on sixteen productions of *Follies*, gave the shows a branded quality and Ziegfeld's productions could be immediately identified by Urban's designs. Cameron Mackintosh developed a similar relationship with John Napier in the 1980s and 1990s, and when Mackintosh turned to a different designer for Boublil and Schoenberg's *Martin Guerre* (1996), the show performed very disappointingly at the box office and failed to replicate the anticipated commercial success that his other megamusical productions had enjoyed. Mackintosh admitted to me in a conversation at the opening night of *Oklahoma* in 2000 that 'we got everything wrong with *Martin Guerre*.' When I asked him to expand on this remarkably frank admission, he suggested that the set design had lacked the spectacular element of his other megamusical productions, and the show's logo had been poorly conceived and was therefore ineffective. Interestingly, Mackintosh demonstrated the important contribution that Napier had made to the establishment of a branded identity of his earlier shows, by turning to Napier for the redesigned American touring version of *Martin Guerre* in 1999.

<sup>116</sup> Ziegfeld's observation sums up the essential paradox that, while the familiarity (or 'predictability' in Ritzer's terminology) of a product may have a heavy influence on consumption patterns, consumers will only continue to be satisfied if a consumption experience offers something that is, or seems to be, new and different. Even the McDonald's corporation not only had to vary its product but also to adjust radically its marketing strategy when it became apparent in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century that consumers were demanding variations in the overall consumption experience, including the provision of more healthy options. By repositioning itself as a company that was making major efforts to promote a healthier lifestyle, by appealing to different markets by its association in advertising with a range of different well-known personalities, and by adding a limited number of healthy eating options to its core products, McDonald's was able over an eighteen month period to reverse a serious decline in its commercial fortunes.

### 3.3.2 Building on the Ziegfeld model: The Shuberts, increased standardization and diversification

During the 1920s, more than one hundred spectacular revues opened on Broadway, all of them hoping to benefit from the apparently insatiable public taste and appetite for glamorous visual spectacle.<sup>117</sup> The Shubert brothers, for example, produced a large number of revues during the same period, although these lacked Ziegfeld's attention to detail and never compared favourably with Ziegfeld's *Follies*. As Lee Shubert himself confirmed in a 1921 interview for *American Magazine*, Shubert productions were unashamedly populist fare that had no pretensions about their aesthetic limitations:

We have learned a few things, at least. We know that people like youth and beauty. We know that they will go down in their pockets and pay gladly, if you will give them something that will make them laugh. They like to see a play that holds their attention, keeps it from straying off to their worries and troubles. Probably that is the reason that they are so keen about something new. People want a play to have plenty of action. A few persons will go to a 'talky' play and be interested, if the talk is clever and brilliant. But those persons form a very small group.<sup>118</sup>

The Shubert shows, as well as featuring stars and glamorous dancers, also utilised elaborate scenic technology, some of it borrowed from the movie industry and much of it reminiscent of 19<sup>th</sup> century spectacular melodrama.<sup>119</sup> Each Shubert show became identified with a particular spectacular feature, in the same way that

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<sup>117</sup> Broadway audiences were not only increased by Ziegfeld's productions, but the audience profile was also becoming broader. As a result, the 1919 version of *Follies*, which capitalised at \$175,000 and took \$174,000 in the first six weeks of its twenty-two week run, even sold out its matinees, an achievement that had not previously been managed by other *Follies* shows.

<sup>118</sup> Quoted in *The Shuberts on Broadway*, pp.xxv-xxvi

<sup>119</sup> The first act of *Passing Show* (1914), for example, closed with a trans-Atlantic flight scene, in which members of the chorus flew across and around the stage in a small aircraft; *The Whirl of the World* (1914) included a spectacular ship-wreck and the subsequent rescue of passengers; *Show of Wonders* (1917), lived up to its title, as a crew of sailors were shown escaping from a sinking submarine, a visual effect that was highly elaborate but was also highly original as it included film projection within the theatrical scene to heighten atmospheric realism.

*Cats* would later become famous for its hydraulic staircase and revolving junk-yard set, *The Phantom of the Opera* would be remembered for its falling chandelier, *Les Misérables* for its hydraulic barricade, and *Miss Saigon* for the spectacular appearance on stage of an apparently fully functional helicopter. However, while each Shubert revue contained spectacular elements that differentiated it from other productions and provided audiences with a sense of excitement,<sup>120</sup> the shows also had a high degree of standardization, as Hirsch notes:

J.J. [Shubert] prepared three and sometimes four revues a year for the Winter Garden...Even with his hard-working in-house staff, however, the only way that J.J. could produce so many revues was through a process of standardization. Titles, settings, production numbers, and personnel rotated, but the basic format for each seasonal revue was pre-ordained- Winter Garden revues were a mélange of movable parts that could be easily recycled (Hirsch 1998: 142).

The Shuberts adopted a Fordist approach to production, and their assembly-line technique resulted in a standardized model into which existing acts, songs, scenery and costumes could be introduced; conversely, individual items could equally be excised, without the overall model being detrimentally affected. Most of the Shubert productions were loosely plotted star vehicles that were designed to provide a star performer with a substantial but irrelevant solo section. Stars were treated as bankable commodities and, when an individual such as Al Jolson proved to be a popular attraction, would appear in show after show. While Ziegfeld, the Shuberts' prime competitor in the production of revues, went to considerable lengths to perfect each

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<sup>120</sup> Like Ziegfeld, the Shuberts recognised that while consumers were attracted by familiar or 'predictable' elements in a particular product, consumption levels would only be maintained for successive standardized products if some degree of surprise or novelty was included. The Shubert approach also demonstrates that audiences could be encouraged to attend a production that was poorly constructed and of an inferior aesthetic quality if the respective production was marketed as one that offered familiarity with an element of spectacle that was new and had not previously been experienced.

element of his productions, the Shuberts were content to produce shows that could often only be differentiated by their titles.

The stock market crash of 1929, together with the Depression that followed, hastened the demise of the spectacular revue and created an environment in which songs and sketches of a more thoughtful and socially aware nature could flourish. Audiences also began to favour the dramatically connected songs of the modern book musical and, with the rise of Hollywood extravaganzas choreographed by Busby Berkeley, the popularity of the theatrical revue began to wane.<sup>121</sup> The response of the Shuberts to changing economic conditions was to diversify. In an attempt to capitalise on a rapidly developing market for movie production, they had already founded their own film studio in New Jersey in 1914, and they intended to build another studio in which productions of Shubert plays might be filmed, under the auspices of the Shubert Feature Film Corporation, for general theatrical release. In this way, they believed, their theatrical products could reach a mass audience without incurring the level of production costs that would previously have been inevitable. Although the Shuberts had primarily been theatrical producers, they also rapidly became involved not only in film production, but also in other areas of business, particularly the ownership of theatrical real estate. This diversification into other areas of the entertainment market was instigated in order to achieve greater commercial security and to enhance

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<sup>121</sup> This is not to say that the revue format was finished. Shows such as *Forbidden Broadway*, which began in 1982 and draws on the burlesque style established by Joe Weber and Lew Fields, maintain the tradition that had been established by Ziegfeld for producing annual versions of a revue. Other recent revue format shows, ranging from the Fats Waller-inspired *Ain't Misbehavin'* (1978) to *The World Goes Around*, (1991), which featured the songs of Kander and Ebb, and *Smokey Joe's Café* (1995), a compilation of thirty six songs by Jerry Lieber and Mike Stoller, while not attempting to replicate the level of sumptuous spectacle of Ziegfeld's productions, have nevertheless also proved successful. This apparent revival of the revue in recent years, however, says much about the state of musical theatre production in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, as producers attempt to reduce their commercial risks by utilising songs that are already known to audiences or already have a broad fan base.

profitability,<sup>122</sup> but it also demonstrated that a corporate approach to production seemed to be the most effective means of ensuring financial stability in a rapidly changing economic environment.<sup>123</sup>

### 3.4 David Merrick

#### 3.4.1 New Approaches to advertising and publicity

David Merrick was prepared to go to any lengths to obtain the publicity that could maximise a show's profitability or even keep it alive.<sup>124</sup> As his biographer Howard Kissell suggests, Merrick, like Ziegfeld before him, was fully aware of the value of establishing himself as a star in his own right, so that stories about his life that appeared in the media could also be used as a vehicle to publicise his shows:

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<sup>122</sup> It is interesting to note that theatrical production companies such as CML and RUG would adopt a similar policy of diversification, even if CML and RUG originally chose the burgeoning videotape market rather than cinemas for the gradual release of a number of its filmed back-catalogue productions. Although the RSO film production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973) and the joint RUG/RSO film production of *Evita* (1996) had received a theatrical release and had achieved a degree of commercial success, the decision to release *Cats* only on video, in a joint venture between RUG and CML, was justified in commercial terms by its high volume of sales. The 1990s also saw RUG and CML moving purposefully into the market for theatre real estate in London and elsewhere, both for the presentation of their own productions and for leasing to other production companies. With capitalisation costs continuing to rise dramatically and with the entry into the marketplace of multinational corporations such as Disney, with their substantial budgets for marketing and development, it is not surprising that companies such as RUG and CML chose to diversify into areas of potential investment that involved less commercial risk.

<sup>123</sup> Even a corporate strategy failed to prevent the Shubert Theatre Corporation from being placed into receivership in 1931. The ravaging effects of The Great Depression resulted in the corporation, which at the time controlled or had an interest in seventy theatres in New York and other cities, listing debts of over \$17million. The federal court ordered liquidation on January 10 1933 and instructed the assets of the corporation to be sold. Lee Shubert formed a new corporation, Select Theatres, which purchased the properties of the Shubert Theatre Corporation on 17 March 1933, and began the slow revival in the Shuberts' fortunes.

<sup>124</sup> Merrick was prepared to resort to almost any form of 'stunt' advertising to promote his shows. For his 1954 production of *Fanny*, for example, he organised a papier-mâché statue of belly-dancer Nejla Ates, who featured briefly in the show, to be erected in Central Park. He then notified the police, and ensured that tabloid journalists were on hand to witness the removal of the offending statue. Then, during the summer of 1955, Merrick's press agents attempted to persuade the U.S. weather bureau to name the next hurricane 'Fanny' and, although they were unsuccessful in their attempts, Merrick ensured that the story received national media coverage. The following summer he even arranged for *Fanny* to be publicised in skywriting over Monaco during the wedding of Grace Kelly and Prince Rainier. Merrick employed three press agents who were given the responsibility of initiating such stunts to generate continuous publicity for his productions.

Never has any producer in the world captured as much front-page newsprint as David Merrick- and not merely for his shows- but for that endlessly captivating enigma of his own persona. When other producers pleaded for ink, the press poured it out for the American legend who produced some of the greatest shows ever presented: *Gypsy*; *Irma La Douce*; *A Taste of Honey*; *Hello, Dolly!*; *Cactus Flower*; *I Do! I Do!*; *Look Back in Anger*; *Stop the World- I Want to Get Off*; *Promises, Promises*; and, of course, *42<sup>nd</sup> Street* (Kissell 1993: inside cover notes).

Merrick's career as a producer was not just characterised by his idiosyncratic publicity initiatives and promotional activities, but also by the prodigious number of shows that he produced and the high levels of commercial success that he achieved, even in the early stages of his career:

Starting with *Fanny* in 1954 through *Carnival* in 1961, Merrick had presented twenty shows. Fifteen qualified as hits; only four were outright failures. No other producer, including Mike Todd, Flo Ziegfeld or the Shubert brothers, Sam, Lee and Jake, had ever approached this record in a similar period of time. This was an era, it is important to note, when there were no more than thirty Broadway houses available for productions, when roughly one out of eight shows reaching the Great White Way paid back its investment, and when even the most active producers found it prudent to confine themselves to two productions a season. In all, Merrick's twenty shows had cost \$4 million to produce, grossed \$40 million, and repaid \$8 million (Horn 1992: 18).

Merrick pioneered the sweeping advertising campaign<sup>125</sup> and instigated the widespread use of subway posters, advertising hoardings and publicity material in trains to ensure that his shows achieved a high level of public awareness, in the firm belief that money spent on advertising a show would be repaid with dividends at the box office. *Fanny*, which Merrick co-produced with Joshua Logan, was the first of many productions that derived considerable commercial benefit from Merrick's

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<sup>125</sup> Broadway productions up until the time of Merrick had relied heavily on newspaper advertisements, and had made some use of billboards in the locality of the theatre district, but Merrick initiated advertising on a much wider scale, introducing promotional and advertising material into numerous locations where large numbers of potential consumers were guaranteed to congregate. Equally significant was the fact that Merrick advertised widely outside the Tri-State area, at a time when other producers were concentrating their marketing efforts on a more local consumer base.

approach to aggressive marketing, and the show ‘launched a campaign three times as vast and ten times as vulgar as anything the theatre had ever seen’<sup>126</sup> (Gottfried 1979: 131). *Fanny* did not receive glowing reviews, and Merrick himself was said to have been disappointed with it as a show. Nevertheless, he was relentless in his pursuit of publicity for the production, running radio and television spots long before they became a regular marketing tool, as well as taking out full-page newspaper advertisements- the first time that any Broadway show had been publicised in this manner.<sup>127</sup> Merrick considered that a clear and coordinated marketing strategy was crucial if a show was to achieve its commercial potential, as Dash (1956: 46) reflects:

Merrick promotes a play along national lines. He advertises in metropolitan New York, in the suburbs, and national magazines, in papers and on billboards. No medium is held in contempt. To promote *Fanny*, the producer bought national and local radio and television time. He advertised in 40 papers around the country, employing half-page and full-page ads frequently... He also utilised point-of-sales promotion pieces at brokers’ offices, sometimes at montages on small easels...During 1955, Merrick spent \$4,200 per week in advertising *Fanny*.

The substantial sums spent on marketing *Fanny*, however, were viewed as an investment by Merrick, who pointed out that this expenditure had resulted in the generation of, for that time, a substantial profit: ‘I spent \$500,000 on that campaign. But we made *Fanny* into a hit that grossed \$7,000,000 and showed a \$1,000,000

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<sup>126</sup> Merrick enthusiastically embraced a range of publicity initiatives that other producers might refrain from adopting because they might be considered inappropriate or tasteless. To publicise *Fanny*, for example, posters, fliers and stickers with the words ‘Have you seen *Fanny*?’ were distributed widely but these included no details about the show or the theatre where it was being performed. Indeed, there was no indication that the advertisements were promoting a show at all. Merrick himself acknowledged the importance of his many publicity stunts to his overall marketing strategy: ‘Other things being equal, using promotion stunts would allow me to get ahead of my competition- I’d say that’s been a big factor in my success’ (*Chicago Tribune*, April 27 2000, p.1).

<sup>127</sup> This level of advertising in Merrick’s marketing strategy, with the considerable costs that were inevitably involved, is all the more remarkable when one considers that *Fanny* was produced so early in Merrick’s career.

profit in the final tally' (Silvester 1962: 16).<sup>128</sup> These figures provide a clear indication of the critical level of importance attached by Merrick to the marketing of his products. He was prepared to invest heavily in the promotion of his shows, not only after they had opened but also considerably in advance of their opening, building up a healthy advance in the process that could offset the impact of poor critical reviews.

### 3.4.2 The advent of direct mailing and other promotional techniques

Merrick was keen to retain control over the marketing of his products, and for this reason he reduced the number of tickets available for sale through ticket agencies, preferring to target through an extensive mail order scheme the much larger audience that existed outside the confines of New York City itself. By targeting potential audience members through his own system of direct mailing, Merrick was able to build up advance sales, a feature of his marketing strategy that he believed was critical to the success of his shows.<sup>129</sup> When asked to evaluate the significance of his various marketing schemes, Merrick suggested that advance sales were the essential ingredient of the seven consecutive Broadway hits that he had achieved at that time, and that his innovative system of direct mailing was of fundamental importance to building a sizeable advance and, as a result, a critic-proof show:

[Advance sales] give you time to maneuver (sic) after the notices. The point is to keep the show on long enough- about ten weeks- for the public to make up

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<sup>128</sup> Despite the obvious shortcomings of the production, Merrick's publicity initiatives ensured that *Fanny* became the most profitable show on a weekly basis in Broadway history up to that time. Considering the negative notices that the show received after its opening, *Fanny's* financial figures are remarkable, for it recouped its \$275,00 investment within just seventeen weeks of its three year run, and paid its 'angels' over a million dollars by the time it closed (Dudar et al. 1960: 6).

<sup>129</sup> As early as 1959 Millstein observed that Merrick adopted an idiosyncratically commercial approach to the organisation of marketing initiatives: 'He has a habit of getting to work on a show months before other producers do and he cultivates mail-order lists with the assiduousness of a bucket-shop operator' (Millstein 1959: 42).

its own mind. You see, critics *can* be wrong, and the people *can* like the show in spite of them... First I offer my tickets to the 65,000 on a (mailing) list I've accumulated over the years. I write to them in advance of theater parties or newspaper advertising- and give them the best seats...By being on the list they get first crack, like the old Theatre Guild subscription. They are very loyal. I keep getting an increasingly high response. *Romanoff and Juliet* was an English import, and that kind of play is viewed with suspicion by American audiences- they're not keen about British plays- but we were able to work up a \$300,000 advance (Wallace (1958), New York Library Clippings Collection).

A Merrick production also benefited from its producer's establishment of the name of the show in the public consciousness some months before the show actually opened. This involved a wide range of promotional activities and 'stunt' advertising,<sup>130</sup> which supplemented more traditional print advertising and encouraged further advance sales; these cheap promotional schemes also helped to generate group bookings that would make a significant contribution to the show's chances of achieving commercial success. Aware that a high level of product awareness amongst potential consumers can have a significant influence on commercial performance,<sup>131</sup> Merrick went to great lengths to ensure that the titles of his productions were familiar even before the show actually opened:

To get advance sales, I plant the title. Take *Romanoff and Juliet*. When I started to produce that, Peter Ustinov was not a big Broadway name yet. So we managed to keep the title of the show, which I think is a pretty interesting

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<sup>130</sup> At the time, Merrick's widespread use of stunt advertising was almost unique, but its contribution to his overall strategy of enhancing product awareness amongst consumers was highly effective. It was also inexpensive, particularly when compared to the traditional forms of media advertising. Merrick's success in his use of promotional advertising can be gauged by the fact that almost all producers of modern musical theatre now employ one or more professional promoters whose sole function is to come up with innovative (and inexpensive) initiatives to help promote a show to consumers. Scott Walton is just one example of a successful promoter who has responsibility for a number of Broadway productions.

<sup>131</sup> Cameron Mackintosh, following Merrick's example, developed a relentless style of marketing from the 1980s onwards that targeted a broader, and ultimately globalized, audience. Mackintosh ensured that each new show was heavily promoted, not just through traditional forms of advertising, through print and broadcast media, but also through a huge range of promotional events and product tie-ins that kept the name of a show in the mind of potential consumers, even before the show itself actually opened.

one, in the press pretty regularly. We invented ways of talking about it. During last summer we had railroads all covered with ‘Watch for *Romanoff and Juliet*’ billboards and all that. We keep up that kind of attrition. So when charity groups and theater parties were approached for their autumn functions, the title was familiar to them, and they bought (Wallace 1958).

### 3.4.3 The increasing cost of marketing and the commercial benefits of audience development

The increasing cost of musical theatre production, particularly from the 1960s onwards, meant that shows required longer runs to achieve profitability,<sup>132</sup> and longer term marketing strategies therefore needed to be developed. The commercial success of *Subways Are for Sleeping* (1961) readily exemplifies the influence that Merrick’s marketing strategy was able to exert on his shows. Despite being the least favourably received of all Merrick’s shows up to that point, *Subways Are for Sleeping* ran for over a year and managed to recoup 90% of its investment within six months of opening. Merrick’s orchestrated publicity campaign, which began well in advance of the show’s opening, included a teaser campaign in which nearly three thousand green placards with white lettering began to appear in the New York subway system. Merrick spent \$60,000 annually on subway advertising, but the placards’ simple announcement that ‘Subways are for Sleeping’, had no indication that a Broadway show was being advertised.<sup>133</sup>

Other Merrick shows utilised different marketing techniques. *Stop the World, I Want to Get Off* (1962), for example, contained two first-rate songs but arguably little else,

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<sup>132</sup> *Do Re Mi* (1960), for example, cost nearly \$480,000 and was predicted to need a sell-out run of 38 weeks before it started to make a profit; in fact, the show ran for fifty weeks and had a long road tour, but even then it failed to recoup its investment.

<sup>133</sup> Cameron Mackintosh adopted a similar teaser campaign to help promote *Cats* on Broadway twenty years later.

and Merrick therefore ensured that both ‘What Kind of Fool am I?’ and ‘Gonna Build me a Mountain’ were well known before the show opened, having been recorded by Sammy Davis Junior, Vic Damone and others.<sup>134</sup> Within one year, *Stop the World* had made \$700,000 on a \$175,000 investment, but this level of commercial success was far from unprecedented for Merrick productions: in January 1996, *Time* magazine reported that since 1954 Merrick had presented 37 shows on Broadway, twenty two of which had made a profit; on a total investment of \$7million he had grossed \$115 million, and had produced a net profit of \$14 million for his investors. Merrick’s commercial success was remarkable, but it was his ability to market his products so effectively that set him apart from other producers, as Christiansen (2000: 1) notes:

There have been producers with great egos and huge hits on Broadway before Merrick. In an earlier era, David Belasco and Florenz Ziegfeld were men whose taste and personal touch shaped the nature of Broadway production. But it was Merrick who took the art of selling and marketing shows to a new level.

As well as developing new productions, Merrick was not averse to bringing to Broadway shows that had already been produced elsewhere. Lionel Bart’s *Oliver*, is just one example of a show in New York that benefited from Merrick’s idiosyncratic marketing approach and, as a result, achieved considerable commercial success.<sup>135</sup> The marketing of *Oliver* also reflected Merrick’s firm belief that audience development was a commercial necessity and, having conducted a detailed analysis of the varied profile of his own audiences, Merrick ensured that tourists and other

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<sup>134</sup> ‘Memory’ would fulfil a similar purpose for *Cats* as Mackintosh strove to establish his show in the public consciousness.

<sup>135</sup> While Cameron Mackintosh now owns the worldwide performing rights to *Oliver*, and his own 1995 version of the show was packaged and marketed as a Mackintosh branded product, using a Dewynters-inspired graphic logo, it was David Merrick who had brought the original production of *Oliver* to Broadway, after the show had been presented by Donald Albery in the West End. Merrick had been able to reap the benefits of a song from the show becoming a commercial hit, since ‘As Long as He Needs Me’ had become a major success well before the show opened; moreover, the American cast album had been recorded and distributed before *Oliver* actually opened in New York.

lucrative sectors of his potential market were both targeted and developed. Other producers had already recognised the value of targeting tourists<sup>136</sup> and Merrick had, from the start of his career as a producer, been keenly aware of the commercial benefits of this market sector. As the fledgling producer of *Clutterbuck*, for example, Merrick had adopted the first of a wide range of idiosyncratic publicity stunts when each night, during the cocktail hour of five to six o'clock, he telephoned a number of the busiest Manhattan hotels and persuaded their respective bellboys to page a 'Mr Clutterbuck' in their lobbies.<sup>137</sup> *Fanny* was similarly marketed to the potentially lucrative tourist audience after Merrick discovered through his own audience research that a large number of American tourists read *The Herald Tribune* while in Europe. Merrick also found that ninety percent of these travellers paid to see a show in New York before travelling on to their various destinations around the United States. He therefore took out a series of advertisements in the Paris edition of *The Herald Tribune* in a deliberate attempt to target this specific audience. Moreover, during the traditional summer lull in audiences in 1955, *Fanny* performed unusually well at the box office, largely as a result of the series of advertisements that Merrick had secured aboard a number of ocean liners that were transporting tourists from Europe to America.

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<sup>136</sup> For the original West End production of *Oliver*, Donald Albery had probably been the first English producer to recognise the potential commercial value of tourists, particularly American tourists, and had deliberately targeted this sector in his advertising and marketing campaign for the show: leaflets and other advertising materials were distributed to those places where groups of tourists would see them- hotels, airports, and major tourist attractions in and around London, for example.

<sup>137</sup> Merrick chose to do this between the hours of five o'clock and six o'clock in the afternoon, since this was the time, he believed, when many tourists would be deciding how to spend their evenings and would therefore be particularly susceptible to suggestion.

### 3.4.4 The potential for a globalized product

Merrick had an instinctive awareness about what style, lay-out and colour would suit a particular show and would produce the desired effect in the marketplace. Merrick's instinct for exactly what design would work best in the marketing of a particular show was one of his major strengths.<sup>138</sup> This idiosyncratic and, at times, obsessive approach that characterised the advertising of his products, was apparent even in the early stages of his career, as Helen Dudar observed in 1960:

He keeps one sub-department of a large ad agency in full-time operation and reportedly on tranquilizers full-time. Obsessively fastidious about each detail, he may discard a dozen lay-outs before finding one that satisfies him. His eye for color is incredibly accurate; the day the red posters for the road show of *Fanny* arrived one shade off, all of 44<sup>th</sup> Street, where he has his office, shook with ire. 'He's the only producer I know', says one theatrical press agent, 'who not only knows when an ad or a poster is off, but can tell you precisely why' (Dudar 1960: 6).

Such an approach cost both time and money, but Merrick demonstrated that an effective marketing strategy could have a significant effect on a show's commercial performance, and he was willing to allocate an increasing percentage of a show's capitalisation and running costs to marketing expenditure.<sup>139</sup> According to *Variety*, Merrick's advertising costs for *Oliver*, for example, amounted to a record-breaking

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<sup>138</sup> Cameron Mackintosh seems to have displayed a similarly instinctive ability in the selection of appropriate logos for his megamusicals. The development of the artwork used in the promotion of *Miss Saigon* and the way in which Mackintosh discarded a large number of suggested designs before ending up with an oriental-style graphic that incorporated a helicopter with an Asiatic female face in its slipstream, exemplifies the instinctive nature of Mackintosh's approach to the marketing of his megamusical productions.

<sup>139</sup> In the early 1960s David Merrick would allocate roughly 10% of a show's capitalisation budget to pre-opening publicity and advertising. This level of financial investment may have been unprecedented at the time, but it now seems very modest in comparison with the costs associated with marketing a musical just twenty years later. Following the success of *Cats* in 1981, producers began to allocate an ever-increasing percentage of production budgets to the marketing of shows, thus contributing both to the spiraling overall capitalisation costs and to the running costs. The 1997 Los Angeles production of *Ragtime*, for example, devoted 18.1% of its pre-production budget to advertising, while Rob Bettinson told me that he had been forced to spend 'close on a third' of his £1.4million budget on marketing for his 2002 West End production of *125<sup>th</sup> Street*.

\$133,488 during the show's first four months on Broadway, or roughly \$3000 a week.<sup>140</sup>

Merrick's greatest commercial success was *42<sup>nd</sup> Street* and, as sole producer of the show, Merrick achieved earnings that were, according to *Variety*, 'by far the greatest weekly profit total for any producer in U.S. stage history' (Quoted in Kissell 1993: 470). As a result of *42<sup>nd</sup> Street*'s remarkable level of commercial success, and following the show's highly successful openings on Broadway and in the West End,<sup>141</sup> Merrick began to exploit the show even further, opening a production in Australia in 1987 and, soon after, making plans to open the show in Tokyo.

Merrick believed that the mood of audiences in 1980 reflected that of audiences in the post-Depression years of the early 1930s, a period when escapist extravaganzas were proving to be popular commercial successes.<sup>142</sup> He considered that *42<sup>nd</sup> Street*, with

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<sup>140</sup> This substantial figure was, however, slightly inflated, due to the fact that a long newspaper strike had forced Merrick to maintain audience awareness of his new show through more expensive advertising and a publicity campaign on radio and television, rather than through the traditional printed advertising in seven daily papers.

<sup>141</sup> Cameron Mackintosh himself had already negotiated with Merrick about his possible involvement in a proposed London transfer of *42<sup>nd</sup> Street* after it had opened on Broadway. At an early stage in the negotiations, Mackintosh, who was a great admirer of Merrick, made use of the opportunity to discuss Merrick's advertising strategy for *42<sup>nd</sup> Street*, and was happy that, should he be involved with a London transfer, Merrick should take star billing as producer of the show. Before further more detailed arrangements could be finalised, however, Mackintosh was to produce *Cats*, and the relationship between the two men became strained. In 1985, a year after *42<sup>nd</sup> Street* had opened in London, the two men met again. By this stage, both *Cats* and *Les Misérables* were becoming international hits, and Merrick was keen to discuss with Mackintosh how he was able to finance shows on a global scale while still retaining overall control of the various productions. The roles had become reversed, and Merrick now learned from Mackintosh's own approach to the global marketing of his products, as Mackintosh himself suggests: 'He treated me now like an equal. I had done a thing he hadn't dreamt of' (Quoted in Kissell 1993: 474). Reflecting on his dealings with Merrick at this time, Mackintosh himself suggests, 'From seeing me as a surrogate heir, he now suddenly saw me as a threat. I wanted to be associated with a man and a show I admired, but I kept *not* playing Cat and Mouse with him, and his demands became more and more convoluted.' (Kissell, p.472)

<sup>142</sup> In 1934, for example, after the death of Florenz Ziegfeld, the Shuberts had produced their own *Ziegfeld Follies*, a production that was described by *Variety* (January 7 1934) as 'a super-revival of the old Winter Garden extravaganzas, the most ornate of the Shubert *Passing Shows*.'

its lively upbeat tone and emphasis on visual spectacle,<sup>143</sup> would appeal to audiences in the early 1980s, and could achieve a level of commercial success similar to that of the 1930s extravaganzas. In an interview published in the *New York Times* (7 September 1980, Section 2, p.1), Merrick suggested that *42<sup>nd</sup> Street* was ‘the sort of lively, lavish, frivolous musical I believe people have been missing. I think the musical public is fed up with those solemn ones and those tiny little ones with a half dozen people, skimpy sets and squeaky orchestras.’

*42<sup>nd</sup> Street* was Merrick’s last major commercial success, and ran for nearly 3,500 performances on Broadway alone. Yet, even in this late stage of his career, Merrick himself was constantly devising new promotional schemes to extend the life of his own show. These included rescheduling the ‘curtain up’ time of *42<sup>nd</sup> Street*, so that the show would start fifteen minutes later than *The Phantom of the Opera* and would therefore, Merrick hoped, attract those audience members who had been unable to obtain tickets for Mackintosh’s production. The advertising poster for this particular scheme featured a giant image of Merrick himself accompanied by the words, ‘David Merrick is holding the curtain for you,’ and announced that this was ‘Broadway’s latest hit!’ As Mackintosh himself had observed during the two producers’ negotiations regarding the proposed transfer of *42<sup>nd</sup> Street* into the West End, Merrick

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<sup>143</sup> *42<sup>nd</sup> Street* was a lavish production: the cast was fifty four strong, there were over four hundred costumes and a dozen sets that featured electrified backdrops, revolves, an enormous double-curved staircase and a full-length Pullman car which slowly rolled off stage. The show inevitably exceeded its production budgets, and a \$370,000 costume budget for the pre-New York run, for example, soon passed the half million mark. By the time the show opened, the total outlay was close to \$2.5 million, all of which was provided by David Merrick who had already bought out the other three original backers. The *New York Times*, which described Merrick as arguably ‘the greatest Broadway showman since Ziegfeld’ accurately anticipated that, as sole producer, Merrick would generate considerable personal wealth from his new show: ‘Since he owns the entire show, his personal income as long as *42<sup>nd</sup> Street* plays to sold-out houses, will exceed \$50,000 dollars a week. Subsidiary rights and road companies will generate enormous additional income, but just the Broadway production alone, after a five-year capacity run, would net Mr. Merrick more than \$11 million’ (*NYT*, 7 Sept.1980).

himself was still a star in his own right, and this latest publicity campaign confirmed Mackintosh's observation.

### 3.3.5 Merrick's legacy: product branding and commodification

Throughout his career Merrick retained his status as an independent producer,<sup>144</sup> and he always ensured that his name appeared on its own above all advertising material for his shows.<sup>145</sup> Merrick realised the commercial advantage to be gained from establishing a brand that implied the delivery of guaranteed quality for consumers.<sup>146</sup> At the same time, however, he marketed his productions as events

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<sup>144</sup> Whereas Merrick was prepared to invest his own money in a production, the advent of Cameron Mackintosh, while maintaining the tradition of impresario as independent producer, also seemed to usher in the era of corporatisation, with a production's 'angels' often being replaced by a long list of corporate backers, and with associated producers at times outnumbering the performers in a particular show's cast. Rocco Landesman (*New York Times*, June 4 2000) considers that this change has resulted in a reduced level of artistic enterprise, since modern corporate backers are less prepared to take risks than independent producers such as Merrick had been: 'The idiosyncratic giants of an earlier day have given way, by and large, to syndicates of producers and corporations. Big Broadway successes are more often the product of well-crafted nostalgia brilliantly marketed than of bold and intrepid producing... The road presenters poll their audience's responses to various titles and stars before deciding on their seasons. The stakes (read costs) have simply become too high to assume undue risks.'

<sup>145</sup> Cameron Mackintosh told me when I interviewed him in 2005 (23 June) that Merrick's approach to the promotion and branding of his shows had had a significant influence on his own career as a producer. Mackintosh was clearly in awe of Merrick when the two men met in 1980, shortly before *42<sup>nd</sup> Street* opened on Broadway: Mackintosh acknowledged that Merrick would be the 'very much the star' of the production and offered to assist with the show as he was 'wanting to be associated with a man and a show I admired' (Kissel, p.472). Like Merrick, Mackintosh recognised the value of establishing his name as a brand in its own right; the Disney Corporation have followed a similar line, so that the Disney brand name always appears prominently on all advertising material and, for *Disney's Beauty and the Beast*, the Disney name is actually incorporated into the title of the show. Susan Lee (Lee 2) suggests that Merrick not only demonstrated to Mackintosh and others the value of branding his products, but also helped to convince him that each product needed to be controlled along McDonaldized lines in order to ensure exact replication, concluding that consumer expectations could only be fully satisfied through strict quality control: 'David Merrick was the Cameron Mackintosh of his time. I think [Merrick and Mackintosh] want to deliver for the people in the seats, and that to me is one of the reasons why certain producers transcend the others. David Merrick more than once really closed a show out of town because, he said, the show just wasn't good enough for his audience.' Mackintosh followed Merrick's example in 1996, when he announced that he was replacing most of the cast of the Broadway production of *Les Misérables*, because he felt that the performers were not replicating the standard of performance that had been achieved by the original cast in the West End and his brand was in danger of being devalued as a result.

<sup>146</sup> One of the fundamental principles of Ritzer's McDonaldization theory is that McDonaldized products offer consumers 'predictability.' This does not mean, however, that consumption cannot also involve a degree of excitement and originality. Indeed, it is clear that even McDonald's markets itself in such a way as to stress the individuality of the consumer experience that is being offered, suggesting in television advertisements that eating at McDonald's can promote individual family bonding and

that could offer consumers a unique and individual experience that would surprise and delight in equal measure. A radio commercial for *42<sup>nd</sup> Street*, for example, featured a fictitious producer who boasted about the seven-strong cast and two songs that were a feature of his new show *22<sup>nd</sup> Street*. The commercial ended with a friend of the producer admitting that David Merrick's *42<sup>nd</sup> Street* was considerably grander. Clearly, Merrick was suggesting to potential audiences that his production offered so much more than other shows and they could not fail to be delighted by its high production values. Another advertisement proposed that *42<sup>nd</sup> Street* was the perfect antidote for people who were 'allergic to *Cats*', implying that *42<sup>nd</sup> Street* offered a unique and original experience for more discriminating consumers who did not wish to patronise anodyne shows that appealed to the masses.<sup>147</sup>

In his approach to advertising and promotion, Merrick packaged his shows as products that could be marketed and sold like any other commodity.<sup>148</sup> Dash (1956: 46) draws particular attention to the commodified nature of Merrick's approach to production, suggesting that 'it is just as important to merchandise a show as it is to promote such tangible commodities as autos, refrigerators, home appliances and

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togetherness. Moreover, offering different toys in Happy Meals each week, for example, encourages children to return to McDonald's restaurants for a different consumer experience.

<sup>147</sup> Even though Merrick was indirectly being dismissive of Mackintosh's own production, Mackintosh was prepared to admit a few months before *Les Misérables* opened on Broadway that he greatly admired the lengths to which Merrick was prepared to go to promote a show's uniqueness and its potential to excite audiences: 'Mr. Merrick is one of the great showmen. He knows exactly how to titillate the public. He does the most outrageous things so that a show of his is not just another show-things for which any less a man than he would either be put in jail or run out of town. And he brings it off with aplomb' (Richards 1986: H1). Arthur Laurents, the librettist who worked with Merrick on *Gypsy* and other shows, similarly commented: 'He loved the theatre, and there was nothing [to which] he wouldn't stoop to sell his shows.' (Philips, 2000: 1) Merrick was eager to consider almost any form of promotional activity or strategy that might help to extend a show's run by attracting more consumers. Producer Robert Whitehead considers that this overtly commercial aspect of Merrick's approach to producing was to have a profound effect both on Mackintosh and other producers that came after him, suggesting that Merrick's tenacity and innate gift for self-promotion contributed 'something in the air today- that sense of how many ways there are to sell tickets' (Philips, 2000:).

<sup>148</sup> It is interesting to note that as early as 1956, Dash (p.46) suggested that Merrick improved the commercial performance of his production by 'merchandising his shows', a phrase that now seems to have become synonymous with Cameron Mackintosh's own style of producing.

wearing apparel.’ Merrick himself was candid in the assessment of his own highly commercialised style of production:

I have always disliked anything that smacks of Madison Avenue and all the hot air that is foisted on the public by the advertising men. But they seem to be able to sell the American people all their trash so why not use publicity to sell fine theatre, which is a business after all. When I became a producer I knew I would have to distinguish myself from all the others and get an edge. I decided the only way to do it was to get more mileage from my plays and beat mixed notices. I’ve done that by using the ad man’s methods to sell my product.’  
(Gary 1959)

Reactions to Merrick’s achievements were not always positive. Some critics considered that he sacrificed his own artistic integrity and that of his productions for the sake of commercial expediency, directing contemporary theatre along a path that was inappropriate for an industry that should not be governed and controlled solely by profit margins and balance sheets. Brustein (1963: 26) epitomises this reaction, adding that Merrick’s commercial achievements as a producer were undermined by the fact that he imported a number of successful shows from overseas,<sup>149</sup> and was therefore reducing the level of financial risk that other producers were taking:

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<sup>149</sup> Merrick himself defended his decision to import many of his productions in the early stages of his career. He argued that he received few high quality proposals from American playwrights, and that his forays into the overseas market-place had resulted in the transfer to the Broadway stage of many of the most influential and ground-breaking productions from Europe and, particularly, from England: ‘When I first started producing, the American playwrights sent their scripts to a dozen other producers before trying me. I reasoned that if I was to become a producer, I would have to turn to Europe’ (Coe 1967). Despite this assertion, Merrick was clearly concerned about the long-term effects that the commercial success of his productions that originated in Europe might have on the creative output of home-grown talent. In 1959 he therefore decided to make amends by diverting a percentage of the income from his commercially successful productions into a non-profit foundation that would be able to support the American theatre industry. The David Merrick Arts Foundation followed the example provided by the Shuberts, by establishing an organisation that could finance productions that would probably incur a greater financial risk for his loyal backers, or which were not likely to attract outside investors at all. Through this system of sponsorship, playwrights who might otherwise have never reached an American audience, such as John Osborne, Terence Rattigan, Tom Stoppard and Jean Anouilh were produced on Broadway. If a production that was wholly or partly funded by the David Merrick Arts Foundation was a commercial success, the profits could be returned to the Foundation for other future productions or could be invested in other ventures such as Brandeis University’s experimental theatre, which Merrick himself set up. The Foundation, however, was not only used by Merrick to fund the production of straight plays; musical theatre productions such as *Gypsy* and *Stop the World- I Want to Get Off* also received investment funding. Merrick thus provided a role model for the institution of the

(Merrick is) the embodiment of pure disinterested commercialism- his motto might be that of Shaw's *Undershaft*: Unashamed. As a producer he has about as much identification with his products as the manufacturer of trusses- even less, since his shows are usually imported from abroad, already packaged, with a built-in success factor.<sup>150</sup>

Although the advent of Cameron Mackintosh coincided with David Merrick's ultimate decline, Merrick's influence on marketing practice and the merchandising of musical theatre was significant and, in Kissell's view, paved the way for the megamusical productions of Cameron Mackintosh:

The realm in which Merrick sought to reassert his power was sadly diminished... The longest running shows were British imports. They had redefined the musical. These shows tended to have almost no spoken dialogue, which meant the elimination of what was often the most difficult element to get right in a musical, the book. The scores tended to be heavy-handed, closer to rock than the original Broadway idiom. The attraction tended to be the subject matter and the visuals. The content was secondary. If Merrick had pioneered the 'merchandising' of musicals, the British, notably Cameron Mackintosh, had brought it to new heights (Kissell 1993: 499).

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Cameron Mackintosh Foundation which similarly aims to provide support for a range of artists, production companies and producers who might otherwise struggle to find appropriate levels of funding.

<sup>150</sup> Brustein's comments made shortly after *Oliver* opened on Broadway, fail to take into account that, apart from *Oliver*, Merrick's musical productions were generally not imported from overseas. It is interesting to note, however, that a similar critical response greeted the unashamedly commodified approach to musical theatre production of Cameron Mackintosh, and the dismissive reaction of many critics, particularly in America, to his unprecedented commercial success seems in many ways to mirror Brustein's criticism of Merrick. Anne Marie Walsh (1998: 34), for example, adopts a fiercely critical stance as she focuses on Mackintosh's modern commercial approach, suggesting that his shows, and the marketing techniques employed to sell them, have had a wholly detrimental effect on the artistic integrity and substance of the genre and have reduced musical theatre to the superficiality of theme-park attractions: 'Cast-proof, critic-proof and saturation marketed, these shows rely as much on visual spectacle as music for their effect. Like other commercial products, they have theme songs and logos: the cat's eyes, the phantom mask, the brush-stroked helicopter... Two things are sure: these imported spectacles have had a continuing influence on theater worldwide and have changed the shape of the musical in the United States. They've divided the Broadway audience into two camps: theme-park visitors and serious theatergoers.'

### 3.5 Robert Stigwood

#### 3.5.1 Marketing to a new demographic

Two shows in the 1970s, *Hair*<sup>151</sup> and *Jesus Christ Superstar*, had a groundbreaking influence on the demographic profile of musical theatre audiences, and helped facilitate the globalization of the genre.<sup>152</sup> The appeal of *Hair* to new, younger audiences<sup>153</sup> through its reappraisal of the musical theatre genre,<sup>154</sup> and its consequent commercial performance, ensured that other productions would attempt to emulate *Hair*'s appeal and develop further the markets that the show had begun to open up. Both Andrew Lloyd-Webber and Tim Rice had been inspired by the radical

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<sup>151</sup> *Hair* (1968) was the first rock musical on Broadway and, as such, was a milestone in the history of musical theatre production. Michael Butler's Broadway production of *Hair* (1968) grew out of Joseph Papp's version of the piece at the Public Theatre (1967); Robert Stigwood was responsible for producing the West End and UK touring versions of the show.

<sup>152</sup> Andrew Lloyd Webber suggests that one of Robert Stigwood's greatest achievements as a musical theatre producer was to exploit the commercial potential of his products on an international scale, acknowledging that Stigwood became a major influence on his and Mackintosh's own style of production: 'One of the greatest things that Stigwood had done was to get productions up and running around the world once the initial show was proven. It was but a couple of years later that Cameron and I were to learn the pluses and pitfalls of international production when we did it ourselves' (Quoted in Morley (1998: 7)).

<sup>153</sup> Produced at a time of considerable social change, when challenges were being mounted against the political, religious and social structures and conventions of the time, *Hair* appealed directly to a younger audience who could readily identify with the show's radical posturing. The informal sampling of audience members conducted by *New York Magazine* (Nash, 1968: 60) at performances of *Hair* on Broadway illustrates a clear departure from the general demographics of Broadway theatregoers: 46% of *Hair*'s audiences were under thirty years of age, while only 13% were over fifty. *The Wall Street Journal* (June 11 1969) similarly reported that around 50% of *Hair*'s audience was aged between eighteen and twenty-five, as compared to 3% for other Broadway productions; moreover, 7% were black. *Hair* attracted a significant number of black theatregoers for the first time, for although the content of the show related directly to white suburban youth, the way in which it addressed civil rights issues and the fact that one third of the cast of *Hair* was black undoubtedly helped to attract black audience members to the theatre.

<sup>154</sup> *Hair* achieved an unprecedented level of commercial success that inevitably resulted in a number of other 'rock' musicals attempting to duplicate the phenomenon. However, the influence of *Hair* on the production process of musical theatre and its significance in the development of the genre also had a wider impact. The departure from the traditional theatrical convention of the integrated book musical, and the evolution of a show through the experimental technique of development through workshops, enabled the fully realised concept musical to become a dominant format of musical theatre in the 1970s and beyond. *Hair* was not the only 'concept' musical of the period. Other 'concept' musicals included Sondheim's *Company* (1970) and *Follies* (1971), and Kander and Ebb's *Cabaret* (1966) and *Chicago* (1975). *Hair*, however, was the first show to suggest that the concept musical had the potential to become a globalized product. *A Chorus Line* (1975) would popularise the concept musical format still further, broadening the audience in the process and paving the way for Cameron Mackintosh's *Cats*, which would exploit the format's commercial potential in an ever-expanding globalized market to a degree that twenty years earlier could not have been contemplated.

departure from traditional musical conventions that *Hair* represented,<sup>155</sup> and *Jesus Christ Superstar*, with its through-composed format and rock-oriented sound, reflects the influence that *Hair* was to exert on their work.<sup>156</sup> However, while *Jesus Christ Superstar* is indebted to *Hair* in terms of style and format, *Superstar* is also a critical milestone in its own right in terms of musical production techniques that included significant advances in product marketing and development.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> The Broadway production of *Hair* espoused a far broader range of political and social causes than Joseph Papp's original version and became more pointedly anti-establishment in its stance and tone. More songs were commissioned, thus reducing the prominence of any narrative elements, and ensuring that the traditional focus on plot and character development that had characterised the format of the traditional book musical would be discarded in favour of bold visual statements. *Hair* became 'a succession of songs and dances with almost no libretto to absorb any of the time' (Gottfried, 1969: 657).

<sup>156</sup> *Hair* may have been labelled as a rock musical that was a genuine attempt to dramatise the hippie counterculture of the 1960's, but the deliberately commercial quality of the music, which was more of a pop sound than a rock score, one that incorporated jazz, blues and even country and western, seems to suggest that a broader audience was being targeted than that which might have been attracted by a genuine rock sound. Rockwell observes that *Hair* occupied a 'tenuous position between the hip and the commercial, between the popular and the sophisticated, between artifice and nature' (Bordman, 1978: 657), implying that the show's producer was deliberately attempting to broaden the appeal of the show and thus increase its commercial potential. Director Tom O'Horgan similarly hints at the eclectic quality of the score: 'Rock is a very broad term. Not everything is hard acid rock. There are rock ballads. There are power ballads. It's almost impossible to make a musical all out of one kind of concept... You just can't make an evening out of one kind of idea. The basic fix of the music in *Hair* is all from a rock standpoint. And there are as many aspects to rock as there are rock composers' (Horn, *The Age of Hair*, p.85). The music of *Hair* represents a significant departure from the traditional Broadway musical, and its score anticipates the eclectic nature of not only *Jesus Christ Superstar* but also Cameron Mackintosh's megamusicals produced in the 1980s and early 1990s. The blend of progressive rock with softer, less aggressive melodies, together with the introduction of amplified electronic guitars, bass and keyboards to compete with traditional acoustic instruments, was to become a feature of musical theatre productions, as producers such as Mackintosh attempted to increase the commercial potential of their shows by deliberately broadening the profile of their target audience, appealing to a younger market that, up until *Hair*, had remained largely unexploited.

<sup>157</sup> Global audiences that had begun to be reached by *Hair* were exploited for *Jesus Christ Superstar* with a level of aggressive marketing and commercial control that would be a hall-mark of Cameron Mackintosh's own production strategy throughout the following decade. There were other aspects of *Hair*, however, that were to have a major influence on the way in which Cameron Mackintosh would produce his own musicals. By early 1970 there were twenty three companies playing in ten different countries, a figure that would rise to as many as thirty five companies by the end of that year. These rapidly proliferating international adaptations were also being given a perceptible regional flavour appropriate to the country in which they were being performed. Bertrand Castelli, executive producer of the various foreign productions that were soon appearing around the world, decided that the original show should be translated into the languages appropriate to its respective audiences, a development that had previously been deemed an unnecessary expense by Broadway producers, but which inevitably had a significant effect on the commercial profitability of the show. However, although the translation of each foreign production of *Hair* may have been given a degree of national flavour, in the way that foreign productions of Cameron Mackintosh's *Les Misérables* would later be given a degree of national identity by the regional variations in the design of the Cosette logo, the set and other technical aspects of the production remained the same: despite the nuances that may have been apparent in the libretto, a performance of *Hair* in France, Germany or Japan would be a duplication of that seen by American audiences in New York, Los Angeles or San Francisco. The development of

By the time *Hair* opened in the West End, the show had already achieved remarkable levels of commercial success on an international scale,<sup>158</sup> and Stigwood was responsible for a product that had gained notoriety in the American and British media and had consequently achieved a high level of brand awareness.<sup>159</sup> His role as the producer of *Hair* in the West End therefore focused on maintaining brand awareness for the production, and marketing to the new consumer demographic that the show attracted both in the West End and when the show was produced as a national touring version.

Paul Nicholas, who starred in Stigwood's West End version of the show, suggests that the commercial success of Stigwood's production was due not only to the show's originality of content and style, but also to the innovative way that Stigwood marketed the show, suggesting that the theatrical experience for an audience was much more of an 'event':

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musical theatre as a globalized consumer product had begun, and the application of McDonaldized principles was becoming an integral part of the production process.

<sup>158</sup> Although the Broadway production of *Hair* was capitalised for just \$150,000, the show grossed \$22,300,000 in its first two years alone. This is attributable to the fact that fourteen national companies, together with a number of international companies, were playing concurrently with the show's run at the Biltmore Theatre, the Broadway production itself running for five years and achieving a run of 1,750 performances. By 1990 *Hair* had grossed over \$80 million from its American productions and maybe even more from its international stagings and, as a hugely-profitable international product, it provided an indication of the path that would be followed by Cameron Mackintosh a little over a decade later.

<sup>159</sup> The number of profanities that were included in the production when it transferred to Broadway were increased considerably, and ensured that a range of controversial topics were touched on throughout the show. There seems to be no doubt that this was a deliberate ploy to increase the levels of controversy surrounding the show, and substantial publicity was generated on both sides of the Atlantic as a result. In his review of the show for *The New York Times* (29 April 1968), Clive Barnes drew attention to some of the many controversial elements that were deliberately included in the show: 'A great many four letter words...are used very freely. At one point...a number of men and women...are seen totally nude...Frequent approving references are made to the expanding benefits of drugs. Homosexuality is not frowned upon- one boy announces that he is in love with Mick Jagger, in terms unusually frank. The American flag...is used in a manner that not everyone would call respectful. Christian ritual also comes in for a bad time, the authors approve enthusiastically of miscegenation, and one enterprising lyric catalogues somewhat arcane sexual practices more familiar to the pages of the *Kama Sutra*.'

[*Hair*] was fresh and different. It was a new form of musical theatre. A rock musical with something to say. It seemed appropriate in 1968. The Year of Revolution... *Hair* opened at the Shaftesbury Theatre in September 1968. People would enter the auditorium and be welcomed by the 'tribe' offering flowers and greetings of 'peace' and 'love'. A strong smell of incense hung in the air. It was a really different experience for theatregoers. They were being invited to participate in not just a show but a 'happening'. (Nicholas, 1999: 51, 55).

Cameron Mackintosh gained valuable experience in the early stages of his career from working with Robert Stigwood on the West End production of *Hair* and, as will be demonstrated in chapter 5, would similarly market shows such as *Cats* and *The Phantom of the Opera* as 'events' that offered audiences a unique consumer experience. However, of much greater significance is the way in which Stigwood attempted to increase product consumption for both the West End and touring versions of *Hair* by aggregating the various geographical markets and targeting consumers for both versions of the show through the same marketing drive. To this end Mackintosh was asked by Stigwood to come up with ideas for promoting *Hair*, and under Stigwood's guidance, Mackintosh developed a partnership scheme with British Rail and with individual travel agents, whereby the show could be promoted as part of a package:

When I was working on *Hair*, one of my jobs was to do all of the promotions for *Hair* which was also on a national tour around the country, and one of the wheezes I came up with was a thing called 'Hair Rail.' I realised we needed people to come in from all of the suburbs of all of these cities to see our show, [so] why didn't I use what was then the British Rail booking network to do a combined package and you could go to your local station and buy the ticket. I thought that the least that would happen is that they would give me free advertising for the show on the railways, which is exactly what happened. But I set up this network and it was all done through one office in each central area. People would ring through and get a ticket to Manchester but could also get a really good seat in the theatre. We did that all over the country and I also tied lots and lots of travel agents into it. It was a sort of first. It is easy with the internet, but in those days you had to do it all by hand (2001 interview).

The scheme was highly effective, as Mackintosh's initiative made use of pre-existing booking networks that allowed Stigwood to promote his production on a national scale without incurring the usual heavy marketing expenditure. It also enabled Stigwood to attract consumers for whom transportation considerations, particularly those travelling longer distances, might have inhibited their consumption. However, the most significant aspect of this new marketing scheme was the way in which Mackintosh developed commercial relationships with transport and tourist-oriented companies to sell a musical theatre product. This policy later became one of the fundamental tools of Mackintosh's marketing strategy that was based on partnerships with global tourist and travel companies, particularly airlines. The global reach of such companies enabled him to target global markets for his megamusicals and thus facilitated the development of these productions into global entities.<sup>160</sup>

### **3.5.2 Globalization and the advent of the globally marketed branded product**

Stigwood was responsible for producing the West End and touring productions of *Hair*, but in 1971 he secured global theatrical rights to *Jesus Christ Superstar* and was thus able to exercise complete control over the exploitation of the show on a global scale.<sup>161</sup> Stigwood's wide experience of 'profitably purveying

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<sup>160</sup> When asked what he felt was the single most significant influence on his global success, Mackintosh has replied on more than one occasion that it was the dramatic rise in popularity of international air travel.

<sup>161</sup> Having bought David Land's New Ventures Theatrical Management Ltd., to whom Rice and Lloyd Webber were contracted, and having changed the name of the company to Superstar Ventures Ltd., Stigwood acquired full performing rights to the show. *Superstar's* publishing rights and recording royalties continued to belong to MCA and its publishing division, Leeds Music.

popular entertainment to the masses' (Walsh: 1999: 72) <sup>162</sup> would prove to be a valuable commercial asset as *Jesus Christ Superstar* was developed into a product that would be received enthusiastically by markets that had so far remained relatively unexploited. <sup>163</sup> *Jesus Christ Superstar* also reflected the political uncertainty of the period in which it was produced, <sup>164</sup> and therefore, like *Hair*, appealed to a young, politically aware audience. The combination of a controversial libretto that challenged traditional beliefs and the rock-oriented score not only generated considerable publicity but also appealed to the sensibilities of a youthful audience. <sup>165</sup>

The development of *Jesus Christ Superstar* into a global brand was characterised by the level of control that Stigwood exerted over his product, which ensured that the Robert Stigwood Group, and no other, would benefit from the considerable financial

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<sup>162</sup> Stigwood's own company, RSO, founded in 1967, was responsible for the management and marketing of a range of high-profile rock bands such as Cream, and Stigwood was therefore fully aware of the money-making possibilities that such attractions represented.

<sup>163</sup> Stigwood developed *Superstar* at a remarkable speed. By October 1971, rights to *Superstar* had been licensed in France, Scandinavia, Germany, Spain, Holland, Australia, South Africa, Israel, Mexico and South America. In early 1972, *Superstar* opened in Copenhagen, Paris, Munster, Stockholm and Sydney. The following year the show opened in Reykjavik and Tokyo, although Stigwood's lack of confidence in the Broadway version of the show ensured that none of the European or other versions bore any resemblance to O'Horgan's original production. Tim Rice (1999: 279) credits Stigwood with achieving 'near-global success' and there is no doubt that Stigwood's achievement would have a significant impact on the future of musical theatre production. Michael Coveney (1999: 55-6) sums up the influence of Stigwood's *Jesus Christ Superstar*, not only on Cameron Mackintosh's productions but also on the development of megamusical as a globally marketed product, by concluding that '*Superstar* laid the foundation for the global marketing of musicals that characterised the 1980s.'

<sup>164</sup> Coveney (1999: 80) felt that the success of *Jesus Christ Superstar* owed much to its tone, which 'seemed to catch something in the politically strife-torn air of Britain in the mid-1970s. This was a volatile, dangerous time in British politics, with a weak Labour government standing helplessly by while the stock market wobbled. The show took its energy from a spirit of football hooliganism, violence, private armies and a growing need for someone to take control.'

<sup>165</sup> Paul Nicholas, who was to take the starring role in the West End version of the show, and who would work with Stigwood as the co-producer of both *Grease* and *Saturday Night Fever*, recognises the daring quality of *Jesus Christ Superstar* and the influence that it would have not only on the musical theatre genre in general, but on the British musical in particular: '*Jesus Christ Superstar* had...a rawness to the music, a youthful daringness about it...It was a dangerous piece of work. A dangerous title...Like *Hair* it was an event. It was a mile-stone and a beginning of something that was going to permeate throughout the West End for three decades to come' (Nicholas: 1999: 77-78).

investment that had been made.<sup>166</sup> Having originally been released as a record album in October 1970, *Superstar* had attracted high levels of publicity on both sides of the Atlantic and a range of unlicensed theatrical productions began to appear in the United States and Canada. Stigwood realised that, having acquired the exclusive rights to the show, all such unauthorised productions would need to be terminated if he was to maintain control over the commercial exploitation of the show and thus protect his investment.<sup>167</sup> Stigwood was not only eliminating any commercial opposition to his own productions but was also ensuring that the show would only be produced in a format and style that he himself had authorised. He therefore went to great lengths to control the creative format of his product and orchestrated a national publicity campaign in the printed media, assuring potential audiences that his was the only official authorised version of the show: ‘Purchasers of *Jesus Christ Superstar* tickets (Beware!). Perhaps you are unaware that there is only one touring company of *Jesus Christ Superstar* that has been authorised...’ Stigwood was uncompromising, realising that the commercial potential of his product was intricately linked to the establishment of his brand in the minds of consumers.<sup>168</sup> However, Stigwood also

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<sup>166</sup> In late 1970, Stigwood had bought 50.2% of New Ventures Theatrical Management Limited for 150,000 shares in RSG, plus £10,000 in cash. Six months later, he bought out David Land for 100,000 RSG shares and £40,000 in cash. He completed his purchase of the company two months later with a final payment of 152,300 shares that were worth about £80,000 at the time. Considering the income that *Superstar* would generate for RSG, Walsh’s comment (1999: 72) that ‘Lloyd Webber and Rice had come cheap’ is particularly apt.

<sup>167</sup> Employing a team of over fifty lawyers, and spending in excess of \$1 million on legal fees, by August 1971 Stigwood had successfully shut down sixteen unauthorised productions in major cities around the United States, and left no doubt about his desire to protect his own copyright. A press release made clear Stigwood’s uncompromising stance: ‘It is patently clear that a small group of people have set out to mislead and deceive the public. We intend, in every case, to pursue vigorously anyone who attempts to infringe on our copyrights’ (Quoted in Walsh 1997: 73). Stigwood ruthlessly retained complete creative control over his product in a manner that would characterise later Cameron Mackintosh productions.

<sup>168</sup> Stigwood’s difficulties were exacerbated by the fact that various unauthorised touring producers were giving the impression to potential audiences that their shows were, in some way, official performances of the original recording, as Ellis Nassour (1973: 96) illustrates: ‘Unauthorised productions started to snowball, and so did the lawsuits. Soon there were over ten groups advertising or giving the impression that they were an official Stigwood touring company- and more lawsuits and petitions for injunctions in the United States District Court in Manhattan than there were touring versions...In Preoria, Illinois, within the span of eleven days three different companies played the city-

realised that 'pirate' productions threatened the value of his brand by offering consumers a second-rate product, as Nassour (1973: 201) suggests:

One reason why Stigwood fought the unauthorised concert presentations of [*Superstar*] was that, in most cases, they put on shoddy performances with bad sound equipment, a rock group with no orchestra, and second-rate singers. It was felt that a bad show of the Jesus Christ *Superstar* compositions would leave a sour taste in audiences' mouths.<sup>169</sup>

*Jesus Christ Superstar* gave a clear indication of the commercial potential that musical theatre offered to producers.<sup>170</sup> Although the Broadway production of *Jesus*

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one billing itself as the authentic production, a second calling itself the authorised production, and a third terming itself the complete independent production.'

<sup>169</sup> Stigwood took great care to ensure the satisfaction of consumer expectations. The pre-Broadway tours showed that most people who bought tickets were not traditional theatregoers but younger rock fans, individuals who had enjoyed the original album and therefore expected the stage show to reproduce a similar sound in the theatre. Up until the time of O'Horgan's Broadway production of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, most Broadway shows were either lightly amplified or not amplified at all, but, in an attempt to reproduce the sound on the album, the sound was amplified through a vast array of loudspeakers in a way that had never before been experienced inside a Broadway theatre. Shortly before the show opened, when Stigwood was not satisfied with the quality of sound in the theatre, he had a new sound system installed at a cost of \$100,000, which added considerably to the \$700,000 capitalisation budget.

<sup>170</sup> The touring concert production of *Superstar* visited nineteen cities, grossing over \$1.3 million in four weeks. Stigwood estimated that it grossed over \$12 million in its first year. The success of this venture led Stigwood first to organise a second touring production, and then a college touring company. Profits were swelled still further by merchandising royalties and radio performance rights, which were worth a further \$3.5 million; added to these were the profits generated by performance rights licences that had been granted to productions in ten other countries. Considering the lengths to which Stigwood was prepared to go to protect his copyright, it is perhaps surprising that he allowed Tom O'Horgan to have total creative control over the Broadway production of *Superstar*. Stigwood clearly believed that O'Horgan's success as the director of *Hair* made him an obvious choice to direct *Superstar*, a show that Stigwood clearly felt would similarly attract a younger audience demographic. Nevertheless, the contract agreed with O'Horgan (quoted in Walsh 1999: 75) seems remarkably generous: 'On August 5, O'Horgan formally accepted Stigwood's offer to direct the show, contingent on the following demands: a twenty-thousand dollar fee to be paid prior to the first performance, a 4% royalty of the gross weekly box-office receipts and 5 percent of the net profits, if any; the right to direct any and all English-language productions presented anywhere in the world by Stigwood, except those already licensed in Australia and South Africa, with an additional ten-thousand-dollar fee for each, plus royalties; and total creative control over all aspects of the production, including casting, sets, lighting and costumes.' Despite the apparent rigidity of O'Horgan's contract, Stigwood was able to exploit the loophole that exempted productions 'already licensed in Australia and South Africa,' so that Jim Sharman was imported from Australia to direct the West End version of *Jesus Christ Superstar* that opened at the Palace Theatre in August 1972. Future big budget musicals would not allow a director to exercise such overwhelming control: the production process would become more collaborative, with the composer and lyricist becoming much more involved in the development of their own work, so that by the time of *Miss Saigon* they would be contracted to approve all creative decisions. The experiences of *Jesus Christ Superstar* taught Andrew Lloyd Webber that creative control of the musical product, once given away, might never be regained. This led him to assume the role of producer for later productions, whereby he could maintain control over all aspects of production, both financial and creative. It was a role that Cameron Mackintosh was later to assert, as

*Christ Superstar* ultimately failed to fulfil the commercial dreams of its producer,<sup>171</sup> the show had a significant effect on the way in which musical theatre would be marketed in the future. Like *Hair*, the show attracted a younger audience demographic, and Tim Rice (1999: 247) considers that a comment made in *Variety* during the concert tour of *Superstar* to the effect that ‘outstanding from a trade point of view was the dominance of family groups in the audience- all ages were seen everywhere in the crowd’ highlights the commercial significance of a show being able to appeal to a broad market. Rice concluded that the broad appeal of *Superstar* was ‘a crucial reason for our work’s commercial clout.’ The show in its various forms did a great deal to make musical theatre more accessible to a more diverse audience,

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the producer's responsibilities and interests continued to become wider ranging. It is interesting to note, however, that it was the West End production of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, rather than the Broadway version, that would forge a path for Lloyd Webber and Mackintosh to follow. In the words of Paul Nicholas (1999: 82), the London production ‘changed the world’s view of theatre... Shows were being created to run, run, run. Not for months as in the past but for years.’

<sup>171</sup> Having capitalised at \$700,000, and having achieved an unprecedented box-office advance of over two million dollars, the Broadway production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* had a relatively disappointing run of about two years (711 performances) at the Mark Hellinger Theatre. There were a number of reasons for this, including the fact that ticket prices ranged between \$5.00 and \$12.00 for weekday seats, and were almost certainly pitched too high for the predominantly youthful audience who wished to see the show. This mistake would not be duplicated when Stigwood reproduced the show in the West End, where the top price seat cost £2.50, and the show went into profit after twenty-two weeks. The response of the New York critics was also lukewarm, with only Douglas Watt in the *Daily News* writing an ‘unqualified rave.’ The major reason for the show’s disappointing run, however, was O’Horgan’s direction, which resulted in a production that was characterised by the excesses of its design and its consequent lack of dramatic impact. Tim Rice (1999: 264) concludes: ‘Too often the spectacle overwhelmed or distracted from the actors or the songs, so the emotional and dramatic power, which the virtually effect-free concert tour had surprisingly delivered, was almost absent.’ Years later, even Lloyd Webber himself would write about the ‘vulgar’ and ‘brash’ nature of O’Horgan’s interpretation of his musical, suggesting that the show’s lack of subtlety had been a major cause of the Broadway production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* performing disappointingly at the box office. He also made clear his frustration at being effectively excluded from the production process, remarking that he had resolved from that moment to retain creative control of his productions by forming his own production company: ‘Never in my opinion was so wrong a production of my work mounted. Even though this brash and vulgar interpretation was quite leniently dealt with by the critics at the time, the public saw through it... I resolved that night that when I got my first opportunity I would start my own production company... I still wonder how my career would have been perceived in those early days if Hal Prince had directed it, rather than my theatrical debut being allowed to be turned into a mountain of kitsch that looked like a monument to a demented pastry chef’ (*Jesus Christ Superstar*, Programme notes, 1996 London production). Stigwood learned from his mistakes: the subsequent London version of *Superstar* at the Palace Theatre, directed Jim Sharman, was far less excessive in its interpretation and took over £8m at the box office, running until 1980 for a total of 3,358 performances.

and the eclectic nature of the show's music, which mixed popular music with more classical elements, helped to broaden its appeal.<sup>172</sup>

*Superstar* also demonstrated the value of pre-opening publicity and reflected that successful marketing did not need to rely totally on traditional forms of expensive print advertising. As has been shown above, David Merrick had already demonstrated that a show could be promoted in a highly effective manner if it generated regular column inches in the print media, and the controversy that arose as a result of the show's subject matter, together with the success of the original recording of show,<sup>173</sup> ensured that the Broadway production of *Superstar* was a pre-sold show, as Nassour (1973: 120) notes:

Very little in the way of advertising was necessary. Anything connected with the production was good newspaper and television copy and the stories on the auditions, the casting, the concert tour, and the rehearsals netted an unprecedented advance sale- all previews were sold out, and there was a three-month wait for tickets.

Stigwood's employment of Cue Consultants, a fast-emerging publicity company, who would promote both his production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* and later shows, is an indication of the importance attached by Stigwood to the promotional marketing, publicity and graphic image of the show. The simple gold relief design of praying angels shaped as a curling laurel wreath, which adorned one of the early record sleeves, would become an iconic logo that branded the product and all later versions

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<sup>172</sup> Like *Hair*, one of the strengths of *Jesus Christ Superstar* was that it blended a range of different musical styles that included hard rock ('Superstar'), gentle ballad ('I don't know how to love him'), soul ('Simon Zealotes'), orchestral ('John 19: 41'), and even ragtime two-step ('King Herod's Song').

<sup>173</sup> The original recording of *Superstar*, excluding tape and sheet music sales, generated \$15million in the US and Canada during its first year of release. It was also a commercial hit across Europe, Scandinavia, Australia and South America. Merrick had already demonstrated the value of releasing a cast album before a show actually opened: his 1963 Broadway production of *Oliver* benefited not only from the early release of the American cast album but also from a hit single ('As Long as He Needs Me').

of the show.<sup>174</sup> This logo featured prominently on all advertising and promotional material for the show and contributed to the development of *Superstar* as a global brand. However, while Stigwood's merchandising efforts included the manufacture of Superstar badges and buttons, posters and programme brochures, Tim Rice (1999: 229) notes that 'merchandising, which these days is often more lucrative than the music or show that inspired it, was not even past the embryo stage in 1970 and no one, other than bootleggers, spotted the enormous potential of our work in this department.'<sup>175</sup> Cameron Mackintosh would be the first musical theatre producer to realise the inherent commercial opportunities that integrated product merchandising presented, and that the sale of items such as t-shirts, mugs and posters featuring a trademarked logo, could not only generate a valuable source of revenue but could also be employed as a cost-effective means of promoting products on a global scale.

### 3.5 Conclusions

This chapter has demonstrated that various producers seemed to have been aware of the value of branding within a marketing strategy for musical theatre, and Ziegfeld's *Follies* are an early example of the way in which the level of product awareness and, therefore commercial performance, can be heightened by the establishment of a brand name in the minds of consumers. It is clear that in more recent years product branding has also become a means of achieving product differentiation in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

It has been shown that, as producers have begun to target broader and more diverse

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<sup>174</sup> The creation of an effective logo to promote a particular show, without the need to include additional wording, would become a key feature of the marketing strategies that were adopted for the development of megamusical productions.

<sup>175</sup> Nassour (1973: 202) gives a number of examples of the many unauthorised products that were available. Tim Rice (1999: 229) notes that unauthorised *Superstar* merchandise quickly began to appear in shops around the world in the early 1970s.

audiences, the genre has begun to exhibit features that Ritzer would denote as being broadly McDonaldized. Elements of homogenization are identifiable in the productions of the early twentieth century, as producers such as Ziegfeld and the Shuberts developed products that were broadly similar in content and that, in order to appeal to a wide audience, had a clearly recognisable style and format that were visually spectacular but aesthetically unsophisticated.<sup>176</sup> Ziegfeld, in particular, not only realised the value of branding his products but was also keenly aware of the drawing power that was associated with his name, and he therefore ensured that his products were always clearly identifiable as ‘Ziegfeld’ shows and that his name was used whenever possible in advertising and promotions.<sup>177</sup> Eyre’s assertion (2000: 344) that with Ziegfeld ‘there were only two stars- the show and the producer’ is highly relevant: such an approach allowed Ziegfeld and other later producers, such as Cameron Mackintosh, to market their productions as branded entities that were not over-reliant on expensive star performers whose appeal was not only inevitably limited to a section of the consumer base, but which also, especially in the late twentieth and early twenty first century, often had a limited shelf-life.

David Merrick also seems to reflect elements of Ritzer’s theory: Merrick considered that an integrated marketing strategy was a critical component of his highly commercialised production process, believing that the quality of his products needed to be predictable along McDonaldized lines, to provide reassurance for potential

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<sup>176</sup> The *Theatre* review of the Shuberts’ *The Show of Wonders* (1916) is particularly apposite in this respect, noting that the Shuberts were become renowned for producing formulaic products that had very little originality or distinguishing features, and suggesting that ‘for the twentieth time the Shuberts have changed the show, or at least the title, at the Winter Garden. You would scarcely realize that anything is new, however.’ (Quoted in Hirsch (1998), p.136)

<sup>177</sup> The Shuberts clearly desired to emulate Ziegfeld’s unrivalled commercial success, and recognised the value of the Ziegfeld brand name in the successful promotion of his shows. Four years after Ziegfeld’s death in 1932 the Shuberts even produced a new show that retained the *Ziegfeld Follies* title, following this with two further editions in 1936 and another in 1943.

audience members that any of his products would satisfy consumer expectations wherever it was produced.

This chapter has proceeded to suggest that, while rock-oriented productions such as *Hair* had a significant effect on the audience profile of musical theatre, and paved the way for mass marketing to a mass audience, Robert Stigwood's production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* epitomised the way in which a producer could achieve standardization by exerting tight control over every aspect of the production process. Conforming to one of the central tenets of Ritzer's McDonaldization theory, Stigwood fiercely protected the value and image of his brand and ensured, in the process, that its commercial potential was maximised on a global scale. In this way he provided a production paradigm that Cameron Mackintosh seemed, at least superficially, to embrace enthusiastically.

The following chapter will examine in more detail the approaches to musical theatre production adopted not only by Cameron Mackintosh but also by Judy Craymer, and will assess the influence that these two producers have had on the genre as a whole.

## CHAPTER 4

### CASE STUDIES

#### 4.1 Cameron Mackintosh

##### 4.1.1 Logos and branding: advertising and merchandising

*Cats* epitomised the development of a stage musical into a commodity that could be exported worldwide and that was not restricted by geographical, cultural or linguistic barriers.<sup>178</sup> With its innovative and highly visual design concept, and with a minimal story that was told not so much through words as through music and dance, *Cats* became the ideal exportable international entertainment.<sup>179</sup> The global success of *Cats* can be attributed, however, not only to its innovative format and content, but also to the ways in which it was marketed. The pre-show hype for the Broadway production of *Cats*, which would become a feature of later shows, was unprecedented and exemplified the commercial rewards of generating consumer interest in a particular product through the development of an innovative marketing strategy.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> The other three CML shows to develop into global products in the 1980s were *Les Misérables* (1985), *The Phantom of the Opera* (1986) and *Miss Saigon* (1989). Morley (1998: 11) concludes that 'Mackintosh has effectively reinvented the form', and suggests that there is an unprecedented global dimension to 'the creative and commercial influence that Mackintosh now wields over the whole world of the stage musical.'

<sup>179</sup> Morley and Leo (1998: 132) suggest that *Cats*, *Les Misérables*, *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Miss Saigon* were able to become established as successful commercial entities around the globe, because global audiences were able to identify with the archetypal elements of their themes and content. Richard Eyre (2000: 341) is more dismissive, suggesting that the British megamusical has been able to be developed as a global generic product because any Britishness that might have been apparent in its themes or language has been subsumed by the universal nature of its 'voice': '(British) musicals have had a global success precisely because their voice can't be identified as British: it's universal, an Esperanto spoken by cats in *Cats*, trains in *Starlight Express*, Argentinians in *Evita*, French people in *Phantom of the Opera*, film-folk in *Sunset Boulevard*.' Tim Rice, interviewed on stage at The Royal National Theatre (24 May 1990), goes even further, insisting that the language and 'voice' of the megamusical genre have become an irrelevance, and suggesting that in a postmodern and McDonaldized world, patterns of consumption are dictated by the application of spectacle rather than a respective product's aesthetic content: '99.9 per cent of people on this ghastly planet want to see huge mega-musicals and couldn't give a stuff what language they're in.'

<sup>180</sup> The largest billboard on Broadway was painted black and adorned with the cat's eyes logo, while the same logo appeared on a blackened Winter Garden Theatre a full four months before the show actually opened; an expensive 'teaser' advertising campaign was even run on television, with the ubiquitous cat's

Unlike earlier shows, *Cats* did not therefore have to rely heavily on favourable reviews,<sup>181</sup> and the production demonstrated that an integrated marketing strategy could radically improve the level of profit generated by a particular show.<sup>182</sup> Since 1981, the original production of *Cats*, unrestricted by geographical, cultural or linguistic barriers, has been replicated on a global scale,<sup>183</sup> being translated into ten languages, and being presented in twenty-six countries and over three hundred cities,

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eyes being supplemented by a teasing voice-over that asked, 'Isn't the curiosity killing you?' Advertisement-carrying planes traversed the New York skyline every weekend throughout the summer, while a broad variety of newspapers and magazines were not only subjected to the continuing teaser campaign but were also filled with news stories related to the production. Even the record price of the tickets became a source of publicity, as New Yorkers had always been led to believe that a product's quality was directly proportional to the price paid for it. It was perhaps not surprising, therefore, that *Cats* opened on Broadway on October 7 1982 with the largest advance booking of any show in Broadway history, over \$6.2million, considerably more than its \$4million budget.

<sup>181</sup> It should be noted that the critical response to the production on Broadway was, in fact, generally positive, so it is not possible to discount the influence of these reviews on the commercial success of the production.

<sup>182</sup> Marketing budgets for subsequent shows increased dramatically, and there was therefore a proportional increase in overall capitalisation costs. Future productions would be compelled to incur increased production costs in order to compete in the market-place, a trend that would inevitably undermine a production's chances of achieving profitability, and would increase the levels of commercial risk involved. Rob Bettinson (see chapter 5), for example, stressed during my interview with him that his new production of *125<sup>th</sup> Street* needed a substantial increase in its capitalisation and running budgets in order to fund a successful marketing drive that would enable his show to compete effectively. It soon became clear that increased marketing funding was not available and the show closed after just four months.

<sup>183</sup> The global replication of *Cats*, whereby a standardized product has been reproduced for a global marketplace, seems to conform to the fundamental principles of McDonaldisation, and RUG freely admits on its official web-site that productions deliberately 'replicate the original show as closely as possible.' Although various changes were necessitated because of the different dimensions of the Winter Garden Theatre, and although various minor improvements were made to the original choreography and set design, the show essentially remained exactly the same. To ensure that the visual effect of the West End production was replicated on Broadway, the Winter Gardens Theatre had to be completely gutted, at a cost of \$2.5million, to accommodate the junk-yard set of the original West End design. Moreover, since Grizabella was required to ascend a flight of stairs into the roof, a key moment of spectacle in the West End production, a large hole was duly cut in the roof, topped by a hut of corrugated steel that would house the mechanism to operate the stairs. Director Trevor Nunn insisted that the Broadway version of *Cats* was not to be simply a clone of the London version: 'Most emphatically, what I'm *not* doing is cloning the London production. I don't think any version should have the burden of being absolute. There are eight acrobats, six more than in the London cast and there are shortenings, tightenings, lengthenings, repeats and cuts all the way through - exactly the kind of thing one does the second time round. Very little in theatre stands still.' (*New York Times*, 17 August 1982). Despite Nunn's comments, however, audiences who attended both the West End and Broadway versions of the show would have felt that they were seeing the same production, with only very minor differences being apparent.

including such diverse locations as Buenos Aires, Seoul, Tokyo, Budapest, Helsinki and Singapore.<sup>184</sup>

Cameron Mackintosh used graphic logos as an essential tool in the global branding of his shows,<sup>185</sup> and the widespread use of a show's logo to establish a production such as *Cats* in the consciousness of consumers became an integral part of Mackintosh's marketing strategy.<sup>186</sup> Logos from each CML show appeared on numerous

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<sup>184</sup> While acknowledging that the adoption of a McDonaldized approach to the global branding of his products has provided Mackintosh with unprecedented levels of commercial success, Eyre (2000: 343) pessimistically concludes that Mackintosh has created a genre that is defined by its synthetic nature and lacks the spontaneity that has previously been an essential characteristic of live theatre: 'Mackintosh recruited a team of resident assistant directors and choreographers to keep the performances up to standard, and created a brand image- the 'Cameron Mackintosh musical'- which offered a guarantee of quality: the show you see in Sydney or Tel Aviv is essentially the same as in Los Angeles or on tour. Only the actors are different, only the actors change the specific gravity of a performance, only the actors remind you that what you are watching is live theatre- even if it is vulnerable to nothing but an accident or a power cut.'

<sup>185</sup> As was shown in the previous chapter, producers such as Robert Stigwood had already demonstrated the value of using logos as a means of identifying particular shows. Variations on the 'entwined angels' motif that Stigwood developed for his original production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* have been used for almost all consequent productions of *Superstar*, including the Really Useful Theatre Company revivals in the West End and on Broadway in the late 1990s. However, such logos, when used in advertising and promotional materials, were usually rather inconsequential and featured only as minor additions to the central image or wording; they were also generally one-dimensional and lacked any real sense of visual impact. The image used in association with *Evita*, for example, was usually in black and white; it was also flat, always appearing in conjunction with the title of the show and, although used at the top of every page of the souvenir brochure for the original West End version of the show, for example, did not have any particular impact. The graphic image itself may have been trademarked, and the lettering for the show's title may have retained the same font style and proportional size wherever it appeared, but it was hardly what might be called striking. Besides, the stark black and white colouring of the original design did not seem to be controlled when it was reproduced for later manifestations of the show, so that the background colour on the front of the Los Angeles show programme, for example, was a light green that greatly reduced the stark quality of the Broadway Playbill printing, and was far removed from the silvery grey background of the original design used for the West End brochure. The conclusion must be either that Stigwood, who ostensibly retained full control of the show as it was reproduced in the US, was happy that such 'modifications' to the logo should occur, or else he did not exert the level of creative control that would be a feature of later Cameron Mackintosh productions.

<sup>186</sup> The simplicity and adaptability of the *Cats* logo enabled it to be used in a wide variety of ways. Russ Eglin, graphic designer at Dewynters, had been required to produce a strong image that was able to span the show's publicity media and was also able to communicate to the show's prospective audience that this was a new type of show rather than just another Broadway style musical. 'Excitement' and 'tension' were to be the key elements, and the logo needed to be both striking and relevant, yet broad enough to reflect closely the show's wide range of character and mood. Eglin commented after the show opened that the design brief necessitated the development of an image that 'had to get away from a lovable kitty idea that simply didn't have the dramatic impact we wanted' (*Design & Art*, 15 October 1982, p.21). In this way, cartoon and caricature representations were rejected, as were a range of other feline designs that suggested too specific a character to represent the show. The graphic design that Dewynters finally submitted for approval was a head-on view of two

merchandising products, and items such as a t-shirts emblazoned with a show's logo helped to enhance levels of product awareness amongst consumers,<sup>187</sup> without necessitating an associated dramatic increase in advertising spending. By purchasing and then displaying the wide range of merchandising products which featured the logos of Mackintosh's various productions, consumers were effectively paying for the privilege of promoting CML shows and, at the same time, helping to establish the shows' brand identity.

*Cats* instigated a new era of musical theatre marketing in which the carefully controlled and licensed logo became the pre-eminent means of branding a show and preparing it for global replication.<sup>188</sup> A recognisable logo has become an essential ingredient in the creation of a successful brand and, in the view of David Thomas, much of the global success of CML productions has been due to the company's

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daunting cats' eyes, the pupils of which housed two performing dancers, a design that seemed to encapsulate all the essential ingredients of the show. A teaser campaign that featured only the cats' eyes logo was launched three months before the show opened, and when posters appeared that included information such as production credits and performance details, the copy was grouped as tightly as possible in order that the overall impact of the logo should not be reduced. Russ Eglin was insistent that identical proportional distances were maintained between the graphic eyes, but the problem that this might have presented when filling awkward shaped locations such as bus backs or some press advertising spaces was solved by the logo's overall adaptability, since the eyes could simply be left in more space rather than being placed too close together or too far apart. Careful control of the show's logo and the ways in which it was used enabled a level of mystique to be generated that, in Marc Thibodeau's view, made a fundamental contribution to the show's commercial success: 'To me the innovation of *Cats*, and I don't know if a show prior to *Cats* ever sold itself on mystique in the way that *Cats* did, was they never released any photos of the show. The front of the theatre never had a photograph, it was the eyes and the blackness and it took a long time before they ever had a television commercial that showed any of the images from the show. So it was the whole philosophy of building this aura and mystique: if you really want to know what it looks like and what it is, you have got to go, and the only place you are going to see that is within the theatre.' (Thibodeau, interview 2000)

<sup>187</sup> Other items that included mugs, beach towels, pens and key-rings soon confirmed that an effective logo, through the strictly controlled licensing of such products, could generate substantial sums that were independent of ticket income. Walton (Interview 2000) was just one of a number of interviewees who considered that Mackintosh had been one of the first musical theatre producer to recognise fully the value of enhancing brand awareness through the sale of licensed merchandise: 'Cameron was big on merchandising, and was one of the first people to really build merchandising brands with logos, you know, cups and t-shirts and hats and everything else which are recognised all the world over and, as a result, the shows are recognisable.'

<sup>188</sup> The logo developed by Robert Stigwood for his production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* had also quickly appeared on a wide range of merchandise items, but the majority of these were unauthorised and unlicensed. In a world where consumers are bombarded by a plethora of visual marketing images, the effectiveness of a logo in creating an instant impression becomes paramount.

carefully controlled brand image.<sup>189</sup> The global success of *Cats*, for example, and its development into a global brand, owed much to the way in which the show's logo facilitated Mackintosh's opening up of various global markets that had not previously been exploited.<sup>190</sup> The logo that was designed for the original version of *Cats* was replicated exactly in every advertisement and on every billboard that was used to promote the show, wherever in the world it was playing.<sup>191</sup> Moreover, as a result of heavy advertising, particularly on Broadway, whereby the cat's eyes logo was established in the consciousness of the consumer, the show could imitate the McDonald's model, promoting and marketing itself through a branded sign that symbolised the predictability of its quality.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Thomas (Interview 2002) indicated that he felt that Mackintosh's approach to the creation and protection of the CML brand was one of his company's major strengths: 'I would consider branding one of our core expertise, looking at the individual brands, the shows themselves, over the years. I consider brands in their own right and the piggy-backing between them and the super-brand of Cameron Mackintosh is something that has driven people crazy around the world.'

<sup>190</sup> Allan Wasser (Interview 2003) emphasised that a strong logo was a vital part of a show's global marketing strategy since it enabled a producer to connect directly with consumers: '[Mackintosh's] shows have very identifiable logos, which actually can brand the show without even having to give the title. The famous image of Cosette *is* *Les Misérables*, whether or not you see the title.' Chris Grady (interview 2002) developed this idea, suggesting that CML logos generate a sense of predictability, along McDonaldized lines, so that consumers gain 'a feeling of familiarity with the piece when [they] recognise the logo, and the proof of that is in the logo of *Cats* and in the logo of *Phantom* and in that of *Miss Saigon*. Clearly there is an image there that comes across very clearly. I think the logo is very important.'

<sup>191</sup> As was discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis, innovative musical theatre producers such as David Merrick and Robert Stigwood had used graphic logos to promote their shows. The original basic 'praying angels' graphic, for example, that was created to publicise the original production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* on Broadway, even if it varied slightly from production to production, attained almost iconic status in the 1970s, particularly after the same design was used to promote the revamped and much more commercially successful version that opened in the West End in 1972. However, the Tom O'Horgan-directed Broadway version of the show, that was characterised by blatant visual vulgarity and excess, bore little relation to the Australian version, directed by Jim Sharman, which seemed much more reverential in the sterility of its space-age setting. Despite the commercial success of this latter version, the show was redesigned yet again for its West End incarnation, and it was this version that not only proved the most successful but also became the basis, even if not the template, for future productions of the show. The 'predictability' that Ritzer insists is one of the four cornerstones of the McDonaldized system of production was not a dominant feature of musical theatre production before 1981, even if some of the elements of a rationalized system were beginning to appear, albeit in an unintegrated form.

<sup>192</sup> Lee suggests (Interview 1) that in a postmodern world where marketing is dominated by the application of such signs and symbols, and where patterns of consumption are progressively influenced by the McDonald's fast-food model, musical theatre producers similarly need to develop universally-recognised symbols: 'I think that the logo is very important [for a show]. A logo can help position in people's minds what the show is all about. When you look back, think of all the logos that come to mind that have become universal symbols. It is usually a very striking piece of artwork that is

CML shows from *Cats* onwards would be marketed as branded products, where the show itself was the 'star' and, while performing stars might still appear in Mackintosh's shows at the beginning of their runs, his marketing strategies would not be over-reliant on the pulling power of such star names.<sup>193</sup> This approach to the production of musical theatre, which reflects the McDonald's model of emphasising the primacy of marketing within the production process, was innovative for British theatre,<sup>194</sup> but it has also had a significant effect on production costs. Mackintosh's *The Witches of Eastwick*, for example, was a more recent CML production to be marketed, along McDonaldized lines, as an 'event' musical, and the cost of this

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provocative, that people can understand and it leaves an impression, you know, and if you think about the many shows that have been successful internationally, or the shows that have lasted a long time, they usually have an image that can connect consumers with what the show is about. [The logos for] *Phantom*, *Cats*- these are logos that help consumers follow those shows and set an image in their mind.' Susan Lee's suggestion that a successful show invariably utilises a logo that provides potential consumers with an instant impression of a particular show's thematic content or style seems particularly pertinent in the case, for example, of *Miss Saigon*, whose logo instantly suggests its Vietnamese setting (through the oriental style of its graphic that is superimposed over a rising sun), a state of war (by means of the black central graphic of the military helicopter dominating the yellow of the sun behind it), and tragic romance (through the mournful Asiatic woman's face that is integrated into the helicopter's slipstream).

<sup>193</sup> *The Phantom of the Opera* is a good example of the success of this approach. Michael Crawford and Sarah Brightman had starred in the two leading roles, first in the West End and then on Broadway, but Cameron Mackintosh ensured that the show itself was marketed as a 'must see' experience that was not overly dependent on the pulling power of its star performers. Promotional and advertising material made full use of the mask logo, but the names of Crawford and Brightman were used only sparingly. The popularity of the production in both cities therefore continued unabated when Crawford and Brightman were replaced by less well-known performers. The RUG marketing strategy developed for the Broadway production of *Sunset Boulevard*, on the other hand, focused much more insistently on the appearance of Glenn Close in the lead role of Norma Desmond, and Close's name and photograph appeared regularly and prominently in press reports and media advertising. Not surprisingly, Close's departure from the show at the end of her contract had a severely detrimental impact on ticket sales which contributed directly to the Broadway production's unexpectedly early closure. In comparison, by marketing a CML show as an 'event experience' in its own right, Cameron Mackintosh productions continue to generate consumer interest once a star had left the show, as Lee notes: 'In everything that Cameron has done with his shows, he has taken a product and managed every detail down to the consumer experience, and that to me is a totally vertically integrated approach. The way he markets his shows, he is very particular on how he markets them: he markets them as events, he doesn't market them as star vehicles, so they become bigger than any one of their individual parts. (Lee interview 2)

<sup>194</sup> Interestingly, Richard Eyre notes (2000: 343-4) that Mackintosh's approach echoes the American production model initiated by Florenz Ziegfeld, whose status as a star impresario was only equalled by the shows that he himself produced: 'Cameron Mackintosh showed a conviction- more or less unique in British theatre when he started- that marketing was an essential tool rather than an optional extra. His spiritual ancestor is Florenz Ziegfeld, whose *Follies* [productions] were synonymous with his name, and whose shows were replicated for tour while still playing on Broadway, where they were cloned on occasion in adjoining theatres. And with Ziegfeld, as with Cameron Mackintosh, there were only two stars- the show and the producer.'

marketing approach, with its broad-based advertising and publicity campaign, swelled the total production budget to over £5million. At the time, *The Witches of Eastwick* became the most expensive show to have been produced in the West End.<sup>195</sup>

Having used a logo to establish a particular show as a branded product, Mackintosh has also been prepared to reinvent a show in order to extend its longevity and maintain its appeal with consumers, without diluting the brand image.<sup>196</sup> The reinvention of CML shows through variations in the use of the logo was clearly demonstrated, for example, in the aftermath of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre in 2001. It soon became clear, particularly in the United States but also in Britain, that audiences were turning away from shows that were unable to offer subject matter that was perceived to be light or uplifting. As a result, a show such as *Mamma Mia!*, which opened on Broadway just one month after the events of 9/11, still managed to attract capacity audiences, while *The Phantom of the Opera*, which had been a long-runner and therefore relied on foreign tourists and those who lived outside the tri-state area, saw a significant drop in takings and, for a time, was attracting audiences that were less than 50% of the theatre's capacity. Responding rapidly to this situation, Mackintosh readjusted the focus of his advertising in order to respond to changing consumer tastes, repositioning his productions in the process.

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<sup>195</sup> Despite its substantial marketing budget, *The Witches of Eastwick* did not achieve commercial success in the West End, closing after 504 performances. There were various reasons for the production's disappointing run, including the miscasting in the central role of Ian McShane, who lacked the necessary level of sexual charisma and whose singing was weak throughout; the show's logo was also changed on a number of occasions and this did not help to establish the production in the consciousness of consumers; moreover, the intimate nature of the story was never really suited to a performance space as large as the Drury Lane Theatre.

<sup>196</sup> Allan Wasser (interview 2003) considers that this has been one of Mackintosh's greatest achievements and one that has had a significant impact on the marketing of musical theatre by other producers: 'One of the major influences that Cameron has had on the marketing of musical theatre has been reinventing the look of a show, reinventing the public's impression of a show on a regular basis. It's a simple aspect to change the way the logos are used but, more importantly, he constantly changes the marketing look of a show to keep up with the times and to keep up with the pace of the theatre-going public.'

The post-9/11 repositioning of *The Phantom of the Opera*, which saw the show's element of romance being clearly emphasized in promotional material, led to the show's mask logo being accompanied by a red rose, which was gently spot-lit to draw even further attention to this symbol of the show's romanticism.<sup>197</sup>

During my discussions with a range of individuals who were responsible for the brand identity of CML shows, it soon became clear that Mackintosh always insisted that the intrinsic value of his branded products had to be protected and that no marketing initiative should be allowed to damage the overall value of either an individual brand or the super-brand that CML represents.<sup>198</sup> David Thomas, for example, suggested that Mackintosh has focused on long-term audience development rather than the short-term commercial advantage that might usually be gained from price discounting and other similar promotional strategies. He explained that Mackintosh would readily approve special offers and packages that included tickets for a show, particularly at the budget end of the market, but that he was naturally unwilling to discount tickets in such a way that consumers would gain the impression that a show was struggling to attract audiences in significant numbers and that he was

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<sup>197</sup> The original logos continued to be used prominently in the promotion of CML shows, but David Thomas (interview 2002) explained to me that their setting or the wording that accompanied them had been subtly changed in order to respond to changing consumer tastes: 'One of the things we have done with *Les Mis* in the main, is to get away from the grim images like that of Javert, the single shot of which is everywhere. To my mind, it is an uplifting show, rather than a depressing show, so in the main we use Cosette with the wording 'She's the One' or 'Revolutionary', which is an adjustment to a change in the public psyche. For a period we weren't selling *Phantom* on the romance. To me that is the strongest card with *Phantom*, so now 'London's Most Haunting Romance' is everywhere. 'London's Most Haunting Romance' is not a complete change but it is a variation on the original world-renowned icon, the *Phantom* mask.'

<sup>198</sup> Susan Lee (interview 3) suggested to me that Mackintosh has reacted to changing patterns of consumption and has managed to promote his shows very effectively through a range of marketing initiatives that have never had a detrimental effect on the consumer perceptions of his brand. In recent years, increasing production costs have necessitated a substantial rise in ticket prices, but these dramatic increases have also led to a proliferation of discounting promotions: 'In the last four or five years, with so much discounting, it's both driven prices up and driven prices down, but very few producers have reacted to that. In fact, I think, Cameron Mackintosh has really been quite brilliant in doing strategic promotions and marketing when he needs to, but also always protecting the value of a full price ticket and the value of the brand.'

simply discounting as a panic measure.<sup>199</sup> Thomas (interview 2002) insisted that generating such an impression among consumers would seriously damage the CML brand and would negate Mackintosh's long-term strategy of audience development; however, offering hotel, restaurant and theatre packages, a marketing device that Mackintosh has used so effectively, disguised the fact that top price seats were being discounted and therefore avoided denting the company's brand image:

Some people will go out and spend £80-100 on a night out, but there is a budget market there as well, and the seats may be very high up but who is going to complain at that! You see a great show, have a two-course meal for £14, and it is not affecting the brand at all, it is a cheap night out. On Last Minute.com you can also book the show plus a meal in 'Bertorellis' for £40, and no one is going to think 'Oh! they are having problems.' Nothing will be done which will damage the brand, it is as simple as that... Hotel packages are vital. Until September 11th nothing had really dented London hotels, because there was 85% corporate occupancy, even in the summer. [Then] September 11th happened, corporate [business] was not around any more and four-star went down to £18.50 to the trade. One of the last promotions we did was £89 for a four-star hotel with full English breakfast and a top price ticket for a show, and two-course lunch at a top restaurant. Now that room would normally be quoted at twice that. It is an attractive offer. It gets people into town who wouldn't ordinarily come because London hotels are normally so expensive. It would be much more desirable to be going out full price and everyone paying the full amount in the short term. The difference between ourselves and a lot of other companies is that we are very focused on audience development in the long term.

Thomas explained that not only were members of the CML marketing team very careful to take consumer perception of the various CML brands extremely seriously in the way that they marketed tickets and put together packages, but they also did their best to ensure that advertising opportunities were carefully vetted, so that there was no chance of the CML brands being damaged by their association with other companies' products or services that might be considered inappropriate. This strict

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<sup>199</sup> Thomas was clearly reflecting Susan Lee's comment to me that 'pricing is a marketing strategy, whereas discounting is a liquidation strategy, but most people don't distinguish the difference' (Lee Interview 3)

level of control, which is an identifying feature of McDonaldized forms of production, is essential if the value of the brand is to be effectively protected.<sup>200</sup>

Mackintosh has managed to create a series of strong individual brands, but he has also been keen to create a superbrand that has enabled his shows to be cross-fertilised by each other. In an age when production costs are spiralling and the market-place is becoming saturated, producers need to obtain as much value as possible from each dollar spent on marketing, so each new show that Mackintosh has produced since *Cats* has benefited from its association with the CML super-brand and the promotional opportunities that this association has provided.<sup>201</sup> Mackintosh was the first musical theatre producer to brand his products in this way, advertising and promoting his shows together,<sup>202</sup> so while CML shows had their own individual logos and became established as global brands, Mackintosh was also keen to brand his

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<sup>200</sup> This not only contributed to the longevity of CML shows but, as Thomas (interview 2002) suggests, also made them less vulnerable to a downturn in the economic climate: 'Someone will phone up and say, 'We have got a half page free, put whatever you like in it, an offer or just an awareness piece, whatever.' I would ask: 'What is on the other half of page? Unless I know what is there, it is no good.' We have to have control. That perception of quality which is enshrined in the brand is our main marketing tool. That is our reputation, especially when times get hard or economically more difficult; the value in the brand then is that people could take a chance and see X, Y or Z or a new show, but it is a big expense and, if it is an important occasion, you are going to go for something you know is going to be great. The fact that that quality is pretty universally recognised in the show brand and the company brand is critical.'

<sup>201</sup> When I interviewed him in 2002, Chris Grady confirmed how the Mackintosh brand name had become progressively more important as a means of promoting CML-produced shows: 'There has been a shift in the last ten years. If you look back at the publicity material or the way that the promotions were all done in the early days of *Miss Saigon* and *Les Misérables* and *Cats*, there was less of a Cameron Mackintosh presence than there is now; and if you look at the bill-boarding and things like that, the brand, using Cameron as a sales point, has become a more recent phenomenon. He is realising the need to step a bit more into the limelight than maybe he did in the early days. If you look at some of the posters, bill-boards and things like that of some of the earlier years, Cameron's name is always there, absolutely. I mean, he has always insisted that his name was there, and if you read back in the stories of his early first productions and things like that, he required his name to be on the first show that he ever did, but it was smaller. Bit by bit that name, from a marketing point of view, has been increased and used more, which does show a shift in the kind of way that branding is being done.'

<sup>202</sup> It is clear that other companies such as Disney Theatricals have followed Mackintosh's example, even if Carol Chiavetta insists that 'combination' advertising was simply a cost-effective marketing technique originated by Disney.

shows collectively.<sup>203</sup> This synergistic approach is exemplified by the ‘combination’ advertisements that Mackintosh has used to promote his productions. Every new show has its own identity that is symbolised by its own individual logo, but it is also advertised on the back of earlier successful shows, with captions that link the shows together and that suggest that the new show will be equally entertaining and equally successful. As Walton points out (Interview 2000), Mackintosh’s synergistic approach also makes commercial sense, since one advertising space can be used to promote more than one show at the same time, a technique that not only reduces the attendant costs of marketing the various shows, but also enables larger spaces to be bought which, in turn, creates greater impact:

To promote Cameron’s shows we ‘combo’ all the advertising. This brands the three shows together and they can take out a bigger ad together, instead of taking separate ones. We advertise in airline magazines and, instead of having a sixth of a page, we can take a full page together and make an ad that looks cohesive for the shows. They all have recognisable icons- the waif, the mask and the helicopter, so we can put all three of those images on a page and people know what they are. We can then put a title like ‘Legendary Musical Theatre at its Best’ and make it a little more like it is all one piece. It just seems bigger- a full page as opposed to a sixth of a page seems that much bigger. In reality, each is only taking a third of a page so they are not taking much more space than there would have been otherwise.

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<sup>203</sup> David Thomas asserted that this was a central feature of CML’s global marketing strategy: ‘At Tottenham Court Road Station or Victoria Station there will be advertisements for the three shows. If you go to Leicester Square you will see the big exterior display on Cranbourne Street with the three shows, so people identify the three together. And if you asked who was behind it, most people would know us as well. If you go into any building in Japan and ask them which are the Mackintosh shows, I think they will be able to tell you.’ Scott Walton (interview 2000) similarly considers that Mackintosh became a global brand in his own right and suggests that other producers have attempted to follow his lead: ‘Mackintosh has a brand name, like his shows have a brand name. I think every show on Broadway looks towards those shows as the model. This is what they would like to become- they would like to have a logo that is recognisable the world over.’

#### 4.1.2 The creation of TDI and the development of tourist marketing affiliations as a means of facilitating global distribution

An opinion shared by all those that I interviewed was that a major reason for Cameron Mackintosh's global success was his ability to develop and enhance ticket distribution through various marketing affiliations. To maximise ticket sales, for example, Mackintosh founded his own wholesale ticketing company, Theatre Direct International, as a means of developing group sales and, more importantly, establishing direct links with travel operators and tourist agencies.<sup>204</sup> Mackintosh founded TDI as a live theatre marketing and sales organisation that quickly established itself as an influential player in the Broadway theatre group sales market, serving thousands of domestic and international travel professionals. However, it soon became clear that the provision of travel packages for individual consumers and theatre patrons from the NYC area provided further marketing potential. Bruce Amick (interview 2001), Senior Vice President of Marketing for Broadway.com, explained how TDI had responded to this opportunity:

Our company is focused on selling and marketing to the travel industry, tourism sales primarily- we work with tour operators and travel agents. Most of our focus has been based on selling directly to the travel trade which includes tour operators and travel agents, selling primarily wholesale tickets in blocks of twenty or more; but we have also facilitated their individual package sales as well, with methods for them to include tickets within their own reservation systems, in the same way they sell hotels and vacation packages that include car rentals and things like that, what they call 'options'. We made it possible for them to add theatre as an option and, by so doing, enabled travellers from foreign countries to pre-book their theatre through the tour operators and travel agents in their native countries. That accounted, on the individual side, for about about \$3-\$4 million from ticket sales per year that was really wholly incremental. These tour operators weren't selling theatre as part of their packages prior to this because they didn't have a way to include it

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<sup>204</sup> The commercial success of TDI can be gauged by its remarkable growth: by 2001 annual sales had mushroomed to around \$22.5 million, with further commercial expansion being anticipated following the company's merger with Broadway.com.

within their booking systems, so they were telling their passengers and their customers that wanted theatre to book it when they got there, as there was nothing they could do for them in advance. When we started making it available for them, they very readily accepted it and added it to their tariff of options, and so they included it in packages. We just thought it was the most effective way to reach tourists, the 32 million people that come to New York every year.

Initially, TDI was a mechanism to increase ticket sales for Mackintosh's own shows, although it soon became evident that the company had the opportunity to generate incremental income from selling shows of other producers, both in New York and in the West End, so that by 2001, as a marketing agency, TDI represented eleven producers and sixteen Broadway shows to the travel industry around the world. In addition, TDI's education division, Broadway Classroom, marketed group tickets to schools across the United States. The acquisition of TDI by Hollywood.com Inc. not only ensured that the ticketing operations of Broadway.com, one of Hollywood.com's subsidiaries, would be effectively complemented, but also provided a clear indication of the increasing commercial opportunities offered by a global theatre product. As explained in a Broadway.com press release (27 September 2000), 'The combined companies would provide live theatre ticketing and related content for over 100 shows and over 200 venues in multiple markets to a consumer base consisting of over 40,000 travel agencies, tour operators, corporations and educational institutions.' Hollywood.com was thus not only able to achieve economies of scale in its theatre ticketing operations, but was also able to expand dramatically its consumer base, both in the United States and on an increasingly global scale, as Mitchell Rubenstein, Chairman and CEO, explained (*ibid*):

Theatre Direct International has built a solid online business platform with an attractive economic model. The acquisition of TDI expands our customer base of ticket buyers to include a powerful client list of travel agencies and tour

operators from around the world. By combining the critical assets of TDI and Broadway.com, including our comprehensive content, technical infrastructure and customer relation capabilities, we are enhancing the company's position as a provider of live theater ticketing.

The reciprocal benefit to Cameron Mackintosh Ltd was equally clear, and illustrates both Mackintosh's desire to continue to expand the marketing of his products on a global scale and also his readiness to make full use of increased marketing opportunities provided by other larger, specialist, marketing companies.<sup>205</sup> The agreement that was reached in August 2001 between Broadway.com and Travelocity.com extended still further the global reach of musical theatre in general, and Cameron Mackintosh in particular. With revenues in 2002 amounting to \$308million and travel bookings in excess of £3.5 billion, Travelocity.com. is the world's largest online travel service, and the agreement with Broadway.com, whereby the latter would become the primary theatre ticketing service to the millions of travelling consumers serviced by Travelocity.com., provides a clear indication of the perceived global potential of the musical theatre genre. As a result of the deal, Travelocity would offer consumers travelling to New York, Las Vegas, London and Toronto the opportunity to purchase tickets through Broadway.com which, as a company, would be promoted throughout the Travelocity web-site. However, while the agreement expanded the exposure of Broadway.com to millions of travellers seeking to take in a show while visiting these four key entertainment destinations, Mitchell Rubenstein (Broadway.com press release, 23 August 2001) was quick to

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<sup>205</sup> Martin McCallum, Vice Chairman of CML, made the company's position very clear at the time of TDI's merger with Broadway.com., suggesting that Hollywood.com would facilitate sustainable economic expansion for CML and a broader reach in terms of marketing potential: 'We have been building our internet presence since 1994, always with a focus on forming the best partnership opportunities in order to build a well-integrated site with wide distribution and a sustainable business model. We feel Hollywood.com Inc. is an excellent match for us. It will provide productions with a far greater reach and enable producers to achieve greater value from larger marketing and advertising opportunities.' (Broadway.com press release, 27 September 2000)

point out that the agreement between the two companies would also inevitably facilitate a rapid expansion of theatre ticketing capabilities to additional major cities around the globe.

Although the internet brings the global market within reach of producers, the rapid expansion of ticketing necessitates the implementation of an improved distribution network of specialist e-companies, and it is for this reason, as Amick explained (interview 2001), that company mergers and the application of cooperative working practices between companies seems to be the inevitable way forward:

Just like any other distribution, there are different types of avenues that you need to explore, usually simultaneously...I think the most effective e-commerce route is to work with consolidators. If you are working with a ticketing consolidator such as ourselves, or Broadway.com or Ticketmaster or Telecharge, you are getting hooked to a site where people are coming to buy tickets. You take that route to several different paradigms such as travel paradigms and you find ways to hook your site to a travel consolidating site like Travelocity or Expedia; or you look at hooking up with a portal which is on an informational basis such as Deals for Students or Deals for Seniors, or things of that nature; a lot of the most effective kinds of marketing that you can do on the internet has to do with distributing your content, and your access to tickets, through as many different channels as you possibly can.

The early 21st century has seen dramatic and rapid developments in the globalized marketing of musical theatre, and the founding of TDI by Cameron Mackintosh greatly enhanced the targeted marketing of tourists and groups.<sup>206</sup> Bruce Amick suggested that, prior to the founding of TDI, the commercial opportunities of marketing to the tourist industry had not been fully explored and the business potential of musical theatre had been viewed in parochial rather than global terms:

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<sup>206</sup> Bruce Amick was unequivocal when I interviewed him in 2001, asserting that 'Cameron has been extraordinarily influential [in the marketing of theatre tickets, especially group sales] here in New York through Theatre Direct; he really opened up the whole travel and tourism marketing for New York that, previous to TDI's existence, just was not being done. Without any question at all, Cameron has opened up the global market!'

There were two major group agents at the time the TDI was founded. One was called Group Sales Box Office, and that was the de facto group sales company, and they were doing very nicely just having their number put in the paper, doing a mailing and selling blocks of 20 or more seats. There was no need for them to change how they were operating, or change their focus because, quite frankly, they had all the business that they needed in order to be profitable. There was no insistence on anybody else's part to move forward. Broadway [producers] were looking at the tourist business and scratching their heads saying, 'All these people are coming to town, but how do we get them to buy a ticket?' Nobody was really sitting down for an in-depth study. Cameron's office and Martin McCallum's office, and through associations they had with ticketing agents in London like Applause, came up with some ideas that they would like to try for New York, and TDI was essentially founded to put those ideas into place, and when we started offering individual tickets to tour operators, it opened the floodgates. The tourism business started to respond with an enthusiasm that nobody really predicted.

These developments clearly demonstrate the degree to which theatre, particularly musical theatre, is increasingly viewed by marketers as a commodity that can be sold in an expanding globalized market. More and more business is generated through the medium of travel companies that sell neatly packaged products to consumers, with musical theatre becoming merely one part of an overall package trip, visit or holiday.<sup>207</sup> The travel industry itself may initially have been slow to embrace such changes, and there may have been a degree of resistance that, Amick suggests, resulted from travel companies having originally been unwilling to move from their own proprietary booking systems. However, TDI had already begun to attend international travel shows such as the World Travel Market in London, ITB in Berlin, which in 2000 attracted nearly 9000 exhibitors from 189 countries along with 60,000

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<sup>207</sup> As will be demonstrated later in this chapter, since musicals have begun to be treated by travel companies as tourist attractions that may be visited like any other traditional landmark, it is perhaps not surprising that in 2003 Cameron Mackintosh began specifically to market his own long-running West End productions of *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Les Misérables* in his own printed advertising and in the media as 'Landmark Productions'. Moreover, it seems an almost inevitable development that Mackintosh should also strike up agreements with companies organising tickets for visits to historic landmarks such as The Tower of London, whereby his shows would be promoted to those companies' own consumers and other visitors to a range of historic British landmarks.

trade visitors, and POW WOW, which brings together US sellers and foreign buyers of travel-related services pertaining to travel to the US. Bruce Amick (interview, 2001) told me that TDI's presence at such major travel shows resulted in a 'fair amount of volume' to the TDI web-site, although the 'great majority of people using the internet were more consumers than the travel trade.' However, the impetus generated by a small number of major travel conglomerates in the mid to late 1990s ensured that affiliate agreements were the way forward for the travel industry and for the companies, such as TDI, that serviced them and, although the marketing of theatre on the conglomerate's web-site would be in a brandless format, companies like TDI would benefit from their close association with a major global brand such as American Express and from the dramatic increase in commercial opportunities that such affiliations offered:

Conglomerate travel agencies like American Express Travel are setting up their own internet booking mechanisms and they are now going out to other suppliers and saying, 'Can you provide us with an affiliate booking mechanism, so that we can book your product through our website for our users?' We started that strategy about two years ago when we would do what were called 'affiliate arrangements' and 'affiliate agreements' with different websites, whereby we provide the booking engine, we provide the data on the theatre tickets on performances and all of that associated information in a brandless format, where our logo is not on the page- our contact information is not there at all, and it opens up within a frame of the affiliate's website; so American Express can have their website and, when it comes to booking tickets, it opens up a generic page on our site that makes it look like it is within American Express's web-site. (Amick interview 2001)

I asked Amick to summarise what he perceived to be the benefit of this arrangement to an affiliate organisation such as TDI, and what he felt were the commercial implications for the future enhanced integration of theatre marketing within the framework of the travel and tourism business. He told me that while such marketing integration in the late 1990s and early part of the 21st century was very much in its

infancy, the increased emphasis on branding, and the continuing trend towards the establishment of a globalized market place, would result in affiliated marketing assuming an ever-greater level of importance.

### **4.1.3 McDonaldization and the marketing of the musical**

#### **4.1.3.1 The development of targeted marketing**

From my interviews with marketing specialists and analysts, it became clear that Cameron Mackintosh has had a significant influence on the modernisation of musical theatre marketing and that he had developed an integrated marketing strategy that seemed to embrace the basic principles of McDonaldization. In the 1980s, however, Mackintosh moved away from using only traditional, parochial avenues for advertising his products, and began to explore other possibilities which provided a more globalized reach and which could therefore facilitate the development of a global product. In the first instance this involved developing relationships with a wide range of travel companies, airlines and travel agents, whose own publicity material offered opportunities for advertising CML products to a much broader consumer base. This, in turn, has more recently led Mackintosh to work with organisations who are able to provide more precise data about potential consumer groups and who are therefore able to offer cost-effective opportunities to target specific niche markets. Allan Wasser (interview 2003), explained how producers of musicals, following the Mackintosh lead, had moved away from simply advertising in the manner that had been traditional before the advent of *Cats*:

If you go back about twenty years, most Broadway shows would rely on getting the word out in two areas: one is through the show's press agent, to get as many column items and news pieces and even stunt sort of things as possible, and the other was just paid advertising which tended to be very

restricted, say in just *The New York Times* and maybe on television, which is not a very efficient way of advertising. Marketing of the shows now, which I think primarily does still consist of paid advertising, has become much more broad-based. We advertise now in airline magazines, in general interest magazines, we advertise in many suburban newspapers, papers across the country, rather than just restricting ourselves to *The New York Times*.

It is clear, however, from Wasser's comments that this development was not simply a case of producers placing advertisements in a larger number of print publications and using a wider range of opportunities for marketing individual products. Instead, the potential for marketing to a global audience through publications that had a wider geographical consumer base was being suggested and Cameron Mackintosh began to develop relationships with other companies to promote his own products on a global scale.<sup>208</sup>

From the late 1990s onwards, the shift from mass marketing to targeted marketing strategies became progressively more pronounced.<sup>209</sup> The rapid expansion of the internet, coupled with the continuing development of satellite technology and distribution, has not only provided marketers with a wide range of new opportunities for reaching consumers but has also seen the increased segmentation of markets as

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<sup>208</sup> When in 2000 I interviewed Martin McCallum, Managing Director of CML, he told me how the company had initially used this approach in the marketing of CML products to potential consumer groups in the English-speaking territories: 'We targeted these groups really by working with people who knew the local community and seeing where the gaps were. Working with travel specialists, we have developed a relationship in Australia with the [Australian] airline and we are very careful to work with the airlines and with travel groups throughout the UK. We have obviously worked very closely with these...In America we have worked with organisations such as American Express who directly target people, as well as the insurance companies, because of this huge body of data that they have on individuals and their interests.'

<sup>209</sup> The change of focus from mass marketing to targeted marketing reflects the decline of the American management mystique identified by Locke and others (for example, Wood, Taylor, Smith and Lyon). Even McDonald's has been forced to respond to increased competition from other fast-food outlets, producing a range of new products to try to satisfy changing consumer demands, and marketing them to different market segments. Writing about the hospitality industry, Crawford-Welch (1994: 169) suggests that the mass market has already been superseded by mass customization: '[The] emphasis on new product development and introduction...was, in essence, a response by corporations to the plurality of the marketplace and the diverse price/value needs of multiple market segments. In today's hospitality industry there is no such thing as a mass market. Mass markets are a vestige of the past.'

entertainment production is becoming more targeted and aimed at specific demographic groups. So while a McDonaldized system may increase the production of homogenized products, there has been a noticeable shift in recent years in the way that such products are marketed, and advertising has been adjusted to appeal to different demographic groups. Changing environmental and political attitudes have also had a significant effect on marketing strategies.<sup>210</sup> Therefore, although a producer may have a product that has mass appeal, and Ritzer argues that in a McDonaldized world such products are likely to dominate, a mass consumer base now requires a range of targeted marketing initiatives to be developed if that broad market is to be reached effectively. This diversification results in increased marketing spend and the need not only for more careful focusing of marketing strategy but also the application of more innovative approaches, if commercial success is to be achieved.<sup>211</sup>

I was left in no doubt from my conversations with musical theatre marketers that Cameron Mackintosh has continued to achieve a preeminent level of commercial success with his products because he has an instinctive awareness of the changing patterns of his markets. David Thomas (interview 2002) emphasised that the success

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<sup>210</sup> McDonald's itself has been keen to highlight in its promotional and advertising material the introduction of new nutritious products, in order to offset increasing concerns about obesity and heart disease.

<sup>211</sup> Susan Lee (interview 2003) suggested that non-corporate musical theatre producers, with limited marketing budgets, need to be particularly astute in this area although many producers have not yet responded to this changing commercial reality: 'We can't afford to advertise mass any more. So we have to be more focused. You can be a family show, but instead of a producer saying, 'Well this is a family show,' in the strategic planning meetings for your show you need to define 'family' more carefully. Most products are defined between this age and that age... You may be a show for a family audience, but particularly relevant to a parent of a pre-school to a third grader. You're still marketing to a family audience, but you're picking where you are going to advertise against the demographics who are most likely to come to the show... We need to find innovative new ways to help market these shows in non-traditional ways, because kids aren't reading the newspapers. If we are looking at spending most of our advertising dollars in the same two or three print publications and the next audience is not reading it, it is pointless. We have to look at what we do against what the results are. We don't measure enough.'

of musical theatre marketing in general has become dependent on identifying individual market segments and ensuring that the timing of advertising placements coincides with consumers' lifestyle patterns:

Marketing spend is all about how you spend money, where you spend it, and most importantly when you spend it. There will be times where you will only hit the domestic market, and there will be times when you only hit the inbound market; trying to sell a show in the summer to the domestic market when they are on holiday and coming back from holiday or about to go on holiday, is a non-starter. So you hit *Time Out* as most tourists will have a copy.

Mackintosh has not only been successful commercially because he has targeted his marketing effectively, but also because he has developed a detailed knowledge and understanding of his various markets through regular audience surveys.<sup>212</sup> So, for example, when I interviewed Marc Thibodeau in December 2000, he was able to give me precise details and breakdowns about the audiences that attended CML productions, how these audiences had changed and developed over a period of time, and what trends could be identified for the purpose of initiating new targeted marketing campaigns.<sup>213</sup> It therefore seems clear that, while Mackintosh continues to market his productions on a global scale, technological advances, coupled with

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<sup>212</sup> I could not find any evidence of any other producer commissioning audience surveys before Cameron Mackintosh, although these have now become common in musical theatre production. Judy Craymer went one stage further for her production of *Mamma Mia!*, employing focus groups to assess audience reactions both to the production itself and to its marketing strategy.

<sup>213</sup> Thibodeau was also able to provide analysis of the effectiveness of particular marketing initiatives, and explained that all the surveys that he had conducted continued to reflect the importance of product branding as a critical element of CML strategy: 'In our most recent survey, for *Les Mis* 80% [of audience members] were tourists, for *Miss Saigon* 77%, and *Phantom* 78%. Of the tourist 80% [for *Les Misérables*], 72% were from the US and 8% were foreign, for *Miss Saigon* 56% were from the rest of the US and 21% from out of the country, and for *Phantom* 68% were from the rest of the US and 10% were internationals. The breakdown we do by sex, by age, by income, and we ask, 'How many shows have you seen in the past year?' One of the most fascinating statistics for Cameron's shows is, 'Have you seen this show before somewhere else?' It is staggering. For *Les Mis*, [when we asked], 'Have you seen a production of *Les Mis* before, 37% of the audience responded, 'Yes', and in many cases it's more than once... It is not the same with other shows. That's why these shows have run so long. There is also a safety factor: a lot of people would rather go see *Les Mis* or *Phantom* again than risk their \$85 on a new show that might be unsatisfying.'

increased competition and market fragmentation, have had a significant influence on CML marketing strategy, which has developed from a mass into a more targeted approach.<sup>214</sup>

#### 4.1.3.2 Visual spectacle and predictability

This thesis has suggested that Cameron Mackintosh's products have been able to develop as global brands, partly because they seem to have followed some of Ritzer's principles of McDonaldized production, and the CML/RUG production of *Cats* seems to have been the catalyst for the increasing McDonaldization of musical theatre productions.<sup>215</sup> Mackintosh himself has ensured that any version of any one of his shows should, as far as possible, replicate in every detail the visual and aural quality of the original production.<sup>216</sup> In the past, producers had scaled down their productions when they went on the road, and audiences who attended performances outside Broadway or the West End would experience a

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<sup>214</sup> Ritzer has modified his original theory, and now, following the line of Pine and others (for example, Taylor Smith and Lyon), accepts that 'mass customization' has become a feature of postmodern production in a globalized economy: 'There is considerable evidence that we have entered a post-industrial era that disdains the kinds of standardized, 'one-size-fits-all' products at the heart of McDonaldization. Instead, what we see is much more customization... [which] in this context is more akin to niche marketing.' Ritzer (2000b: 197-8) argues that this development does not 'represent significant threats to McDonaldization...[and] 'does not reflect a trend towards de-McDonaldization' Rather, recent technological advances that have made the production of customised products possible have also enabled them to be marketed in a much more targeted manner. Ritzer (Ibid) concludes that 'we are [therefore] talking...as is usually the case, about degrees of McDonaldization.'

<sup>215</sup> The John Napier-designed set for *Cats*, which consisted of a larger than life junk-yard with the audience on three sides, was designed to move, along with the front rows of the auditorium, contributing to the overall spectacle that the show generated. It was this sense of spectacle that provided Cameron Mackintosh with one of the major marketing angles for the production, and which led to the intriguing line that accompanied advertisements for the show - 'Latecomers not admitted while the auditorium is in motion.' However, in comparison to other shows, the elements of spectacle that were apparent in *Cats* were relatively unsophisticated. Broadway extravaganzas at the turn of the century were much more spectacular in terms of their staging, while later CML productions such as *The Phantom of the Opera* are considerably more ambitious than *Cats* in their use of hydraulics and radio-controlled stage machinery to achieve spectacular effects.

<sup>216</sup> Mackintosh's McDonaldized approach has been highly influential, as Thibodeau (interview 2000) makes clear: 'Cameron was the first one who insisted that the touring company of his show be every bit as spectacular as what was playing on Broadway. That had not been the case prior to *Les Mis* and *Phantom* going on the road. Road tours used to be substantially pared down versions of their Broadway counterparts. He changed all that.'

production that was likely to be inferior to the more spectacular original, particularly in terms of its visual impact; to reduce costs, cast numbers might have been reduced, large-scale scenic effects might have been scaled down or removed altogether, and lighting rigs might have been simplified to facilitate a more rapid get-in. With shows such as *The Phantom of the Opera*, however, where spectacular visual elements made such an essential contribution to the overall theatrical effect of the piece, such a reduction in the level of spectacle would have seriously undermined the productions' impact on consumers.

Even twenty years after his blockbuster musicals were first produced, when the shows had become established as global phenomena, Mackintosh continued to insist that the highest production and performance standards were maintained and that the shows looked as fresh as they did when they first appeared. This was brought home to me in 2002, when I went to see the touring version of *Miss Saigon* at the Palace Theatre in Manchester in 2002. I was informed at the time by Sound Operator, John Asher, and again in June 2004 during a conversation with Chris Grady, that a new statue of Ho Chi Min, the Vietnamese communist leader, which was one of the spectacular centrepieces on stage, had been built for the touring show; however, while being constructed to the same specifications of colour and shape as the statue that had appeared in the original West End production, the new statue built for the Manchester performances had been considerably smaller in height and therefore did not have the same visual impact as the eighteen foot original. When Mackintosh came to see rehearsals of *Miss Saigon* in Manchester, not long before the show opened, I was told that he was perfectly satisfied with preparations for the production until he saw the new statue. At this point he flew into a rage and demanded that another completely

new statue which conformed to the dimensions of the original was built in time for the first night, despite the considerable cost involved. Not only was he insisting that audience members should as far as possible have the same experience as those who witnessed the original production, but even at this point in the life of the show he was prepared to go to any lengths to protect the brand image that he had so carefully established.

Mackintosh has become equally renowned for turning up unannounced at performances of his productions around the world, to check that performance and production standards are not being allowed to slip, and he regularly recasts his shows in order that performers do not become stale and lose the freshness of their performance. Minor technical changes may also be made when it is felt that these might add something to a show, although the appearance of the overall design will ultimately remain largely unaltered. I was told that various minor changes and additions had been made to the *Miss Saigon* lighting rig in Manchester, for example, and all these adjustments had to be cleared by Mackintosh himself, although Chris Grady (interview 2002) suggested that audience members would be unlikely to be able to detect such changes:

Ultimately a member of the audience will probably think that they are seeing more or less the same show [as the original production]; it is the same set, so at the moment, for example, we have *Les Misérables* in Mexico which uses a set that we brought in from an Australian touring set, and the technical creative team came in from Australia.

Mackintosh's process of production therefore conforms to Ritzer's theory of McDonaldization on two levels, first in his emphasis on the importance of the 'predictability' of his products, and second in his insistence on the provision of a

consumer experience. Susan Lee (interview 3 2003) had told me that producers in a modern experience economy needed to deliver immediate satisfaction along McDonaldized lines if their products were to gain lasting acceptance by consumers; visual spectacle was an essential ingredient of this, she suggested, and musical theatre had to adapt to this cultural climate if it was to flourish:

*The Lion King* is a spectacular example of the kind of show that defines what Broadway is all about: big, lavish spectacle, beautiful. People see it, and it delivers on all of their expectations... We are still in an experience economy and people are experience junkies now, and I think it's now an immediate gratification economy, it's not just the experience. You have to deliver a great experience, and you have to deliver it in real time, fast, when people want it. We live in an easily zapped economy so that if you don't capture somebody's imagination instantaneously, they will zap you away, they will delete you. You only have an instant to catch somebody's imagination. And at very best, you are not going to keep it for very long, which fundamentally is the climate in which the theatre, which is antithetical to all of that, has to exist.<sup>217</sup>

The words 'big, lavish spectacle', used by Lee to describe *The Lion King*, could just as easily be applied to Mackintosh's own blockbuster productions, and the visual impact of these shows is an essential ingredient that is carefully replicated in all different versions of the shows in order to provide consumers with the high level of 'predictability' demanded by the McDonaldized system of production.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Lee conceded, however, that productions did not always need to be 'big lavish spectacles' in order to succeed. The Broadway success of shows like *Avenue Q* and *The Drowsy Chaperone* demonstrate that there is still a market for original material that relies more on the quality its writing than spectacular effects.

<sup>218</sup> Although David Thomas (interview 2002) agreed with this assessment of CML productions, he told me that he preferred to use the word 'reliability' rather than 'predictability', owing to the latter word's pejorative associations. He went on to suggest that CML followed the McDonald's model of marketing products as consumer 'experiences', not just by focusing on visual spectacle, but also by ensuring that audience members gained the impression from the moment they arrived at the theatre that a special event was to be experienced: 'If you go to *Phantom* tonight, there will be a very dapper young man in tails, greeting people as they come in. If you go to *Les Mis*, there is a very nice lady in a red coat doing the same thing there. For many years we did not have anyone like that at *Phantom* and I said, 'That is what makes the experience: as soon as they arrive there they are in a different world and they know they are going out for a special occasion.'

#### 4.1.3.3 Universal appeal and the development of a globalized product

The success of the McDonaldized system of production owes much to the fact that the product of such a system is not only able to be replicated on a global scale but also has a universal level of appeal so that consumption is not restricted by varying cultural demographics. The latter part of the twentieth century may have seen the mass marketing approach of the 1980s becoming more focused, as marketers sought to target their marketing spend more effectively, and consumer segmentation, whereby marketing strategies are developed to target different consumer groups, may have become the norm rather than the exception, but the broad appeal of McDonaldized products has enabled them to continue to expand into a global marketplace. In a McDonaldized world where consumers prefer to choose products that have a predictable level of quality, producers whose products have followed a McDonaldized process of production, and which therefore have broad cultural appeal, will benefit not only from mass consumption but also mass reconsumption, so that the potential for market exploitation becomes unlimited. It is this universal level of appeal that characterised Cameron Mackintosh productions in the 1980s and 1990s in particular and that for a time set him apart from other producers.<sup>219</sup> Martin McCallum (interview 2001), Managing Director of CML, explained that Mackintosh's product

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<sup>219</sup> Susan Lee (interview 2000) suggests that Mackintosh was the first producer to achieve global success through his adoption of a McDonaldized approach to production: '*Phantom* first and then *Les Mis* have returned to some [global] markets six or seven times. I think that where Cameron was so brilliant is that he so understood his shows are about universal themes. They are relevant to anyone regardless of their social or economic background. He has used images for the artwork that are so universal. If you look at a lot of the other titles, the audiences today just don't have any way of being educated. *The Lion King* has done it very much the same way. There are things in common, it is a universal story regardless of what country the story comes from, and the themes are relevant to people wherever they come from. Even if you don't understand the language of what they are saying, you can follow the story. I think it is much harder to follow *Kiss Me, Kate* and *Music Man* if you don't speak the language and you don't know what is going on.'

‘crossed every kind of cultural and language barrier’, suggesting that it was so successful by virtue of the fact that ‘it speaks to people and not to cultures, it has crossed all of those boundaries.’ This viewpoint was developed by Allan Wasser (interview 2003), General Manager of a range of Broadway shows, including all the CML productions, who asserted that Mackintosh was the catalyst for the globalization of musical theatre production and the development of the genre from its more parochial American roots into a truly international commodity. Having been involved in the management of Broadway musicals throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Wasser was in an ideal position to be able to assess the influence of Cameron Mackintosh on both the process of production and on the product itself. He clearly believed very strongly that Mackintosh had had a significant effect on audience demographics, and implied that this development was exerting a powerful influence on the type of show that was being considered by other producers for potential production:

The demographic has become much much broader. Broadway musicals were generally a very American sort of form for many years, and traditional American musicals, like those of Rogers and Hammerstein, and the more recent shows of the seventies and eighties tended to be produced primarily in the English-speaking world, but not very much beyond that. Cameron’s shows, in particular *Les Misérables*, *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Cats* and, indeed, *Miss Saigon* as well, have gone well beyond that, both in terms of having been produced outside those territories as well as the appeal that the shows have in New York, for example, to visitors from overseas. It’s a very important influence: the idea of producing shows which are very broadly based in terms of their popular appeal. These shows have very broad appeal and also very broad return appeal, so that we have a lot of people come back to see our shows again and again, because the standard of production is so high. I think one of the key things that has changed is that contemporary musical theatre has grown in the last fifteen to twenty years to the point where it appeals to a much broader audience than was the case when I first got into the business, and I think Cameron has been very much a part of that by virtue of the shows he’s produced which have been truly international... One [other] thing I think which is true is that many Broadway shows are becoming much more family oriented to a much broader age range.

Products with broader appeal are inevitably able to be marketed to a broader range of consumers, which might even include those for whom English is not the native language. Susan Lee (interview 3, 2003) explained that, since the original production of *Cats*, marketing budgets had increased significantly and overall production costs had increased proportionately as a result; shows therefore needed to run longer if they were to have any chance of recouping their capitalisation costs and, since the supply of consumers who lived within travelling distance of centres of production such as Broadway or the West End would become exhausted within a relatively short period of time, it was necessary to target and attract audiences from further afield, including those who lived overseas:

There is a life cycle of a show and when *Phantom* first started it was all the people that lived in New York that wanted to see it, and so, as shows run longer and longer and longer, it becomes more and more important to attract that international tourist audience. Depending on where you are in the life cycle of the show might dictate where you spend your marketing dollars.

Alan Wasser (interview 2003) told me that in the case of *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Les Misérables*, before the terrorist attacks of 9/11, nearly seventy percent of audiences for the Broadway versions of the shows were tourists,<sup>220</sup> and that it was essential not only to appeal directly to this consumer group but also to market the shows in such a way that tourists continued to choose these two CML productions, often in preference to other shows. Mackintosh may have insisted that global productions of his shows were performed in the native language of the country in which they appeared, but he also enthusiastically embraced a range of initiatives that were specifically targeted at non-English speaking visitors to Broadway and the West

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<sup>220</sup> I was able to confirm Wasser's figures from the statistical audience surveys that had been undertaken by Marc Thibodeau for CML over a period of years.

End. So while a CML production could be enjoyed both for its music and as a visual spectacle, the introduction of an initiative such as ShowTrans, whereby foreign language commentaries can be provided 'to enable non-English speakers to understand the content and sensibility of a Broadway show in their own language, without interrupting or detracting from the action on stage' (ShowTrans company web-site), has clear benefits for producers who follow a McDonaldized system of production. Susan Lee (interview 1, 2000), who developed ShowTrans with sound designer Richard Fitzgerald, told me that the system was considered by Cameron Mackintosh to be a valuable tool in the provision of a more satisfying consumer experience for many of the foreign tourists who attended his productions; he agreed that the system provided a marketing opportunity to attract the 'ever-growing international visiting and ethnic populations in the United States and abroad'<sup>221</sup> that ShowTrans specifically aims to attract and whose 'unique cultural needs'<sup>222</sup> the company aims to address:

I just made a simple assumption that the demographics of this country are changing and the theatre does not reach out to a multi-cultural audience, whether it be African, American, Hispanic or Asian. And so I said, 'Part of it is language and part of it is culture.' So I came up with a project called Show Trans, which provides multi-lingual commentary for non-English speaking people. So you could go to *The Phantom of the Opera* and not speak a word of English and be able to follow what it is. I know with Show Trans that people are so appreciative of knowing what the story is because they feel like they are missing something. We did it for *Phantom*, *Les Misérables* and *Miss Saigon*. Even though you won't know what those stories were, Cameron understood that, as a tool, it would help people feel better about spending eighty dollars a ticket if they understood what the story was about.

Mackintosh has also been acutely aware of the importance of focusing on the entire consumer experience, for foreign tourists, not only during the performance of a show,

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<sup>221</sup> ShowTrans company website

<sup>222</sup> Ibid

but also before the show even begins. A show such as *The Phantom of the Opera* attracts a global audience and needs to address the wide-ranging needs of a broad consumer base:

If you went to Her Majesty's box office and you were Japanese, you would have it explained to you in Japanese that you couldn't see from a particular seat because there was a pillar in front of it. Now they can explain in Korean and Malayan. The Japanese and Asian market is very, very important to shows like *Phantom*' (Thomas, interview 2002).<sup>223</sup>

The importance of the tourist market is clear from the way in which CML ensures that the company's products maintain a high profile in publications that are tourist-specific, as well as at established tourist attractions and at other locations where tourists congregate. Marc Thibodeau (interview 2000) told me that Cameron Mackintosh was keen to ensure that his shows had a high level of product awareness amongst visitors to New York: 'We do things like airline magazines, airline in-flight video, displays at airports, the tourist publications in New York like *Where?* Magazine and *City Guide*. We have a constant presence at places like that. We also have promotional deals with The Statue of Liberty, The Empire State Building, places where we know tourists go.' A similar approach has been adopted in London, although here, as David Thomas (interview 2002) explained, the CML marketing

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<sup>223</sup> Chris Grady (interview 2002) explained that ensuring that all consumers gained a totally satisfying all-round consumer experience was considered by Cameron Mackintosh to be of the utmost importance, and that the continuing success of CML as a global brand owed much to this McDonaldized model of production: 'The total product experience is critical for consumers. We definitely take a hell of a lot of time checking that the theatre is going to be the right theatre for the event, that the marketing is putting the right messages across, and that the foyer is welcoming for the theatre, wherever it might be in the world. I have spent quite a bit of time trying to deal with the parking in Mexico City, because the experience would be ruined if that went wrong; the theatre happens to be built in a multi-story car park, so that becomes a very integral part of the experience. So, yes, the experience of going to a theatre event of any sort is as much about the augmented product as it is about the core product, and so anything one can do to make it easier for people to decide to shell out the money necessary to get baby sitters, or have meals or anything else like that the better; so that when they actually end up sitting in the theatre and the house lights go down, they are relaxed and ready for an extraordinary experience, and then go away happy and spread the word to their friends.'

team had gone even further, by offering packages to tourists that include entry to a historic sight or bus or river tour, together with a ticket to one of the current CML productions:

The other way it works is that we tie in with the other attractions, so you can get a ticket for The London Eye plus *Phantom*. If you go on one of the Big Red Bus tours then you can get the value of your bus tickets back against a ticket for one of the shows. In return, every time that bus goes past the Palace Theatre they say, '*Les Misérables* matinee, tomorrow at 2.30pm' and they have actually got their own box office in their headquarters in Victoria, which only advertises Cameron Mackintosh shows. Over the last two years we have had to work a lot closer with the historic Royal Palaces- Kensington Palace, the Tower of London, Hampton Court- and other attractions like riverboats, because that way we save money on marketing as well... At the historic palaces you can get tickets to the palaces plus admission to *Phantom*, *Les Misérables* or *My Fair Lady*; it is the same with Tussauds, the same with The [London] Eye or HMS Belfast.

Although Mackintosh has promoted his products as parts of various packages, his marketing team has also promoted his shows as tourist attractions in their own right, marketing them as 'Landmark Productions' and suggesting in the process that not only should they appear on any tourist's list of attractions to visit, but also that the shows have achieved a classic status and significance that mark them out from other musical theatre products:

I have tried to establish shows as landmark attractions within the London tourism market. About seven years ago I first tried to get it off the ground by basically saying, 'If you come to London, these are the things you need to see: you need to see the Houses of Parliament, you need to see *Phantom*, you need to see *Les Mis*. To me they are landmarks geographically, they are also landmarks within someone's life when you are looking at anniversaries (Thomas interview 2002).

Another significant advantage of successfully establishing branded products as tourist 'landmarks' is the implication that such products have stood the test of time and will be available to potential consumers for an indefinite period of time in the future.

However, since ‘the majority of the business, maybe 40% with a show like *Phantom*, would probably be through the trade, through agencies that service the travel trade globally,’<sup>224</sup> the durability of the CML brand in an industry where the majority of musical theatre products have a relatively short shelf life, is of particular relevance to travel companies who are looking to provide their own consumers with appropriate tourist packages, the majority of which are booked months in advance and for which print advertising is finalised even earlier.<sup>225</sup>

#### 4.1.3.4 Franchising, licensing and the rise of corporatisation

Dicke (1992: 2-3) defines franchising as a system in which ‘one large firm... grants or sells the right to distribute its products or use its trade names and processes to a number of smaller firm. Franchise holders...must conform to detailed standards of operation designed and enforced by the parent company.’ Although Ray Kroc only initiated his system of franchising McDonald’s restaurants in 1955,<sup>226</sup> his ruthless imposition and enforcement of a uniform system of production, thereby delivering a uniformity of product, ensured that his system rather than anyone else’s became the preeminent model of rationalization and standardization that forms the basis of Ritzer’s McDonaldization theory. In Ritzer’s view (Ritzer, 2000: 121), ‘control over work-related processes and finished products’ is a defining feature of the McDonaldized system of production that is primarily achieved through the control of ‘employees and customers’.

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<sup>224</sup> Thomas interview 2002

<sup>225</sup> Thomas (interview 2002) explained to me that, for this reason, CML still had a major trading advantage: ‘Five years ago the [Big Red] Bus Company received daily phone calls [from other producers] saying, ‘Will you promote our shows?’ They were rejected as it was a deal that we set up. Now it might well be that they will include other shows, but who is going to invest in print for a year with a show that might not last... This is one of the things with our shows: people in the German market might be doing their brochures eighteen months out; the contracts are being done for the major Dutch operators and they would have been last week to take them through to October next year.’

<sup>226</sup> Other food franchise operations had begun much earlier than this. Howard Johnson, for example, began franchising ice cream outlets in 1935.

By retaining complete control over his products and all aspects of their production, Cameron Mackintosh has ensured that the quality of his brand has been able to be protected.<sup>227</sup> Susan Lee (Lee 2, 2000) suggested to me that part of the reason for Mackintosh's McDonaldized level of control has been the vertical integration of his production process, which has resulted in him having a controlling interest over each stage of production, from a product's inception to its global replication.<sup>228</sup> The protection of a brand image, through the strict control of every aspect of the production process, is of the utmost importance to producers who wish to develop a corporate mentality and to achieve commercial success on a global scale for, without control of the ways in which a product is developed and marketed, a producer will be unable to assert control over the quality of the product itself. Martin McCallum (2001 interview) explained how Cameron Mackintosh had introduced a model of musical theatre production that ensured that the producer himself retained creative control to a degree that had previously seldom been achieved:

It is unusual that producers control the overall rights [to shows] but, because Cameron created these works, either on his own or in collaboration with somebody else, he was effectively on the ground floor of the authorship of the pieces and therefore he had a vested interest in seeing these stories told in as

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<sup>227</sup> This thesis has demonstrated that earlier producers had struggled to retain control over merchandising and licensing rights. Unauthorised productions of D'Oyly Carte's early Gilbert and Sullivan productions, for example, often appeared before the authorised version was produced in the United States. Furthermore, Robert Stigwood, whose *Jesus Christ Superstar* had become a major international success, struggled to retain control over merchandising and licensing opportunities. Mackintosh, on the other hand, ensured that his products would be easier to control by, for example, establishing his shows' logos as globally registered trademarks that could be legally protected.

<sup>228</sup> Susan Lee (Interview 3, 2003) considers that CML is 'the most vertically integrated business that exists in the theatre industry, and [Mackintosh] has understood the sequential distribution of his product.' She also remarked that the CML model for an integrated production process for musical theatre was now being adopted by other corporate producers who realised that they were being presented with an opportunity to develop for the stage a range of products that had already been successful in other media such as film: 'You now see a lot of movie companies that are coming to Broadway, because they are seeing that they can, in essence, exploit some of their archives in innovative new ways, and I think, if you look at most of the producers behind the shows that indeed grow up into productions that play around the world, these are fully integrated businesses that are in the business of managing every aspect of their production.'

wide a variety of places as possible and to the highest possible standards. Historically, when you look specifically at the musical theatre, when a show has been an enormous success either in the UK, or more likely in New York, those shows might have had one move, possibly to London, which is the usual trip, and on occasion to Australia, although that was much more rare. Beyond that, the show would just get licensed as a book, music and lyrics, and you might get an assistant who was then engaged by that company to do a version of the show, but never before has there been such concentration on making sure that the same creative team stayed together and went and worked with a local creative team in that territory and showed them the way with the show, whilst allowing those people to have to some degree their own creative voice so that they were fulfilled, whilst always maintaining the integrity of the show.

While Mackintosh conformed to the McDonaldized principle of retaining control over both the product and the production process through which it was created, he was also keen to follow the McDonaldized example of investing his products with some of the cultural qualities of the countries and regions where his shows were replicated.<sup>229</sup> CML products were therefore endowed with an indigenous quality that would make them more appealing to local consumers and would facilitate the more rapid acceptance of a non-indigenous product that might otherwise generate a degree of resistance to consumption.<sup>230</sup> This strategy not only included casting local acting talent and hiring local production personnel, but also presenting the shows' logos in

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<sup>229</sup> Since the 1980s when Cameron Mackintosh began to adopt a more fully rationalized approach to production and marketing, the commercial efficacy of the McDonaldized model of integrated marketing, for which a branded image is the dominant feature, has also become apparent in the productions of other musical theatre producers. Following the Mackintosh's example, producers of musical theatre are providing branded products for a global market, and while these products may be marketed in such a way to give the impression that they have acquired an indigenous quality that makes them more relevant or more attractive to different consumer groups or have been superficially adjusted to suit the tastes and expectations of local markets, rigidly controlled corporate branding has become a pre-requisite feature of global product marketing. Klein (2002b) concludes: '[Brand identity] is enforced with military precision throughout a company's operations. The brand identity may be tailored to accommodate local language and cultural preferences (like McDonald's serving pasta in Italy), but its core features- aesthetic, message, logo- remain unchanged. This consistency is what brand managers call 'the promise' of a brand: it's a pledge that wherever you go in the world, your experience at Wal-Mart, Holiday Inn or a Disney theme park will be comfortable and familiar. At its core, branding is about rigorously controlled one-way messages, sent out in their glossiest form, then sealed off from those who would turn corporate monologue into social dialogue.'

<sup>230</sup> Martin McCallum (2001 interview) explained that this McDonaldized approach had characterised CML marketing campaigns wherever in the world CML shows were produced: 'We have been very keen that, wherever we have done the show, even if it is an English speaking country, it has the stamp and pride and talent of that culture, that nationality, whatever it is.'

ways that provided them with a local cultural flavour. In Amsterdam, for example, the Cosette logo for *Les Misérables* was depicted holding a small bunch of tulips, in Cape Town she was set astride a leaping springbok, in Madrid she was holding a lace fan and wore traditional Spanish dress, and in Honolulu she was shown wearing a Polynesian grass skirt and leis. On all these occasions, however, despite additions being made to the logo in order to generate a degree of local cultural resonance, the graphic depiction of Cosette's face, that was the essence of the show's logo, was never altered, since Mackintosh, following McDonaldized principles, did not wish to suggest to consumers that the version of the show that they would see would be anything other than a replication of the original.<sup>231</sup>

Mackintosh has retained overall control over all aspects of his products, not only when shows are replicated versions of the original,<sup>232</sup> but also when other producers wish to use the book, lyrics and music of a particular show to create their own version

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<sup>231</sup> In *McDonald's: Global Logo and Trademark Standards Reference Guide*, the McDonald's Corporation emphasises (pp.3-5) that their trademarked logos are a vital means of achieving global protection of the brand: 'As McDonald's presence continues to expand throughout the world, it is essential to use our logos properly to maintain a consistency in our visual messages to our core equities. In doing this, we will support and strengthen our brand identity around the globe.' The publication goes on to state that trademarks are readily identifiable and, as such, are a guarantee of quality for global consumers: 'A trademark is a word, symbol or phrase adopted by McDonald's to identify our products and services and distinguish them from those of our competitors. A trademark is a guarantee of consistency and quality. It assures our customers that all products bearing our trademarks are of the same high quality that customers have come to expect from McDonald's.'

<sup>232</sup> Chris Grady, who is responsible for licensing all such productions worldwide, explained the difference between a 'reproduction' and a 'local' production (2002 interview). A reproduction would follow closely the production process of the original version, even if small changes and adjustments might be made to the libretto, for example, to improve the overall consumer experience: 'A 'reproduction' is where we fly in crack troops who have been involved in the original production, so we work to fly in a set, or build one that is a reproduction, we fly in a local designer who has worked in the original production to do any changes that are needed; we bring in a director, a choreographer, whatever might be needed, a musical supervisor, all of whom then work on the casting and direction of the show so that it is as close to the original as is possible, taking into account that it will be in a different language, it will be with singers who are fifteen years later in terms of their development from when it was done originally. It is a new production, but it is a new production based on the original, replicated but developed.'

of the show. Grady told me that Mackintosh would oversee all such replicated productions, wherever in the world they were produced, and would be in a position to have the final say in any creative decisions that were made. In this way he was able to protect the image of his brand through strict control of each of his products, during the production process and beyond, and could ensure that no decisions were made that would adversely affect the value of his brand or superbrand. Mackintosh was also keen, however, to exploit his products by offering them to other producers for 'local' production, although it was very clear from my interview with Grady that Mackintosh was also able to exert tight control over the ways in which 'local' licensed productions were developed. 'Local' producers were required to come up with a treatment that was totally different to the original version of the show and that had to be acceptable to Mackintosh or Grady before any such production was allowed to go ahead. The contract drawn up by Mackintosh also stipulated that a local producer was obliged to make it clear to consumers that his production was a show based on the original script but was not a replication of the original CML production, in order that there was no chance that the Mackintosh brand could be damaged in any way:

On a local production, in Italy and Estonia with *Miss Saigon* is an example, when a director wants to do the show or a producer wants to do the show, they come to us and say, 'We would like to do *Miss Saigon*.' The next question is, 'What is your vision for it?' At that point they need to have a vision which isn't infringing any copyright of earlier designs or directing, so they need to come up with something that is different. That is not to say that they can't use the helicopter in a particular way, but it needs to be clearly a new design and a new concept. (Grady 2002 interview)

Other CML licensing opportunities included the development of a script for performance in schools, and a special 'schools edition' of *Les Misérables* became available for performance from 2002 and, although 'it is not policed in quite the same

way’<sup>233</sup> (Grady interview, 2002), it is clear from the official web-site that there are considerable limitations regarding how the piece may be staged.<sup>234</sup>

#### 4.1.4 Conclusions

Cameron Mackintosh has had a significant influence on the production process of musical theatre in general, and its marketing in particular. Many of my interviewees suggested that Mackintosh had helped to accelerate the global commodification of the genre and that he had enthusiastically embraced modern business practices to a degree that had arguably not previously been attempted. It seems that Mackintosh has adopted McDonaldized principles of production, that his products have therefore been able to be replicated effectively on a global scale and that the broad appeal of his products has enabled him to open up global markets that had not previously been exploited. *Cats* and *Les Misérables* and, later, *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Miss Saigon* were the first musicals that developed into global products and that helped to generate increased opportunities for products developed by other producers in the years that followed.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Grady argued that my own suggestion, that Mackintosh had adopted an aggressive McDonaldized approach to the protection of his brand, was perhaps indelicately phrased, but he agreed that, whatever the nature of a local production, the value of the various brands would be protected vehemently and at almost any cost, concluding, ‘We are concerned if we spot that someone is doing a production of any work of ours without a licence, because it is illegal and it is watering down the value of the brand.’

<sup>234</sup> The web site of Josef Weinberger, the company that organises performance licences for *Les Misérables (Schools edition)*, gives an indication of the restrictions that CML has put in place. These include the stipulations that ‘all of the actors and singers must be under the age of 19,’ the show ‘must be performed with male and female actors/singers in the correct roles,’ and performances can also only take place where a school ‘would normally perform its in-house productions.’

<sup>235</sup> Martin McCallum (2001 interview) explained that Mackintosh had initiated the creation and development of new musical theatre industries around the world and that it was his pioneering approach that had made it possible for other companies to benefit from the enhanced commercial opportunities that presented themselves: ‘People have followed and taken advantage of the infrastructures that we have either sparked or created in some of those places. Obviously, when you have gone into a place and had a huge success with a show that in some countries may have run for a number of years and toured and played and continued to play- *Les Misérables* has played in Japan alone for almost 13 years- that has encouraged those countries to look at other opportunities. They are

It was also clear from my interviews that while clearly being influenced by earlier producers of musical theatre, Mackintosh had followed McDonaldized principles of production to an extent that had not previously been attempted and, by demonstrating that it was possible to develop a musical theatre product on a global scale, had encouraged a substantial increase in corporate involvement in musical theatre.<sup>236</sup>

Dramatic increases in capitalisation costs, caused to a large extent by substantially increased marketing expenditure, have resulted in companies viewing musical theatre productions simply as an opportunity to exploit further the existing products over which they already have integrated control. Corporations such as Disney, which have substantial financial resources to produce and market their products through corporate synergy, have followed the Mackintosh model and have developed musicals as global products that become identified by consumers as 'landmark' productions with long-term potential.<sup>237</sup>

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now looking for other companies and other works where they can continue that idea because it has created a whole level of work for their artists and their creative teams.'

<sup>236</sup> While various aspects of CML marketing practice reflect Ritzer's McDonaldization theory, it should be noted that certain aspects of his system of management conform more to Locke's depiction (1998: 216) of the new global environment, where 'the speed and agility afforded by electronic networking permits the high value-added enterprise to dispense with large overhead costs like office-buildings, plant equipment and payroll,' and there has been a 'shift from the high-volume mass-production corporation to the high value-added globalized firm.'

<sup>237</sup> Various interviewees, while praising Mackintosh for his bold, visionary approach to the marketing of his products, also lamented the fact he had initiated the McDonaldization of the genre. Susan Lee (interview 3, 2003), for example, rather gloomily concluded that Cameron Mackintosh's legacy would be the corporatisation of the genre through the unrelenting application of the basic principles of McDonaldization: 'Nowadays you have many, many very large corporate interests, whether they be movie companies, or entertainment companies, people who have made great successes in other industries, coming to the Broadway industry. So you now have a much more sophisticated base of producers who understand how the rest of the world is marketed. And they are no longer afraid to do a lot of innovative marketing promotions, because that's what they've done either in their film, or their television or their business careers. These companies are in it for the long haul and, as a result, they make long-term decisions as they are managing their day-to-day operations. So I think that what we are going to see in the future is the corporatisation of the theatre.' Alan Wasser (2003 interview) was also rather downbeat, suggesting that the dramatically increasing costs of production, an inevitable result of corporatisation, had hastened homogenization; as a result, non-corporate producers were finding market entry impossible to finance: 'Broadway is more corporate or appears more corporate to the extent that there is more at stake, and the dollars involved require a much greater level of sophistication. I think the real issue is the fact that it costs as much as it does to produce a show. Naturally it eliminates some people who might be working in this field or in this arena. I know many

Mackintosh's use of logos as a primary marketing tool and as a means of creating a strong brand image for his products also conforms to a McDonaldized pattern. In a crowded market place where product identity has become critical to the commercial success of a show, and where the visual impact of an effective logo can heighten levels of brand awareness amongst consumers, Mackintosh's development of globally recognised logos has had a significant effect on musical theatre marketing in the establishment of products as event experiences.<sup>238</sup> Mackintosh's emphasis on visual spectacle, however, had also affected the nature of the product itself, and many of those whom I interviewed suggested that Mackintosh had unwittingly brought about the 'spectacularisation' and general 'dumbing down' of the genre.<sup>239</sup>

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would-be producers who don't have trust funds or access to corporate funding or access to other major funding, may not be working in this industry.'

<sup>238</sup> Lee (interview 1, 2000) believes that this ensured that language and other cultural barriers were broken down, so that 'if you did not understand the language you would go to see *Phantom* because it was an event and, if you understand the language, you see *Phantom* because you have heard of it, because it is an event and because you can now learn the story.'

<sup>239</sup> Shows such as *The Lion King*, for example, owed much to the Cameron Mackintosh model, yet for all its sumptuous Julie Taymor designs, it is 'not a great show...not a great book, but it is a spectacular theatrical event...it is people getting their money's worth' (Lee, interview 2, 2000). The impression that I was repeatedly given by many of my interviewees was that musical theatre was becoming less of an art form that espoused aesthetic quality and more of a money-making machine, where the words 'producer' and 'investor' seem to have become synonymous, where 'the risks in producing new material are so high that people are looking for whatever insurance they can come up with' (Lee 3 interview, 2003) and where consumers are being offered products that appear increasingly unoriginal, superficial and homogenized.

## 4.2 Judy Craymer: *Mamma Mia!*

### 4.2.1 McDonaldization and the emergence of a new format

As has been demonstrated above, shows such as *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Evita* had established their credentials as best-selling pop albums before they became shows and had confirmed that the stage musical and the hit parade were by no means mutually exclusive.<sup>240</sup> By the 1990s, pop's back catalogue was being used to put together such shows as *Elvis-The Musical*, *Beatlemania* and *Lennon*. Such productions owed more to the revue format than the traditional book musical, but *Buddy*, which offered a package of Buddy Holly hits that were loosely strung together as the story of the performer's life, suggested that a more traditional format could also achieve considerable commercial success. With a basic storyline that could be easily followed through the songs, a show such as *Buddy* could be understood and enjoyed by a global audience and, in this way, a path was opened up for *Mamma Mia!* to follow.<sup>241</sup>

The effect of *Mamma Mia!* on the musical genre has been significant and, since the show opened in the West End in April 1999, there has been an increasing number of shows based on the hit songs of pop groups and popular solo performers, with *We Will Rock You* (2002), a show that is built around the songs of Queen, proving to be particularly successful.<sup>242</sup> There have, however, been other less obvious effects on the production process of the musical, and *Mamma Mia!* has not only introduced a series

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<sup>240</sup> The success of *Cats* was similarly due in no small part to the dramatic chart success of 'Memory' that in time would become Andrew Lloyd Webber's most recorded melody. *Chess* likewise achieved considerable pre-opening exposure as a result of two songs, 'One Night in Bangkok' and 'I Know Him so Well', becoming major hits on both sides of the Atlantic.

<sup>241</sup> Shows such as *Buddy* could be marketed to a broad consumer demographic, and the opportunity to target a pre-established fan-base ensured that the number of potential consumers was significantly increased.

<sup>242</sup> On Broadway, the influence of *Mamma Mia!* has also been clear. *Good Vibrations* (2005), a catalogue musical featuring the hit songs of The Beach Boys, and *All Shook Up* (2005), a show that featured the songs of Elvis Presley, are just two examples of recent productions that have followed the *Mamma Mia!* 'catalogue' format.

of strategic marketing techniques for theatrical productions, but has also fine-tuned the McDonaldized model of marketing that was adopted by Cameron Mackintosh, to the extent that the overall approach to the production of musical theatre in the new millennium has developed rapidly. The speed, in particular, at which *Mamma Mia!* has become a genuinely globalized product is remarkable.<sup>243</sup> When I talked to Michael McCabe (2003 interview) about this rapid commodification of the show, he explained that a decision had been made early on in the production process to develop *Mamma Mia!* as a global commodity, with each version of the show being used to market the others worldwide:

*The Lion King* and *The Producers* will now begin to open all over the world, but *Mamma Mia!* has been able to do it very quickly and the philosophy was ‘Who knows how long the *Mamma Mia!* kind of bubble has to grow, so let us give ourselves a five year plan and open this show everywhere we can, as fast as we can, while it remains this very, very hot property!’ The decision not just to go from London straight to Broadway was incredibly sensible, because those cities became like a road show for Broadway. By the time it got to Broadway, a large part of the market had already bought into what *Mamma Mia!* was and people said, ‘I have to see that show.’ When we opened the box office in New York, people would say, ‘Oh, I have already seen the show in Los Angeles,’ or ‘My brother saw it in San Francisco,’ or whatever it was. It was already a very hot property, so we came onto Broadway with this massive momentum.

The British critics tended to agree, following the show’s opening on 6 April 1999, that if *Mamma Mia!* was to achieve commercial success it would do so in spite of its storyline rather than because of it.<sup>244</sup> However, Judy Craymer (Inverne, 2002) argued

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<sup>243</sup> Having opened in London in 1999, the show received its North American premiere in Toronto just over a year later, before opening in San Francisco in November 2000 and on Broadway in October 2001; however, this was only the start, and having toured cities across America throughout 2001 and 2002, *Mamma Mia!* spread into continental Europe in 2002, before moving into the relatively untested, but potentially hugely lucrative, markets of Asia; the show opened in Tokyo at the end of 2002 and an all-Korean version opened in Seoul in 2004. The Las Vegas version of *Mamma Mia!* that opened in February 2003 was the ninth production of the show.

<sup>244</sup> Benedict Nightingale (*The Times*, 7 April 1999) referred to Catherine Johnson’s book writing as a ‘nice, naff story’, a view reflected by Lyn Gardner (*The Guardian*, 7 April 1999) who considered the story to be ‘good-humoured’ but ‘absurdly simple’, and suggested that the show’s greatest strength was

that her production of *Mamma Mia!* was not simply a McDonaldized product with limited aesthetic value, but that its simplicity was one of its strengths,<sup>245</sup> insisting that a catalogue show cannot work unless it is carefully crafted and is therefore good enough to reach beyond a group's traditional devotees: 'The fans will give you an instant audience, but getting beyond those first few months is the real test. It's hard work to get it right- it's not fast-food theater.'

Ritzer's McDonaldization theory, however, contradicts producers such as Craymer who imply that the commercial success of a particular product reflects its quality or the detailed care with which it has been produced. For Ritzer (2004: 167), even though a McDonaldized product may lack any degree of intrinsic value and is 'comparatively devoid of distinctive substantive content,' it is capable of appealing to a broad consumer base and, by implication, can therefore go on to achieve commercial success, by virtue of the McDonaldized process that controlled all stages of its production. Despite Craymer's protestations, *Mamma Mia!* has severe limitations in terms of its storyline and the artificial way in which so many of the songs are introduced. On a number of occasions during the show, the audience laughs at the contrived nature of the script, but the plot often seems to be largely irrelevant and simply becomes a device whereby the hit songs may be performed, and for this

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'sending up its own naffness,' since it was a 'rare moment when situation, music and lyric come together.' Cultural commentators have generally been even more dismissive: Thompson (quoted in Inverne, 2002), for example, derides catalogue musicals such as *Mamma Mia!* as 'pure commercialism', and Inverne himself who compares the vacuous simplicity of *Mamma Mia!* to that of other catalogue musicals such as *We Will Rock You*, remarks that they are 'no more than a big-budget karaoke experience for the audience.'

<sup>245</sup> Craymer agreed that the show was simple and lacked the level of visual spectacle that had been a feature of the megamusical format in the 1980s: 'The '80s and '90s were filled with spectaculars, amazing helicopters, chandeliers crashing or people storming barricades. This show goes with the times. Minimalist. Simple. Effective' (Glauber, 1999).

reason audiences and critics have been extremely forgiving.<sup>246</sup> The characterisation is equally limited, and characters are generally one-dimensional and seldom achieve any degree of emotional intensity, except on one occasion when Donna, the mother, reflects on the way that her daughter has grown up and is now about to leave.<sup>247</sup>

The broad-based popularity of the songs is critical to the show's success, and the end of the production, which sees the main characters dressed up in flamboyant 1970s ABBA costumes and reprising some of the main numbers, suggests that the songs, rather than the characters and the story, are the most important element of the show. *Mamma Mia!* comprises inconsequential fare that satisfies its consumers' desire for bland unsophisticated entertainment and that does not require any level of intellectual or emotional response.<sup>248</sup> While there are clear inconsistencies in Judy Craymer's assertions that the content of catalogue shows such as *Mamma Mia!* do not resemble a 'fast-food' product, there are also grounds for suggesting that Craymer's marketing of the show exhibits a distinctly McDonaldized pattern in its production process. Craymer's product is rigidly controlled in all its different versions around the world, so that audiences can expect to experience a show that is essentially the same, in terms of production standards, that was originally produced in the West End and on Broadway. Glenn Schaeffer, President of Mandalay Resort Group, whose Mandalay Bay Resort Hotel received the Las Vegas production of *Mamma Mia!* in February

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<sup>246</sup> Other producers whom I interviewed were astonished that *Mamma Mia!* had been able to achieve such high levels of commercial success, in spite of the show's contrived book. Paul Nicholas (1999 interview), for example, had suggested, 'People laugh at the book: 'It is so bad that people think it is good: I think it is supposed to be for real, that book. It is an amateurish book, but people love the songs.'

<sup>247</sup> Ironically, the ABBA song, 'Slipping through my Fingers,' that the character sings at this point and which contains the most genuinely heart-felt lyrics of any of the songs that appear in *Mamma Mia!*, was never a hit single, and yet the scene has an emotional resonance that is not achieved elsewhere in the show.

<sup>248</sup> This was highlighted on Broadway, when the production was the first to open after the cataclysmic events of September 11 2001, and the show's light-hearted escapism helped *Mamma Mia!* to accumulate a record \$27million in advance bookings.

2003, explained that his group attracted a ‘very discerning customer’, one who held ‘very high expectations’,<sup>249</sup> when it came to entertainment. He added that the version of *Mamma Mia!* that could be experienced by his customers in Las Vegas would fulfil audience expectations by ‘ensuring that the production standards would follow as closely as possible the original Broadway staging of the runaway hit.’<sup>250</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Broad appeal, the mass market, and global product marketing

Judy Craymer (2003 interview) agrees that Cameron Mackintosh had a significant influence on the marketing of shows such as *Mamma Mia!*, acknowledging that Mackintosh had opened up international markets in the 1980s and 1990s, and that his pioneering approach to musical theatre production had enabled so many separate productions of her own musical to open in such a short space of time around the world:

[Mackintosh] and the Really Useful Company kind of created this international ability, not to franchise a show out, but to roll it out across the world to the extent that people kind of expect it, although when you think about it there aren’t that many shows that have done it- *Cats*, *Les Misérables*, *The Phantom of the Opera* and, to some extent, *Miss Saigon*. In fact, in three and a half years to have nine shows is probably beating even Cameron’s record.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Glenn Schaeffer, *Arts4All Newsletter*, e-magazine, Breaking News Section, 4 August 2002

<sup>250</sup> Paul Garrington, Director of the Korean production of *Mamma Mia!* which opened in Seoul in 2004, similarly insisted that while his new production of the show inevitably established an identity of its own due to casting and other decisions that were made on a local basis, the overall look and sound of the show was never allowed to become in any way idiosyncratic, and Garrington was required by the producers to keep ‘as close as possible to the original London production’ (*Seoul Now*, e-magazine, Arts and Performance Section, 16 December 2002)

<sup>251</sup> Michael McCabe, Marketing Director of *Mamma Mia!*, is similarly complimentary about the invaluable contribution that Mackintosh made to the global success of *Mamma Mia!*. *The Phantom of the Opera* for example, had transferred to Tokyo, prior to the start of a nationwide Japanese tour, just eighteen months after it had opened in the West End, a move that helped to open up lucrative new markets in the Asian continent for later productions such as *Mamma Mia!* McCabe (2003 interview) emphasised that, without Mackintosh’s pioneering approach, audiences would have been less prepared to accept later musical productions: ‘When it comes to musical theatre, everyone looks to Cameron as being the kind of person that more than anyone has driven his product. Without the Cameron model, to take a musical all around the world would be a much tougher job. He has created markets where there were never markets in musical theatre, so when it comes to Europe and Russia and Tokyo and China

It became clear during my discussions with the creative team of *Mamma Mia!* that Mackintosh had also had a more subtle effect, not only on the globalization and global marketing of musical theatre but also on the genre itself. Mackintosh's pioneering approach had facilitated the advent of the musical as a global product; however, the universality of appeal that was such an important contributory factor to the commercial success of his productions, seems to have encouraged later producers to endow their own shows with as broad an appeal as possible in order to maximise their potential audiences.<sup>252</sup> Catherine Johnson (2000 interview), for example, who wrote the book for *Mamma Mia!*, freely admitted to me that she deliberately crafted a story that was light-weight and uncontroversial, in order that it would appeal to all ages and would attract the all-important family audience. She explained that *Mamma Mia!* was unlike much of her other work, in that she deliberately set out to write a piece that lifted people's spirits, without really challenging them in any way or encouraging a more thoughtful response to some of the potentially serious contemporary issues that the storyline raises:

That's the most stunning thing, to see how many different kind of age groups you get in there. I was with my kids, and my son is fifteen, and then there were people who looked to be in their seventies or eighties... [It's] a great big family show... I was fully aware that I was doing something different, not what I would generally write, so I think always in the back of my mind I was perhaps speaking to a larger audience. What I had in mind an awful lot

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and all these places, you have to kind of say that we are very lucky that there was this pioneer and that was Cameron Mackintosh. So there is now an audience who is ready to engage in musical theatre in some extremely obscure places and so *Mamma Mia!* is able to roll itself out around the world.'

<sup>252</sup> As has been demonstrated above, the success of a show like *Cats* owed a great deal to its broad appeal: the simplicity and unchallenging nature of the subject matter ensured that the show would appeal to a wide age range and could therefore be enjoyed by adults and children alike. Moreover, the emphasis of *Cats* on visual elements ensured that an understanding of the English language was no longer a prerequisite for anyone hoping to enjoy the production: the essentially plotless story was told by music and dance, and by costume and set, rather than by subtle characterisation and narrative development. In this way, the show even became a popular choice for foreign tourists whose grasp of the English might otherwise restrict their appreciation and understanding of other productions in the West End and elsewhere.

sometimes was things like *Friends*, that kind of comedy I guess, which goes down well practically everywhere without being offensive or too much in your face. There is always this theory, isn't there, that in the times of depression people just want to go out and have a good time, but I think people have always just wanted that really. It's a case of finding a way of giving people an evening out, so that they can have a laugh and enjoy themselves but that they might also be touched at moments as well.

Johnson's comments about the show's universality suggest that *Mamma Mia!* conforms in this respect to Ritzer's definition of a McDonaldized product, and I received the impression from all the creative team for *Mamma Mia!* that the show had been conceived in such a way as to ensure that it appealed to a genuine mass market. Judy Craymer (2003 interview) had already told me that the ABBA songs contained in the show were critically important in the marketing of *Mamma Mia!* to foreign tourists and non-English speakers around the world: '*Mamma Mia!* does work with people who don't necessarily speak English, maybe because of the songs. I think all the shows around the world have attracted people who don't speak English.'<sup>253</sup> Craymer also repeatedly emphasised that the unprecedented success of her show was due to a large extent not only to the way in which it was able to appeal to a mass market, but also because there were very few 'blocks' in terms of age, sex, nationality and social class that might otherwise have restricted the show's potential audience. She agreed that the music of ABBA, with its light catchy pop tunes and lyrics, was an

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<sup>253</sup> Michael McCabe (2003 interview) was more specific about the vital contribution that the show's broad-based appeal had made to its extraordinary level of commercial success, suggesting that the ABBA songs were important, but concluding that the show succeeds because of the way in which it is targeted directly, and possibly cynically, at its potential audience: 'There was certainly a series of extraordinary 'blockbuster' shows but they were going down the route of being about wars and starving peasants and revolutions and whatever. I think that there was, in a way, a need and a great desire to be able to see something that is purely about having a wonderful time. It is very relevant that the central characters [of *Mamma Mia!*] are all female and 60% of all musical audiences are female; they are also 40 plus, which again connects directly with the age demographic that we deal with. There were also two generations, so it is the kids as well as the grown-ups in the show. You are appealing on many different levels but, I think, in terms of pure escapism it just went straight to the heart of so many people watching, and the ABBA songs were the bonus rather than the only reason that you were there. When we last did audience surveys, 40% of people were there because of the music of ABBA and that remains the number one reason that people are engaging with the show.'

essential ingredient, since the songs were already so well known around the world and had a universal appeal. However, she also insisted (2003 interview) that Catherine Johnson's book, which was built around the experiences of two generations of very ordinary women, was also a crucial contributing factor which ensured that *Mamma Mia!* could be marketed to a mass audience, suggesting that 'people can also relate to the characters- it has a kind of mass appeal, almost like a soap opera in that sense.'<sup>254</sup> The overall impression that I gained from my interview with Craymer, as well from my interviews with the other members of the creative team, was that a degree of commercial opportunism had been involved in the production of *Mamma Mia!* and its marketing. The show seemed to have been manufactured as a product along McDonaldized lines: the story, although at times witty, had an artificial and contrived quality, and a range of decisions had been made with the specific purpose of broadening its appeal.

### 4.2.3 Logo and Product Branding

My conversations with Judy Craymer and other members of her creative team demonstrated not only that *Mamma Mia!* had been developed as a product with universal appeal, but also that the show's whole marketing strategy was deliberately designed from the outset to attract a mass audience. The creative team were fully aware of the importance of designing a logo for *Mamma Mia!* that would enable the show to be marketed on a global scale. It was equally clear that the Cameron Mackintosh production model had exerted a strong influence over the development of

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<sup>254</sup> Having three ordinary middle-aged female characters as the three central roles seemed to have been a conscious decision to appeal to the middle-aged female market who are the primary purchasers of tickets for musicals.

the *Mamma Mia!* logo,<sup>255</sup> but Craymer (2003 interview) also explained that she was looking for something that was lighter in mood and that reflected in its colour and design the less serious nature of her product. She was making a conscious decision through her choice of logo to move away from the darker heavier artwork that, she felt, characterised many of the megamusicals of the 1980s and 1990s:

Choosing the *Mamma Mia!* logo was very important to give the impression that it wasn't a dress-up ABBA show, but was fun and was frivolous and romantic. I think that the model that we have now is very fresh. It is kind of abstract and it is white, and I think that is very effective because very much coming out of the 80's through the 90's, a lot of the big musicals are very dark, their artwork looks very black with red, and consciously I loved the white and wanted to go with the white. Even to this day I get persuaded, 'Oh! you are going to be playing in Melbourne in the winter, it is going to be very dreary- I suggest you have a blue bus,' and I go, 'No, it must be white!'<sup>256</sup>

For Catherine Johnson, the image of the 'laughing bride' was critical to the show's success, partly because it made no mention of ABBA and in no way suggested that *Mamma Mia!* was merely a contrived story that was artificially built around a series of ABBA hits, but also because it assured potential consumers that they would experience a romantic musical comedy that was guaranteed to deliver unrestrained fun and frivolous entertainment. Johnson (2000 interview) also suggested,

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<sup>255</sup> Michael McCabe considered that Cameron Mackintosh's approach to logo design had become a paradigm for musical theatre production, and he wanted to incorporate into his own design for *Mamma Mia!* the 'universal' quality that Mackintosh had achieved: '[Mackintosh] was creating images that appealed to people all around the world, no matter what language you spoke. The *Cats* logo remains, I think, one of the greatest pieces of art, and it didn't matter if you were Chinese or Russian or Czech or whatever, you knew what that was, and I think that was a real benchmark for theatre, in the same way that Cosette and the whole *Les Misérables* image is just a very universal thing: it is a strong icon that is a very clever image and goes right back to the original Victor Hugo drawing, but has been reinvented' (McCabe interview 2003).

<sup>256</sup> Phyllida Lloyd (2000 interview) similarly felt that the *Mamma Mia!* logo was taking the show in a new direction that focused on its slightly frivolous nature: 'I think we were breaking away in a very abstract way from the logo tradition of *Miss Saigon* or the eyes in *Cats* or whatever, and really going for something rather different. In a way, slightly more human or sort of less graphic and more jolly.' Catherine Johnson (2000 interview) suggested that the show was generally unsophisticated, and that the laughing bride provided 'a slightly more sophisticated veneer' than would have been the case if the producers had ended up with a logo that consisted of 'kitsch disco boots and glitter'; the latter, she felt, would have emphasised effectively the retro quality of ABBA's music but, at the same time, would have highlighted the show's superficiality.

interestingly, that she fervently believed that the *Mamma Mia!* logo would have a major influence on the way shows would be marketed in the future because it indicated so clearly and simply for consumers, in a way that had not been achieved before, the precise nature and content of the show:

Bjorn and Bennie were absolutely keen on it not being seen as the story of ABBA or the ABBA compilation musical, so that I think led to the choice of the bride because you couldn't look at her and go, 'That's got something to do with ABBA.' I think that the logo says 'light romantic and happy' to people, it says she is a very happy bride. I like the fact that she is laughing, and it appears to be immoderately laughing, so I think the logo suggests a bride without decorum. I do think the logo suggests that you are going to have a laugh. It's a happy romance. In terms of marketing, the logo is something easily identifiable to the product, and I am sure that that's created a real shift in those terms.

The producers of *Mamma Mia!* wished to emphasise the fact that their production has a very human dimension and that it centres on a number of ordinary individual relationships, and the show's logo has clearly moved away from the impersonal graphic that had been used, for example, to promote *Cats*, *Miss Saigon* or *The Phantom of the Opera*. For Michael McCabe (2003 interview), the logo 'had to be a human emotion, not just some cold logo, it had got to be a moment that captured the essence of the show.' McCabe (2003 interview) also stressed that *Mamma Mia!* was rapidly becoming a globally branded product and that the show's logo was a vital component in the branding process, since it encapsulated in a visual format the sheer unadulterated joy that, McCabe felt, was the production's essential ingredient:

You can go into all these cities around the world, and see this image everywhere, on flags, on bill-boards, and no matter where we do photo scoops and we test all the materials, the reactions to the girl is so strong that people just buy into the joy that she is conveying, and it has worked, I think, because we needed to go back to something more human and it needed to be a person and not just some sort of Greek island icon. The story is so much about people and emotion and, you know, love lost, love found, about confronting the past

and human emotion. It is a fact that something in the whole notion of the show works in conjunction with this brand. And now, yes, it certainly is a brand.

Having established the importance of the logo as a global marketing tool, I asked McCabe to expand on his suggestion that *Mamma Mia!* exemplified the global commodification of musical theatre. He explained that, for consumers in the global market, predictability of quality was an over-riding consideration, and musical theatre consumption patterns were being heavily influenced by this factor. For McCabe (2003 interview), one of the fundamental principles of McDonaldization was becoming an essential part of the overall production process, and the branding of a product, a process that he considered had been initiated by Cameron Mackintosh in the 1980s,<sup>257</sup> resulted in the predictability of a theatrical experience for consumers:

It is the safety issue- why would you go and see something that you have never heard of? Would you really take that risk? It is in the same way that you buy a pair of Levi jeans, in that you feel that you know that brand, which is a standard of quality. This is why always going back to this constant reinforcement of the brand is so important. It stands for assurance. That's why Disney has been successful in the theatre, because to most people 'Disney' is a stamp of quality. If it is 'Disney presents...', that means you are going to get strong value for money because that is what Disney means to people. More and more, and very much going back to the Cameron model, it is about making sure that your brand is as strong and as high profile as possible, and theatre is in a way increasingly becoming like any product. There is so much more global awareness in products, and things are not now territory specific, they are brands that cross all continents, and it is the same with shows.

In an increasingly globalized and competitive world, where consumers are literally bombarded by a never-ending series of images, signs and logos that are used to identify and promote products in a saturated market-place, brand identity has assumed critical importance. So, while the unprecedented level of commercial success enjoyed

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<sup>257</sup> This thesis has shown that earlier producers such as David Merrick had attempted to give their products a branded quality. Cameron Mackintosh took this process further by establishing his products as *global* brands.

by a show such as *Mamma Mia!* cannot be attributed simply to the design of its logo, the logo was a vital element that enabled the production to expand into the global marketplace. Jim Erlick<sup>258</sup> suggested that while brand awareness for *Mamma Mia!* had already to some extent been established through the ABBA brand-name, the show's logo was still an extremely important factor in the global marketing of the *Mamma Mia!* brand. He added that other shows, which did not have the built-in brand name that *Mamma Mia!* enjoyed, would rely more and more on the quality of their logos and their ability to communicate their brand essence in a direct and incisive manner, particularly in markets where consumers were not necessarily English speakers and at a time when consumers had less time to focus their attention on advertising images:

The show's logo is an important mnemonic device and it's the brand identity. That's most people's first point of contact. Someone may not see the TV commercials or may not hear the radio commercials, so if your only point of contact is the visual on a billboard, or outdoor signage or in a print ad, then there is a huge onus to basically drive home the message in terms of what the show is all about. The logo and the tag-line and overall positioning is critical: you have a very short period of time [to communicate with people as] they're subjected to this sensory bombardment. There's got to be something that people feel is going to appeal to them, that's going to be understandable to them, recognizing that perhaps English may not even be their primary language. (Erlick interview, 2003)

#### 4.2.4 Licensing and Product Control

For George Ritzer, one of the fundamental principles of McDonaldization is that of control,<sup>259</sup> and it became increasingly clear from my discussions with Judy

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<sup>258</sup> Erlick's company, the Erlick Group, was launched in 1992 'to conceive/broker strategic sponsorships/promotions on a national, regional and local basis' (Erlick Group brochure). Erlick had the responsibility of creating partnerships between *Mamma Mia!* and commercial companies in the United States, thus extending the show's brand awareness across a range of different markets.

<sup>259</sup> In *The McDonaldization of Society* (p.121) for example, Ritzer asserts that 'controlling employees and consumers [leads to] greater control over work-related processes and finished products.' This control is achieved primarily through the replacement of human with non-human technology that,

Craymer and members of her *Mamma Mia!* creative team that strict control was being exerted, not only over the quality of their product, but also throughout the production process. Michael McCabe (2003 interview), for example, felt it was critical to the continuing success of *Mamma Mia!* that the brand image should be strictly controlled, so the design of the logo had to be exactly replicated wherever and whenever it was used, and he explained that he went to great efforts to ensure that the marketing of all new productions of the show followed similarly strict criteria. McCabe believed that this level of marketing control had increased significantly since the megamusical format had first emerged in the 1980s, and he explained that he was fully involved in the marketing of all the productions of *Mamma Mia!* world-wide, and was consulted about all major marketing decisions:

We want to protect the main image of the girl. You can't do stupid things to it, you can't colour it, you can't use it in certain formats. It is really just safeguarding our global branding and it must be used in that style. With the old blockbuster musicals an agency would pass over a disk of artwork and that was the end of their relationship. Retaining me as the sort of Marketing Director, we are much more involved with the grass roots stuff. So it involves conference calls every week in every territory. We go through all the minutes of all their local meetings, and talk to them about every single promotion they are setting up. We actually design a lot of the creative gear for them. So for Toronto, we are doing all of their ads- we are building all the ads here, as opposed to them just using our logo.

McCabe went on to explain that having direct control over the worldwide marketing of *Mamma Mia!* resulted in a number of quantifiable benefits. The overall quality of the show, for example, was able to be systematically and continuously enhanced by the process of 'cross-fertilisation', as McCabe described it, whereby improvements initiated in one particular version of the show could then be introduced into other versions. In McCabe's view, this process of product enhancement had not been

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Ritzer (1996: 104) suggests, includes not only the more obvious application of robots and computers 'but also the less obvious, such as the assembly line, bureaucratic rules, and manuals proscribing accepted procedures and techniques.'

possible to the same degree before, largely because those responsible for marketing shows, with the possible exception of Cameron Mackintosh, had appointed different marketing teams in different territories and these had enjoyed a degree of autonomy and self-regulation and had not been exposed to the level of control that was now being exerted by McCabe himself and producer Judy Craymer. Such a change is also demonstrated in the fact that the *Mamma Mia!* web-site reflects its global identity and a single, centrally-controlled web address is the first point of contact for potential consumers rather than the range of independent sites that had been associated with global productions of other musical theatre shows in the recent past:

Having learnt from that [Cameron Mackintosh] model, *Mamma Mia!* has been able to push the whole marketing issue further. I am in a sort of umbrella position for all of these different productions, and we can actually do this sort of cross-fertilisation. For example, if something is working for the show in Sydney, we can test it in Toronto. Previously that opportunity hadn't really existed for shows because it had been much more truncated, in that you got a very independent team in every city, with possibly only really Cameron himself having the whole overview. I have taken a much more active role and we are able to create materials that are used in all of the markets. There are similar styles and similar language and similar photography and that seems to have really worked. We also have a global website and we are the only show that really has that, so no matter where you are in the world, you still go into the same site. Whilst for, say, Tokyo you will be directed to a Tokyo site, it is still all umbrella'd by *MammaMia.com* and that was a big leap forward. (McCabe, 2003 interview)

Reflecting McCabe's overall viewpoint, Judy Craymer (2003 interview) confirmed that, while she was keen to incorporate minor technical improvements at every opportunity and was eager that all the different productions of *Mamma Mia!* should benefit from improvements initiated in one particular production of the show, she was equally keen that such changes in no way undermined the brand image that had been built up; she also stressed that, while she agreed that she maintained a firm control over her product, she realised that it was important that this did not have a detrimental

effect on the spontaneity and joyous quality of the show which was the essence of its brand image and which was so clearly represented by the *Mamma Mia!* logo:

We retain fairly strict creative control, without taking a kind of spontaneity away. We continue to improve the show every time it is re-lit, for example, and Howard Harrison has the chance to go in there and re-light it. I mean, in Las Vegas he will probably give us even more bloody lamps and then he will come back and he will say, 'Right, I want to go into London again or Toronto and do the same.' [It is] the same with Mark Thompson's set, which is good because it is always getting constant care and attention. I doubt, unless you see it and scrutinise it, you would really know the differences, but it keeps it fresh. I think *Mamma Mia!* is a brand in its own right, and the production has been part of a branding process. It has quickly [become a brand], it has its own strong identity which is why I am very keen to protect the visual of the logo and not change that, and we haven't allowed it to change in Japan or anywhere else.

When I interviewed him in January 2003, Michael McCabe told me that the producers of *Mamma Mia!* had decided that the Las Vegas production of their show would be the last one to be produced entirely by Littlestar Services Ltd., the company founded by Judy Craymer, Bjorn Ulvaeus and Benny Andersson explicitly to produce *Mamma Mia!* All future versions of the show would be licensed productions that would follow the McDonaldized system of franchising; this would allow the continued global expansion of the product into markets that had not previously been exploited, where the indigenous producers' local knowledge and infrastructure would provide Littlestar Services with the opportunity for continued commercial expansion into markets that would otherwise have been prohibitively expensive to develop:

Las Vegas will be the last official Littlestar production. From now on it is all licences, because basically the Littlestar productions are all the major traditional territories: London, New York, Toronto, Sydney, the two US tours and Vegas. That covers your biggest world markets. Beyond that, in the more difficult territories and the foreign language territories, it is much more important to have a local promoter with local knowledge. It is hard for any of us to get really involved in a production in Japan, given that we can't read

anything and you are relying on very much the local knowledge, and so it is much better to license rather than to try and do it. I normally meet every territory at least once or twice...I get flown out there, spend the day with the marketing team, really just talking about everything we have done, imparting all the knowledge that we possibly can, and giving them basic guidelines, the do's and don'ts...What tends to happen is that all the creative people like the Associate Director and the Associate Choreographer go and recreate the show. When it comes to the marketing, we are saying, 'Okay, these are our basic guidelines, this is what you can and can't do with the logo.'

Yet even these licensed productions continue to be strictly controlled by the parent company, and McCabe explained that he believed that this heightened level of product control was a key element in the continuing global success of the show, since its brand identity was protected to an extent that had never previously been possible. This was partly achieved through the more globalized approach to the web-site design and structuring, which, McCabe felt had enhanced the overall branding process:

They (CML) sort of have a different system, because so much of it is licensed, and those licensed productions all do their own thing. The New York website for *Les Misérables* was different from the London website, whereas for *Mamma Mia!* there is a scroll-down which basically you go to first and that lists all of the productions and you choose which one of those you want...This gives it more of a global identity, and that also again allowed us to protect the brand and protect the language that is used to describe the show. You get the pictures of ABBA in their funny costumes from 1976 but it is backed up with all of the *Mamma Mia!* wording- 'Original book musical by Catherine Johnson', and all of that stuff. The site is hugely successful and useful and allows anybody to tap in and get all of the background that they could possibly need. That is quite revolutionary really. (McCabe interview, 2003)

All the licensed versions of *Mamma Mia!* are also controlled by the process of production that was initiated by Cameron Mackintosh in the 1980s, whereby the original creative team are instrumental in the creation of each new version. Minor adjustments may be made in order to suit the sensibilities and tastes of a particular market, but these always have to be agreed with the creative team, and Catherine Johnson (2000 interview) emphasised that, while she made minor changes to the

script for new productions, in order that ‘certain little English nuances can be addressed just to make sure that things are being understood,’ any other changes in the script, however small, had to be agreed with her first, in order that the branded quality of the show as a whole would not be undermined.

This rigid level of control in all areas of the production process ensures that the essence of the show remains the same, not only in the versions that are mounted totally by Littlestar Services, but also in all the licensed versions. In this way the global branded identity that has been established is carefully protected, a fact that Judy Craymer reiterated in my interview with her in 2003:

Every time we represent *Mamma Mia!* in another country, Phyllida directs it, or her associates direct it, just making little changes to make it kind of work indigenously for that territory, so on Broadway it isn't a group of British people on a Greek island, it is a group of Americans on a Greek island. The worldwide versions are complete reproductions of the original. We are very careful it is the original Littlestar creative team that creates them, so even when we license, Germany being our first and Japan our second, it is still our creative team [that creates the show], and I think that is important.

In this way the product continues to be marketed along McDonaldized lines, with standards of product quality being rigidly controlled by the show's producers and the quality of the brand thus being both protected and maintained. Consumer expectations regarding the predictability of the show's quality are met, following the McDonaldized pattern, and repeat business, which Craymer (2003 interview) insists is a vital component of the show's continuing profitability, continues to be generated on a global scale:

I think that it is very important that we creatively keep to what we started out to do, and that is why we are so rigid and strict about it. I think something that is very important about the success of it is that it does attract a repeat business.

So if you saw the show on Broadway and you were visiting London, you are likely to go to London to see it again and that has kind of been proved, especially with the two US tours and Broadway at the moment: one feeds the other. Audiences who are going again would expect to see essentially the same show, and that is important.

#### 4.2.5 Marketing Developments: Sponsorship and Commercial Tie-ins

Although the influence of Cameron Mackintosh is clearly apparent, not only in the way that *Mamma Mia!* has developed from a globally produced Littlestar product into a globally produced licensed product, but also in the way that the producers of the show have maintained a vice-like grip over the branded image of their product, it is apparent that *Mamma Mia!* has also developed significantly the marketing of musical theatre. This is particularly obvious in the way that the American touring version of the show has embraced commercial sponsorship in a way that has never previously been attempted.<sup>260</sup>

Jim Erlick explained that *Mamma Mia!* was attractive to would-be sponsors because of the level of brand awareness that it was able to generate<sup>261</sup>: the ABBA name

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<sup>260</sup> In the past, arts organisations such as The Royal Shakespeare Company have been ‘sponsored’ by commercial companies such as Allied Domecq, but this has involved little more than the latter providing funding in return for having its name appear in the RSC’s programmes, literature and advertising material. The perceived benefit for Allied Domecq was its association with the RSC company as a branded corporate entity, and there was never an intention to sponsor RSC productions as individual shows, as such shows have never achieved, nor have they been intended to achieve, an individual branded identity. *Mamma Mia!*, however, is clearly very different, and the branded image that has been so carefully constructed and then controlled by the show’s creative team has inevitably enabled it to embrace commercial sponsorship as a natural extension of its commercial potential.

<sup>261</sup> The Erlick Group, founded by company President Jim Erlick in 1992, specialises in arranging ‘strategic sponsorships with distinctive entertainment properties’ (Erlick Group brochure), and the company has quickly become a pre-eminent force in the field. Robert Butters, VP Finance for the Really Useful Group, suggests that Erlick’s approach to the sponsorship of live theatre is to a large extent groundbreaking, partly due to the very nature of the genre. Butters (Testimonial entry, Erlick Group brochure) emphasised that there were ‘inherent difficulties’ in ‘selling to the corporate world an unproven theatrical product that may play for nine days or nine years,’ adding that ‘by finding an effective sponsor/client partnership you can create a win/win situation.’ Before the advent of *Mamma Mia!*, Jim Erlick had already arranged a sponsorship deal with the airline TWA and Mastercard for the American tour of RUG’s *Sunset Boulevard*. TWA had wanted to instigate a major market promotion

symbolised the show's broad appeal and the production itself was already a huge hit in the West End; moreover, the show was rapidly becoming a global phenomenon that had quickly developed into a global brand in its own right.<sup>262</sup> In the past, sponsorship of theatrical productions had generally been initiated as a means of raising additional capital to provide a company with funds to offset production costs. Sponsorship of *Mamma Mia!* would be on a much more commercial basis, and would be a means of increasing ticket sales as a result of the broadened marketing potential that sponsorship could offer. Erlick explained that Judy Craymer was attracted to the idea of a sponsorship agreement being drawn up with Olive Garden because such an

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that combined cost effective media promotion with travel agent entertainment, the latter involving the provision of tickets for TWA's travel agent customers and, in some cases, post-show 'meet and greet' sessions with cast members and production team. Erlick explained that the show became a high profile social event for the markets being targeted by TWA, as there were very few such events of a similar type each year, and the inexpensive cost of \$0.10 per \$1.00 for media promotion was matched by the relatively low level expenditure of \$2.00 CPM (cost per thousand) borne by TWA's Frequent Business Traveller programme. Mastercard, meanwhile, felt that the provision of advance ticket access as a cardholder benefit in key markets would be a cost-effective means both of attracting new consumers and as a means of rewarding consumers who already ran a Mastercard account. The sponsorship deal that was struck between the companies was used to launch an integrated electronic, print advertising and billboard campaign for the show at a cost of \$5million, while the relationship between the show and its sponsors was also emphasised in in-flight media, such as in-flight videos and magazines on TWA flights and in a range of discount offers that were made to frequent flyers, and in Mastercard promotional direct mailings that offered advance ticket access and a show sampler CD to Mastercard customers. Over \$1million revenue was generated for the show itself through the range of TWA/Mastercard sponsorship initiatives. *Sunset Boulevard* was undoubtedly easier to sell to potential sponsors than it might otherwise have been, because it was able to make prominent use of the Andrew Lloyd Webber brand name.

<sup>262</sup> While the show was an attractive proposition for potential sponsors, the producers of *Mamma Mia!* did not initially consider that a sponsorship arrangement was necessary or even desirable, since they had already achieved considerable commercial success and the future long-term profitability of the show seemed secure. Jim Erlick (Interview 1, 2003) explained that his negotiations with the producers of *Mamma Mia!* were lengthy, and it took over six months to make them fully aware of the potential advantages that a sponsorship deal would provide and to appreciate how the creation of a sponsoring partnership with Olive Garden, the American restaurant chain, could benefit their own product: 'With a case like *Mamma Mia!*, they consciously chose not to really consider a leverage sponsorship, because they didn't need it, as the popularity [of the show] kind of exploded worldwide on a concurrent basis, and they were too preoccupied with it, and *Mamma Mia!* was a show that really didn't need sponsorship per se. Our *Mamma Mia!* Olive Garden partnership would invariably benefit the show even further because, once again, if a show like that is going to be on the market for two, three, four, five weeks, with a decent but not a huge amount of spending, it can only benefit by having the show tied and integrated with another marketing factor in those markets, and another way to get in front of people in a non-traditional setting. Look at all the folks who go to an Olive Garden restaurant- their traffic patterns are huge, and it's the same group of consumers. How can a show not benefit when people there are looking at a *Mamma Mia!* menu and listening to ABBA music four to six weeks before the show comes to town? It's obvious that that's just another way to kind of increase the show's appeal, especially when so much of it ties back to the underlying appeal of the music itself.'

arrangement would greatly enhance audience awareness for *Mamma Mia!* before the production arrived at a particular tour destination.<sup>263</sup> This was therefore a means of achieving an effective targeted marketing campaign without incurring the usual attendant costs. Erlick felt that Olive Garden ‘perfectly complemented’ the show’s Mediterranean imagery<sup>264</sup> and audience demographic and that this was a significant element in the marketing mix that was achieved. The reciprocal integration of both partners into each other’s print/electronic media campaigns provided a national major market presence for the show that significantly extended local impact and brand awareness.<sup>265</sup> The sponsorship of *Mamma Mia!* by Olive Garden saw an increased focus on the light musical experience that was being offered to consumers, without any pretence being made about the show’s rather superficial content, and Erlick made clear to me that the essential ingredient of the sponsorship deal, from the show’s point of view, was that it enabled an innovative marketing initiative to be targeted at a

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<sup>263</sup> Olive Garden restaurants not only have a nationwide reach across the North American continent, but the family-oriented consumers who frequent the restaurant chain also form the core of the *Mamma Mia!* target audience. These two facts facilitated an extremely effective marketing partnership that both resulted in *Mamma Mia!* becoming integrated into Olive Garden’s national advertising campaign and led to the show establishing a visual and audible presence nationwide in the Olive Garden outlets themselves. Erlick explained: ‘The original intent from the Olive Garden standpoint was to have a more traditional sponsorship, but the producers of *Mamma Mia!*, who knew they already had a runaway success, really did not want to structure a formal sponsorship per se, but more of a marketing partnership. So what we ultimately worked out was each brand was integrated with the other brand’s print and electronic media campaign. This meant that, as *Mamma Mia!* went around the country, Olive Garden would be integrated in its television, print and outdoor campaign, and at the same time Olive Garden would integrate *Mamma Mia!* in their local market campaign. Then, in addition, we decorated Olive Garden restaurants with a *Mamma Mia!* themed environment four to six weeks prior to the show hitting town. There was a special menu, the ABBA CD was playing and there were promotions motivating people to have a chance to win CDs or tickets. So there was a reciprocal integration in each other brand’s media, and we created this whole outreach effort promoting the show in the restaurants, which the show was excited about because it was a great way for them to build up some equity and anticipation and buzz as it was going from market to market around the country (Erlick interview 2, 2003)

<sup>264</sup> The show is not only set in Greece and therefore has a Mediterranean atmosphere, but Erlick felt that the *Mamma Mia!* title also had an Italian resonance that linked it effectively to Olive Garden restaurants.

<sup>265</sup> In-restaurant promotions were conducted six to eight weeks prior to opening and included special *Mamma Mia!* family dinner menus, posters, server hats and buttons, while sweepstake competitions were also organised for families, with opening night tickets, show merchandise and dinner gift certificates being offered as prizes. In addition, exclusive backstage tours were arranged for both consumers and employees, while Olive Garden maintained its own brand awareness through the prominent display of its name on in-theatre signage.

potential consumer demographic in a way that would not otherwise have been possible:

We thought there was a good audience overlap in terms of age demographic...Olive Garden is a quintessential family restaurant that is ideal for couples or families with children. So it tied in very well with *Mamma Mia!* Olive Garden have very good coverage, and in most areas there are many Olive Garden restaurants, so it gave us very good retail coverage to extend the message. By definition, if there's greater awareness for *Mamma Mia!* in the market and from all the people who are going to Olive Garden restaurants, invariably some of those people will think about the show, and will want to see it... When *Mamma Mia!* was launched [the producers] positioned it as a fun, light, musical experience, as opposed to a traditional Broadway show. (Erlick, interview 2, 2003)

#### 4.2.6 Focus Groups and Audience Surveys

A central innovative feature of the marketing strategy adopted by the producers of *Mamma Mia!* was the introduction of comprehensive audience surveys and the continuous testing of marketing approaches through the use of focus groups. Judy Craymer explained to me that she had instigated a wide range of market research surveys and was continuing to do so.<sup>266</sup> As a result, she was able to assess the demographics of her consumer base and was able to analyse the degree to which audience demographics were developing and changing throughout the production's run, an analysis that was then able to influence strategic marketing decisions. Craymer told me, for example, that surveys were regularly conducted which requested groups of consumers to give their reactions to new artwork and production photographs used to promote the show world-wide. Such surveys enabled her marketing team to discover which artwork appealed most to particular demographic

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<sup>266</sup> While Cameron Mackintosh had commissioned regular audience surveys and statistical analysis, the information that was gleaned provided evidence of consumption patterns rather than analysing reasons for non-consumption.

groups, and this information enabled printed marketing material, for example, to be varied to suit the tastes and preferences of particular market segments. Craymer also told me that the impact of the show's logo was periodically assessed, in order that decisions might be reached about where and how often the logo should appear, although she stressed that all the surveys that had been conducted had consistently shown that the logo continued to have a positive influence on consumers of both sexes and of all ages.

Although audience surveys had been conducted in the past, especially for Cameron Mackintosh shows, the effectiveness of musical theatre marketing strategies had never before been assessed through focus groups. *Mamma Mia!*, however, has seen this commercial approach being applied to all areas of the show's marketing strategy, especially in identifying the demographic groups of consumers who are reluctant or unwilling to commit themselves to ticket purchases, and in formulating a marketing initiative to address a particular 'block'. Michael McCabe (2003 interview) explained that the show's producers were eager to find out more about their audience's reactions to the show and to analyse the demographic break-down in order to be able to target advertising and promotional initiatives more effectively:

It is something that is done a lot around the world, particularly in North America because they are always testing everything. Strangely, it wasn't done very much here, but we have embraced it very much and we are always trying to grow our audience. We are constantly saying 'OK, currently our audiences are 70% female and an average age of forty-two. How can we attract more men to the show?' So we tend to do a kind of competition, where you could win £500 worth of theatre tokens, or whatever it is. You can complete and send back the form or hand back the form at the end of the show to an usher, and what we are doing is finding out your age, sex, where you live, your postcode, what newspapers you read, what radio stations you listen to, which of these images you find appealing, which magazines you tend to read, why

you are here, when you bought your tickets. As much information as we possibly can.

McCabe felt that it was essential to have an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the demographics of *Mamma Mia!* audiences world-wide, in order that marketing initiatives continued to target specific consumer groups. He believed strongly that it was necessary to complete detailed analysis and quantification of consumers' responses in order that levels of consumption might be maintained and expanded.<sup>267</sup> He also stressed that no producer before *Mamma Mia!* had undertaken on a global scale the extensive questioning of focus groups in order to discover the varying reasons that consumption amongst different demographic groups had been restricted. His marketing team, he explained, had approached non-consumers in order to discover their reasons for non-consumption and in order to develop marketing initiatives that might effectively address the situation. The interviewing of non-consumer groups ran in parallel with the surveys of actual consumers, and both had a considerable influence on the show's marketing strategy and on the developing style of marketing material such as printed media:

We use focus groups extensively, where we meet people that go to the theatre regularly but have chosen not to see *Mamma Mia!* We consider what the block is and try to resolve it, rather than just always doing the same thing over and over again, because otherwise you will never change certain people's opinion about the show. In the sense of how we go forward with our marketing, that is incredibly important, and enables us really to better understand, for example, why certain types of men have a block about a show like *Mamma Mia!* They may tell us, 'It's a girls' show', or 'It's all about weddings.' I think that we can only keep marketing the show by understanding and addressing blocks. As an industry we spend a lot of time

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<sup>267</sup> McCabe agreed that such a practice was desirable in the marketing of any commercial product, not just a branded musical theatre production such as *Mamma Mia!*, although he felt that, while audience surveys had provided useful information for other producers, the surveys undertaken by the producers of *Mamma Mia!* were considerably more detailed and were integrated into the show's overall marketing strategy to a degree that had never previously been attempted.

asking questions of people that are sitting in the theatre, but not nearly enough time asking questions of people that aren't sitting in the theatre.

The producers of *Mamma Mia!* felt that it was imperative, McCabe suggested, to apply effectively the knowledge that they had gained from audience surveys and focus groups to the marketing strategy of their show and they were fully prepared, on occasion, to adjust elements of their strategy according to the preferences of their consumers. Interestingly, McCabe (2003 interview) emphasised that all his focus groups insisted that global box office success was the single most important and influential factor in consumption patterns, and that the overwhelming majority of consumers chose to consume on the basis of box office performance:

All of the focus groups always talk about how it is success at the box office rather than its critical acclaim that means that audiences like the show, and that is what matters more than anything. So there are the top five shows that will always be in amongst everyone's first choices and they are all of the most known shows.

As a result, the producers of *Mamma Mia!* reiterated the global nature of the show in all advertising material in order to persuade potential consumers that the show was a world-wide phenomenon which had enjoyed success on a global scale, and to demonstrate to them that their non-consumption had prevented them from participating in an unprecedented consumer experience:

Our marketing has been affected and adjusted by the responses of focus groups and surveys. One of the main issues at the moment is to really push the global success of the show, and to emphasise that we are not just a hit West End show or hit Broadway show, we are a global phenomenon. Sitting at the back of my desk is the 'Worldwide mega-hit' ad which is being developed at the moment. That is all about saying, 'This is truly international.' We are saying, 'Why haven't you seen this show? It is so successful, so big, it is working with audiences all around the world.' So you are able to get people to

engage with it on a slightly different level from just the fact that it is a romantic love story on a Greek Island: it is a global phenomenon.

### 4.3 Conclusions

The production process for *Mamma Mia!* exhibits a wide range of McDonaldized features, particularly in the level of control exerted by the producers over the marketing of the show and the degree to which they are prepared to protect the branded image of their product; moreover, the McDonald's model of production, whereby the same product can be consumed anywhere in the world in any McDonald's outlet, is clearly reflected in the insistence by the production team of *Mamma Mia!*, particularly Judy Craymer and Michael McCabe, that their product and its global identity should continue to be reproduced on a global scale according to their original, rigidly controlled, model. Although the show has clearly benefited from its association with the ABBA brand, Judy Craymer's McDonaldized approach has enabled *Mamma Mia!* to develop into a global brand in its own right.<sup>268</sup>

The influence of Cameron Mackintosh on the overall marketing strategy adopted for *Mamma Mia!* is also clearly apparent, and all the creative team that I interviewed were prepared to acknowledge freely the debt that was owed to Mackintosh, both in

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<sup>268</sup> Lee suggests that *Mamma Mia!* has not only adopted McDonaldized principles of brand marketing but has also overcome the funding limitations usually associated with theatrical productions and, in a traditional corporate manner, has successfully dovetailed the marketing of a particular production of the show with the longer-term development of the brand as a global entity: 'Most shows will never be a brand because the theatre industry just doesn't have enough money to make shows brands. So it's only over time that the shows actually indeed become brands. With that in mind, the producers of *Mamma Mia!* have been very smart in terms of really protecting the show's brand image: they created an iconic image, and they are carefully opening productions in strategic theatre markets around the world. In addition to their local marketing of the particular engagement, they also do traditional brand marketing which most shows don't do. They'll take an ad out in *People* magazine to talk about all of the different productions. They are doing a campaign now in movie theatres. They have really built a business on franchising that show around the country. It's a slightly different business model than what most shows have at their disposal. (Lee, interview 1, 2000)

the creation of a branded identity for their product through the use of a strictly controlled graphic logo, and in the expansion of their product into global markets that had originally been opened up by Mackintosh and which would otherwise have been much more difficult to exploit effectively. The development of a product whose broad appeal is closely linked to songs that are instantly recognisable around the globe is a critical factor in the global success of *Mamma Mia!* and has resulted in a show that is readily accessible to a global audience and that does not have the usual barriers of culture and language to overcome.<sup>269</sup>

The McDonald's model of franchising also seems to have been followed first by Mackintosh, and then by Judy Craymer, in the production under licence of their respective shows. The 2003 Las Vegas version of *Mamma Mia!* may have been the last to be produced in its entirety by Littlestar Services, but the commercial reach of *Mamma Mia!* continues to expand under a licensing arrangement whereby Judy Craymer will retain strict creative control over the branded identity of her product, in new and previously unexploited global markets such as South Korea.

*Mamma Mia!* has also broken new ground in marketing terms, utilising a range of initiatives within an integrated overall strategy that have not previously been attempted on a fully coordinated global scale. The show's commercial success will probably result in other marketers attempting to replicate the *Mamma Mia!* model, as producers strive to target consumers more effectively in an increasingly saturated market-place, but the importance of achieving a globally branded identity is clear, and the exact replication of the musical theatre product along McDonaldized lines has

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<sup>269</sup> This feature is reminiscent of *Cats*, which had not only proved that audiences could be sold a product that was aesthetically unchallenging, but also that consumption patterns could be clearly influenced by an integrated marketing strategy that followed McDonaldized principles.

therefore become a production priority. It might even be argued that the packaging and marketing of a show has become more important than the actual content of the show itself, and recent attempts by producers to repeat the success of *Mamma Mia!* by building the flimsiest of stories around the back catalogue of well known pop artists seem to confirm this observation.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> *We Will Rock You*, for example, was justifiably derided for the quality of its story line, which lacked any sense of subtlety or cohesive structural development, but intensive marketing that in many ways has followed the *Mamma Mia!* model has enabled this particular McDonaldized product to achieve global success. Michael McCabe (2003 interview) accepts that it was inevitable that other producers would attempt to capitalise on the phenomenal success that *Mamma Mia!* had achieved and that his production and its marketing strategy would become a model for other producers to follow. He also confirmed to me that *Mamma Mia!* seemed to reflect a general 'dumbing down' of the theatrical experience: 'Obviously there are innumerable copycat shows, and that is always true of any success. Now there are lots of people raiding the back catalogues of various pop groups. *Mamma Mia!* has set a standard, and it has grossed \$500,000,000 all around the world, but what it has strongly said is that there is a very, very big audience out there that is just hungry to have fun. People are saying, 'Just let me sit here and not have to think too much, because I just want to use theatre as a chance to be entertained in a rip-roaring sort of way.'

## CHAPTER 5 MARKETING PRACTICE

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter will examine the ways in which patterns of cultural consumption have developed and changed as a result of the branded approach to marketing that has been adopted, following Cameron Mackintosh's lead, by a number of leading producers of musical theatre. Ritzer suggests that the fundamental principles of McDonaldization underscore a range of marketing techniques adopted by a growing number of producers of cultural products. These principles include the use of signs and logos to establish corporate and brand identity, which may have indirectly resulted in increased homogenization and a consequent reduction of consumer choice. This thesis considers these developments and assesses the degree to which the McDonaldization of the production process has resulted in marketing assuming an ever-greater importance in a progressively saturated marketplace, as producers seek to attract commercially viable numbers of consumers.

Consideration is also given to whether the transition to an 'experience' economy, whereby the consumption of a particular product is marketed as a 'consumer experience', has resulted in a greatly increased emphasis being placed on spectacle. Ritzer reflects Debord's suggestion that spectacle is the 'chief product of present-day society' (Debord, 1994:16), asserting that spectacle is a fundamental element of cultural production in post-modern systems. As has been demonstrated in Chapter 3 of this thesis, spectacle has been a central element of a number of influential musical theatre shows, but Cameron Mackintosh's megamusical productions provided a

model of production for which marketing was to achieve an even greater prominence, and spectacle would become an essential ingredient of the marketing strategy. This chapter demonstrates that Mackintosh's productions, while reflecting earlier trends, have had far-reaching effects on the genre as a whole.

The immediate effect of the enormous commercial success of Cameron Mackintosh's global branding of his own productions has been a significant increase in the cost of market entry, with fewer producers being able to compete against companies such as Disney, whose ability to market productions through cross-fertilisation and corporate synergy provides such corporations with an unmatched competitive advantage. The recent trend towards productions built around already familiar pop songs has resulted in shows such as *We Will Rock You* and *Tonight's the Night* which are not only marketed to a mass audience, but also pay negligible regard to traditional elements of musical theatre such as character or plot development.<sup>271</sup> In many ways they also seem to be symptomatic of the homogenizing effect that Ritzer suggests is the direct consequence of the McDonaldized system of production.

This chapter also considers other aspects of commodification within the musical theatre industry, including the ways in which Cameron Mackintosh developed the merchandising of productions, which had substantial commercial benefits and also became an effective means of self-promotion. The late 1990s and early twenty first century witnessed the progressive integration of cultural production, with corporate mergers ensuring that significantly fewer producers wielded proportionately greater control. This, too, seems to have resulted in the reduction of consumer choice and

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<sup>271</sup> Flinn (1997) bemoans what he sees as the death of the American book musical, arguing (pp.479-499) that the megamusical and catalogue formats brought about its gradual demise. At the same time, he concedes (p.498) that other musical forms continue to flourish.

increased homogenization, and this thesis will aim to demonstrate, through the examination of a range of musicals and the methods employed to produce them, that in the field of musical theatre production Cameron Mackintosh has had a similar effect.

Centres of production such as Las Vegas, and multi-national corporations such as Disney, having originally drawn on the Mackintosh model of marketing, have now developed their own brand image to such a degree that they have had, and are continuing to have, a significant influence on global culture. Las Vegasization<sup>272</sup> and Disneyfication, while exhibiting McDonaldized elements, have become rationalized processes in their own right and have, in turn, exerted their own influence on the musical theatre genre. This chapter will consider the growth of 'entertainmentization and retailtainment',<sup>273</sup> with their attendant and defining features of simulation and spectacle, and will show that these elements are having an effect, not only on the ways in which musical productions are marketed, but also on the substance of the productions themselves.

One of the major advantages of entertainmentization and retailtainment for any cultural producer is that potential markets are expanded by the inclusion of a wider consumer demographic. Centres of everyday consumer activity have been transformed by being developed and marketed as places of family entertainment, so that shopping malls have become more like amusement parks, while amusement parks, with their emphasis on the selling of branded merchandise, have come to resemble shopping malls. This cultural development, to which Ritzer refers as the

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<sup>272</sup> 'Las Vegasization' is a term coined by Weeks and Roberts (1996) to describe the influence of Las Vegas on other areas of cultural production.

<sup>273</sup> These two terms were originally used by Wolf (1999), who suggests that the boundaries between entertainment and commerce are becoming increasingly blurred.

creation of ‘cathedrals of consumption’, has begun to permeate all areas of cultural production, including the musical theatre industry. A greatly increased percentage of productions is now deliberately targeted at the family market or is produced in a way that will not exclude this market segment, and producers are fully aware of the importance of their shows being endowed with broad appeal. Arguably, this has led to the ‘dumbing down’ of the genre, in a way that reflects a wider shift of the cultural paradigm.

## **5.2 Product branding, logo development and McDonaldization**

### **5.2.1 McDonald’s as a model for musical theatre: superficial, standardized, homogenized product**

McDonald’s has established itself as a global brand through its widespread use of trademarked signs, all of which have helped to impress on consumers the reliability and predictability of the core McDonald’s product.<sup>274</sup> However, while the ubiquitous signs and symbols of McDonald’s and other fast food chains have become embedded in the psyche of consumers, the product itself, which is being marketed on a global scale, has remained, in the view of cultural analysts such as Schlosser (2001: 103), one that offers very little nutritional value to its consumers:

There is hardly a place in the world where one cannot get a hamburger. Even in the remote jungles of Sarawak, the rainforests of Brazil, the deserts of North Africa, one cannot escape the ‘golden arches’ of McDonald’s, the ‘flaming grills’ of Burger King, the cute little girl of Wendy’s and other signs and symbols of American food chains. But hamburgers are more and more ubiquitous. While the mass-produced hamburger is promoted as food, it is essentially junk, food compounded by a whole series of additives that make the final product of little nutritional value.

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<sup>274</sup> McDonald’s has developed a wide range of trademarks including words (such as ‘McDonald’s’), symbols (such as the Golden Arches) and phrases (such as ‘I’m Lovin’ It!’). All of these are carefully controlled, and strict guidelines are laid down about the exact colours, font sizes and styles that should be used whenever and wherever they appear.

For Schlosser, therefore, the fast-food hamburger epitomises the McDonaldized product whose marketing promises a worthwhile eating experience but whose consumption offers little in terms of nutritional quality.<sup>275</sup> Such a defining feature could be ascribed to other cultural products, including a range of musical theatre productions that have adopted McDonaldized principles as a basis for their production processes. *The Lion King* is an example of a recent musical theatre production that seems to conform to this analysis of McDonaldized culture: the show provides consumers with a beautiful and spectacular theatrical design concept, and the high level of visual spectacle, while conforming to one of the central principles of McDonaldized culture, ensures that audience members who have had to pay high prices to purchase their tickets have, to some degree at least, obtained value for money.<sup>276</sup> Julie Taymor's visual interpretation of the story is as evocative as it is original, and there are a number of sequences in the production that are so imaginative and are such exquisitely theatrical interpretations of the story that the images of which they are constructed remain with an audience long after the final curtain has fallen.<sup>277</sup> Yet, while *The Lion King* has been deservedly praised for the beauty and originality

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<sup>275</sup> While Schlosser may be right to argue that the hamburger, McDonald's core product, has limited nutritional value, the introduction of a wide range of 'healthy' options such as salads suggests that the restaurant chain can no longer be dismissed simply as a purveyor of 'junk' food alone. McDonald's is acutely aware of changing public taste and has responded quickly to a demand by consumers for more nutritious products, as one of corporation's official web-sites ([www.makeupyourmind.co.uk](http://www.makeupyourmind.co.uk)) confirms: 'The current menu now offers a broad choice of food that can accommodate most tastes and dietary requirements. There is more choice and variety on the menu than ever before, [and] more has been added in the last three years than in the previous thirty... Additional options have been added to the menu over the past few years in response to requests from customers, not as a defensive measure... The menu is now wider than ever, with new items such the Ranch and Caesar Salads plus Toasted Deli Sandwiches joining old favourites to offer a huge range of options.'

<sup>276</sup> When interviewed by Simon Mayo on BBC Radio 5 (1 August 2004), Nicholas Hytner, Director of the Royal National Theatre, discussing what he considered to have become the essential ingredient of spectacle in the commercial sector, suggested that audience members needed to be able to 'get a bang for their buck.'

<sup>277</sup> The stampede of wildebeest, for example, with tiny distant silhouettes on a revolving canvas developing relentlessly into a crazed herd of huge and fearsome beasts that seem to bear down on the audience, is a triumph of simplicity and ingenuity that is just one of many highlights.

of its designs,<sup>278</sup> and while Michel Eisner, Chairman of the Disney Corporation, asserted in *The New York Times*, just before the show's premiere, that 'in the intellectual community in New York we surprised them with *The Lion King*,'<sup>279</sup> Eisner's additional suggestion in the same interview that the most significant achievement of *The Lion King* was the degree to which it had enhanced the Disney brand, reflects the commercial nature of its core. For, while the show's spectacle has the power to entrance and delight its consumers, almost every other aspect of *The Lion King* leaves the audience largely unsatisfied. As one would expect from a show that is based on a cartoon film, the characterisation is one-dimensional and the story is simplistic throughout, so that while the originality of the show's spectacular design concept may help to divert the audience's attention, the limitations of the production are always apparent. In Kustow's view (2000: 188), *The Lion King* is symptomatic of the triumph of visual spectacle over visual restraint that characterises the McDonaldized system of production, and consumers are sold a product 'experience' that, like a McDonald's hamburger, is 'bland, predictable, packaged, no longer nourishment.'

### 5.2.2 The growth of product branding and product promotion

An approach to the marketing of both products and services that Ritzer would denote as McDonaldized is evident in a number of commercially successful companies and corporations, and the rapid growth of such companies over a relatively short period of time could be attributed to their adoption of a McDonaldized system

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<sup>278</sup> The scenic design of *The Lion King* was by Richard Hudson, while the design of the costumes and puppets was by Julie Taymor who also directed the production. Hudson and Taymor won a range of awards for the original 1998 Broadway production, including Tony and Drama Desk Awards for Best Scenic Design (Hudson) and Tony and Drama Desk Awards for Best Costume Design and Best Director of a Musical (Taymor).

<sup>279</sup> Quoted in Kustow, p.168

of production and the successful branding of their products.<sup>280</sup> This emphasis on product branding and conveying a branded image through advertising and marketing has been apparent in all areas of cultural production, including musical and, indeed, non-musical theatre. Cameron Mackintosh may have been the first producer of musical theatre to achieve commercial success on a global scale with *Cats*, but other producers such as Disney have subsequently followed Mackintosh's example, and have branded their products through the creation of logos and through relentless advertising campaigns that have seen musical theatre productions appearing across all five continents since the 1980s.

Marketing itself, however, has also seen major developments, and the mass advertising campaigns that characterized the promotion of *Cats* and *The Phantom of the Opera* have evolved into more strategic campaigns, in which a range of niche areas are targeted in an attempt to reach new audiences in an increasingly saturated

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<sup>280</sup> Blockbuster is just one example of a company that has embraced McDonaldized principles as a means of achieving commercial success on a global scale. Referring to itself as 'The McDonald's of the video business' (Potts, 1991: 24), Blockbuster quickly became the largest video franchise in the United States, on the back of relentless advertising to establish its brand identity. According to Shapiro (1992: D6), Blockbuster's profits rose from \$18million in 1988 to a staggering \$244million just five years later, and the company's continuing rapid expansion ensured that the Blockbuster brand became established as a major global entity by the mid to late 1990s. By following the McDonald's precept of delivering a 'predictable' service in 'predictable' surroundings, Blockbuster has been able to become a dominant global brand, despite the fact that its basic service of offering video and DVD recordings for hire is exactly the same service that is offered by a multitude of other companies who have failed to achieve the globalized level of commercial success that Blockbuster has enjoyed. Similarly, the Starbucks coffee chain, whose explosive rate of growth has seen the company develop from a modest local business to a company with a global reach, is identified by Ritzer (1996: 153) as being a model example of a McDonaldized company. This meteoric expansion of Starbucks may not originally have been planned, but it demonstrates the commercial potential of a McDonaldized system of production, and reflects the rapid rate of growth that may be achieved, a point that was not lost on Howard Schultz, the company's CEO: 'The size and scale of what Starbucks is today was never originally planned. In 1987 we had 11 stores and 100 employees. Now [in September 2003] we have 7,000 stores and 70,000 employees. When we floated the company in 1994, it had a market value of £200 million, now it's £11 billion. I guess we kinda underestimated the opportunity initially' (Quoted in Davidson, 2003: 7).

market-place. For Slater (1997: 191), this represents a post-Fordist approach to marketing, whereby markets are progressively seen as segmented rather than mass:

Post-Fordist marketing...disaggregates markets and consumption into 'lifestyles', 'niche markets', 'target consumer groups', 'market segments.' These are not defined by broad social demographic structures (and do not correlate with them easily, if at all) but rather by cultural meanings which link a range of goods and activities into a coherent image. The broader claim is that lifestyle marketing not only identifies and targets existing lifestyles but rather *produces* them by organising consumers according to meaningful patterns, constructed and distributed through design, advertising and the media (which are themselves increasingly segmented or 'narrowcast' rather than mass).<sup>281</sup>

As Slater (1993: 193) correctly points out, however, the apparent shift of emphasis from Fordist product differentiation to post-Fordist market segmentation should not be overstated as both will continue to coexist: 'As any marketer will say, the two are inextricable because a product difference must be a difference *for* a particular consumer segment for whom that difference has relevance.'<sup>282</sup> This is particularly clear in the marketing of musical theatre productions, where the global marketing approach of CML provided a template that would be imitated by a wide range of other producers, including Disney. The marketing campaign for *The Lion King*, for example, made full use of a Dewynters-designed logo to market the production to a world-wide audience that was already familiar with the show's plot, characters and

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<sup>281</sup> Ritzer (1996: 150ff) acknowledges the claim made 'by a number of Marxist thinkers' that industry has 'undergone a transition from Fordism to post-Fordism,' and admits that 'greater differentiation in the workplace leads to greater differentiation in society as a whole.' However, he seems unwilling to accept the argument put forward by Locke that the collapse of the American management mystique has already been witnessed. Instead, Ritzer suggests that 'less radical postmodern orientations allow us to see phenomena like McDonald's as having *both* modern and postmodern characteristics,' (Ibid: 154), concluding that 'McDonaldization constitutes a rejection of the thesis that we have moved on to a postmodern society in which...modern phenomena are quickly disappearing' (Ibid: 159).

<sup>282</sup> While writers such as Locke contend that the McDonaldized model of mass production seems to be in terminal decline, and Schlesinger and Heskett (1991) suggest that organisations such as McDonald's cannot respond effectively to increased market segmentation with 'production-line thinking,' others, such as Yasamuro (1993: 215), suggest that the rationalized approach adopted by McDonald's has continued to be commercially successful because it enabled the corporation to '[create] variety through the combination of standardized materials.'

music as a result of the success of the earlier cartoon version. At the same time, other shows have adopted a much more targeted approach,<sup>283</sup> and the Walton Group, which promotes both CML shows and other productions on Broadway, is one of a small number of marketing companies that has become very successful in blending mass and niche marketing strategies. In November 2000 Scott Walton himself explained how his company adopts a more targeted approach to the marketing of a show, when such an approach is considered likely to achieve greater commercial success.<sup>284</sup> He also emphasised that such a flexible approach is a relatively recent development in an industry that even in the early 1990s still used to rely almost exclusively on mass, particularly press, advertising.<sup>285</sup> The growth in promotional marketing has resulted in a wide range of initiatives being developed by Walton and others, but the major difference between this form of marketing and more traditional advertising methods is that the modern promoter seeks to enhance the recognition of a particular product

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<sup>283</sup> Lee (interview 3) stressed that even producers of musical theatre productions with broad appeal needed to develop marketing strategies that were focused effectively on reaching specific market segments: 'It's very much like McDonald's and, if you look at the McDonald's or look at what most other companies do, they don't have one commercial running, they have up to three different ones that all speak the same message but speak to slightly different audiences. In contrast, sometimes I think that one of the things the theatre does is that we take an advertisement and we put the same advertisement in every publication. Why don't we take the same advertisement and change the headline for the reader who's reading that publication! I think there is still a misnomer that tourists are all the same, that family shows are all the same, that suburban audiences are all the same, that multicultural audiences are all the same.' Targeted marketing was especially important for musical theatre productions, Lee insisted, since even megamusical productions 'are not 'mass' in McDonald's terms, [they] are 'mass' as it relates to live theatre, or performing arts.'

<sup>284</sup> Walton interview (2000)

<sup>285</sup> According to Walton (interview, 2000), the Broadway production of *Smokey Joe's Café* saw a major turning point in marketing philosophy. Not only was a new type of Broadway audience targeted for the show, but the production also saw the introduction of the rock and roll-style promoter to the musical theatre marketing mix, with many producers soon following suit as they sought to incorporate innovative promotional techniques into their overall marketing strategies: 'Six years ago there was nobody out there like me or the other people like me. It was always just about advertising, and advertising in the press. Then a show called *Smokey Joe's Café* came along and they recognised that they were probably not going to get the most stellar reviews because it was not the type of show that the *New York Times* goes for and because this was a show that was not going to be for the traditional theatregoer because it was a rock and roll music show. So they really needed to reach that crowd and they said they ought to try more rock and roll techniques and should bring in somebody who has worked, not in the rock and roll arena, but has experience of how you promote in outside entertainment ventures, and that really opened the door. Now I don't think you can find a Broadway show that doesn't have a promoter because they recognise the need.'

by a target audience, without significantly increasing the overall marketing budget.<sup>286</sup>

Many musical theatre shows now benefit commercially from this targeted approach, even when, over a period of time, there are fairly radical changes in the target market of a specific show.<sup>287</sup>

### 5.2.3 The advent of the experience economy with its emphasis on spectacle, and the attendant cost of this development

Within a McDonaldized system of production, packaging and image assume ever-greater importance, so that even the most mundane of products and services are marketed as ‘cultural experiences’ that can be shared by all its consumers.<sup>288</sup> In a market-place where consumers have the choice of products that are broadly similar, producers need to achieve product differentiation in the minds of their consumers in

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<sup>286</sup> Wolf suggests (1999: 107) that although a mass audience is obviously desirable, since it offers the greatest opportunity for producers to maximize their commercial potential, mass marketing has become increasingly expensive; niche marketing has consequently assumed a much greater importance in a market-place that is becoming increasingly saturated, and where targeted advertising is therefore often likely to be more cost-effective: ‘At the same time that mass audiences are so coveted, target audiences are also increasingly valuable. Niche audiences offer a high level of commitment to a particular lifestyle, attitude, buying behaviour, and even a set of beliefs. Advertisers can identify the group of people they want to reach when they purchase ads in niche media such as the Discovery Channel, Lifetime Television, *Maxim*, *Brides*, *iVillage*, or *Auto Trader*. As they try to increase the efficiency of their advertising buys and associate their products with a lifestyle, interest group, or set of trendsetters, these targeted impressions become highly valuable.’

<sup>287</sup> The Walton-promoted *Naked Boys Singing* is an example of a show for which the marketing strategy was retargeted: ‘Every show now has its own target market. We handle a couple of Broadway shows, such as *The Donkey Show*. We also promote a little Off-Broadway show called *Naked Boys Singing*, which has been running for two years. Both shows are very target market specific. [The target market for] *The Donkey Show* is young people who don’t really even go to the theatre, who are aged eighteen to twenty-five and who want a fun night out on the town. *Naked Boys Singing* was originally targeted at gay men, now it is [targeted at] bachelor night parties and women in their forties.’ (Walton interview, 2000)

<sup>288</sup> Slater (1997: 193-194) considers that marketing is becoming defined by the growth of the ‘experience’ economy: ‘Even material commodities appear to have a greater non-material component. This includes the extension of ‘commodity aesthetics’, so that much of a product seems to comprise design, packaging and advertising imagery, and these elements seem to be dominant in the object’s constitution (in production, distribution and consumption). A more general sense of this dematerialization is indicated by the fact that, whereas people used to talk about the consumption of goods and services, we now tend to talk about product ‘experiences’: Mars does not sell chocolate bars but rather a ‘taste experience.’”

order to gain market dominance.<sup>289</sup> McDonald's itself, while tailoring its advertising to 'the needs and interests of different ethnic and national groups, different races, and both genders' also attempts to portray a visit to one of its restaurants as an 'entertainment experience' that encourages familial togetherness and 'fun' (Ritzer 1998: 87). In Japan, for example, it was reported (*New York Times*, 8 October 1991, p.D15) that Toys 'R' Us had struck a deal whereby their new outlets would each include a McDonald's restaurant. By deliberately associating itself closely with a global distributor of children's toys, it becomes apparent that McDonald's wishes to portray itself as being in the business of providing fun for its consumers. Furthermore, eating at McDonald's is portrayed in the company's advertisements as an entertainment experience that will satisfy the whole family, while other traditionally mundane activities in the McDonaldized system, such as shopping, have been similarly transformed.<sup>290</sup>

Susan Lee (interview 2) suggests that McDonaldization has resulted in the establishment of an 'experience economy' in which theatricality has become a major

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<sup>289</sup> The Starbucks product, for example, is simple, and Scott Bedbury, the company's Vice President of Marketing, admitted that 'consumers don't truly believe there's a huge difference between products' (*The New York Times*, 20 October 1997, p.5). Expanding on Bedbury's comments in the same article, Starbucks CEO, Howard Schultz, suggested that the success of the company was to a large extent attributable to the consumption experience that the company provided for its consumers, most of whom expect more than the simple products that are on offer: 'It's the romance of the coffee experience, the feeling of warmth and community people get in Starbucks stores.' The infusion of meaning into the consumer experience is a dominant feature of the McDonaldized system and it is interesting to note that Bedbury's approach to product marketing at Starbucks was similar to that adopted by Nike, where Bedbury was responsible for the launch of the 'Just do It!' branding campaign. His comments (Quoted in Peters 1997, p.96) about the significance of product branding in a McDonaldized system that is dominated by the prevalence of consumer experience culture, are equally applicable to musical theatre production in an increasingly commodified world: 'Nike...is leveraging the deep emotional connection that people have with sport and fitness. With Starbucks, we see how coffee has woven itself into the fabric of people's lives, and that's our opportunity of emotional leverage...A great brand raises the bar- it adds a greater sense of purpose to the experience, whether it's the challenge to do your best in sports and fitness or the affirmation that the cup of coffee you're drinking really matters.'

<sup>290</sup> Carlson (1990: 20) comments: 'When The Shopper was young, Americans used to sing, 'There's no business like show business,' but they don't sing it much anymore, probably because just about every business is like show business now. Supermarkets are certainly no exception. These days, supermarkets are like theme parks.'

feature of cultural production. Producers no longer focus their marketing drives directly on their products but on the experiences that their products can provide for consumers. Disney, for example, therefore tailors its marketing strategies to the role that it has created for itself as a purveyor of happiness:

Marketing a service is different to marketing a product. A theatre ticket for a producer is a product, whereas theatre-going is a service, it is an entertainment service, especially because we live in an experience economy. In the United States you can go to Barnes and Noble and that is an experience. You go into a retail store and that is an experience. Everything that we do, everything that consumers are used to is an experience- if we go to a theme park, that is a surreal experience. So, if every other industry is using theatre to sell its product, what can theatre do to sell its product? It needs to be an experience that is different from retailing and different from a theme park. Disney's core product is happiness- that is what they sell and it is central to everything that they do- it is manifested in their shows, in their theme parks and in their cartoons. They stated this themselves.<sup>291</sup> (Lee Interview 2)

For Wolf (1999: 28), the differences between the entertainment industry and other forms of commerce have become blurred: 'Brands and stars have become the same thing, and in the emerging world economy where entertainment and the laws of the entertainment business infuse more and more of the rest of the world of commerce and culture, successful businesses need star brands to bring consumers through the door.'<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> Lee suggests (interview 2) that Cameron Mackintosh has marketed his musicals as events that potential audiences need to experience for themselves, and that he has thus ensured that each of his products is a star attraction in its own right, and is marketed as such, without being reliant on star names as had so often been the case with other musical theatre producers in the past.

<sup>292</sup> Expanding on this theme, Wolf (1999: 108-9) suggests that television is just one area of cultural production that is focusing more on a progressively smaller number of high profile broadcast 'events' that are advertised to a mass audience: 'In television (both cable and broadcast), as in movies, we are moving to an era of blockbuster events because those are the only products that can deliver the giant numbers that warrant television advertising's increasing price tag. Thus, there is no escaping a diet of event television based on gigantic movies of the week, big-time marquee sports with media-pumped hero athletes, awards specials, and mini-series. By virtue of the fact that the 'mass' in this mass medium has grown smaller, a higher premium will be placed on any product that can deliver truly mass numbers.'

#### 5.2.4 The production of Musical Theatre in an experience economy

Andrew Lloyd Webber predicted in the early 1980s that the high cost of tickets for musicals that was a direct result of rapidly increasing capitalisation and running costs, would result in shows being increasingly marketed as ‘entertainment experiences’ that offered audiences a unique consumer opportunity that could not be provided by another medium:

I think *Cats* is far and away the most entertaining of the musicals I’ve done. If you look at it as an experience (which incidentally is how theatre is going to be increasingly looked at in my opinion, because seats are so expensive) then surely it is *hugely* [relevant] for the medium. It’s no good putting on something nowadays which people can see just as well on their video. That’s why *Cats* is so popular. They can’t get to see anything like it, not at all. It doesn’t exist.<sup>293</sup>

The success of *Cats* demonstrated the value of marketing a product as a consumption experience,<sup>294</sup> and Cameron Mackintosh has had a significant influence in this respect on the marketing strategy for those shows that aspire to megamusical status. Production budgets for musical theatre productions have continued to spiral, as other producers have initiated a similar strategy. In 2001, for example, Michael Rose claimed that his new production of *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* would assume the mantle of ‘most expensive British production to run in the West End’ (*The Stage*, 22 November 2001, p.2). Rose acknowledged that the cost of employing what he considered to be the ‘best creative talent available’ would inevitably inflate the show’s production budget; however, he also made direct reference to Cameron

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<sup>293</sup> Lloyd Webber’s view (Quoted in McKnight, 1984: 233) seems to be borne out by the increasingly prevalent promotion of all cultural products, not just musical theatre, as ‘event experiences’, a development that mirrors the postmodern approach to the marketing of products within a McDonaldized system. Wolf writing in the late 1990s, suggests (passim) that the trend towards the marketing of products as ‘events’ is becoming a major feature of late twentieth and early twenty first century cultural production.

<sup>294</sup> Cameron Mackintosh (Quoted in Morley 1998, p.62) acknowledged that ‘the brilliance of [Director] Trevor (Nunn) and [Designer] John (Napier) was to realise that they could make [*Cats*] an experience rather than just another musical.’

Mackintosh's marketing approach and the attendant budgetary inflation that inevitably ensued, suggesting that such an approach had now become a necessity in a market-place where magical effects such as flying helicopters (*Miss Saigon*) and flying people (*The Witches of Eastwick*) had become a priority. A flying car in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* was simply the latest magical effect that would contribute to the producer's opportunity to market his show as a major theatrical event and which therefore fully justified the considerable additional financial outlay:

Technically, to make the car fly has cost us more than three quarters of a million pounds... It has got to be an event. This is event theatre and that doesn't come cheap (Ibid).

The marketing approaches adopted for shows such as *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* highlight not only the influence that Cameron Mackintosh has had on the promotion of the musical as an event and the development of the musical as spectacle, but also the heightened expectations of consumers. As Walsh (2000) suggests, the influence that Mackintosh has had on Disney's theatrical productions, in particular, is clear:

Works like *Cats* and *The Phantom of the Opera* set the standard for the musical-as-event. Once the chandelier came crashing down at the end of Act 1 of *Phantom*, the landing helicopter in *Miss Saigon*, and the sinking ocean liner in *Titanic* were inevitable. Further, the success of the Disney musicals, *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Lion King* in their Broadway incarnations would be unthinkable without their [Mackintosh] progenitors...Audiences today go to Broadway not for a show but for a spectacle.<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> Rob Bettinson, the creator of *Buddy*, which itself ran for thirteen years in the West End, suggests that the emergence of the megamusical as a dominant form has not only made it almost impossible for new writers to break through, but has also had a homogenizing effect on the genre as a whole, with spectacular effects becoming the central focus, and investors being unwilling to put money into a show that does not include this essential, and expensive, ingredient: 'When I started out, you could go to a rep company and create shows and you could develop your ideas. Now the economics don't allow it... Musical theatre has become horrendous. Shows such as *Miss Saigon*, and recent productions such as *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* and *The Witches of Eastwick* have used their multi-million budgets as a marketing tool. The production expenses are massive. It is like you can't sell it unless it has got a car in it or a helicopter. You can't get anybody to invest in them. It is very difficult to get people to part with

### 5.2.5 Musical Theatre and the post-modern triumph of spectacle over content

In the McDonaldized system of production, spectacle becomes an integral part of marketing strategy and producers strive to portray their productions as ‘events’ in an attempt to generate maximum levels of audience interest.<sup>296</sup> Writing in the 1960s, Debord (1977: 16) suggests that ‘the spectacle is the chief *product* of present-day society,’ arguing that one of the functions of the spectacle is to conceal both ‘the rationality of the system’ and the ultimate sense of dissatisfaction that is the inevitable consequence of consumption in such a system. The McDonaldization of society which, Ritzer argues, has increased the rate of this rationalization and has resulted in the progressive homogenization of both the process of production and the product itself, has inevitably led producers of cultural artifacts to seek new means of product differentiation. Packaging therefore becomes as important as content as producers attempt to attract potential consumers, and spectacle assumes ever greater importance as a means of achieving this end:

Postmodern systems are intent on offering ‘spectacles’. Examples include the garishness of fast food restaurants and their amusement-park qualities such as playgrounds for children, the modern malls that are more entertainment complexes, as well as the amusement parks themselves. Cruise ships, casinos, hotels, even supermarkets seek to present themselves as spectacles so that they can elicit that intensity that is otherwise made so difficult to experience by the unemotional and affect-less (sic) character of postmodern systems. (Ritzer, 1998: 124-125)<sup>297</sup>

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their money- unless you are Cameron Mackintosh or Andrew Lloyd Webber with a track record... The pressure on new shows is to be massive, to spend six or seven million pounds.’ (Bettinson interview 2002)

<sup>296</sup> Zink (1997: 1D) considers that this reflects a trend that is particularly noticeable on Broadway: ‘[Megamusicals] bring lavish production values, in many cases equal to the theme park that is Broadway these days. Huge scale and magical special effects are now as much a part of the musical as the songs. No longer just theater, they have become what their producers call ‘event musicals.’

<sup>297</sup> Debord’s contention that the function of spectacle is to obscure and conceal the rationality of the system is developed by Ritzer (1999: 105-106), who suggests that ‘spectacle is used to overcome the liabilities, especially the disenchantment, associated with highly rationalized systems.’ Spectacle is therefore able to disguise the dissatisfaction that consumers would otherwise feel in response to the consumption of goods and services, since consumers are also buying into a product or service experience of which spectacle is an intricate part. This disguising of inherent lack of quality and the

The emphasis on spectacle has also led to a change in audience expectations, which now demand the same level of big budget spectacle from touring versions of musical theatre productions that had made the shows famous in the first place and had enabled them to be marketed as 'event musicals' by their producers. Regional theatres that were not large enough to take the full, original productions, would be unable to consider receiving such shows:

Spectacle altered the way audiences regard theater. Both the patrons and donors so desperately sought by regional theaters have become accustomed to big-budget touring shows, whose sensory impact can seldom be duplicated at the local level. Even those who are willing to make the attempt, the most dramatic spectacles aren't available. *Les Misérables*, *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Miss Saigon* are showing no signs of road weariness, and the smaller *Cats* seems to be taking 'now and forever' literally. In fact, most of Broadway's musical hits since the arrival of *Les Misérables* in 1987 have been spectaculars that go on endless tour, leaving slim pickings for regional theater...Audiences come in with expectations...and audience disappointment would be inevitable in a scaled-down regional production. (Zink, 1997: 1D)<sup>298</sup>

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consequent suppression of consumer dissatisfaction has permeated all areas of the McDonaldized system. Brantley (1995) considers that, in the world of musical theatre, an ever-increasing appetite for spectacle on the part of consumers has resulted in a sense of increased artificiality and a move away from more cerebral or subtle elements such as characterisation: Weber's vision of a rationalized system, in which non-human technologies gradually displace their human counterparts, therefore seems to be reflected in the increasing prominence given to spectacle in musical theatre productions, and the way in which non-human technology has increasingly become a star in its own right: 'It's not easy being human in the Broadway musical of today. The public appetite for spectacle that directly recalls the artificial thrills of movies and amusement parks has shifted the emphasis away from the charismatic performer who sings, dances and charms. And it's evident in everything from *Showboat* to *Beauty and the Beast*, from *Grease* to *How to Succeed...* the acid test for the star of *Sunset [Boulevard]* comes when Mr. Napier's set literally splits in two: when the grand, baroque foyer of Norma's mansion is stunningly hoisted into midair, leaving room for another scene to take place simultaneously below.'

<sup>298</sup> This is not to say that the British musical productions of the 1980s and 1990s were the first to employ elements of spectacle. In early twentieth century America, as has been shown, producers such as the Shuberts had attracted audiences almost exclusively on the strength of their shows' spectacular nature. Moreover, twenty years before *Cats* was produced, a number of shows in the West End included spectacular design concepts. The massive revolving set that was a major feature of the 1960 West End production of *Oliver*, for example, was the first of a number of spectacular sets that Sean Kenny was to design for West End; moreover, it is interesting to note that the remarkable and spectacular exploding set created by Kenny for *Blitz* had led Kenneth Tynan (Quoted in Flinn 1997: 485) to warn of the developments that he felt might occur in the staging of musical theatre: 'There are distinct signs that sets are now taking over. They swoop down on the actors and snatch them aloft; four motor-driven towers prowl the stage, converging menacingly on any performer who threatens to hog the limelight; and whenever the human element looks like gaining control, they collapse on it in a mass of flaming timber. In short they let the cast know who's boss...I have a fearful premonition of the next show Mr Kenny's designs. As soon as the curtain rises, the sets will advance on the audience and summarily expel it from the theatre.' Tynan's remarks foreshadow the emphasis placed on spectacle

The substantial profits that were generated by *Cats* both in the West End and on Broadway encouraged other producers to attempt to duplicate the feat. *Starlight Express*, for example, was one of a number of shows that followed the *Cats* model, but where the total budget for staging *Cats* in London had been £500,000 just three years earlier, the budget just for modifying the Apollo and putting in the set for *Starlight Express* was £1.4million. The total budget for the show was in excess of £2million, a sum that crept up to nearly £2.4 million by the time *Starlight Express* actually opened,<sup>299</sup> and reflected that such spectacular musicals were becoming ventures of increasing financial risk.

*Starlight Express* reflected the attraction of innovative but expensive staging. Roller-skating actors simulated the various trains in the superficial and highly repetitive story-line, and skating tracks stretched from the stage to all levels of the theatre, while video screens were built into the set so that members of the audience would not miss any of the action. *Starlight Express* was to be a triumph of spectacle over dramatic content; the visual effect of this spectacle, which was heightened by the addition of a light and laser show designed by David Hersey, was remarkable, but the musical score was, at best, superficial and many of the lyrics plumbed new depths.<sup>300</sup> Despite

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during the 1980s, a decade that saw the production of shows such as *Time* and *Starlight Express*, in which visual spectacle seemed to be a prerequisite, while a carefully-crafted book and subtle characterisation seemed to be almost an irrelevance.

<sup>299</sup> The show needed to be sold out for forty-three weeks if it was to run into a profit.

<sup>300</sup> One of the show's choruses reflects the overall lyrical banality of the production:

'Freight is great  
 Freight is great  
 We carry weight 'cos we are freight  
 And freight is great.  
 Freight is great  
 Freight is great  
 We never sulk. We hulk the bulk.  
 'Cos freight is great.'

the show's aesthetic limitations,<sup>301</sup> its technological innovation still attracted a large audience. The show was still doing excellent business in London and, considering the profitability of *Cats*, the \$8million budget for the Broadway launch of *Starlight Express* seemed to be an attractive proposition for investment, even if this considerable sum would make the show the most expensive in Broadway history.<sup>302</sup> The trend that saw production costs spiralling, however, began to attract a different type of financial investor, and the substantial level of investment required by a new show ensured that corporate investors were to play an increasingly influential role in the production of the spectacular musical. In the case of *Starlight Express*, MCA contributed \$5million towards the production costs, with Strada Holdings, a New Zealand investment company, providing another \$3 million.<sup>303</sup>

A number of producers followed the example of *Starlight Express*, believing that

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<sup>301</sup> Even Lloyd Webber himself seemed to acknowledge during an interview on *The South Bank Show* (15 November 1986) that the show's aesthetic limitations were disguised by its expensive elements of spectacle: 'What Trevor (Nunn) did with it was probably the only way you could stage it... I would not be very honest if I put up a great bravura front and said that I think it's the most important piece of musical theatre that ever happened because it was not. It's a fun piece, it's my rock and roll side coming out. I thought, 'Let's do a fun thing and not worry about whether or not it gets good or bad reviews and just do it.' But it's a bit too expensively produced for my taste.'

<sup>302</sup> The Broadway production of *Starlight Express* ultimately failed to repeat the commercial success of *Cats*. While there was probably an audience who would pay to see the latest Lloyd Webber-branded offering, the contrived and repetitive storyline lacked the innocent charm of *Cats*, and gave rise to a range of vitriolic reviews from American drama critics who seemed to resent the British takeover of an art form they considered to be their own. Despite having opened with \$4million in advance bookings, *Starlight Express* closed in January 1989, after two years and 761 performances. Banal lyrics, simplistic melodies and exceedingly repetitive choreography, coupled with very poor reviews, ensured that the show's appearance on Broadway was short-lived. In London, however, where the views of drama critics were less influential and where ticket prices were considerably lower, the show continued to do good business, celebrating its fifth birthday soon after the Broadway version closed.

<sup>303</sup> The set alone for *Starlight Express* was to cost \$2.5 million but, despite the money that was sunk into the production, Broadway's *Starlight Express* failed to replicate the success of the London version. The critics were almost unanimous in their view of the show: visual spectacle alone, at least on Broadway, was no substitute for a well-told story and, three weeks after the first night of *Starlight Express*, Frank Rich (1987) was to write: 'Along with Lloyd Webber's ability to connect with mass taste, the other key to the English musical's new success is its shift in emphasis in musical staging. Unable to compete with Broadway's high-powered choreography, the English musical has to turn elsewhere for kinetic energy. The option chosen was spectacle: if the performers can't dance, why not let the scenery do so instead? The spectacles of *Cats* and *Starlight Express* are top-heavy with smoke-filled special effects, simulated trains and all the other toys a big budget can buy. As visitors to *Starlight Express* soon discover, hardware, money and noise are no substitute for inspiration. With its dehumanised look and equally metallic canned sound, *Starlight* is as heavy and remote an evening in its way as pre-electronic English musicals were in theirs.'

spectacular staging could help to offset commercial risk. The West End success of *Starlight Express* seemed to confirm that there was a ready market for undemanding and spectacular entertainment,<sup>304</sup> and *Time*, for example, like *Starlight Express*, emphasised its spectacular staging in all its advance publicity. Plot and story-line gave way to lasers, spinning mirrors and flying saucers, as the production budget climbed from an initial £2million to over £3million.<sup>305</sup> The Dominion Theatre was turned into a setting from outer space, and the scenery, weighing over twenty tons, would rise hydraulically to the roof in the manner of a giant spaceship under a blaze of laser lighting.<sup>306</sup> The idea of a carefully crafted story-line seemed to have become redundant, but shows like *Time* and *Starlight Express* never pretended to be anything other than superficial spectacle. Although *Starlight Express* had very little story, it also presented no language problems for foreign tourists, no demands of shared heritage, and no cultural barriers to be overcome. So, whereas traditional American book musicals were written from an American standpoint and were generally based on American traditions and culture, the successful British musicals, especially those of the 1980s, were much less geographically-specific, a fact that contributed to their

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<sup>304</sup> Trevor Nunn suggested in the programme notes for *Starlight Express* that there was a market for productions that were 'undemanding in content, novel in theme, inventive in composition and full of opportunity for spectacle and theatre magic.' In an interview published in *The Guardian* (9 December 1992), Cameron Mackintosh was much more cynical: 'If a genre is successful, everyone wants to jump on the bandwagon. After *Starlight*, for instance, the rash of huge sets looking for a musical was enormous. It's just people trying to make money out of something they think is safe. And, of course it isn't. Musicals have always been the riskiest of ventures because they're so expensive and the alchemy is so difficult.'

<sup>305</sup> Despite the show's lack of a cohesive storyline or musical score, producer Dave Clark was happy to justify *Time* as a high-tech visual spectacle that transcended the traditional boundaries of musical theatre: 'This isn't one of the usual run of musicals. It's a trial set in space so you've got to use techniques that will give the audience the impression that that is where they are. After films like *2001* and *Close Encounters*, people won't accept anything cheap and unconvincing. I think average people enjoy lavish spectacular shows. For the amount of money you have to pay for a theatre ticket these days you're entitled to a bit of value for money and something visually exciting. It can only be good for the theatre that there are so many remarkable musicals on offer in the West End.' (*Today*, 25 May 1986, p.19)

<sup>306</sup> *Time* also relied heavily on the casting in the central role of Cliff Richard, whose broad fan base, Dave Clark was fully aware, would ensure that the production could be kept afloat for at least its opening months.

worldwide success. *Starlight Express* may have performed disappointingly in America, but that was of no great consequence when the show was a commercial success in other countries.<sup>307</sup>

### 5.2.6 The experience economy and Weber's iron cage of rationality

Max Weber (1968) argued that bureaucratization, his paradigm of formal rationality, had a number of advantages, namely its efficiency, calculability, predictability and control. At the same time, however, he argued that as society became progressively more rationalized, individuals would become trapped within the 'iron cage of rationality' and, inevitably, have their basic humanity denied by the increasingly influential role that non-human technology would play in the production process.<sup>308</sup> Smart, echoing Lee's depiction (Lee, interview 2) of the dominance of experience culture, argues that consumers in a post-modern capitalist society are 'powerfully seduced' rather than 'imprisoned' by the promise of particular experiences that are depicted in advertisements. He also draws attention (1999: 12) to the post-modern dominance of 'signs' within the McDonaldized system:

People are not so much 'trapped' or 'imprisoned' as powerfully seduced by the signs and promised prospect of pleasure, economy and sociability promoted by marketing departments and persuasively portrayed in advertising copy.

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<sup>307</sup> Since its West End opening, *Starlight Express* has been a major hit in Bochum, Germany, where it has played continuously in a specially built venue since 1988. The show also had a successful four-year run in Las Vegas, and has been reproduced in various countries, including Japan, Australia and Mexico.

<sup>308</sup> Ritzer argues that many of the rational principles identified by Weber that were pioneered by the bureaucratic system, have been employed by fast-food restaurants and have, therefore, helped to create the McDonaldized system of production. Ritzer (1996: 143-160) briefly considers the ways in which a demand for rationalized products such as fast foods are created, and alludes to the pressures that are brought to bear on people to ensure that the consumption of McDonaldized commodities is not only maintained but also increased; however, the basic metaphor of the iron cage that Ritzer inherits from Weber seems too simplistic to be able to explain adequately the complex consequences of a McDonaldized system, particularly since marketing techniques have become so much more sophisticated.

Kroker (1989: 119) pursues this line of analysis still further by arguing that McDonald's has marketed the consumption of its product as an experience that can be shared by a wide range of consumer groups, to such an extent that its primary product has actually become a sign in its own right:

Hamburgers have been aestheticised to such a point of frenzy and hysteria that the McDonald's hamburger has actually vanished into its own sign. Just watch the TV commercials. Hamburgers as *party time* for kids; as *nostalgia time* for our senior citizens; as *community time* for small town America; and, as always, hamburgers under the media sign of *friendship time* for America's teenagers. Thus processed hamburgers for a society where eating is *the* primary consumptive activity.

The scale of the company's advertising and promotional campaigns resulted in McDonald's spending in excess of \$20 billion during the 1980s and 1990s, but this has ensured that the Golden Arches has become the second most recognised symbol in the world. The reduction of a product, and more particularly of a service, to a sign that signifies predictability of quality and that can be recognised on a global scale, whatever the language of individual consumers, has become a significant feature of the McDonaldized system.<sup>309</sup> As has been demonstrated above, McDonald's has developed a range of trademarked signs and symbols, all of which it protects with the full force of its considerable legal muscle, and which the company uses on a global

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<sup>309</sup> Following the McDonald's model, Cameron Mackintosh developed similarly iconic symbols, particularly during the 1980s, in order to establish his shows on the global consciousness and thereby open up markets that had previously been unexploited by musical theatre producers. Munch (1999: 138) draws further comparisons between the McDonaldized marketing of Cameron Mackintosh shows and the rationalized approach to both the production and marketing of its product that has been adopted by McDonald's. Although he erroneously attributes the McDonaldization of musical theatre marketing to Andrew Lloyd Webber, failing to acknowledge that *Cats* and *The Phantom of the Opera* were joint CML/RUG productions, and although he is apparently unaware that it was Cameron Mackintosh, rather than Andrew Lloyd Webber, who was responsible for adopting McDonaldized marketing principles, Munch's comparison is highly pertinent to this thesis: 'Specialists like Andrew Lloyd Webber market their musical productions uniformly throughout the world. The original is played everywhere, that is, the same musical is performed in the same way everywhere. There is no room for deviation. The public can accordingly count on the same professionally assured quality, the product itself can bring in the largest possible profit on the world-wide market. It is the same strategy introduced by McDonald's for serving the whole world with the same fast-food product. In this sense we can speak of the McDonaldization of culture.'

scale to market its branded products and services to an ever-larger number of consumers. McDonald's has not only aggressively marketed its core product as a consumer experience but, as Kroker has observed, the company has also broadened its consumer base in the process, aestheticising the humble hamburger to such a degree that the experience of consumption can satisfy a wide age range in equal measure. In particular, children have been specifically targeted,<sup>310</sup> both as consumers in their own right and as members of larger familial groups, and the company's product advertising and marketing, together with its promotional tie-ins and merchandising operation, have ensured that its consumer base has been expanded and developed for the future.<sup>311</sup>

The development by McDonald's of an eating 'experience' that will appeal specifically to children (and their families),<sup>312</sup> together with the long-term service

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<sup>310</sup> Acknowledging the disquiet that is often felt about the targeting of children by commercial organizations, Ritzer (1998: 185) considers this consumerist policy to be a feature of McDonaldization: 'Commercial organizations are often demonized for aiming their advertisements at children and for turning children into our 'littlest consumers'. Certainly no commercial organization is more guilty of this than McDonald's. McDonald's advertisements are a powerful presence on Saturday morning cartoon shows. More generally, McDonald's has historically been defined by its efforts to cater to children with a clown (Ronald McDonald) as its dominant symbol, its playgrounds, its carnival-like atmosphere, its child-oriented foods, and its promotional tie-ins with many movies (e.g. *Batman Returns*) and toys (e.g. Mattel's Happy Meal Snack Maker Set and Barbie dolls). In these and other ways, McDonald's has sought to make children lifelong consumers of its products, indeed lifelong members of, and active contributors to, our consumer society.'

<sup>311</sup> Broadening market appeal by targeting the family audience has become a central feature of the marketing strategies adopted by producers. Katherine Boursecnik, AOL's vice president for network programming, for example, admits: 'We are a service that prides ourselves on having a wide-ranging appeal to a wide range of individuals. But at the same time we're also a family service' (Harmon p.A1). Klein (2000: 166) applies Ritzer's theory to a range of companies, concluding: 'Both Wal-Mart and Blockbuster Video...believe that being 'family' stores is at the core of their financial success, the very key to their mass appeal. The model is to create a one-size-fits-all family entertainment center, where Mom and Dad can rent the latest box-office hit and the new Garth Brooks release a few steps away from where Johnny can get *Tomb Raider 2* and Melissa can co-angst with Alanis.'

<sup>312</sup> Paul Nicholas explained to me that he felt that it was important to appeal to as wide an audience as possible. His production of *Saturday Night Fever*, for example, which contained adult themes- the film version had received an 18 certificate- nevertheless also needed to attract younger audience members and family groups, particularly if it was to fill its matinee performances. To ensure, therefore, that the show did not alienate this important audience sector, performers were severely reprimanded if they improvised in any way on stage that might alienate family groups: 'I noticed when I last saw *Saturday Night Fever*, that there was a little bit too much bad language creeping into the show, I thought, and also a couple of the people were pretending, not instigated by us I hasten to add, to take cocaine. Now

marketing strategy that has been adopted to promote it, have resulted in bright colourful restaurant environments which display prominently the company's trademarked logos and signs that are printed on all packaging, embroidered on workers' clothing, painted on restaurant walls and are even hanging from the ceilings. In keeping with 'a key element of the postmodern world', 'fun' and 'spectacle' have become essential ingredients of the McDonald's marketing recipe (Ritzer 1998 : 181) and, in a post-modern economy where products are becoming increasingly homogenized, spectacle has become a significant means of product differentiation.<sup>313</sup>

### **5.3 The advent of the global musical: product branding and consumer convergence**

Klein (2001: 3) suggests that the commercial expansion of multi-national companies during the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s resulted largely from a shift in the emphasis of marketing strategies. Branding assumed a much greater significance as companies strove to differentiate their services or products from those of their competitors. Marketing strategies have come to use the brand name as a central point of reference, and the image that is generated for a particular brand has arguably become more important than the product itself, with consumption patterns becoming radically affected by this paradigm shift, as Klein (2001 : 4-5) notes:

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those elements you don't need....Here we are presenting ourselves at the Palladium, in one of the biggest family venues in the world...Why do you want to kill your Wednesday matinee off? Then when I went [to the show] I saw that there were kids pretending to sniff cocaine, because they thought it looked hip. Even though they were in an environment, a disco, where kids really do that, you are alienating a potential section of the audience, which is stupid and doesn't make any sense at all. The family audience is very important, otherwise you won't get any of the matinees filled.'

<sup>313</sup> Despite this development, there still seems to be some room for quirkiness and originality. *Avenue Q* (2003) for example, a musical comedy that featured puppets rather than actors and which won the Tony award for Best Musical, was a major hit on Broadway and successfully transferred to the West End in 2006. It should be noted, however, that Cameron Mackintosh, the producer of *Avenue Q* in the West End, had to resort to slashing ticket prices by 50% a few months after the show opened, in order to attract audiences in an increasingly competitive market-place.

The astronomical growth in the wealth and cultural influence of multi-national corporations over the last fifteen years can arguably be traced back to a single, seemingly innocuous idea developed by management theorists in the mid-1980s: that the successful corporations must primarily produce brands, as opposed to products...What these companies produced primarily were not things, they said, but *images* of their brands. Their real work lay not in manufacturing but in marketing. Whoever produces the most powerful images, as opposed to products, wins the race.

To achieve higher levels of brand identity and product recognition among consumers, and to exploit the greatly increased commercial potential of trading in a global market-place, companies began to realise that logos were an essential component of marketing strategy. With geographical barriers being swept away by the improvement in electronic communications, and with the political map of Europe, in particular, being redrawn after the rapid demise of the communist system in the late 1980s, companies began to develop a global approach to product and service marketing. This approach utilised graphic logos as an effective means of overcoming one of the last barriers, that of language differences, that could hinder the expansion of capitalism into the four corners of a newly globalized market-place.<sup>314</sup> The emphasis was therefore on the development of brands that could cross national boundaries and could overcome the barriers that had previously resulted from the cultural differences of consumers. The postmodern emphasis on product signifiers and brand marketing which quickly captured the corporate imagination, ensured that the product itself became less significant than the consumer experience which the company's brand marketers suggested it could provide, as Phil Knight, Nike CEO, illustrates:

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<sup>314</sup> Klein suggests (2001: xvii) that one of IBM's recent advertising campaigns epitomises the way in which companies' marketing approaches have developed from being relatively myopic to having a vision of unlimited commercial potential in a global economy of equal opportunities: 'Everyone, from Coke to McDonald's to Motorola has tailored their marketing strategy around this post-national vision, but it is IBM's long-running 'Solutions for a Small Planet' campaign that most eloquently captures the equalizing promise of the logo-linked globe.'

For years we thought of ourselves as a production-oriented company, meaning we put all our emphasis on designing and manufacturing the product. But now we understand that the most important thing we do is market the product. We've come around to saying that Nike is a marketing-oriented company, and the product is our most important marketing tool (Willigan, 1992: 92)

Similarly, as musical theatre has become progressively more commodified, so marketing strategies have assumed much greater significance and marketing budgets have, accordingly, risen substantially. In 1996, for example, the pre-opening production budget for CML's *Martin Guerre* was almost £500,000, more than the total production budget for the 1980 London version of *Cats*.<sup>315</sup> Similarly, on Broadway, marketing budgets increased significantly throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s: before the advent of *Cats*, the average cost of advertising and publicity for a Broadway musical was between 5% and 10% of its total annual production costs, but by 1993 these costs had risen to between 15% and 25% of the production budget as a whole.<sup>316</sup> The marketing of the stage musical has not only become a dominant feature of production, but it has also reflected the increased emphasis on product branding that has been a key element of cultural production as a whole.<sup>317</sup>

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<sup>315</sup> The subsequent commercial failure of *Martin Guerre* in the West End was brought about by a wide range of factors, and Cameron Mackintosh himself admitted to me in an informal conversation (1999) that he had 'got everything wrong' with this particular production. The book was unconvincing and Mackintosh was forced to commission substantial rewrites in the months after the show had actually opened; the logo was ineffective and provided no clear indication for consumers about the tone or content of the show; the staging was repetitive and unexciting; and the show's score lacked any memorable songs. Although all of these shortcomings were greatly improved upon when a new version of the show toured the UK, the production's disappointing West End performance ensured that it would not transfer to Broadway, despite achieving modest success during a short US tour.

<sup>316</sup> (*The Arts as an Industry: Their Economic Importance to the New York/New Jersey Metropolitan Region*, 1993).

<sup>317</sup> Fowler (1996: 13), for example, suggests that *Cats*, having adopted McDonaldized production methods, signalled a paradigm shift in the production process, as theatre became a potentially global product and Andrew Lloyd Webber developed into an internationally-recognised brand name: '[Andrew Lloyd Webber and Cameron Mackintosh] franchised the show in much the same way as McDonald's has franchised its methods of making and selling hamburgers. In the past there have been shows that have transferred from Shaftesbury Avenue to Broadway. *Cats* took the international marketing of theatre on to a different plane. It created the theatre production as a global product; Andrew Lloyd Webber became a global brand.' Although Fowler is not strictly correct in her assessment that Lloyd Webber and Mackintosh adopted the McDonald's system of franchising, since Mackintosh has always maintained direct involvement in all aspects of production for all his shows, wherever in the world they have been produced, her conclusions about the effect that Mackintosh had

McDonaldized industries have followed the branding model that had been initiated by Ray Kroc himself, through Kroc's insistence on what Ritzer refers to as the 'predictability' and 'calculability' of both his company's products and standards of service.<sup>318</sup> The McDonald's brand image, which could be symbolised by the sign of the golden arches, provided consumers with the confidence and expectation that they could experience the same standards of quality anywhere in the world, as Andrew Taylor, CEO for McDonald's UK explains:

Ray Kroc's vision was to establish in the consciousness of all McDonald's customers a brand image whose essential characteristics and appeal never wavered. As the first restaurant succeeded, with the granting of further franchises, the need to maintain the consistency of both product and operational standards became central to the development of the McDonald's brand character. Kroc believed that the key to global dominance of the food service industry lay in establishing the belief in customers that wherever they travelled in the world they could expect, under the sign of the famous golden arches, an experience every bit as familiar and enjoyable as that to which they were accustomed in their local McDonald's restaurant. That vision has truly been realised: a Big Mac served in our largest restaurant in Beijing, China, is the same product in all respects as a Big Mac served in Eureka, California. McDonald's is something you can rely on (Tragos 1998: 118):

The rapid improvement in communications technology during the 1980s and 1990s hastened consumer convergence and the development of global markets of consumers that desired similar products and services that they had seen, heard about or

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on the global marketing of the musical, together with her brief reference to the rise of product branding within musical theatre marketing, are more pertinent.

<sup>318</sup> Although McDonaldized products are characterised by their predictability and calculability, elements of surprise are also important to ensure that the consumption experience remains attractive for consumers. The McDonald's core product, for example, may remain the same, but the company continually introduces to its menus new items that may or may not be retained for a long period. McDonald's also ensures an element of surprise to encourage children to return to McDonald's restaurants by changing on a weekly basis the toys that are included in Happy Meals. In a similar way, musical theatre productions that have adopted a McDonaldized process of production introduce elements of surprise into a predominantly predictable product. The theatrical version of *Mary Poppins*, for example, while including all the songs that had become familiar to consumers as a result of the original film, also includes a small number of new scenes and songs to surprise audiences. A memorable upside-down tap-dancing sequence, for example, helps to give the show a freshness that encourages those who have already seen the film to experience the live musical theatre version.

experienced. Tragos (1998: 124) suggests that this convergence of lifestyles and purchase patterns is particularly characteristic of consumers in non-western countries under the age of forty, who are more receptive to possible changes in their patterns of consumption and are therefore more likely to be receptive to target marketing:

Target marketing on a global scale is less a question of geography than of intersecting psychographics...This convergence is most evident in the younger generations, whereas the forty-plus age segment in emerging markets, in general, has stronger ties to their established consumption patterns, resisting the advancing influence of western culture.

The rate of convergence has also been accelerated by the increasing percentage of younger consumers who are able to speak English. In 1950, less than 25% of all people under the age of 35 in Western Europe could speak English; by 1969 this figure had risen to 42% and by the late 1990s the number finally broke through the 50% mark. English is becoming dominant as a global language, and this fact has contributed to the potential for commercial expansion by British and American companies. The ability to market a product on a global scale on a 'one product, one message' basis is the ultimate goal of any producer wishing to maximise his profitability, and successful product branding has therefore assumed a critical level of importance. Tobacco, soft drinks and alcoholic drinks companies were amongst the first to realise the value of international branding, and marketing giants such as Coca-Cola and McDonald's have positioned and advertised their products, with few adjustments and almost negligible alterations, on a global scale.<sup>319</sup> The commercial advantage of being able to do this is clear: by radically reducing development,

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<sup>319</sup> Other companies, such as those that produce a range of household products, have developed marketing strategies along similar lines, so that Colgate-Palmolive, for example, now utilises more or less the same advertising, packaging and positioning of its Total toothpaste in all of the seventy five countries which form its global market.

packaging and marketing costs, a company increases its ability to dominate a particular sector of the marketplace.<sup>320</sup>

## **5.4 McDonaldization and its consequences for Musical Theatre Production**

### **5.4.1 Corporatisation and homogenization**

In 2004, film director John Boorman argued that although blockbuster films were exciting cinematic events, they were threatening the survival of Hollywood. Boorman suggested that the enormous cost of producing such films was increased still further by burgeoning marketing budgets, which could amount to as much as £25million, as distributors ‘swamp the multiplexes in attempts to squeeze out the opposition.’<sup>321</sup> This level of investment in the blockbuster film genre has resulted in studios making fewer films per year, a figure that Boorman suggests has fallen from around twenty to a little over ten per year. According to Boorman there is ‘no place for originality’, and innovation has become anathema, with studios focusing on ‘a simple direct storyline that is clear and undemanding’ but which incorporates ‘subject matter that an audience can instantly relate to, sequels, films based on television series, or a storyline that copies last year’s big hit.’ The result is a gradual homogenization of cinematic product that ‘feeds into audience expectations of

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<sup>320</sup> Nevertheless, the success of such international brand marketing may also depend on the ability of a company to take into account idiosyncrasies and variations within the regional consumers’ patterns of consumption, an awareness of which Tragos (1998: 126-7) considers to be of considerable importance: ‘The prize for successful international branding is potentially enormous bottom-line profitability. From an operational perspective, consolidating manufacturing, packaging, and marketing functions represents tremendous savings. From a competitive viewpoint, the cost savings and efficiencies ideally enable a brand marketer to achieve low-cost producer status in its category- the key to dominating the marketplace... While worldwide markets have moved a lot closer to demographic convergence over the last generation, domestic cultural influences still have a powerful influence on consumers’ desires and purchase behaviour. This is where an international company will find it important to have grass-roots expertise in the region; it can make the crucial difference between successful branding and irrelevance.’

<sup>321</sup> *Daily Mail*, 28 March 2004, *Night and Day* Section, p.26-27

comfortable patterns, making them uneasy if a film diverges from that formula. Little by little, films become increasingly similar to each other with marginal variations.’<sup>322</sup>

Boorman’s comments about the state of the film industry in general, and about the impact of the blockbuster on the film genre in particular, could equally be applied to the current state of musical theatre. Hilary Strong, executive director of Greenwich Theatre, which has become a leader in the development of musical theatre through such initiatives as its annual ‘Musical Futures,’<sup>323</sup> is adamant that the high budget, heavily marketed blockbuster musical is endangering the survival of smaller scale work. Strong believes that the blockbuster musical, particularly those shows inspired by the success of the *Mamma Mia!* format which relies on a well-known film or a back catalogue of pop songs that are already firmly established in the public psyche, is leaving the future of musical theatre in a parlous state by denying opportunities to new composers and writers to develop new work:

The big productions we are all looking forward to in the West End- *Billy Elliot*, *Mary Poppins* and *Jailhouse Rock*- all draw on established works or a back catalogue. [This could]... bring to an end the creation of new pieces of musical theatre in this country. Without overstating it, the future of musical theatre seems to be hanging in the balance. [It] is a genre that we cannot afford to let die. (*The Stage*, 11 March 2004, p.2)<sup>324</sup>

<sup>322</sup> It has always been possible to categorise films by their genres. The ‘Western’ genre, for example, embraces films as diverse as *Stagecoach*, *True Grit* and *Dancing with Wolves*. Boorman, however, suggests that films are becoming homogenized in content and style and are losing their originality. A ‘war’ film such as *Enemy at the Gates* (2001), for example, not only imitated the jumpy hand-held camera technique of *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), but included several individual scenes that were highly derivative. The strafing of troop-filled boats as they crossed the river at Stalingrad in *Enemy at the Gates*, for example, was so similar to the machine-gunning of landing craft in the opening scenes of *Saving Private Ryan*, that even the camera angles were more or less indistinguishable. However, it is not just the visual elements of films that are becoming homogenized: film score composer Barrington Pheloung (2005), for example, told me that he was becoming increasingly frustrated by producers who wanted him to imitate as closely as possible the music of previously successful films, rather than composing entirely original scores.

<sup>323</sup> ‘Musical Futures’ is an annual festival that showcases the best new work, and secured three further years of funding for Greenwich Theatre from Arts Council England in 2004 in the form of a grant of £200,000.

<sup>324</sup> Such comments might, at first sight, appear alarmist. They might even be dismissed as the words of a theatre executive who is deliberately exaggerating the situation in order to secure funding from Arts

Hilary Strong cited *Mary Poppins* as one of the blockbuster musicals that was threatening the future of the musical genre, and her comments were not without some justification, in view of the fact that the show had been conceived in a way that would maximise its chances of being successfully developed into a globalized product.<sup>325</sup> Cameron Mackintosh and Disney Theatricals, fully aware of the commercial potential of a musical version, were very keen to develop *Mary Poppins* for the stage,<sup>326</sup> and conceived the whole project in such a way that it could be developed as a global entity.<sup>327</sup> So, while officially there were no immediate and concrete plans for future productions, and the producers were waiting to see how the show was received in

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Council England and to justify the continued financial support for Greenwich Theatre's initiatives in its promotion of new work from a range of other bodies such as the Foundation for Sport and the Arts, the Performing Rights Society and the Mackintosh Foundation, all of whom are essential to the commercial future of the theatre. However, an examination of current trends suggest that Hilary Strong's viewpoint may have a validity that cannot be so easily ignored.

<sup>325</sup> The effect of *Mary Poppins* and other recent large scale productions on the overall production of musical theatre has yet to be fully realised but, as this thesis will show, there seems to be some justification in Hilary Strong's assertion that a plethora of musicals that rely on established material or a back catalogue of pop songs will threaten the development of new work and will see producers rejecting the careful crafting of aesthetically satisfying material because of its inherent costs, in favour of more superficial productions that can be heavily marketed to a mass audience.

<sup>326</sup> Tee Hesketh, Mackintosh's personal assistant, told me in the late 1990s that *Mary Poppins* was a show that he wanted to produce more than any other. Indeed, Mackintosh had managed to secure the rights to a stage version of the original P.L. Travis books as early as 1993, although Disney owned both the title and the rights to the songs that were composed for the 1964 film version so, as Anthony Drewe (2001) explained to me, 'Cameron can't do a show called *Mary Poppins* as Disney own the title and the songs that exist, but Disney can't turn it into a stage show either as Cameron owns the stage rights! The only way it is ever going to happen is if they get into bed together and agree.' CML and Disney ultimately agreed to co-produce the show and, while Mackintosh was given control of selecting the creative team, Disney used its global muscle to maximise the show's merchandising opportunities.

<sup>327</sup> Anthony Drewe explained to me (e-mail, March 2004) that the choice of the mid-scale Prince Edward Theatre in London was made specifically with future productions in mind and that a crew of assistants had already been assembled to replicate the work of the core creative team: 'The show has been designed on a 'footprint' plan of the Bristol Hippodrome, Prince Edward Theatre and a Broadway Theatre, so that replication of the design is straightforward. The Prince Edward was chosen because it is a middle-size West End house which will make it easier to replicate the show around the world. *The Lion King* is only on in ten productions around the world because the size of the show limits which theatres can accommodate it. *Les Misérables*, on the other hand, is replicated in dozens of productions because it is in a medium scale theatre. Disney and CML both agreed that it would make sense to conceive *Mary Poppins* for medium scale theatres...Our Assistant Director, Assistant Musical Supervisor and Assistant Choreographer staff have been assembled at an early stage with a view to replicating the show without the need for Richard Eyre, Matthew Bourne and Stephen Mear to be available for all future productions.'

London before deciding how to proceed, Anthony Drewe expected a Broadway production to be up and running within eighteen months of the London opening.<sup>328</sup>

A major attraction for both Disney and CML of *Mary Poppins* as a potential product for production on a global scale has not only been the songs, which have become familiar to audiences around the world as a result of the original film's success, but also the branded nature of the show's title.<sup>329</sup> Such a strong and long established brand name made the marketing of *Mary Poppins* a relatively straightforward proposition and provided the theatrical version with a major commercial advantage over shows that did not have such pulling power. This was confirmed by the box office advance that quickly built up when tickets went on sale nearly a year before the show was due to open, many performances quickly selling out, and it became clear that consumers were fully prepared to invest in a product that was a strong brand, even in a marketplace where the trend has been for the overwhelming majority of box office bookings to be taken close to a particular performance date. The aesthetic quality of the show would then shine through once the production had opened and, Mackintosh hoped, would enhance its commercial performance.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> The Broadway version of *Mary Poppins* opened in November 2006, and Tom Shumacher, President of Disney theatricals, told me (2005 interview) that there were plans to develop the production on a global scale. In September 2006 Cameron Mackintosh announced a historic deal with the China Arts and Entertainment Group to produce *Mary Poppins* and other CML productions in Beijing and Shanghai.

<sup>329</sup> As Drewe (2004) emphasised, 'The show will sell on the title alone without the need for huge stars in the cast- it is already a brand name.'

<sup>330</sup> Mackintosh was keen to ensure that the creative team for *Mary Poppins* was the strongest possible, so that the resultant product had a degree of aesthetic quality that it might otherwise have lacked. He has, it should be noted, approached his previous productions in a similar manner, appointing distinguished directors such as Trevor Nunn, Harold Prince and Nicholas Hytner to direct *Les Misérables*, *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Miss Saigon* respectively. Mackintosh also invested a great deal of time and money, as with his past productions, to ensure that *Mary Poppins* met his own rigorous production standards. Such attention to detail and pursuit of excellence is, of course, admirable, but it should not be forgotten that Mackintosh is in the enviable position of having access to the level of funding of which most producers can only dream and, when one takes into consideration that *Mary Poppins* will also have the benefit of Disney's financial and promotional muscle, there is no doubt that few, if any, non-corporate producers will have any chance of competing with *Mary Poppins*

While the effect on the musical genre of those blockbusters specifically mentioned by Hilary Strong cannot yet be fully assessed, the influence of the *Mamma Mia!* model of production is more clearly defined. A show such as *We Will Rock You*, for example, which follows the *Mamma Mia!* format, is unashamedly built round the hit songs of the pop supergroup Queen, and its contrived storyline is almost irrelevant in a show that is, for the most part, little more than a pop concert. The songs are central to the production's success and it has been the songs and the Queen brand name that have been at the core of the show's marketing strategy. The ABBA songs that are used in *Mamma Mia!* may, at times, be introduced in a slightly contrived manner, but this tongue in cheek quality is at least made up for by a storyline that includes a range of relatively believable characters. *Mamma Mia!* was well received by critics and audiences alike, and Charles Spencer's *Daily Telegraph* review of the opening night of *Mamma Mia!* in the West End, where he suggests that 'Catherine Johnson's witty and ingenious script weaves the famous ABBA songs around characters you care about,' is an opinion that most of his fellow critics shared.<sup>331</sup> *We Will Rock You*, however, has no such redeeming features, and even the show's producers are apparently quite prepared to accept that their production is little more than a live rock concert, as is confirmed on the show's official web-site:

The idea was to make a show that resembled a live concert. First of all this has been achieved through the lighting and sound designs, both deliberately similar in style to that of a rock concert. The high-tech stage design, which includes concert-style video screens, also creates this impression. The most

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in any form. Mackintosh could afford to be single-mindedly committed to a musical that was likely to be the most expensive ever produced and could then reap the rewards of its globalized success.

<sup>331</sup> John Peter (*The Times*), for example, similarly praises the quality of Catherine Johnson's book and her effective integration of the songs into the story, writing that 'the fun of this show lies in the skill and wit with which the songs are fitted into the story, not just as decorations, but moving it along, almost as if they had been written for it.'

important aspect of this kind of thinking, however, is the inclusion of two live bands, either side of the stage. This, more than anything else, allows the cast to replicate the famously extravagant Queen concerts of the 70s and 80s.

In contrast to *Mamma Mia!*, *We Will Rock You* was universally derided by the critics.<sup>332</sup> Ben Elton's book is unimaginative and contrived, and his characters are one-dimensional. Moreover, the directing lacks inspiration and, particularly in the second half, is as weak as Ben Elton's script.<sup>333</sup> The final result is a show that lacks both wit and personality.

In the past, ferocious reviews of the sort that greeted the first night of *We Will Rock You* would almost certainly have ensured that a show would struggle even to recoup its capitalisation costs. However, a marketing strategy that included a high level of very expensive television advertising not only managed to keep *We Will Rock You* afloat in the West End, but actually enabled the producers to use the London production as a springboard for global replication of the show. Following the *Mamma Mia!* model, *We Will Rock You* is now being relentlessly marketed as a global

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<sup>332</sup> Charles Spencer (*Daily Telegraph*, 15 May 2002), for example, described the show as a 'pathetic, adolescent piece of work...prolefeed at its worst.' Michael Coveney (*The Daily Mail*) considered it to be a 'shallow, stupid and totally vacuous new musical.' Fiona Sturges (*The Independent*, 15 May 2002) described the whole production as 'trite and tacky.'

<sup>333</sup> The scenes between the songs are often either static or ridiculously overblown, so that the interaction between the main characters is almost always unconvincing. In Act 2, for example, a scene set in the Seven Seas Drinking Club that includes a performance of 'These are the Days of our Lives' is so lacklustre and drawn out that it becomes tedious. Throughout the show the impression is given that the dramatised scenes between the songs are of only limited relevance and that it is only the songs that are of any consequence. Songs such as 'Radio Ga Ga' are performed in such a way that the choreography and costumes closely resemble the pop videos that were originally used to promote them, and the audience participation that is implicitly encouraged ensures that the show is seldom anything other than a thinly disguised pop concert. Moreover, whereas Catherine Johnson was gently affectionate in her integration of ABBA songs into the book of *Mamma Mia!*, and the audience is therefore able to warm to the characters as the story unfolds, Ben Elton's book for *We Will Rock You* is contrived and artificial throughout, and ensures that the characters are mere caricatures to which the audience never responds on an emotional level.

brand.<sup>334</sup> The show's marketers impressed on consumers that the show was rapidly developing into a global phenomenon, with the implicit suggestion that audiences around the world attested to its guaranteed level of consumer satisfaction. The graphics that accompanied all the advertising and marketing material associated with the production emphasised the rock music that is at the core of the show, and the logo depicted a rock guitarist punching the air aggressively with his right hand while his left hand firmly grasped the neck of his electric guitar, the words 'Rock', 'Rocking' and 'Rocked' featuring both prominently and repeatedly. The show's web-site contained the same images, while the main photo still from the production featured the lead character, dressed in jeans and an armless t-shirt that revealed muscular forearms and a large tattoo, punching the air and facing away from the camera to enable us to focus on the massed ranks of screaming and cheering audience members.<sup>335</sup> Consumers could be in no doubt that *We Will Rock You* is a primarily a rock concert that celebrated the music of Queen, and that the storyline was of limited importance and simply provided a contrived narrative thread to introduce the songs in a theatrical setting. The appeal of the show was thus broadened to include not only the substantial Queen fan base who enjoy the extravagant spectacle of a Queen concert and who, under normal circumstances, might not choose to attend a musical theatre production, but also a broad range of theatregoers for whom visual spectacle in a theatrical production was an appealing proposition but who might not consider purchasing tickets for a traditional rock concert. The fact that *We Will Rock You*, according to its marketers, was rapidly becoming a global phenomenon was of greater

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<sup>334</sup> Print material that was sent out to potential group bookers for the West End show in April 2004, for example, focused entirely on the fact that that *We Will Rock You* was now 'opening all over the world', and that new productions would be seen in the USA, across Australia, in Russia and in Germany later in 2004, and that further productions would open in South Africa, Japan, Italy and Canada in 2005.

<sup>335</sup> There also seems to be little doubt that the character's pose is intended to resemble that of Freddie Mercury and this acts as another reminder for consumers that the show offers, as far as possible, the experience of a Queen concert.

significance to its target audience than the fact that the show had little artistic worth and had received disparaging reviews from newspaper critics.<sup>336</sup> The show may, superficially at least, attempt to illustrate the dangers of globalization and the transformation of cultural forms into ‘a world where everyone is the same’ where society is ‘satiated by hyper-consumerism,’<sup>337</sup> but such a viewpoint is rather out of place in the context of the show’s global ambitions and the proliferation of logo-emblazoned merchandise that fills the theatre foyers wherever the show is produced. Even the show’s web-site, following the *Mamma Mia!* model, is specifically designed to market and develop *We Will Rock You* as a global commodity, and consumers can access information and book tickets for any production around the world from the centralised internet location. The lay-out and content of pages for each production in each country is exactly the same, with only the language being changed, and the McDonaldized nature of the product is thus clearly emphasised so that consumers can expect a global replication of the original show, even if the storyline, according to its own promotional material, champions originality and individuality over globalization and consumerist culture.<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>336</sup> It is highly ironic that Ben Elton tries to impose on the show an anti-corporate message that espouses a concern with the increasing homogenization of culture. Brian Logan’s comment in his *Guardian* review of the first night is therefore highly appropriate, ‘It is hard to take seriously a story that invokes spirit and individuality when it is packaged in a spectacle as ruthlessly manufactured as this.’

<sup>337</sup> *We Will Rock You*, official web-site, Teachers’ notes, p.7

<sup>338</sup> The back catalogue format musical that was instigated by *Mamma Mia!* has been imitated by various other producers attempting to duplicate the global commercial success that *Mamma Mia!* has enjoyed. Productions such as *Tonight’s The Night*, based on the songs of Rod Stewart, boasted a book that almost exceeded the contrived nature of *We Will Rock You*, and included over twenty of Stewart’s hit songs. Like *We Will Rock You*, however, the show was little more than a rock concert for which the storyline was largely incidental and there was little time available for anything other than superficial character development. The songs did very little to advance the story to which they bore only the most tenuous connection, and the audience was left with little more than a series of song and dance routines, an endless stream of unsubtle sexual innuendo, and the experience of a flying bed, the almost obligatory moment of spectacle, which offered an adult audience the infantile pleasure provided by a flying car in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*. In Ben Elton, *Tonight’s the Night* boasted the same book writer as *We Will Rock You*, and both shows have an almost equally contrived script. However, *Tonight’s the Night* only achieved limited success in the West End, perhaps partly due to the non-central location of the Victoria Palace Theatre, which inevitably meant that the show would be unlikely to attract passing trade. The production had two much more significant disadvantages, however, when compared to *We*

With a number of companies achieving the complete integration of production and thus being able to exert higher levels of control over musical theatre production, it is perhaps inevitable that levels of homogenization have increased.<sup>339</sup> Recent years have seen a small group of the most commercially powerful musical theatre producers not only seeking to control product development but also seeking to have control over the venues in which that product is produced. By 2002, for example, CML had become the third largest theatre operator in London, having purchased The Strand Theatre, The Prince of Wales Theatre, The Queen's Theatre and The Prince Edward Theatre; The Albery Theatre and Wyndham's Theatre reverted to CML's operational control in 2005, and the Gielgud followed suit in 2006. As a result, CML has a portfolio of seven theatres, including five freeholds and two very long leases. *Les Misérables* moved from The Palace Theatre into the CML-owned Queen's Theatre, while the CML production of *Mary Poppins* occupied CML's Prince Edward Theatre. Meanwhile, Really Useful Theatres, a company that was formed after RUG Theatres acquired the Stoll Moss company, owns and operates a portfolio of seven major West End venues, including the Drury Lane Theatre and The London Palladium. Having become established as one of the largest theatre groups in London, it is perhaps not surprising that the Really Useful Group should seek to gain an even greater level of control over the whole production process of musical theatre by setting up its own ticketing company. With this in mind, in late 2003, RUG launched See, the largest UK-based ticketing company with the stated aim (*The Stage*, 11 December 2003, p.1)

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*Will Rock You*: first, Queen has infinitely broader appeal than Rod Stewart and has a much more substantial back catalogue of well-known songs; second, the producers of *We Will Rock You* were able to support their show with almost unlimited marketing funds that even allowed expensive television commercials and helped to build up a healthy advance despite the mauling that the show received from the critics.

<sup>339</sup> One of the major strands of Ritzer's McDonaldization theory is that producers following a McDonaldized system of production seek to impose strict controls over the whole production process.

that it would become the number one brand in the domestic market within five years.<sup>340</sup>

The homogenization of musical theatre production has become even more pronounced as marketing strategies for shows have been developed by marketing companies whose number has continued to shrink.<sup>341</sup> Although Dewynters is a long established advertising company, it only developed as a full-service advertising and marketing agency in 1980 when it was employed by CML and RUG to develop an innovative marketing strategy for the West End production of *Cats*. Following the commercial success of the latter, Dewynters was contracted to promote all CML and RUG shows and, since that time, an increasing number of other producers such as ATG have attempted to duplicate the commercial success enjoyed by CML's megamusicals by entrusting to Dewynters the design of their shows' logos and promotional material, along with the broader responsibility of marketing their products to consumers.<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> The new company, which is a conglomeration of Really Useful Theatres Ticketing, Ticketselect and Way Ahead, will operate two specialised call centres, and is intended to challenge the market leader Ticketmaster which in 2005, with First Call, accounted for 18 million out of the 23 million tickets sold annually through ticketing companies in the UK.

<sup>341</sup> Anthony Field (*The Stage*, 11 December 2003, p.1) is just one of those who have grave concerns about the level of control that companies like CML and RUG will be able to exercise, and he fears that the result will be the suppression of independent or non-corporate producers and, by implication, increased homogenization: 'I am getting increasingly worried about producers, theatre owners and ticketing companies working in tandem. It was always very healthy that they had their separate paths to tread. If a theatre owner is going to produce and run a ticket agency and have control of touring shows all over the country, it is a frightening concept for independent producers. It means small-scale theatres, new shows or new producers are going to find it more and more difficult to get in on the act.'

<sup>342</sup> By 2004, Dewynters was responsible for the marketing of the majority of large-scale musicals in the West End and, as well as the CML productions of *Les Misérables* and CML/RUG co-production of *The Phantom of the Opera*, the company was able to boast *Bombay Dreams*, *Jailhouse Rock*, *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, *Chicago*, *We Will Rock You* and even Disney's *The Lion King* as part of its portfolio. Dewynters was also appointed to take charge of the marketing of *Mary Poppins*, *The Producers* and the theatrical version of *The Lord of the Rings*.

The rapid development of Dewynters as the dominant force in musical theatre marketing has mirrored the development of the megamusical as a global product. A market has been created that mediates against independent or non-corporate producers, and a McDonaldized system of production seems to have resulted in McDonaldized productions gradually becoming the dominant cultural form. The prevalence of Dewynters in the marketing of musical theatre has resulted in other companies struggling to survive, a fact that was clearly exemplified when M + H Communications, a company that had been formed in 2002 following the merger of McCabes and Haymarket Advertising and had taken on the responsibility of marketing *Mamma Mia!*, went into liquidation in March 2004. M + H's portfolio was quickly divided between the two remaining major players, Adam Kenwright's AKA and Dewynters and, at that time, Mark Borkowski, whose PR firm had represented M+H, suggested rather ominously in *The Stage* (18 March 2004, p.1): 'It will be interesting [to see] what happens between AKA and Dewynters- will Dewynters get the lot or will Adam get the lot? There may come a time when there is only real player left in the market, which isn't good for the clients.'<sup>343</sup>

#### 5.4.2 McDonaldized products and the pre-eminence of marketing within the production process

Schlosser (2001: 229) considers that the process termed 'McDonaldization' by Ritzer has affected modes of both production and consumption and has resulted in

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<sup>343</sup> Since Borkowski was interviewed, the marketing of *Mamma Mia!* has been taken over by Dewynters, a move that seems to epitomise the way in which all aspects of musical theatre production have become progressively more centralised and homogenized, so that Schlosser's conclusion (2001: 5) regarding the homogenizing effect of McDonald's and other fast food chains could just as easily be applied to musical theatre production: 'The centralized purchasing decisions of the large restaurant chains and their demand for standardized products have given a handful of corporations an unprecedented degree of power over the nation's food supply... The basic thinking behind fast food has become the operating system of today's retail economy, wiping out small businesses, obliterating regional differences, and spreading identical stores throughout the country like a self-replicating code.'

progressive and far-reaching cultural homogenization, suggesting that ‘the values, tastes and industrial practices of the American fast food industry are being exported to every corner of the globe, helping to create a homogenized international culture.’ As has been seen, Ritzer (2000b: 1) theorises that McDonald’s serves as the ‘paradigm of a wide-ranging process’ that he calls ‘McDonaldization’, whereby ‘the principles of the fast food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as of the rest of the world.’ However, Ritzer (200b: 62) does not simply address the *process* of rationalization that he considers to be dominating all forms of cultural production, he also considers the *product* and assesses the inherent value and characteristics of this product of the McDonaldized system, concluding that consumers are more concerned with the size and quantity of a product’s substance, together with its cost, than its quality:

At best, what customers expect from a fast-food restaurant is modest but strong-tasting food...Given such modest expectations of quality, customers do have greater expectations of quantity. They expect to get a lot of food *and* pay relatively little for it.<sup>344</sup>

It became clear from my research that this aspect of Ritzer’s theory is applicable to some extent to the production of musical theatre but, whereas Cameron Mackintosh had taken a great deal of time and money to ensure that products such as *Les Misérables* and *The Phantom of the Opera* were developed around a well-crafted book and, arguably, strove to achieve high standards of aesthetic quality, many of the producers that I interviewed were quite prepared to admit that their shows were targeted at audiences whose aesthetic expectations were, at best, extremely limited and who conformed to Ritzer’s model of McDonaldized consumers. Mark Goucher,

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<sup>344</sup> The decision by McDonald’s in 2004 to introduce a wide range of healthier food options to their restaurant menus, following sustained pressure from consumer groups, undermines Ritzer’s conclusion that consumers have very ‘modest expectations of quality.’

for example, openly admitted that his West End production of *Fame* was unlikely to attract audiences who were regular theatregoers or whose consumption patterns were dictated by their taste for more sophisticated theatre. Indeed, he told me (2001 interview) that he had deliberately targeted potential consumers who might view a night out at a West End theatre as an opportunity solely to be entertained, and who only considered such a trip on rare occasions because of the considerable expense involved. He also added that this policy, together with the show's brand name, was at the core of his production's commercial success:

We had a philosophy on *Fame* that, because there were 1,500 seats at the Victoria Palace, we were going to 'stack 'em high and sell 'em cheap.' So we just flooded the market with, you know, offers and all that sort of thing. And I think people just took to it because there wasn't one of those feel-good musicals in town at the time. So we came in and we had nothing to compete against...The show attracts a mixed audience, but primarily a sort of younger out of town audience: lads taking their girlfriends out, mums taking their daughters out, and granddads and grandmas who want to take their grandchildren out for an evening in the West End- a broad age profile. It is not exactly what you would call your cutting edge theatre drama audience, it is much more your sort of standard audience that come into town for a good night out in the theatre.

Goucher told me that, as a producer, he had been attracted to *Fame* because he considered that the show's major strengths were its broad appeal and its branded image. This meant that he was able, in particular, to target groups of tourists, especially students, who were visiting London and wished to have the opportunity to see a West End show but who found the considerable expense involved in obtaining a good seat to see *The Lion King* or *The Phantom of the Opera*, for example, to be prohibitive. He also added that the show deliberately included a high level of visual spectacle to ensure that non-English speakers would be satisfied by their consumption experience:

[*Fame*] is an international brand name. Obviously it is American, set in New York with an American movie and American TV series; it is huge in places like Stockholm and some of the Scandinavian countries and so, over this summer, we will target a lot of that sort of back-packing type of audience through specific marketing initiatives which cover cheaper hotels. There are lists that go on endlessly of what we will be doing, including tourist publications, student publications, inbound travel magazines, all that sort of stuff. I think that it is suitable for anyone who has got any sort of understanding of English. The show is not difficult to follow, there are some recognisable tunes in it, so I don't think that there is a language barrier and visually it is good, the dance routines are always commented on as being very good, the choreography is good, and the taxi cab comes on at the end...

My conversation with Goucher was enlightening because it revealed the extent to which many producers of musical theatre seemed to conform to Ritzer's model of McDonaldized production, and confirmed the direction that the genre seemed to be taking. Goucher conceded that producers like him 'spend probably 55% of our time actually discussing marketing and advertising initiatives and how to get people into a theatre, and only 45% of our time actually discussing developing product and the actual concept of shows and dealing with theatricality.' He added that, for him, producing focuses predominantly on 'running a business which now involves constant reassessing of our marketing and advertising campaigns.' It seems that marketing has assumed a critical level of importance and that, confirming Ritzer's theory, the commercial prospects of a product are no longer dictated by its aesthetic quality but by its packaging and by the ability of its producer to identify and target successfully its potential market:

You have got to appeal to as wide a market as possible. You cannot rely on a sort of straightforward middle class audience in each of the major towns to just become your theatre audience, you have got to be constantly trying to get young people, new people into the theatre, and to do that we now advertise and sell the shows in the most extraordinary places. We take adverts in all sorts of things: we advertise in magazines like *Hello!* and *OK!* for *Fame*. You would never have seen a theatre advert in those magazines previously.

Goucher was by no means alone in his realisation that independent producers could no longer afford to consider material for production that could not be marketed to a broad audience. Rob Bettinson, the co-creator of *Buddy*, a show that was spawned by the repertory system in Plymouth before being produced in the West End<sup>345</sup> and, subsequently, worldwide, told me (2002 interview) that marketing for his latest West End venture, *125<sup>th</sup> Street*, had soaked up about a third of its pre-opening budget of £1.4 million. Bettinson clearly believed that, in the current climate of dramatically increasing capitalisation budgets, the cost of preparing *125<sup>th</sup> Street* for its 2002 Shaftesbury Theatre opening was relatively modest. Despite the financial constraints that he and other independent producers inevitably had to accept, Bettinson was quietly confident when I interviewed him in December 2002 that word of mouth would attract sufficient audience numbers to make his new show into another hit. He explained that he had made full use of the show's branded association with *Buddy* by billing *125<sup>th</sup> Street* as being 'From the creators of *Buddy*', and announcing confidently that 'Anyone who enjoyed *Buddy* is going to love this.' It was clear that he considered that the show had universal appeal and that the show's nostalgic element was an important factor as he strove to attract consumers :

The target market is everybody from nine to ninety- a catch-all situation. One of the strange things is one of our best group bookers is SAGA holidays. The SAGA people came in because they were young people when this music was done. It has a nostalgic element, obviously, because the songs are thirty years old. So, the audience is broad-ranged, everybody who wants a good time.

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<sup>345</sup> *Buddy* opened originally opened in London at the Victoria Palace Theatre in 1989, before transferring to the Strand Theatre (now the Novello Theatre). The production closed at the Strand in 2002, but reopened at the Duchess Theatre in August 2007.

When I questioned him about the substance of the show, Bettinson readily accepted that *125<sup>th</sup> Street* had limited aesthetic or artistic value and had little to offer other than its classic hit songs, but he defended it as a production by suggesting that the show fulfilled audience expectations and satisfied his consumers' desire to obtain a high level of visual entertainment at limited cost:

It is getting seriously expensive for people to come [to the theatre]. That is why we discount the tickets. We need 49% [of capacity] to break even, but we can still afford to discount tickets at our show... We have a lot of great deals and we have done a lot of ground work out in the provinces, making it accessible, making it cheap, instead of making it expensive. There are offers all over the place and tie-ins with supermarkets and magazine offers in black people's magazines such as *Black Pride Voice*, and *New Nation*, and other periodicals such as *Woman's Own*, and in newspapers like *The Sun*. It is not what you would call high art, but it has twenty-two hit songs and the closest experience is *Buddy*, more than anything else.

When I saw the show directly after my interview with Bettinson, I had no doubt that Bettinson had underplayed the similarity between *Buddy* and *125<sup>th</sup> Street*: both shows were little more than tribute shows that were built around a collection of 1950s hit songs. The latter show, in particular, had discarded any semblance of storyline and had developed by the second act into little more than a concert performance. Bettinson had already suggested in my interview with him that it was no longer necessary for a musical to be much more than a collection of popular songs, insisting that, provided that it had broad appeal, and an element of nostalgia inevitably helped in this respect, and provided that it was marketed aggressively, any show had the potential to become a hit:

Marketing is, I would say, about 50% of the game. I mean, in London you see some ordinary shows survive on their marketing. There are some pretty ordinary sort of shows out there... I mean, *Mamma Mia!* isn't exactly the most brilliant brain surgery, it looks like a 70's play with ABBA songs in it. It is no

great play, but it captures a kind of nostalgic element in the audience that keeps them coming in droves.<sup>346</sup>

Bettinson clearly felt that the costs of producing a show had been dramatically increased by escalating marketing costs, and that independent producers were therefore being severely restricted by their inability to compete with corporate producers who had access to considerably larger funds to market their products:

[Musical Theatre] has become a massive industry and that is the biggest factor, the money. It is expensive to go to the theatre and it is expensive to put it on. Now marketing has become an industry in itself. It affects you because if you haven't got the money to market at that level, it is almost as if you are non-existent. You have to match it! So a standard has almost been set where musicals are costing five and six million pounds. How the hell are you ever going to get that back on the seat prices!<sup>347</sup>

Not only has this led to the rise of corporate involvement, but consumer choice has also, as a result, become restricted. Bettinson suggested (2002 interview) that this reflected broader cultural homogenization, where producers were unwilling to risk investing in original material that was in any way untested in the marketplace, and consumers had become unwilling to risk a substantial outlay on a product with which

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<sup>346</sup> Despite the nostalgic element that characterised the show and despite its broad appeal, *125<sup>th</sup> Street* ultimately failed to live up to Bettinson's expectations and closed in January 2003, less than four months after it had opened. The show's poor commercial performance was undoubtedly largely due to the limitations of its marketing budget and clearly demonstrates that market entry is becoming increasingly difficult for non-corporate producers of musical theatre. The show, about the Apollo Theatre in Harlem, also lacked the human interest element that had attracted audiences to *Buddy*, and clearly suffered from being produced at the Shaftesbury Theatre, which was one of the few theatres available at the time but which was outside the tourist trail and was therefore unlikely to attract passing trade. When I interviewed him in 2002, Bettinson himself hinted that funding limitations had meant that *125<sup>th</sup> Street* had to rely too heavily on word of mouth, admitting that he had hoped to raise £2.5million and that, if he had been able to raise more money for the project, he would certainly have increased his overall marketing budget, which he clearly felt was underfunded.

<sup>347</sup> Bettinson seemed to reflect the pessimism that I had detected in interviews with a number of other producers (e.g. Green, Crawford, Masterson), and there seemed to be a degree of frustration with the McDonaldized approach that had become a pre-eminent model of production.

they were in any way unfamiliar.<sup>348</sup> His pessimism about the direction that he felt was being taken by the musical theatre genre was evident:

It has become a big, big money game, and...it is difficult to get new ideas through the system. It becomes like television and film where new ideas get thrown away straight away because they are not commercial or the right star doesn't get in them...The biggest problem now is being able to break new ideas, being able to create an environment in which people and the public will embrace new ideas, without a star being in it, without a great big marketing campaign that costs a million pounds. So less and less new product comes through...Products have become homogenized and less experimental. The experimental stuff starts to get moved out into small venues, as the risks are so high. The problem is that with repertory system disappearing, you can't experiment anywhere, as they haven't got the money to employ the choreographers or the writers and the different people to put things together, or the top quality actors.

#### **5.4.3 Musical Theatre Spectacle: Las Vegasization, Simulation and Entertainmentization**

Burston (1998: 298) suggests that the megamusical was the 'progenitor' of a 'newly transnationalised field' of live entertainment and that the 'genres characteristic of the entertainment sector are as differentiated in form as they are spectacular in content.' He also recommends that future research into the field of global musical theatre production, and its effect on cultural production in general, should consider the ways in which the commodification of musical theatre, a trend that seems to have partly instigated by Cameron Mackintosh in the 1980s, has led to what Weeks and Roberts (1996) describe as the 'Las Vegasization' of various areas of cultural production.

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<sup>348</sup> In this way he seemed to confirm Ritzer's fundamental principle of McDonaldization, whereby 'the craving for diversity is being supplanted by the desire for uniformity and predictability' (Ritzer 2000b: 136).

Las Vegas seems to epitomise Debord's view of spectacle and its relationship to consumerism and cultural commodification. Debord (1977: 26) sees cultural commodities, together with the spectacles that are associated with them, as dominating not only the global economic system but also society as a whole: 'The world the spectacle holds up to view is... the world of commodity ruling over all lived experience.' The emergence of spectacle as the dominant feature of cultural production is particularly obvious in Las Vegas, where 'extravaganzas' have become a vital ingredient in the marketing of the numerous casino-hotels that have been created in the city.<sup>349</sup> Here, the process termed by Wolf 'the entertainmentization of the economy' is most clearly exemplified, to the extent that the rapid economic growth of the city can be attributed almost entirely to its unrelenting focus on its entertainment industry:

Las Vegas is *all* about entertainment. There's nothing else there. You gamble, see shows, play golf, go sightseeing. The unprecedented and continuing growth in the area can all be traced back to one source. Las Vegas is a 'one-industry' town, and that industry is entertainment (Wolf 1999: 3)

The spectacular nature of Las Vegas shows, whose purpose is to attract consumers to the casinos that are housed in the hotels themselves, is intended to achieve product differentiation, as the casino-hotels strive to be more spectacular than others in the vicinity and attempt to achieve this objective in a number of ways:

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<sup>349</sup> In 2007, Macau overtook Las Vegas as the world's leading gambling capital, with record annual revenues of nearly \$7 billion. The city expected to attract 25 million visitors in 2007 and, following the Las Vegas model, a range of megamusicals, including *Mamma Mia!*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Les Misérables* and *Mary Poppins*, will be produced in Macau, in order to enhance the overall entertainment experience offered to consumers. Cameron Mackintosh was the first Western theatre producer to take a large-scale musical to China, when he opened a production of *Les Misérables* in Shanghai in 2002, and his exclusive deal in September 2007 with the China Arts and Entertainment Group, to produce other megamusicals in the country, will begin to open up a substantial market that has hitherto been unexploited. The commercial potential of the Chinese market is such that Deng Wei, China's Assistant Minister of Culture, expects that, within a decade, Macau and Shanghai 'will be the third and fourth musical markets after New York and London' (*The Stage*, 1 November 2007, p.7).

A variety of devices are used to create a spectacular show- legendary stars (more common in the past), huge casts, large orchestras, elaborate production numbers, live animals, blinding light shows, booming sound, ostentatious sets, breathtaking technology, incredible costumes and daring nudity, and so on.' (Ritzer, 1999: 108-109)

Bragg (1997: 22) suggests that, as Las Vegas attempts to maintain the numbers of consumers being attracted to its entertainment complexes, so 'the most over-the-top city in America' will be 'forced to become more sensational.' Moreover, the ever-increasing emphasis on spectacle has resulted in many Las Vegas casino-hotels developing extravaganzas outside the hotels themselves as well as inside.<sup>350</sup> The retail business has been combined with entertainment extravaganza, a process termed 'retailtainment' by Hajewski (1997: 1), whereby the 'use of ambience, emotion, sound and activity get customers interested in the merchandise and in the mood to buy.' In an attempt to counteract the commercial expansion of internet businesses and other forms of virtual retailing, the importance of spectacle as a dominant feature of retailing practice has assumed new proportions:

Retailers are working to make stores provide something that catalogues, the Internet and home shopping cannot- the thrill of an event. Make it spectacular enough and they will come. In a culture that is starved of public experiences and that increasingly consumes entertainment in private, stores are functioning more and more as an escape from the personal space of computers and VCRs... Instead of convenience, [retailers] had to give shoppers the one experience that technology could not replace- indeed, the experience that technology almost eliminated in our time. That is, to give the pleasure of physically being somewhere, of going to a place that was bigger, grander and in every way more exhilarating and more energizing than anything the customer could experience at home. (Goldberger, 1997: 45)

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<sup>350</sup> Postman (1982: 6) sees this process as being reflected in American culture as a whole, and the 'Las Vegasizing of America' has resulted in American culture 'being transformed into one long and uninterrupted show business act.'

For Baudrillard (1983: 4), the postmodern age in which, he suggests, we live, is ‘an age of simulation’ where authenticity of cultural and social experience has been largely rejected in favour of a synthetic and simulated model. Baudrillard sees Disneyland as ‘a perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulation’, where all the most popular attractions or rides are simulated versions of real experience. The influential but synthetic nature of such theme park attractions, coupled with the ever-increasing dominance of entertainment culture in general, has resulted in the pervasiveness of spectacle and artificiality on a global scale that Huxtable (1997) suggests is exemplified by the rapid growth of Las Vegas: ‘The real fake reaches its apogee in places like Las Vegas...the outrageously fake fake has developed its own indigenous style and life style to become a real place...This is the real, real fake at the highest, loudest and most authentically inauthentic level of illusion and invention.’<sup>351</sup>

The increasing demand for spectacle has necessitated the increased application of simulations, so that cultural systems have become dominated by ‘authentic’ simulations,<sup>352</sup> and the homogenization of cultural forms, which has dramatically increased the importance of product differentiation through packaging and marketing, has ensured that spectacle has assumed much greater prominence. As a result, in a fast-moving and homogenized world that is characterised by sound-bites and instant responses, and where the fast-food model of consumption has become prevalent, the recognition of individual products by consumers has become the major marketing goal. The logo has assumed critical importance, not only in the marketing of a

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<sup>351</sup> Richard Eyre (2000: 344) suggests that the musical productions of Cameron Mackintosh are similarly characterised by the synthetic nature of their ‘generalised’ rather than ‘particularised’ sentiment: ‘*Les Misérables* and *Miss Saigon* advance on their audiences laden with weighty subject matter, portentous thin-framed machines for giving you generalised rather than particularised feeling, unmitigated by irony. They give the impression, rather than the reality, of feeling, like Victorians scattering water on letters to look as if they’d been written in tears.’

<sup>352</sup> Ronald McDonald, a simulated clown, is just one of countless simulations that the process of McDonaldization has indirectly produced

particular product, but also in the branding of individual entities as the products of particular producers. It is therefore not surprising that the increasingly rapid commodification of musical theatre production, following the success of CML productions in the 1980s, resulted in the emergence of the logo as possibly the most influential means of achieving global product awareness.

#### **5.4.4 The Disney model of corporate synergy as a means of countering the burgeoning costs of marketing**

Many companies that have embraced the McDonaldized system of product and service marketing have adopted the strategy of providing 'fun' and 'spectacle' to attract potential consumers. Disney, for example, which has had such an impact on the marketing of musical theatre since the advent of *The Lion King*, has applied McDonaldized principles to the marketing its own products, and this thesis has already noted that the company considers its overall service to be the selling of 'happiness' rather than a more tangible product. Disney has also utilised its various shows, films and theme parks as a means of promoting its global merchandising operation, so that, as Fjellman suggests (1992: passim), although complexes such as Disney World and Disneyland are ostensibly about entertainment, they can readily be seen as really shopping malls for the vast array of Disney products.<sup>353</sup> As Disney amusement parks have progressively begun to resemble glorified shopping malls, so shopping malls themselves have become more and more like amusement parks, and many of the larger malls in America and Canada have incorporated traditional

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<sup>353</sup> Julie Taymor's designs may have disguised the cartoon origins of *The Lion King*, and the artistic originality of the show may have been the focus of attention for audiences and critics alike rather than the show's place in Disney's overall marketing strategy, but the synergistic potential of Disney's previous venture into theatrical production, *Beauty and the Beast*, was much more clearly defined, so that in answer to his own question, 'What's *Beauty and the Beast- The Stage Musical* like?' Mark Steyn (1997a) was able to write: 'Well, it's a bit like *Beauty and the Beast- the McDonald's Happy Meal* tie-in, but without the cheeseburger. That's to say, it's a souvenir of the film.'

amusement park attractions such as Ferris wheels and even roller coasters into their locations.<sup>354</sup>

The process of integrated commodification is particularly apparent in the Disney Corporation's approach to the promotion and marketing of its own products. Disney has created its own integrated system of production that enables the company to achieve ever-increasing levels of self-promotion and brand awareness through its corporate synergy. Musical theatre productions such as *The Lion King* or *Beauty and the Beast*, therefore merely become part of this overall strategy. Although Julie Taymor's designs for *The Lion King* may have 'ripped open that antiseptic, vacuum-packed, made in California sameness that is so recognizable in Disney products,'<sup>355</sup> the show is still very much part of a corporate strategy that has resulted in the theatrical division of the company being used to promote the full range of Disney products. On Broadway, therefore, *The Lion King* may be extolled for Taymor's designs, and the show have opened in a beautiful Art Nouveau theatre that cost the company £21million to restore to its original glory, but it is clear from the vast Disney merchandise store at the entrance to the theatre that the corporation's priorities remain purely commercial. Such a synergistic approach has led to the

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<sup>354</sup> Featherstone (1991: 103) notes of a British shopping mall that reflects a growing trend: 'The Metrocentre [in Gateshead] has promoted itself as a tourist attraction with its 'Antiques Village', fantasy fairytale 'Kingdom of King Wiz' [and] Ancient Roman forum gallery.' Barber (1995: 97) goes even further, suggesting that the McDonaldized system of production leads to the formation of a total experience economy that he terms 'McWorld', where consumerism is the over-riding goal of a system that promotes the complete integration of cultural production: 'McWorld is an entertainment shopping experience that brings together malls, multiplex movie theatres, theme parks, spectator sports arenas, fast-food chains (with their endless movie tie-ins), and television (with its burgeoning shopping networks) into a single vast enterprise that... [maximises] profits.'

<sup>355</sup> *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 11 October 1998

emergence of Disney from being a company that was worth \$2 billion in 1984 to one whose market value had risen to over \$60 billion by the end of the century.<sup>356</sup>

Corporate synergy has also enabled Disney to resist the burgeoning costs of mass marketing through the cross-fertilisation of its own products. In this way, even though the overall marketing budgets of the company may be considerable, Disney is able to continue to expand its marketing operation without being crippled by the attendant expenditure.<sup>357</sup>

In Disney's synergistic system of integrated cross-marketing, theatrical productions are able to benefit from the company's other world-wide ventures and can enjoy television advertising on a global scale. Through promotions on the Disney Channel, the Disney-owned ABC Network, ten television stations and twenty-one radio stations, Steyn (1997a) concludes that Disney Theatricals 'is likely to become America's biggest producer of legitimate theatre.'<sup>358</sup> Disney's synergistic approach to

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<sup>356</sup> Wolf concludes (1999: 231-232) that this capital growth was achieved not only through Disney's relentless building of brand awareness among consumers but also through the company's maximisation of marketing opportunities and its policy of total focus on its corporate synergy: 'When a company offers theme parks, hotels (with more than 17,000 rooms, Disney has more rooms than the entire Omni hotel chain), movies, toys, fast food, books, videos, records, magazines, clothing, and other products, the hope is that all these products and the efforts behind them will mesh and contribute to a chain reaction that creates more energy, awareness, and economic effect than any single aspect might have done on its own. This is true synergy. Disney doesn't just talk about synergy. CEO Michael Eisner has institutionalized it by creating the position of senior vice president of corporate synergy... Synergy is not just a theoretical credo at Disney; it is the company's distinguishing modus operandi.'

<sup>357</sup> Corporate synergy significantly enhances a producer's capacity to market products cost-effectively, as Wolf (1999: 232) notes: 'Even though a powerhouse like Disney spends a significant amount on marketing its productions, the amount of advertising and promotion it gains from these joint ventures is far beyond the capacity of Mickey's deep pockets.' By implication, the opportunities provided by corporate synergy make market entry for non-corporate producers increasingly difficult.

<sup>358</sup> While insisting that McDonald's has been 'the paradigm of rationality for society as a whole,' Ritzer (1998: 136) acknowledges that Disney has been 'an exemplar for the tourist industry,' creating the neologism of 'McDisneyization.' Disney World and the company's other theme parks particularly exemplify the cross-fertilisation of Disney products, together with the company's integrated structure: 'Disney World is selling Disney products, and visitors may easily spend far more on overpriced Disney goods (leading to incalculability) than on the visit to the park itself. Visits to the parks help to fuel interest in shopping at the Disney store in the local mall (which, in turn, had probably played a role in creating an interest in visiting the park). Visits to the park and mall shops stoke up interest in Disney movies, the Disney Channel (both of which, of course, helped create the interest in visiting the theme

marketing has resulted in its theatrical arm becoming merely one part of a much larger entity that demands the promotional synergy and cross-fertilisation of its core products in order to maintain its continuing commercial growth.<sup>359</sup> Nike describes this approach as ‘brand extension’; Microsoft refers to it as ‘bundling’; Virgin calls it ‘synergy’. Whatever term is chosen, however, the homogenizing effect on the cultural artifact and its mode of consumption is the same, and musical theatre will ultimately be affected in a similar way, as Klein (2000: 160-161) concludes:

When all synergy wheels are turning in unison and all’s right in the corporate universe is the very moment when consumer choice is at its most rigidly controlled and consumer power at its feeblest. Similarly, in the entertainment and media industries, synergy nirvana has been attained when all of a conglomerate’s arms have been successfully coordinated to churn out related versions of the same product, like molded Play-Doh, into different shapes: toys, books, theme-parks, magazines, television specials, movies, candies, CDs, CD-ROMs, superstores, comics and megamusicals.

Klein’s assessment of the dominance of cultural production by corporate institutions, whose synergy reduces consumer choice as well as controlling it, suggests that the fundamental principles of McDonaldization permeate many areas of the entertainment industry, and that the homogenization of the musical theatre genre is

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park and the shops), Disney books, Disney recordings, and so on. Here we have a synergistic system to sell and keep selling Disney products. Yes, Disney World is itself a commodity and part of the consumer society, but it also plays its designated role in this highly integrated system’ (Ritzer 1998: 136).

<sup>359</sup> Eyre’s pessimistic vision for the future of theatre production suggests that a synergistic approach has become a dominant feature of corporate marketing strategy. For him, (2000: 346), Disney symbolises not only an extreme form of theatrical commodification, but also one that provides a model of increasing sterility: ‘Disney is unaccustomed to failure and is impelled by the remorseless exigencies of business to expand its activities into every territory and every area of entertainment. In which spirit the Mighty Mouse has decided to invade the theatre. This is a logical strategy: their core product is film, feature-length cartoons. A great deal of cash has to be spent marketing these films and on the back of that effort a great deal of merchandise- toys, clothes, books- can be sold. It is a small step to including theatre as part of the merchandising effort, replacing the cartoons not with expensive animatronics but the often frail but essentially cheap human variety- actors. *Beauty and the Beast* is...not heartening evidence of the popular theatre of the future. It is...a *tableau mort*, with all the liveliness of a wax museum and the charm of a yawning grave.’

simply symptomatic of a shift in the broader cultural paradigm. Cameron Mackintosh, by demonstrating the potential for musical theatre to be developed as a global commodified product, may inadvertently have set in motion the corporatisation of the genre, the end result being the production of a limited number of homogenized products that are rigidly controlled and that suppress originality, independence and aesthetic substance.

## 5.5 Conclusions

This chapter has sought to demonstrate that McDonaldization has had a wide-ranging effect on the process of cultural production. To ensure that a predictable consumption experience may be delivered to consumers, producers (e.g. CML, Disney, Littlestar Services) have recognized the value of producing standardized products and, to attain product differentiation within a crowded market-place, product branding has become central to marketing strategy. With products being marketed as consumer experiences to a global consumer base, the development and application of a globally recognised logo has become of paramount importance. Furthermore, visual spectacle has increased the opportunity to market a product on a global scale and, for musical theatre productions that have adopted McDonaldized principles of production, this has resulted not only in a significantly higher percentage of costs being devoted to marketing, but has also resulted in substantial increases in overall capitalisation levels. This has inevitably meant that market entry has become more difficult for independent musical theatre producers and corporatisation has become more widespread.<sup>360</sup> Global consumer convergence and the integration of cultural

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<sup>360</sup> As a result of spiralling capitalisation costs, most Broadway productions now boast a long list of producers. The Broadway production of *The Producers* (2005), for example, lists thirteen Producers and Associate Producers in the production credits. For *Hairspray* (2002) the total is twenty, and, for *Legally Blonde* (2007), thirty seven. A number of independent producers (e.g. Bettinson, Green,

production have increased the global potential of musical theatre, and entertainment corporations such as Disney, with their access to almost unlimited marketing budgets, have entered the market-place. Musical theatre production has begun to be seen by such companies as simply providing an additional opportunity to extend the reach of their brand in a cost-effective manner through cross-fertilisation and increased corporate synergy.<sup>361</sup> Products with the broadest possible appeal that have the potential attract global consumers are therefore more appealing to producers who wish to compete in a global market-place, and this has resulted in increasing levels of cultural homogenization and a reduction in consumer choice. Weber's vision of individuals being trapped in an 'iron cage of rationality' is therefore becoming apposite.

It seems that McDonaldization has led to the creation of the experience economy in which the emphasis on superficial spectacle has permeated all areas of cultural production, and the Disneyization<sup>362</sup> of cultural forms is a consequence of this process. There has also been a significant growth in 'retailtainment', whereby producers seeking to achieve higher levels of product differentiation in a market-place dominated by standardized products can increase the allure of everyday goods and services, together with their modes of consumption, by marketing them as

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Crawford, Masterson) who were interviewed during research for this thesis, confirmed that market entry is becoming increasingly difficult for productions that do not have access to corporate funding.

<sup>361</sup> In an attempt to expand the commercial potential of their brands, various companies have started to develop musical theatre productions from their back catalogue of successful films. The most recent Broadway musical productions to be developed from original film versions include *Spamalot* (2005), *The Color Purple* (2005), *Legally Blonde* (2007), *Xanadu* (2007), *Young Frankenstein* (2007) and *The Little Mermaid* (2007)

<sup>362</sup> The term 'Disneyization' was coined by Bryman (2004) to denote a process that he suggests is a specific development of McDonaldization. Other commentators use the term 'Disneyfication' to refer to the more general influence of Disney on cultural forms.

entertainment opportunities to potential consumers.<sup>363</sup> Las Vegasization has begun to take the McDonaldization process to an inevitable extreme, and musical theatre consequently seems to be losing touch with its dramatic roots: many productions have become superficial spectacles,<sup>364</sup> which enjoy production and marketing budgets that can only be contemplated by a small number of corporate producers.<sup>365</sup>

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<sup>363</sup> The growth of 'retailtainment,' and the increasingly close relationship between retailing and entertainment is exemplified by the commercial significance of merchandising. Disney, for example, use their musical theatre productions, not only to cross-fertilise their films, theme parks and other ventures, but also to promote sales of Disney-branded products such as clothing, DVDs and soft toys. Merchandising has become increasingly important as a primary source of income. According to the Cirque du Soleil web-site, for example, over a five year period up to 2007, 'the Cirque du Soleil merchandising team has successfully launched over two thousand products in diverse categories such as apparel, accessories, gifts, fine arts and handcrafts for Cirque du Soleil spectators around the globe. Its latest challenge is to bring new products developed under license to a variety of retail channels so that the Cirque du Soleil experience can be enjoyed every day.' The lucrative opportunities provided by merchandising were perhaps first realised by George Lucas: by the time of *Revenge of the Sith* (2005), the six-part Star Wars series had made approximately \$9 billion from merchandising, three times the amount of total box-office receipts.

<sup>364</sup> The rapid growth of the Cirque du Soleil company exemplifies the substantial commercial rewards that can be gained by producers of spectacular musical shows that do not have barriers of language or culture. Formed in 1984, Cirque Du Soleil had fifteen different productions around the globe by 2007: nine touring shows and six resident shows, including five shows in Las Vegas (*Love, Kà, Mystère, O* and *Zumanity*). A sixth Las Vegas show was due to open in the summer of 2008. The continuing expansion of the company and the homogenizing effect of its production process is suggested on the company's official web-site: 'While maintaining the same stringent standards of artistic quality and originality that apply to its shows, the organization wishes to extend its creative talent to other spheres of activity. With the collaboration of business partners, Cirque du Soleil is developing innovative projects, particularly in the field of hospitality (restaurants, bars, spas, etc.). *Delirium*, the first-ever Cirque's (sic) arena event produced in partnership with Live Nation is another example. Cirque du Soleil is truly expanding its creative force to other types of ventures with the objective of redefining existing entertainment formats with a Cirque du Soleil creative perspective.'

<sup>365</sup> A number of corporations have now set up separate companies dedicated to developing musical theatre products. These include Fox Theatricals, Live Nation, SFX Theatrical Group and Universal Pictures.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSIONS

#### 6.1 Summary of findings

This thesis has demonstrated that the essential principles of Ritzer's 'McDonaldization' theory now define many of the practices adopted by many, but by no means all, producers of musical theatre. It is clear, however, that prototypes of such principles had characterised the production processes adopted by various musical theatre producers as early as the late nineteenth century, although Cameron Mackintosh seems to have been the first producer to conform explicitly to a wide range of Ritzer's theoretical principles. Later producers have refined and developed the approach adopted by Mackintosh so that the process of production of musical theatre has been rationalized according to what can now be identified as the McDonaldized model.

Chapter 2 of this thesis demonstrated that both Adorno's critique of the culture industry and Weber's theory of rationalization- which are at the core of Ritzer's own theory- focus, in particular, on the strict level of control that is exerted over the production process in order to achieve product uniformity and to ensure predictability in the consumption experience. Ritzer takes McDonald's as a model of rationalized production and details the approaches that the McDonald's corporation has taken to enable it to maintain strict control over its brand identity, suggesting that packaging and the use of trademarked logos are a primary means of implying product predictability to consumers. The overwhelming majority of individuals that were interviewed for this thesis emphasised that an effective logo had now become critical

to the commercial success of any musical theatre production and that a show's logo was at the centre of its global marketing strategy. They also reiterated the influence that Cameron Mackintosh had had in this regard, emphasising that he had successfully established his shows as brands by using logos that did not require explanatory words or other information. In a world where consumers are bombarded every minute of the day by advertisements and promotions for an infinite range of products and services, it has become essential to be able to communicate instantly with consumers by non-verbal means and to fix a product in consumers' minds with a graphic representation or logo. This thesis has demonstrated that the logo has also become the primary means of communicating with potential consumers from across the globe, who speak a wide range of languages and who might be unable to be reached effectively through more traditional verbal means. This development clearly conforms to Ritzer's theory.

This thesis has also suggested that dramatic increases in marketing budgets and the need to attract the attention of consumers in a progressively more competitive and commercialized market-place may result in greater uniformity of the 'art' experience. The lengthy run of many musical productions has meant that the availability of theatres, particularly in the West End, has also become restricted, with the consequence that the production of new work has become curtailed. Moreover, the increasing reliance on expensive spectacle as a marketing ploy has increased the level of audience expectations when a long-runner is finally replaced by a new (or revived) production. My interviewees confirmed that the increasing importance of marketing has contributed to spiralling capitalisation and running costs and that this has led to

significant increases in ticket prices.<sup>366</sup> Consumers are therefore demanding more for their money, and many producers now feel compelled to introduce expensive spectacular elements into their shows in order to satisfy audience expectations.<sup>367</sup> This development is very much in keeping with Ritzer's view of McDonaldization, with its emphasis on signs and spectacle, and has led to the advent of the 'experience' economy, which is now heavily influencing all areas and modes of cultural production.

The progressive corporatisation of the musical theatre industry through the involvement of such companies as Disney, which view musical theatre both as a means of broadening the company's reach and as a means of increasing synergy, has resulted in increased homogenization. Corporate producers such as MGM on Stage, Live Nation (previously Clear Channel Entertainment) and Warner Brothers Theatre Ventures have now followed Disney's example and have not only begun to develop their film titles into musicals, but are 'expecting to benefit substantially from licensing and merchandising revenues.'<sup>368</sup> The commercial power of such companies, together with the almost unlimited funds that are available for marketing, has ensured that originality in all areas of musical theatre production has begun to be threatened by commercial priorities, and a company such as MGM on Stage exists simply to provide 'yet another vital platform by which we can fully leverage MGM's vast

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<sup>366</sup> Shenton (2007: 7) reported that the most expensive seats for a West end musical in 1983 were £14. By October 2003, the cost of top price seats had risen to £55. This represented a '400% rise in twenty years, against UK inflation rates of 78% over the same period.'

<sup>367</sup> Even shows that do not require spectacle to express the narrative, tend to look for ways of integrating scenography and costume as a guarantee of entertainment. The extravagant costumes of *Wicked* (2003), for example, seem to have been included in the production simply to enhance the visual impact of the show. Disney's *Aida* (2000), whose intimate storyline was effectively complemented by the show's understated design, also included a lengthy fashion show sequence that was not only totally out of place in the overall design concept, but seemed to have been incorporated into the story simply to provide an opportunity to introduce a range of spectacular costumes.

<sup>368</sup> MGM On Stage corporate web-site.

collection of titles with the minimum amount of risk.’<sup>369</sup> The ability of such companies to market their products with virtually no financial restraint has meant that independent producers have struggled to compete, and various interviewees (Goucher, Lee, Green, for example) confirmed the conclusion of this thesis that the Disneyfication of the musical theatre industry was simply an inevitable consequence of the adoption of McDonaldized production principles by producers such as Cameron Mackintosh.

This thesis has also shown that revivals and musical versions of popular films have become increasingly popular with corporate producers who wish to reduce the commercial risk involved in musical theatre production, and new work has consequently become less common.<sup>370</sup> Rising costs, prompted by the pre-eminence of marketing, have also given rise to the ‘back catalogue’ musical format, which enables songs that are already familiar to consumers to become the backbone of ‘new’ musicals. This not only obviates the cost of developing new songs, an obvious attraction for cost-conscious producers, but it has also ensured that the quality of the

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid

<sup>370</sup> Interviewed for the BBC Arts web-site (20 October 2005), producer Sonia Friedman commented: ‘Increasingly, new work has become the sole premise of the subsidised sector, with the National Theatre, the Royal Court and regional theatres reaping the benefits, while the West End is submerged in a sea of tribute musicals and starry revivals...New work in the West End is notoriously difficult to make work, because audiences are less confident about buying into a new [production] before it opens - and you need strong advances in the West End because it's so expensive.’ Tim Rice (quoted in Malvern 2006) suggested that the dominance of large scale musicals in the West End and on Broadway has not only restricted the production of new work, but has also severely hindered the emergence of new writers: ‘There is no evidence of a new generation of writing talent...Where is a single young team or young writer writing fresh new musicals that are successful? I can’t think of one.’ In West End theatre listings for September 2007, all musical theatre productions were either revivals (for example, *The Sound of Music*, *Grease*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Joseph*, *Cabaret*, *Fiddler on the Roof*), stage versions of films (*Dirty Dancing*, *Hairspray*, *Footloose*) Broadway transfers (*Avenue Q*, *Wicked*, *Hairspray*, *Spamalot*), catalogue musicals (*We Will Rock You*, *Mamma Mia!*, *Desperately Seeking Susan*) or long-runners (*Blood Brothers*, *Les Misérables*, *The Phantom of the Opera*). The only ‘new’ musicals in the listing were *Bad Girls- the Musical*, based on a television show and *Take Flight*, scheduled to appear at the Menier Chocolate Factory, a small fringe venue.

book has become of secondary importance and has led to audiences being satisfied with shows that are contrived and lack originality.<sup>371</sup>

Some of my interviewees suggested that the commercial potential of a show was still dependent on the quality of the product itself and that no logo or other marketing initiative, however effective, could save a 'bad' show. My research, however, has clearly shown that this is no longer the case, and that, if it is marketed effectively and has substantial funds available for marketing purposes, even a show such as *We Will Rock You*, which was universally condemned by critics, can become a major commercial success.<sup>372</sup>

## 6.2 Suggestions for further research

The research that was undertaken for this thesis focused specifically on the marketing of musical theatre and the ways in which marketing developments have changed the musical theatre industry and impacted upon the form of the musical. It is clear, however, that the commercial success of the megamusical format has also had

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<sup>371</sup> The totally contrived way in which many of the songs are introduced into *Mamma Mia!*, for example, does not seem to have dented the popularity of the show in any way. Despite its obvious limitations, the 2007 revival of *Grease* is similarly proving to be a major hit. Having excised large chunks of the libretto in order to focus more on the Jacobs-Casey songs which, in the words of Michael Billington (*The Guardian*, 9 August 2007), 'the audience greets like old friends,' the show has become more of a pop concert. The two lead performers, chosen through the television talent show *Grease is the Word*, lack charisma and charm, and the production as a whole was appropriately summed up in *The Times* as 'lacklustre' and 'uninspired.' The fact that the show is proving to be such a commercial success, however, suggests that audiences have taken little notice of poor critical reviews and are unconcerned that *Grease* 'comes over in this high-energy, high-decibel but completely unaffffecting production, as a jukebox masquerading as a musical' (*The Independent*, 9 August 2007).

<sup>372</sup> *We Will Rock You* might not have survived if its producers had not had such substantial funds available for marketing which had enabled the show to benefit from an expensive television advertising campaign. The global appeal of Queen has also had a significant effect on the commercial performance of *We Will Rock You*, and marketing initiatives for the show have always emphasised the show's debt to the pop group. Other recent productions have been less fortunate: the producers of *Tonight's the Night*, for example, did not have access to such substantial marketing funds; nor did the show's Rod Stewart songs appeal to such a broad demographic, and the show failed to achieve commercial success. Rob Bettinson made it clear that the commercial prospects of *125<sup>th</sup> Street* were also severely undermined by the limitations of his production's marketing budget, and the show closed within a few months.

repercussions in other areas of theatrical production,<sup>373</sup> and a number of producers who were responsible for the production of both musical and non-musical shows stressed that producers such as Cameron Mackintosh had had a significant effect on both 'legit' theatre and other theatrical forms.<sup>374</sup>

The influence of producers such as CML, RUG and Disney Theatricals on non-musical theatre have not been addressed in my thesis, other than in a tangential fashion, and it is clear that further research is required if a broader picture is to be gained. I would recommend that detailed academic research could be undertaken, in particular, into the following areas:

- The effect of the megamusical production on the audience demographics of 'legit' theatre
- The influence of Las Vegas on musical theatre production, and its role in increasing the dominance of visual spectacle
- The effect of corporatisation, with its emphasis on the production of branded products, on theatre in general

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<sup>373</sup> Michael Kustow (2000: 224), ex-Associate Director of the RNT and RSC, suggests that the gradual corporatisation of musical theatre has resulted in the progressive under-funding of other forms of theatre so that, for example, repertory companies have often been forced to narrow their choices of repertoire to small-cast plays, in order to conserve funds or even to stay afloat. Much of Kustow's argument, however, relies on hearsay and supposition, so that he is quite willing, for example, to condemn a show such as *Mamma Mia!*, which he derides as being 'concocted out of Abba songs, one of a number of knee-jerk shows based on pop music which have been concocted for the coach party trade' even though he has clearly not seen the show himself, as he admits a few lines later. A less biased and more academically rigorous investigation is surely required if a more detailed picture of the effects of McDonaldization on other theatrical forms is to be gained.

<sup>374</sup> Alan Liddiard, Artistic Director of Northern Stage, for example, while stressing that the 'gloss finish' of Mackintosh's productions were not to his 'style or liking' (interview 2000), nevertheless freely admitted that he had been influenced by Mackintosh in his approach to the branding of his own company's productions and that their visual and filmic style owed much to the megamusical format. Guy Masterson (interview 2001), whose work includes the production of a wide range of non-musical shows, similarly made it clear that, while he had grave concerns about the way in which the musical genre was, in his view, threatening the very existence of straight theatre, he felt that he had been influenced by Mackintosh in a range of areas. These included not just the marketing of his shows, which had developed a branded style in their promotional material, but also the shows themselves, with Masterson stressing that he wished to continue to produce work that 'challenged' his audience but admitting that the continuing dominance of the musical genre was resulting in him having to be 'more realistic' about his choices of work and persuading him not to 'take risks' as he had done in the past.

My thesis has demonstrated that, since 1981, musical theatre has rapidly developed into a globalized commodity. The branded nature of products such as *The Lion King* and *We Will Rock You* has enabled them to be marketed to a mass audience, and has created a production paradigm that has been followed by producers of other theatre products.<sup>375</sup> My thesis has shown that this development has had a significant effect on audience demographics for musical theatre, but I also found signs during the period of my research that the composition of audiences for 'legit' theatre seemed to be changing<sup>376</sup> and that these changes could be attributed not only to the ways in which productions were being marketed but also to the type of product that producers were choosing to develop.

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<sup>375</sup> Cirque Du Soleil is an example of a production company that has developed a branded identity along McDonaldized lines that has enabled it to develop its products on a global scale. Since it was founded in the early 1980s, Cirque Du Soleil has grown rapidly into a company of over 3000 employees that in 2006 produced thirteen different shows around the world. The company has also recognised the value of diversification and corporate synergy; in addition to creating shows, Cirque du Soleil has produced material for television, DVD and film through its multimedia division, Cirque du Soleil Images, while the Cirque Du Soleil Musique recording company handles the creation, production and sale of the music associated with current and future Cirque du Soleil shows. Such commercial diversification, however, is very strictly controlled and the protection of the company's branded name and image remains a primary objective, as is made clear on the company's web-site: 'In every project, Cirque Du Soleil Images aims to capture all the spirit of Cirque du Soleil shows... Cirque du Soleil is also diversifying its commercial activities by targeting another niche: merchandising and licensing. Just like its multimedia projects, all merchandising and licensing activities must meet the same stringent standards of quality and originality that apply to its shows. Cirque du Soleil always seeks to imbue each new project with the energy and spirit that are the hallmark of its shows.' Other organisations that have achieved commercial success by their carefully controlled diversification into different media include Blue Man Group, whose core aim, as stated on the company's official web-site, is to provide 'exciting experiences in a variety of media, which appeal to a broad range of age groups and cultural backgrounds.'

<sup>376</sup> Alan Liddiard was one of a number of 'legit' producers and artistic directors who freely admitted to me that their companies had been directly influenced by Cameron Mackintosh's marketing paradigm and now used branded logos, for example, to attract a new, younger audience. Liddiard emphasised that 'the logo and the overall image has become increasingly important... We are trying to hit a niche market which is young people that are potential theatre goers and we try to talk to them, so logos and recognition of those logos is important... I would describe our image as a branded image.' The recent prevalence of 'stunt' casting, whereby celebrities from popular television shows such as *Friends* are cast in leading 'legit' roles, also suggests that producers are attempting to attract new younger audience members who might not otherwise purchase tickets.

The broader relevance of Ritzer's McDonaldization theory needs to be investigated to discover whether the corporate goal of successfully developing a product for global replication has influenced producers of non-musical forms of theatre. My thesis has concluded that commodification and globalization have encouraged musical theatre producers to consider for production shows that have broad appeal and that lack aesthetically challenging themes and content. Moreover, the increasing involvement of corporate producers in musical theatre production has resulted in the dramatic increase of marketing costs that has made market entry for independent producers more difficult. I found evidence that the increasing production costs that have led to the corporatisation of musical theatre were also having a significant effect outside the sphere of musical theatre production.<sup>377</sup> Further research, however, is required in order to provide a clearer picture about the degree to which theatre production in general has been affected.

The current trend for casting film and television stars in theatrical productions, however, has not been the only way in which there has been an identifiable convergence of the film and theatre genres. As I have shown above, corporate producers such as Disney and MGM are increasingly developing successful films and, to a lesser extent, television shows,<sup>378</sup> into theatrical products. Moreover, the

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<sup>377</sup> In recent years, for example, the number of straight plays opening each season on Broadway has dwindled to just a handful, and most of these are revivals or rely heavily on 'stunt' casting and the box office pulling power of a star name. While the casting of stars in lead roles has always been a feature of theatrical production in the past, Sonia Friedman suggests ([www.theage.co.au](http://www.theage.co.au), 26 December 2006) that the point has now been reached where, due to the rise of the megamusical, a 'legit' production is unlikely even to be considered for production in the West End unless it can guarantee to feature at least one star, preferably American, who is a household name: 'The West End is now perceived as the place where you go for your big blockbuster entertainment... There's no risk-taking. If producers even hope to get a theatre to take them, they say they have to hire big-name actors; if they are American, even better.'

<sup>378</sup> *High School Musical*, for example, which first aired on the Disney Channel in January 2006, has become a global success: it has been remade as a staged concert and as a full theatre musical, and *High School Musical on Ice* started touring the US in 2007. The show also generated substantial

marketing images that are used to promote a show such as *Chicago* have a clear film noir quality. I suggest that useful research might be undertaken to analyse the wide-ranging effect of film on theatre,<sup>379</sup> to assess the implications of this apparent convergence of the genres.<sup>380</sup>

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merchandising sales for the Walt Disney company, including \$100 million in sales of DVDs and CD soundtracks alone. Musically, it has produced a Billboard number one album, and at one point most of the songs in iTunes' Top 10 downloads were all from the musical. Initial estimates (*New York Times*, 18 Aug 2007) suggest that the premiere of *High School Musical 2*, which first aired on the Disney Channel in the US on 17 August 2007, was watched by 17.2 million viewers nationwide.

<sup>379</sup> The success of recent film versions of shows such as *Evita*, *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Chicago* suggests the effect of the megamusical format on the film genre could also be assessed.

<sup>380</sup> The focus on spectacular elements that was an essential ingredient of the megamusical format may have been influenced by blockbuster films such as *Star Wars*. Moreover, the global merchandising operation that was a central feature of the marketing strategy for *Star Wars* seemed to anticipate the commodification of the musical genre.

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## Appendix 1

### Thesis Questions

How important is marketing in musical theatre production?

What is your target market? What methods do you use to reach your market?

How important is the tourist market? How do you reach the tourist market?

How important are group sales? Which groups do you target and how?

Did you try to broaden the appeal of your production through marketing? If so, how?

How was the show financed?

What was the capitalisation? What percentage was spent on marketing?

What were the running costs? What percentage was spent on marketing?

What aspects of the marketing strategy were the most effective and/or innovative?

Why do you think your production was successful/unsuccessful commercially?

How important is branding (and the super-brand) in musical theatre marketing?

How do you protect your brand?

How important is a logo for marketing purposes?

Has the musical become a global product? If so, what has facilitated this?

Do you market your shows separately or together?

How important is the total product experience for consumers?

How important is it for audiences to see replicated versions of the original show?

To what extent are the worldwide versions reproductions of the original?

Do you think that shows have to have elements of spectacle to be successful?

How do you assess audience expectations and responses?

How has your marketing been affected by the information you have gained?

Has market entry become more difficult?

Do you think that producers are trying to take less risks?

Do you think there has been a 'dumbing down' of musical theatre?

Are the lyrics and the book important?

What effect has Cameron Mackintosh had on the musical theatre industry & genre?

Has Cameron Mackintosh affected the way you produce your show(s)?

What effect has Disney Theatricals had on you and on the musical theatre genre?

Has your role as a producer changed/developed? If so, how?

## APPENDIX 2

### Sample Interviews

#### Interview with Mark Goucher

##### **Why have you chosen to produce *Fame* in the West End?**

The tour went out in the beginning of 2000 and it was called 'Fame 2000' and the show was slightly modified. It was, I think, made better than it had been previously, and the tour was incredibly successful. It proved that there was a tremendous market out there amongst people who probably don't go to the theatre that much, who just recognised, you know, *Fame* and remembered it from the TV series and the film. The theatres were slightly sceptical about it going out to start with, because it had been out a few times, but we did improve it and we had a great cast and it just worked, and it did fantastic box office everywhere it went and then the tour was due to finish in September and we were offered a good deal at the Victoria Palace to bring it back in for Christmas. And so in we came, and it has done stonking business. We extended the season and we are going to be there through the summer until September, which means it will have done a year at the Victoria Palace. The Victoria Palace were already under contract to take *Annie Get Your Gun* from Broadway and they are taking that in September. So we now unfortunately have to move *Fame* somewhere else for its Christmas Season this year.

##### **How was it financed in the West End?**

By thirty investors. My co-producer and I raise all the money that we need every time that we put on a show.

##### **What were the capitalisation costs?**

Well, in London it was fairly cheap for a musical because it had just come in off the road. So the production was up and running, although there was some re-casting and there was some set that needed doing. Basically, the physical production probably cost, to get it from the road into town, an additional £50,000. But then there was marketing and print and we probably put in the region of an additional £200,000 on top of that for the re-launch of the West End season. So £250,000.

##### **How important is marketing?**

Absolutely critical. Brand new shows cost an absolute fortune to put on. I was talking to an American producer yesterday and he is one of the investors in *The Producers* in America, and *The Producers* will take seventeen months at over 90% business to actually recoup and their break-even figure on Broadway is \$550,000 per week. Now, when you are dealing with that amount of money then, yes, any way you can sell a ticket needs to be explored, and you have to concentrate on extremely large marketing and advertising campaigns.

**What percentage of your running costs is spent on marketing?**

A lot of it will be. Also, America is a lot more expensive in terms of actors and staffing and all that sort of thing and theatre costs. But the same proportions apply over here. You have to spend an awful lot. The biggest part of your budget is normally now to do with marketing and advertising.

**Did you try to broaden the appeal of your production through marketing?**

You have got to appeal to as wide a market as possible and, you know, carry on developing. I mean, the thing that I am proud of in some of the shows that I have produced is that they have encouraged people who have never been to the theatre before to come to the theatre, and if we can keep doing that, then hopefully they are going to keep going to the theatre. You cannot rely on a sort of straightforward middle class audience in each of the major towns to just become your theatre audience, you have got to be constantly trying to get young people, new people into the theatre, and to do that we now advertise and sell the shows in the most extraordinary places. I mean, I take adverts in the music press for *Rent*. We take adverts in all sorts of things, we advertise in magazines like *Hello!* and *OK!* magazines for *Fame*. You would never have seen a theatre advert in those magazines previously.

**Who are you targeting by advertising in those magazines?**

Well, the people who read them. You can draw your own conclusions as to the people who read them.

**Mothers, probably with families?**

Yes!

**Has the family market become more important than it used to be?**

Again, show by show. More important to Disney than it is to me for *Rent*. Possibly more important for me for *Fame* than it is for *Rent*. Yes, the family market is important but not as important to me as students and sort of the fifteen to twenty-five year old category of people. I would prefer to see them at the theatre. Having said that, I don't do children's shows. I do do children's shows because I transferred *The Snowman* to London, where our audience was of the average age of about five. But each show has a different audience and you just have to identify your audience and try to get to them as best you can.

**What is your target audience?**

I think *Fame* attracts a mixed audience, but primarily a sort of younger out of town audience who are sort of lads taking their girlfriends out, mums taking their daughters out, whose daughters want to go to drama school, dance school or anything like that, and grandads and grandmas who want to take their grandchildren out for an evening in the West End. A broad age profile. It is not exactly what you would call your cutting edge theatre drama audience. It is much more your sort of standard audience that come into town for a good night out in the theatre.

**Is there a tourist market for it?**

I think there is, because it is an international brand name. Obviously it is American, set in New York with an American movie and American TV series. It is huge in places like Stockholm and some of the Scandinavian countries and so, over this summer, we will target a lot of that sort of back-packing type of audience. *Fame* is suitable for anyone who has got any sort of understanding of English. It is not difficult to follow. It is not *Rent*. *Rent* is difficult to follow, and if you are not following it you don't get it. *Fame* is not quite the same: there are some recognisable tunes in it so I think it would be fair to say that most Europeans have a far greater understanding of English than we have of any other European language and, actually, it is quite surprising how much they do understand. So I don't think that there is a language barrier

**How do you reach the tourist market?**

Through specific marketing initiatives which cover cheaper hotels and the British Tourist Association. There are lists that go on endlessly of what we will be doing, including tourist publications, student publications, inbound travel magazines, all that sort of stuff.

**What aspects of your marketing strategy were the most effective?**

The recognition of the name, the very strong image that the show has, and the fact that we had a philosophy on the show. Because there were 1,500 seats at the Victoria Palace, we were going to stack 'em high and sell 'em cheap. So we just flooded the market with, you know, offers and all that sort of thing. And I think people just took to it because there wasn't one of those feel-good musicals in town at the time, there was no more *Grease*, there were none of those types of shows, they weren't in town. So we came in and we had nothing to compete against and there still isn't anything like that at the moment.

**Do you think that the production is therefore cutting some of the risks?**

No, because you never cut the risks, you never cut the risks, whatever you do. It could have been an absolute pile of shite and the whole thing could have gone horribly wrong, you never know. You can only use your best endeavours and your previous experience in order to try and mitigate your losses. So, it is a crapshoot, and no-one knows what show is going to work and why it works. No-one knows why the Reduced Shakespeare Company is still at the Criterion six years later. You just really don't know. We just had a feeling that the reaction to the show had been terribly strong in the regions and it was my considered opinion that the reaction to the show had been good and it would therefore stand a chance of coming back into London. And, luckily, that one has been proved right.

**Do you think that a show needs to have elements of spectacle to be successful ?**

Visually *Fame* is good, the dance routines are always commented on as being very good, the choreography is good, the taxi cab comes on at the end. It is not quite as spectacular as a helicopter, and only marginally cheaper!

**Did that add much to the original start-up costs?**

Well, I didn't originally produce it, so I can't really comment on that. It was back in the early nineties and the rights changed hands many times until they ended up with my co-producer about four years ago. And then three years ago I said to Adam [Kenwright] that I would tour it again with him and that is when we struck up the new partnership to do that.

**What is the reason behind taking *Rent* on the road?**

*Rent* was a show which I became very passionate about, having seen it on Broadway a number of times. And I was presented with the opportunity of acquiring the UK touring rights which I did in association with Adam Kenwright and we were both passionate about it and I felt that there were very few real new musicals produced, particularly on the road.

**Why?**

Because they are very expensive to do and also, if new musicals are not received well in London, they do not necessarily stand very much of a chance of going out on the road because theatre managers won't book them. *Rent*, although it ran for eighteen months at the Shaftesbury Theatre, which is a big 1,600 seater theatre, it was actually perceived as being a flop. Now, if you compare how long *Rent* ran with the recent spate of musicals- *Napoleon*, *Lautrec* and various other things of which I have lost count- in fact, eighteen months in a theatre that size is really no small achievement.

**Did it break even?**

No, it lost money. The Americans supported it totally, there was no British money in it, it was all American. The Americans were making a fortune on Broadway and they also believed that the phenomenon that was *Rent* on Broadway was going to be repeated and somehow, through a process of osmosis, arrive over here. And actually, quite frankly, the British audience did not give a monkey's toss that Jonathan Larsen died the week before the show opened, they didn't really see why it was that good and also the Americans would not change it at all for the English market. I mean, it is difficult to follow. So what we set about to do was, whilst we weren't going to actually interfere with the artistic integrity of the show, we wanted to find a director over here who would make it accessible to a regional audience. And we set about making it clearer and we have done that to a certain extent, and it has now been running... it did three weeks sell out in Leicester, it did very good business in Leeds and opened in Northampton last night to a standing ovation. But it is still a very difficult show to sell and we are fighting for every single seat, because it is up against shows like *Fame*, *Grease*, *Saturday Night Fever*, and people are lazy. They go. 'Oh! I know *Saturday Night Fever*, I will book a ticket for that.' It is our job to try and educate people and try to persuade people that it is good to go for new things as well. And we hope that the first tour of *Rent*, although it probably won't be financially

rewarding at all, will lead into another tour, whereby people will start to understand what it is. But I think that it is an exceptionally inspiring musical and I think that if people get into it, then they have a fantastic experience in a theatre. It is contemporary, it attracts a much younger audience, it deals with life issues and I am very proud to have done it.

**The Broadway marketing material is quite dark and brown. In the UK it is much lighter. Why is that?**

There was a conscious awareness that, when the production came to London, it attracted a broad cross section of audience, but London has got a much larger population of kids who are absolutely up to date with fashion, music and everything else, and we felt that this show needed a slightly lighter approach. We also made a deliberate choice to cast an ex-Soap star and, I have to say, not only is he very good in the show, he also has generated an extraordinary amount of publicity lately which has helped us get the message across as to what *Rent* is about and has brought a new audience into the theatre. A lot of Adam Rickett's fans, who know him from Coronation Street and his brief pop career, are in the theatre. They would never have normally gone to see anything like this and I hope they have had an experience that they would want to repeat. So there was a very conscious effort to lighten it up and not have it quite so grungy as it is in New York.

**Were you trying to broaden the appeal of your production through marketing?**

Absolutely, it is a unashamedly way of making the show look more accessible, more fun and more funky, and the marketing campaign is trying to make it more commercial. But that is because you cannot put a musical out on the road against bright pink colours that *Grease* use, the bright yellow colours that *Saturday Night Fever* uses, bright red and blues that *Fame* uses. You have got to go out there and go into the market place and try to win people over. You can't win people over to new products until you have actually got them into the theatre. So, to get them into the theatre, if you have to use a sort of hackneyed old postcards with pretty pictures of young boys on, then that is what you do. But, when they come into the theatre, there is a completely different experience to be had. Some will like it and some will hate it. A lot of people walk out of *Rent*, the older generation particularly. Frankly, I don't care! At least it is provoking some sort of reaction, rather than that lethargic sort of audience that will sit through yet another hackneyed revival of *Me and My Girl*. You know what I mean!

**There have been quite a number of revivals recently and 'catalogue' musicals like *Buddy* and *Mamma Mia!* Why do you think that is?**

Because people like it, there is no point in saying that this is bad art, because people like it. They like to go and there is nothing wrong with it at all. If people want to listen to ABBA music, then go to *Mamma Mia!* Disney is now making huge inroads into musicals over here. I don't particularly have that much affection for them, because I think that they are so contrived and so manufactured, but they provide spectacle and they provide some decent tunes. I like my theatre a little bit rawer than that, but they are crowd pleasers and people like going to them and it is also safe. It costs a lot of money to go to the theatre these days which is why, you know, for *Rent*

we have kept prices as low as we possibly can. You know, people are paying upwards of £45-£50 to go and see *Lion King*, or to see another West End musical. If they are spending that type of money, they want to go and see something that they at least think is going to be spectacular and is going to be good. So they go to see shows like *Lion King* and *Mamma Mia!*

**What sort of trends do you see in the genre?**

Well, I have to say that before I produced *Fame*, I did not produce musicals. I have produced a lot more straight theatre, things like *Trainspotting*, things like *Shopping and Fucking*. So I came rather late to musicals. I was doing work like that, and then basically there are so many good subsidised theatre companies that were getting their own funding to develop their work I realised that I couldn't carry on making a living just doing stuff like that, and I wasn't giving my investors a particularly good return on their money. I thought I couldn't earn a living at it any more, and so I was happy to move and start doing other work and broadening my range of work. So I was delighted that I did *Fame* and it went very well and delighted that it was in the West End and then even more delighted that I did *Rent*, but my work developed out of doing straight theatre.

**Would you say that there has been a 'dumbing down' of theatre in London?**

There have always shows like that *Buddy* or *Mamma Mia!* There have always been compilation shows, there have always been crowd-pleasing shows. There are very few new musicals, and the trouble with new musicals is that they get panned. What was the last new musical that was not a compilation that was reviewed well in the West End? Frankly, I can't remember. *Les Mis*? Critics over here have a very blinkered view about how they think shows should be. Most critics hate tribute shows and probably they didn't like *Fame*. It is very difficult to find new shows, so people just put compilation shows together. I mean, there is another one going in shortly, there is the Beatles thing. People like these sort of shows, people feel safe with them and people go, so I don't think the genre is being dumbed down. I think in many ways musicals have always been a bit dumb. Most musicals are not terribly taxing. I think probably *Les Mis* is the one that broke the mould in recent history, yet half the audience will come not knowing what is going on in *Les Mis*. I really don't think they do!

**So why is Les Mis still doing well?**

I think it has just turned into this sort of epic sort of show with great music, and a lot of people on the stage and it has just become an institution actually, a tourist attraction. Like *Cats*.

**What effect has Cameron Mackintosh had on marketing and on the musical theatre genre?**

I think Cameron was the most revolutionary of contemporary music theatre producers. Firstly, he had a tremendous passion for what he was doing, and he combined his passion with a small amount of luck. Originally, his collaboration with Andrew Lloyd Webber and the ability to create these sort of mega international hits for the first time

ever, relied on marketing to brand their image in the same way that one would brand a car or a computer, or a packet of cigarettes. The images that they created from a marketing perspective are international advertising classics and that was the collaboration of Lloyd Webber, Cameron Mackintosh and Dwynters and that certainly helped the international branding of the show. People knew when they saw that poster for *Miss Saigon* or *Phantom* that they were going to get the show that everyone raved about in London or New York, and it goes on and on and on around the world. So there was a clever combination, and it was the megamusical which, by their own admission, both Cameron and Lloyd Webber now, I believe, have moved away from. Lloyd Webber has done *The Beautiful Game*, much smaller, much more contemporary issue-based and quite a radical departure for him. Cameron is also developing other shows. Cameron loved *Rent*. Cameron produced *Rent* half way around the world. But, I think, that sort of megamusical, that sort of Lloyd Webber/Mackintosh has gone a bit and it has been taken over by Disney now. The Disney Corporation are now doing it. Why has it gone? Because all good things come to an end.

**So, are you saying that the sort of musical theatre you were producing in the 90's came out of demise of the large spectacular musical?**

No, not really. I think that coming out of the 80's there was an awful lot of political based drama which was a backlash against Thatcherism. Then I think that, with Aids, there was a lot more contemporary writing about the Aids epidemic and issues of sexuality. Now we are into a cycle where playwrights are discussing homelessness, drug abuse, social injustice and there will be new issues coming all the time which will be discussed. We will probably have plays about foot and mouth and BSE in a year or so's time!

**Do you think Cameron Mackintosh has affected the way you produced your shows?**

Cameron set international marketing standards. I think that obviously now we are into a much more media interactive age. So everyone has to get with it in terms of marketing. You can't just place a couple of adverts in the London papers or *The Times* and *Telegraph* and expect people to come flocking. I mean, we spend probably 55% of our time actually discussing marketing and advertising initiatives and how to get people into a theatre, and only 45% of our time actually discussing developing product and the actual concept of shows and dealing with theatricality. What we spend most of our time doing is running a business, which now involves constant reassessing of our marketing and advertising campaigns.

**How do you do that?**

We have extremely good advertising agencies and marketing agencies now. I use a combination of Adam Kenwright, AKA, and Guy Chapman Associates. In collaboration some of them then use some of the other agencies who purely book space for us. And these are younger people of my generation who grew up at the same time as me and in the same business and they have a much more contemporary sensibility. And, you know, you advertise your plays in the same way now because everyone is fighting for what is essentially the same audience.

**Do you do market research?**

We do some research. It is easier to do market research for shows which are running for a long time. We do regular research for the Reduced Shakespeare Company, conducting audience surveys as to where our readers come from or what publications they look at, so we do a little bit, probably not as much as we should do. We are supposed to rely on our representative body of The Society of London Theatres to do that. I have no comment on their ability to do that. I would say that I don't read any of their research, so you can draw your own conclusions.

**What effect has Disney Theatricals had on musical theatre marketing?**

Disney are developing new ideas. There is very much a corporate approach to entertainment. I think it is true that they may not make as much from *The Lion King* as a show as they will from the merchandising and the spin-offs. When you have got world-wide domination like that and control absolutely everything, those things can make you a lot of money.

**How has your role as a producer changed and developed? If so, how?**

I think that producers now have to be all things to all people. They have to have artistic integrity in order to be able to deal with the creative team about putting a show on and advising from an audience perspective: how they think the show should be developed in order that an audience enjoys and appreciates it more by going into a theatre. They have to be a hard-nosed businessman in order to be able to cut the deals which are necessary with creative teams, with agents, and also they have to have the ability to raise money. All of those things have probably always been true, but the new element is that you have to be pretty sharp on marketing, design, advertising, sponsorship- you have to have a grasp of all of those things. You can't just now pay an agency to do that for you and expect them to do it. If you don't get in there and roll your sleeves up and get down with the marketing and advertising agency and have regular meetings with them and really challenge what they are doing, then actually you will lose control very quickly of what is going on, because no-one should know how to sell your show better than you do. I have the best knowledge of how to sell my shows, and what my marketing and advertising agencies can do is advise and facilitate a lot of what I want, but I have to lead the way in terms of how we actually sell and push the show forwards all of the time. I think that is probably the thing that has changed most in the last ten years, but that is what producers now have to do, as well as everything else. So it is a pretty long day really.

## 2. Interview with Michael McCabe

### **How important is a logo for marketing purposes?**

With *Mamma Mia!*, when we test materials, the logo girl comes out top every time in the sense that we will show focus groups production photographs, different images from the show as well as the logo and we will literally say, 'Which of these images do you find the most appealing?' And, vastly, it will always be the logo of the girl, but the story behind that really...I mean, when we first met with Judy, Bjorn and Benny, the brief was that first we had to create something that in no way made this look like some sort of Abba tribute show. It had to be a human emotion, not some cold icon logo, it had got to be a moment that captured the essence of the show. It had to be joyous and the line that we came away with from that first meeting was *Shirley Valentine* meets *Muriel's Wedding*, and that is exactly what we went away and did, but they were very determined (particularly Bjorn) that it must not ever seem like it was retro or a seventies show.

### **Why?**

Because I think that for him and Benny this was a new chance to do something with their songs rather than just be a kind of people pretending to be ABBA or one of the Bjorn Again things. The motivation of this was that it was a brand new opportunity for them. Bjorn's quote is now famous, 'It is the musical that you never knew you wrote,' in the sense that they wrote all these songs and then it was almost like twenty years previewing before the show actually opened. But it had to be, on balance, a book musical, it is a story, there are real people in this and it is not the story of ABBA. So when we created the girl, we obviously took the essence of the whole wedding theme, but it had to be joyous, it had to just try and sum up what everyone felt about the show, even at that early stage, because this was a year before it actually opened. What could we do that just made people go, 'That looks lovely, that just looks really enjoyable' and an elating kind of image? There were probably twenty completely different designs and we were very, very far down the road with a design which was the character Sophie in the sky, sitting on the handlebars of the bicycle. Which at the time was a moment in the show, which then got cut, so that imagery all got dumped, but the girl, the bride, was something that we presented very early on which had originally been rejected and, when everyone started to talk again about how they really saw the new direction going, I kind of said, 'Well, we sort of touched that nerve very early on and we re-presented the girl and they all just said, 'That's it, that is exactly the image.' So it was a terrific journey, but now you can go into all these cities around the world, particularly at the time of opening, and see this image everywhere, on flags, on bill-boards and the whole bit, and no matter where we do photo scoops and we test all the materials and whatever, the reactions to the girl is so strong that people just buy into the joy that she is conveying, and it has worked, I think, because it was different. I mean, in London, a lot of other producers thought it was a terrible direction to go in and that the feeling always is a good poster is a poster for a hit show and a bad poster is a poster of a flop show, and people always talk now about how brilliant *Cats* was and *Phantom* was and whatever. If those shows hadn't worked, people now would now be saying, 'Well, of course, it was the logo, it didn't

work. But I think there are many brilliant posters out there for shows that didn't work but they were all beginning to take on a very similar look.

### **Like what, for example?**

In a sort of *Les Mis*, *Phantom*, *Miss Saigon* way- those sort of images.

### **A graphic sort of image?**

Yes, and we needed to go beyond that and go back to something more human and it needed to be a person and not just some sort of Greek island icon. The story is so much about people and emotion and, you know, lost loves, love found, about confronting the past and human emotion. It seems to have worked, and then, as I said, we don't know quite why and you can analyse it until you are green in the face but it is a fact that something in the whole notion of the show works in conjunction with this brand. And now, yes, it certainly is a brand.

### **How important is branding in musical theatre marketing?**

I think identity is very important, but at the end of the day we are all absolutely in the hands of word of mouth and, you know, you could have the greatest materials in the world, but if your audience isn't leaving that auditorium eight times a week ringing their friends and loved-ones and whatever saying, 'You have to go and see the show,' nothing you can do will make it work. So, whilst I am sure we all love to think that there is some unique and magical formula, at the end of the day you stand or fall by the product and we were very lucky with *Mamma Mia!* that literally from that first preview, you saw people in the lobby of the Prince Edward Theatre on mobile phones saying, 'You have to come and see this,' and we all stood there and watched that and that is ultimately what drives *Mamma Mia!* But what you are able to do is take that momentum and push it with what we did. But you still have got to have that ignition but then you just keep marketing and marketing and marketing. I think one of the best decisions that Judy and the team made, and obviously very much led by us, was right from the start: when it just exploded, you know, and we knew we had something extraordinary on our hands, the pressure was kept up on it constantly. We didn't all sit back and say, 'Oh, it is a hit, we can cut the advertising budget, we can just sit back and have lots of long lunches.' We have to keep working on the show and, all the time that people really want it, we have to just keep pushing it. So every day, you know, that remains true and it remains true in all of the territories and we just push, push, push. And you know that you only have a finite period of time to be the one, the number one, whatever it is, and we do just keep that pressure on it all the time. People are very aspirational in the sense that when they can't get a ticket, it is the one that they want. A show that you can walk into tomorrow night is less appealing than one that you have to book up months in advance. So you have to make sure that that momentum remains and that is true all of all the long running shows.

### **How important is the tourist market?**

Very important

### **How do you reach the tourist market?**

*Mamma Mia!* has become very much a tourist attraction, and we invest a lot in what I would call tourism marketing. So we do a huge amount with tour operators and airlines. We have a person here that is absolutely dedicated to tourism marketing so we have materials that are used around the world. In New York we have a special tourism executive and she goes to all of the trade shows. We have stands at most of the big shows around the world, so we are able again to sell all of the productions at one stand. We do signage at airports, and we do whatever it is where you are trying to get to travellers. One of the great bonuses of having a show that is successful around the world is that people have heard of it before they arrive. So when you are confronted in London with about forty options of what you might go and see whilst you are in London for two days, *Mamma Mia!* is right up there at the top of your list because you have heard of it.

### **Product awareness?**

Yes, and it is a safety thing as well: if you are going to put down £40 of whatever on a ticket, people want to know it is going to be good.

### **But how do they know that?**

Its success. You know, all of the focus groups always talk about how it is its success rather than its critical acclaim. Success at the box office means that audiences like the show, and that is what matters more than anything. So there are the top five shows that will always be in amongst everyone's first choices and they are all of the most known shows.

### **You promote that through your marketing?**

Yes, and now at the bottom of all the ads we have this line that tells you all the cities that it is playing in and we are constantly reinforcing the message that we are everywhere and, bizarrely, and it is something that is hard to understand, someone who lives in New York will come to London and choose to see a show that is actually playing in New York, but it is this whole sort of safety thing like, 'Oh! I know that is a hit, so let's go to that.'

### **Predictability in terms of audience expectations?**

Yes, I think it absolutely is the safety issue: why would you say let's go and see something that you have never heard of? Would you really take that risk? It is particularly true with people who come from Oklahoma, or Dallas or whatever, they will predominantly choose to see the shows that are also running on Broadway. This just seems to be a very strong pattern.

### **Is the logo therefore an important part of that?**

Yes, in the same way that you buy a pair of Levi jeans in that you feel that you know that brand. That is a standard of quality and you would hire an Avis rental car or whatever. It is exactly the same mentality, which is why always going back to this constant reinforcement of the brand is so important. It stands for assurance, and I

think that's why, in a way, Disney have been successful in the theatre, as well as obviously in everything else they do, because to most people Disney is a stamp of quality. If it is 'Disney presents...', that means something. That means you are probably going to get strong value for money because that is what Disney means to people. So, I think, more and more, and very much going back to the Cameron model, it is about making sure that your brand is as strong and as high profile as possible. Theatre is in a way increasingly becoming like any product, and because there is so much more global awareness in products, and things are not now territory specific, they are brands that cross all continents and it is the same with shows. That is why we feel, 'Yes, I recognise and understand and therefore I can buy that.'

### **How important is marketing now to musical theatre?**

Unprecedented. I think, ten years ago, you could pretty much say that marketing West End shows was putting out some papers and the phones rang. That is not true any more, you have to work an awful lot harder to get people through the door.

### **Why?**

Because people are more conscious of how expensive it is, it is harder to make the decision, and you are in a very saturated market. There are so many other entertainment choices as well as other theatre products. We are always competing against video and DVD and television and movies. Entertainment is incredibly accessible in all its shapes and forms, and we are still obviously selling the live experience, but I think that you look at something right now, *Chicago* for example, for £9 you can go and see Richard Gere and Catherine Zeta Jones in the movie, or you can see a couple of soap stars in the live London show, but the show is benefiting from the exposure of the movie, on Broadway and here, and I think it is just because it spins out into a much bigger market place and, if people enjoy the movie, they say, 'Well, let's go and see what the live experience is like.' As an industry we have to work much harder than we ever used to and, as individual shows, just to compete, you have to work much harder.

### **Has that affected capitalisation costs?**

Yes, and certainly budgets for shows go up. I think a few years ago you could pretty much say that most musicals were spending about £300,000 on a pre-opening campaign. Now they are spending £1m. It is a dramatic increase but that is only in line with everything else and the additional expense of doing the stuff.

### **What percentage of running costs is marketing?**

Sort of 10%, because obviously there is no point just spending ad infinitum. You have got to know that you can recoup, and you have got to know that your investors buy into the concept of how much you can spend on marketing. But again, I think that was one of the clever things about *Mamma Mia!* They were able to recognise the opportunity they had at the beginning to spend more than they made and necessarily needed to spend, but it was a long term investment and it really paid off. So the investors have benefited enormously.

### **Are there seasonal variations in terms of marketing costs?**

Yes, we have a sort of winter and a summer awareness campaign which is an additional spend beyond the rest of the year and in the summer we spend very much more on outdoor general awareness so that we do more bus sides and billboards, so within a tourist season you are much more aware of *Mamma Mia!* on the streets. In the winter we actually do much more 'below the line' which is less than advertising and bought media, it is much more creative marketing and keeping the pressure up. More work with tour operators, increasing our awareness. It is a time that is traditionally harder to sell shows, so we just have to keep the pressure on the show. In New York everyone jumps on to television in the winter. We have just come through the middle of quite a harsh winter on Broadway but we have managed to come through it without having to commit to television, so we have been very lucky in that most shows have. I mean, *The Producers* and *The Lion King*, our two main competitors, are both on television and *Mamma Mia!* is not, so it means we have still got that up our sleeve.

### **Is there a big difference in marketing costs in London and New York?**

Huge! We would spend maybe £25,000 to £30,000 a week in London. On Broadway they would spend \$90,000 to \$100,000. So it is a big jump.

### **Why is that?**

Everything costs more. It is an even more competitive market and, when you are doing things like signage in Times Square, you are competing against every major corporation in the world. It is incredibly expensive. So here there are still more opportunities, although we don't do television here nearly as much as America uses television for theatre, in a sense that our budgets don't really stretch to it.

### **It is too expensive?**

Yes, producers will have to incorporate television because it certainly will become the medium that you need to sell shows but, right now, it is a rarer thing. Something like *We Will Rock You* used television very cleverly but it is not the norm, although I think that in two years it absolutely will be.

### **What about the internet?**

Yes, more and more so. We still trail a few years behind America in the sense of how much people are embracing it, but it has been absolutely revolutionary, and more and more people book on line as well as just go on line to get information. The web site was designed here and everything is in house, the merchandising, the souvenir brochure, everything was all done in house.

### **Is merchandising important?**

It is unbelievable, it is an extraordinary cash cow. It varies enormously, but I think that part of that whole feelgood experience is that no matter what you pay for your ticket or whatever, when you leave *Mamma Mia!* you are in that mood still to spend

money and also to buy something as a memento of the experience you have had, so brochure sales and T-shirts and baseball caps and whatever have been extraordinary. And they have become useful marketing tools as well because people are wearing these, so we are always pushing that aspect. We use merchandise a lot in promotions, so we are giving away things just to spread the word.

### **In competitions?**

Yes, in radio stations give-aways or whatever, we will try and use merchandising wherever we can, as well as tickets and stuff, although there are so many things we have never yet done on *Mamma Mia!* because we have been in that privileged position of not needing to, but there is a whole world of things still waiting to be rolled out. So we have got, I think, at least ten years ahead of us with the show.

### **How important is promotional advertising?**

Well, I think that the point of advertising is that you have got to keep re-engaging people with the notion of the show.

### **Re-inventing it?**

Yes, you can't let people get bored of it, so I think you could over-play that kind of 'Here is our icon again every week' ad infinitum and we find that's particularly true in territories like Australia where the market is much, much smaller. You cannot just keep running an ad with our logo girl in it every week in three newspapers, you have to give them different images and you have to keep by trying to talk to different audiences and demographics and whatever. I think in the bigger territories, Broadway and London, you are able to actually just keep a lot of the same things for a while, but eventually you have got to go back to people saying 'Don't forget *Mamma Mia!* because suddenly three more big shows are coming to the market place.

### **How important are group sales?**

Huge, and our repeat business is quite extraordinary. Beyond anything I have ever known in the West End, and I have worked in this industry for twenty years and I have never known a show where the same people come back and back over and over again. Every time these groups sit down and say, 'What is going to be our choice for this next period?' it is a case of 'Can we go to *Mamma Mia!* again?' and I think that is because of the experience everyone has.

### **How do you market to groups?**

Well we keep pushing it, keep giving them new materials. We have, you know, group events. Obviously we advised everyone to see the show very early on, but we try and bring people back whenever we have that opportunity. It is just, as always, keeping in touch. Every year we do gifts for all the main kind of bookers, we give them wall planners and whatever it is, it is just something from *Mamma Mia!* saying thank you for all the support over the last twelve months. We do an event annually to bring everyone together and say thank you. Last year we took them all to Stockholm where

Abba began and we gave them a dinner and so a lot of time and money is invested in that, and that will continue.

**Is school groups market important too?**

Yes, although we haven't had very much schools business because we actually don't have special rates for schools. It will become a big part of the audience in years to come. We know that is a market that is out there for us. I mean, there are places that you just can't go until you can offer them the rates. I think that we are very lucky that it has broken all the rules really of what your audience should be or could be and a lot of people come to *Mamma Mia!* who have never been to the theatre before, never seen a West End show. Something about it has touched a nerve and they have decided to go and have this experience and you can't hope for more and I think that is part of why it has worked. It is also, and it is not always the case, an incredibly enjoyable experience for all of us. We love working on *Mamma Mia!* and there is nothing better than whether you are in Hamburg or Las Vegas or whatever, standing at the back of the auditorium and watching thousands of people having a fantastic time. It is a real joy and so it kind of makes everything worthwhile and I think that everyone thinks the same. Whether it is the Director or Associate Scenic Designer or whatever, it has been a fun show.

**Do you think *Mamma Mia!* has broad appeal?**

Yes! It does not matter what age you are.

**And do you think that is important in musicals today?**

I think so, and I think that there was certainly a series of extraordinary 'blockbuster' shows but they were going down the route of being about wars and starving peasants and revolutions and whatever. I think that there was, in a way, a need and a great desire to be able to see something that is purely about having a wonderful time. But I think it, yes, I guess that it is very relevant that the central characters are all female and 60% of all musical audiences are female; they are also [age] 40 plus, which again connects directly with the age demographic that we deal with. There were also two generations, so it is the kids as well as the grown-ups in the show, so you are appealing on many different levels but I think in terms of just pure escapism, it just went straight to the heart of so many people watching, and the ABBA songs were the bonus rather than the only reason that you were there. When we last did audience surveys, 40% of people were there because of the music of ABBA and it remained the number one reason for attending *Mamma Mia!* Second was that it was a hit, it was an aspiration thing, it is the show that everyone is saying, 'You must go, it is the biggest hit in London.' But every single audience reacts to the show in the same way, and when we were about to go to Toronto, as the kind of North American premiere, everyone said to us that it wouldn't be the same there because ABBA was never as popular in America as they were in Europe, and yet the reaction was absolutely the same in that people were dancing at the end, singing the songs. They laughed at all the key moments of the introductions to the songs so, clearly, despite what we had been told, people were remembering the songs, because otherwise you would not have got the joke of, for example, the build-up to 'Chiquitita' or whatever, and it has been true all across the US. I think it is a very appealing two and a half hours of, as the New

York Post says, just 'sitting back and letting the joys sweep over you.' It really is that, and I think that, interestingly, when other greater things are going on in the world and bad news and whatever, *Mamma Mia!* actually does better, because people want it even more, they want to be able to just go and forget about their troubles for a few hours and I think that also becomes a strong part of it, you know, escapism.

**Do you control all the current global productions of *Mamma Mia!*?**

Last Vegas will be the last official Littlestar production and then, from thereon, it is all licences, because basically the Littlestar productions are all the major traditional territories: London, New York, Toronto, Sydney, the two US tours and Vegas. So that kind of covers your biggest world markets. Beyond that, in the more difficult territories and the foreign language territories, it is much more important to have a local promoter with local knowledge. So it is hard for any of us to get really involved in a production in Japan, given that we can't read anything and you are relying on very much the local knowledge, and so it is much better to license rather than to try and do it.

**Do you have any input in the marketing of licensed shows?**

Yes, in the sense that, whatever happens, I normally meet every territory at least once or twice. With Hamburg, for example, I get flown out there, spend the day with the marketing team, really just talking about everything we have done, imparting all the knowledge that we possibly can and giving them basic guidelines, the do's and don'ts, and from there on it is their shout. It is up to them to then come up with the stuff, and we are not supposedly in the kind of approval loop, but what tends to happen...all the creative people like the Associate Director and the Associate Choreographer go and recreate the show. When it comes to the marketing, we are saying 'OK, these are our basic guidelines, this is what you can and can't do with the logo.' From there it is 'Get on with it.'

**So what can they and can't they do with the logo?**

We want to protect the main image of the girl. You can't do stupid things to it. You can't put hats on it, you can't colour it, you can't use it in certain formats, it is really just safeguarding our global branding and it must be used in that style. So from there on, they have a free hand, although what tends to happen is that they will call and say, 'We are thinking of doing this, what do you think?' With Hamburg, for example, they asked me to go out to work with them on the souvenir brochure, so that even though it wasn't strictly an approval job, they still wanted to know that we would be 100% happy with it. So I just spent a day with them and it went to press and everyone was thrilled. The General Manager of the show always says that he views me very much as a sort of member of the creative team, and it just happens to be the marketing element, but I think that the traditional philosophy, and certainly it is true of what you would call the old blockbuster musicals, was all that really happened was that an agency would pass over a disk of artwork and that was the end of their relationship. With us, and with me, it is actually doing that but also retaining me as the sort of Marketing Director, so it is being much more involved with the grass roots stuff as opposed to just saying, 'Oh yes, here is the art, do whatever you want.' So it involves conference calls every week in every territory. We go through all the minutes of all

their local meetings, and talk to them about every single promotion they are setting up. We actually design a lot of the creative gear for them. So for Toronto, we are doing all of their ads; we are building all the ads here, as opposed to them just using our logo.

### **Will they do the placements?**

They will buy the stuff, but we will actually give them the materials to put in the paper. Judy felt very strongly that the brand should be protected and that every production should be selling every other production. So it was this is kind of synergy, particularly with a territory like Las Vegas: we have got this incredible opportunity to promote Vegas to all of the audiences who are seeing *Mamma Mia!* everywhere else in the world. So that has been one of the key things. We have these global marketing meetings, as we call them, where thirty people sit around a table once or twice a year and it is really just about sharing all the ideas. I will go through all the creative [material] that we have got for all of the different territories and everyone can see the directions that we are going, but it is a chance for everyone to say, 'We have done this, we have formed this partnership, we have done something with this drinks company or this holiday company,' or whatever, and everyone else can then see that there are benefits within those areas for their own territory. So it is incredibly useful to cross sell each one, and the repeat business on this show is just so unprecedented, that there are the fans that literally will go and see it everywhere, and I think that's become very apparent with Vegas in that, if you have seen it anywhere, you now really want to see it in Vegas because of all the additional experience.

### **What sort of 'additional experience'?**

Well, it is playing in a extraordinary and very wonderful kind of resort/casino, unlike any other venue that we are playing in the world, with vast spas and swimming pools, acres and acres and acres of it. So it is a very unique environment for the show to be in. So if you have only seen it in some snow-filled city like Toronto, or whatever, the chance to go and see it in Vegas is really exciting.

### **A unique consumer experience?**

Yes, I think it is. I mean, the city itself is so extraordinary in the sense that is a playground for grown-ups and I think it is just a very different experience because, although the venue itself is designed as a traditional theatre, it is still within a casino environment. We are steering well clear of any chance of doing 'Money, Money, Money' type lines, because it is far too obvious, but I think it is just the fact that it is a holiday destination as opposed to just an ordinary working city and that creates a whole sort of caché, but it is also a big journey for a musical to take. We will be one of the only shows in the city that is full length with an intermission: most of the shows are ninety minutes, in and out, but the people in Vegas very much wanted the full, what they would call, Broadway experience, they didn't want it to be in any way edited down.

### **Why do you reckon that is?**

Because I think that they, as a resort, very much wanted to be seen as slightly more up-market than some of the other hotels, and that they want a proper Broadway show as opposed to any show that is specially created for Vegas, because there is the caché of bringing Broadway to the strip and it is a show that absolutely works.

### **Why do you think it works?**

I think that from the outset really in London, and it is true of every city it has gone to, it was the show that all theatre-goers just really, really wanted in that it was a huge amount of fun. It was nostalgic for a certain age demographic, in that people in their thirties and their forties remember ABBA from a time when they didn't have mortgages and children and worries and bills to pay, overdrafts and whatever. So it is engaging back to a very much more carefree and happier time, but it is also very filled with music and there is a sort of tongue-in-cheek factor and the show recreates that in a very clever way. And I think that one of the reviews originally said they thought the show would be a success if it was half as good as it actually was because people just wanted to engage in the ABBA sort of thing. I don't think that that is necessarily true, in the fact that there was a story, that people identify with the story and, unlike most musicals, it was not populated by perfect people, it was populated by real characters who 90% of the people in that audience absolutely connected with, and it is also about women, you know, the central character is someone who is living their dream.

### **What aspects of your marketing strategy were the most innovative?**

Focus groups. Something that is done a lot around the world, particularly in North America because they are always testing everything. It is something that strangely wasn't done very much here and we have embraced it very much and I think that we are always trying to grow our audience.

### **You use focus groups?**

Very much, and will continue to do so! As long as we want to keep marketing the show, we will keep looking at the challenges. You have to address the negatives all of the time, so that you know where you can go next. We consider what the block is and try to resolve that, rather than just always doing the same thing over and over again, because otherwise you will never change certain people's opinion about the show. There are bound to be people out there that will never see *Mamma Mia!*, and they will just go, 'I hate ABBA' or whatever it is, but there might just one day be some mechanism that we create, that will preach to that person and that, you know, five, six, seven years into the run they will finally decide to come and see it. So that is what we have to keep thinking about every day.

### **Is that the same for all the shows you are marketing?**

To a lesser degree, in that at Littlestar Judy is very interested in marketing and she comes from a television background herself, so she is particularly involved the making of TV commercials, but I think that we are constantly always saying 'OK, currently our audiences are 70% female and an average age of forty two. How can we attract more men to the show?'

### **How do you find that out?**

By literally doing audience surveys where people are filling in forms in the theatre.

### **Do you offer incentives?**

We tend to do a kind of competition, you know, where you could win £500 worth of theatre tokens or whatever it is. You can complete and send back the form or hand back the form at the end of the show to an usher, and what we are doing there is finding out, you know, age, sex, where you live, postcode, what newspapers you read, what radio stations you listen to, which of these images you find appealing, as I have said before, which magazines you tend to read, why you are here, when you bought your tickets. As much information as we possibly can. Jumping over that is the focus groups, where we are meeting people who have not seen the show.

### **How do you go about that?**

We use a market research company. We will give them the kind of specifics of what we want, the types of people we want to meet. Those are actually really interesting because you are meeting people that go to the theatre regularly but they have chosen not to see *Mamma Mia!* and so you are able to understand the blocks that people have which, in the sense of how we go forward with our marketing, is incredibly important. You know, as an industry we spend a lot of time asking questions of people that are sitting in the theatre, but not nearly enough time asking questions of people that aren't sitting in the theatre and that enables us really to better understand, you know, why men particularly, certain types of men, have a block about a show like *Mamma Mia!* You know, 'It is a girls' show,' or 'It is all about weddings,' etc etc. And in a sense there is a block to musicals, generally, some of the time, but we have been lucky. I suppose that, although a lot of people don't acknowledge that they love ABBA, it is quite universal, you know, whatever age people are, whether they are sixteen and they just engaged with ABBA through the movies that have used their songs, or the re-issues or whatever, or they are someone that has grown up with Abba. There is still a very universal appeal. But I think that we can only keep marketing the show by understanding and addressing blocks.

### **Can you expand on that?**

Yes. We are always using whatever information we have to sort of sit down and try and plan the next campaign. You know, one of the main issues really at the moment is to really push the global success of the show, so that we are jumping over and above a lot of the competition in a sense that we are just not a hit West End show or hit Broadway show, we are a global phenomenon. Sitting at the back of my desk is the worldwide mega hit ad which is being developed at the moment. Those are all of the global Donnas as it were, but that is the leading lady of every production, although the last photograph is a repeat because we are waiting for the Vegas Donna. But that is all about saying, 'This is truly international.' So we have a Japanese girl and we have a German girl and that is really the current direction we are taking. We are trying to almost say, 'OK, let us for a moment put the story to one side and go for 'Why haven't you seen this show? It is so successful, so big, it is working with audiences all around the world.' So you are able to get people to engage with it on a slightly different level

from just the fact that it is a romantic love story on a Greek Island. It is a global phenomenon. That is currently the push that is going on, and I think that we are always sort of slightly loosening the reins on the whole notion of using images where they are in what we would call ABBA-esque sort of outfits. In the beginning we absolutely rigidly tried to stop anybody using the images of any of the cast in lycra because that was just cementing in people's minds that it was simply an ABBA tribute show. We were trying very much to use the imagery of the characters as they really are. But now, four years into it, we are able to sort of slightly relax that rule and the whole ABBA thing still remains the number one reason that people are engaging with the show. So it is just always about spreading the net and that is what we are doing.

**Do you think *Mamma Mia!* has had an effect on the musical genre?**

Obviously there are innumerable copy cat shows now and that is always true of any success. In our industry no-one believed that *Mamma Mia!* would work. We all sat here and in various places listening to very well known producers telling everyone that it would never work and it did! And it worked to a degree that nobody ever realised, so now there are lots of people raiding the back catalogues of various pop groups and whatever. It is like, 'Oh that works, so let's now produce a musical based on the songs of Queen or the songs of Madness or Rod Stewart or Wham and whatever the other new ones are. I don't think that anyone will ever have the same success that *Mamma Mia!* has had just by trying to recreate the genre. Abba was touching a nerve, it was done brilliantly, it is a brilliant creative team, it has set a standard, it has broken all these records and it has grossed \$500,000,000 all around the world. There will be diminishing returns for all the shows that try to aspire to be *Mamma Mia!* but I think that what it has strongly said is that audiences are absolutely ready to engage with a good time at the theatre and that there is a very, very big audience out there that is just hungry to have fun. And I think that it has generally awakened everyone's kind of thoughts about what theatre is there to do, and thousands and millions of people are seeing all sorts of different shows around the world, but right now the nerve that we touched was 'Just let me sit here and not have to think too much but really have a laugh, you know, have a cry, because I just want to use theatre as a chance to be entertained in a rip-roaring sort of way.'

**Has your marketing strategy for *Mamma Mia!* had an influence on other shows?**

Yes, I mean, we know people now talk about wanting to do a *Mamma Mia!*

**What do they mean by that, do you think?**

I think that when anything is a success, everyone has to analyse what they do and now I think certainly shows on Broadway are buying very heavily into the notion that we didn't just stop when it was a hit, and shows like *Hairspray*, which is a big success, are continually maintaining the show, publicly. Even though there are no tickets for anyone to buy, it is still keeping the pressure on. They sat in meetings and said, 'We want to follow the *Mamma Mia!* model', which *The Producers* didn't do. You know, they stopped spending money and now it has suddenly gone a little soft and, once you go a little soft, it is very hard to go back up to being a 100% sell-out hit. And I think that *Mamma Mia!* has sustained itself as a sell-out hit for so long everywhere because of that model.

### **And what about your global marketing approach?**

Well, we wait really for another show to do what it has done. I mean, *The Lion King* and *The Producers* will be able to, and will now begin to open all over the world, but *Mamma Mia!* has been able to do it very quickly, and the philosophy, particularly of the General Manager in London, was 'Who knows where we will be with Abba in a few years' time? Who knows how long the *Mamma Mia!* kind of bubble has to grow? So, let us give ourselves a five year plan and open this show everywhere we can, as fast as we can, whilst it remains this very, very hot property.' And I think that has been incredibly clever, and each thing the show has done, such as making the decision not just to go from London straight to Broadway, but going to Toronto and then to five US cities before Broadway, was incredibly sensible, because those cities became like a road show for Broadway. And by the time it got to Broadway, a large part of the market had already bought into what *Mamma Mia!* was, and people said, 'I have to see that show.' When we opened the box office in New York, people would say 'Oh! I have already seen the show in Los Angeles' or 'My brother saw it in San Francisco,' or whatever it was. It was already a very hot property, so we came onto Broadway with this massive momentum and it would have been a very different story if we had just said, 'Oh, we have been a hit in London, here we are.' So the tour was such a clever idea. It was a gamble because we were touring before we were a Broadway show. Everyone thought fourteen weeks in San Francisco and that it was a big gamble to do so many weeks, but it broke all box office records in San Francisco, grossing \$14 million dollars in fourteen weeks, so we were literally doing a million dollars a week. You start doing regular kind of daily money projections. You do the first preview and then next day, you know, it just goes rocketing because the word of mouth just starts so fast. In Toronto we had no idea what was going to happen, but the preview audiences were just extraordinary and the news was out there like wildfire, so you were doubling your advance every day and it just seemed that the people weren't just saying, 'Yeah we enjoyed that.' That is never enough, you need people to be saying, 'Go, go now, pick up the phone now,' and that is what people do with this show and that is something that is very unique.

### **What effect has Cameron Mackintosh had on marketing and the musical theatre genre?**

I think that he is a great guru to everybody in the sense that, when it comes to musical theatre, everyone looks to Cameron as being the kind of person that more than anyone has driven his product. His output has been so extraordinary. I mean, obviously less so in recent history, but that is not to take away from the great successes of the 80s and the early 90s. But, I think, you know, without the Cameron model, to take a musical all around the world would be a much tougher job. He has created markets where there were never markets in musical theatre, so when it comes to Europe and Russia and Tokyo and China and all these places, you have to kind of say we are very lucky that there was this pioneer and that was Cameron Mackintosh. So there is now an audience who is ready to engage in musical theatre in some extremely obscure places and so *Mamma Mia!* is able to roll itself out around the world.

### **Has Cameron Mackintosh affected the way you marketed your show?**

I think that certainly that kind of iconic direction was very clever. He was creating images that appeal to people all around the world, no matter what language you spoke. The *Cats* logo remains, I think, one of the greatest pieces of art and it didn't matter if you were Chinese or Russian or Czech or whatever, you knew what that was, you absolutely bought into that image and I think that that was a real bench mark for theatre in the same way that Cosette and the whole *Les Mis* image is just a very universal thing, it is a strong icon that is a very clever image and it goes right back to the original drawing, Victor Hugo's drawing, but has been re-invented. But I think the difference now, and having learnt from that model, is that *Mamma Mia!* has been able to push the whole sort of marketing issue further: it is the whole notion of sharing the ideas. I am lucky to be in this sort of umbrella position for all of these different productions and so you can actually do this sort of cross-fertilisation, whatever you want to call it. For example, if this is something that is working for the show in Sydney, now let us try and test this in Toronto, and I think that previously that opportunity hasn't really existed for shows because it has been much more truncated, in that you get a very independent team in every city, with possibly only really Cameron himself having the whole overview. I have been able to take a much more kind of active role in all of those areas and we are able to create materials that are used in all of the markets. There are similar styles and similar language and similar photography and that seems to have really worked. And also we have this global website and we are the only show that really has that, in that no matter where you are in the world, you still go into the same site and whilst for, say, Tokyo you will be directed to a Tokyo site, it is still all umbrella'd by MammaMia.com and that was a big leap forward.

### **Do the Cameron Mackintosh shows not do that as well?**

They sort of have a different system, because so much of it is licensed, and those licensed productions all do their own thing, but the New York website for *Les Mis* was different from the London website, whereas for *Mamma Mia!* there is a scroll-down which basically you go to first, and that lists all of the productions and you chose which one of those you want.

### **What was the effect of that?**

It gave us a global identity that allowed us to protect the brand and protect the language that is used to describe the show, particularly in the sense of how strongly Bjorn has tried to protect the kind of ABBA element because, of course, whenever you go anywhere the bit that always explodes across the media is the ABBA bit, but we are always trying to make sure that we have that balance. You get the pictures of Abba in their funny costumes from 1976, but it is backed up with all of the *Mamma Mia!* 'Original book musical by Catherine Johnson' and all of that stuff, but the site is hugely successful and useful and allows anybody to just sort of tap in and get all of the background that they could possibly need and so, I think, that was quite revolutionary really.

### **3. Interview with Judy Craymer**

#### **What was the capitalisation for *Mamma Mia!*?**

It was just under £3million.

#### **And how was it financed?**

We didn't go that traditional 'angels' route. I don't know whether that is the main route that the West End goes anyway now with so many corporations like Disney getting involved. So we kept it in the family, but Universal was a major investor.

#### **What sort of percentage did they put in?**

About 50%. I mean Littlestar basically, which is my company with Bjorn and Benny, put some money in, and so did Frieda; actually, Frieda didn't put money into the London show, she came in after. We gathered a few others on the way!

#### **What percentage of capitalisation costs was spent on marketing?**

We put in consciously a kind of medium budget. When you open, you are watching every penny as you are so conscious of the stakes being so high, so I think that went for about £400,000 as a marketing budget, which is kind of medium. I mean, it didn't have the dizzy heights of Disney at those times. When we opened in America, obviously marketing costs and advertising is a lot more.

#### **What was the capitalisation in America?**

Broadway in particular is a very expensive city to put on shows. The ticket price is high but it is also just labour, everything is very different to anywhere else. So, on Broadway it cost just under \$10m.

#### **And what percentage of that would have been marketing costs?**

One and three quarter million dollars nearly!

#### **How important is marketing now?**

Paramount, but I wouldn't say it saves a show that is not going to work. I mean, I think that one can pore over the minutiae of marketing and it still won't change things- you know, should it be on the left hand of the newspaper, the bottom right, you know, it won't really change. In the old days, Harold Fielding used to just buy up any old ads that were going free at the back of the *Evening Standard*. It has become much more specialist now, but, yes, it is a huge part of the production. We were fortunate to work with McCabes who are brilliant and they were young and they had a lot of motivation.

#### **How important is a logo for marketing purposes?**

Very important. I mean, I think it becomes such an icon for the show and *Cats* proved that, *Phantom*, *Les Mis*, so yes, choosing the *Mamma Mia!* logo was very important to give the impression that it wasn't a dress-up ABBA show but it was fun and it was frivolous and romantic.

**Did you have a number of logos that you considered?**

Yes, we went through probably about nine months of choosing different ones. I mean, we kind of went through all different stages. Well, I mean, it depended upon the artist's vision. We had everything from something that looked like something from *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* on a bicycle to sipping cocktails at the seaside, and I think that the model that we have gone on now is very fresh. That was actually a photograph that was adapted. It is kind of abstract and it is white and I think that is very effective because very much coming out of the 80's through the 90's, a lot of the big musicals are very dark, their artwork looks very black with red, and consciously I loved the white and wanted to go with the white. Even to this day I get persuaded, 'Oh, you are going to be playing in Melbourne in the winter, it is going to be very dreary, I suggest you have a blue bus,' and I go, 'No, it must be white!'

**Why do you think *Mamma Mia!* has been so successful?**

I think it is a kind of combination of elements really. Obviously, the music goes without saying, but I think it is also very much Catherine's story, because I think it works on every level. It attracts an audience because people know ABBA but, at the same time, I think that they feel they get much more than a tribute show or a biographical show. People can also relate to the characters. It has a kind of mass appeal, almost like a soap opera in that sense. I think it is the universal appeal of Catherine's story, you know, Phyllida's directing, you know, the development of the characters and what we just said about the logo. You know, the marketing strategists would say that it is women that buy theatre tickets, which does kind of prove that demographic; but men love *Mamma Mia!* and enjoy going, and I think that logo shows that men aren't put off. It is not like it is a girls' show. I think that they can relate to it too, whatever kind of age, twelve year olds to ninety year olds, and I think that it is the same with the broad appeal universally. Every time we reproduce *Mamma Mia!* in another country Phyllida directs it, or her associates direct it, just making little changes to make it kind of work indigenously for that territory, so it isn't a group of British people on a Greek island on Broadway, it is a group of Americans on a Greek island.

**Is broad appeal important to the success of the show?**

I think so. I mean, obviously we knew ABBA had broad appeal, but it is always very difficult to hit the target of what is a hit show. But we knew it had to be contemporary, we knew it should be a romantic comedy, we knew it should be 'tongue in cheek'- it couldn't take itself too seriously.

**Why was that?**

Well, it just felt from the kind of genesis of the project, before Catherine even came into our lives, the story had to reflect the kind of ABBA music, the infectiousness, the kind of fun of the holiday romance, that kind of feel; you couldn't really take ABBA's music and turn it into *Blood Brothers* or a Greek tragedy. So we knew our boundaries in that sense, but I don't think it was a given that it was a hit show because I think there are quite a lot of the ingredients that contribute towards that, especially the whole creative team's contribution. So what I am saying from the producer's point of view, it wasn't a given, and I never sat down and thought 'OK, we want a hit show.' Of course, we wanted a show that wasn't going to lose its investors' money, but I don't think that we knew it was going to be such a success around the world.

**To what extent are the worldwide versions reproductions of the original?**

Completely, I mean we are very careful it is the original Littlestar creative team that creates them, so even when we license, Japan being our first, no Germany was our first, and Japan our second, it is still our creative team, so I think that that is important, but I think that every show has its own life because of those actors. Phyllida has this thing about casting with the *Mamma Mia!* factor and I think that it goes back to the universal appeal: those dynamo women are in every country and, however they are portrayed, they are the same, whether they are from Dusseldorf or back here. Everyone recognises somebody that has indulged in plastic surgery or is the academic pragmatist and the dad.

**How important is it for audiences to see replicated versions of the original production?**

I think that it is very important that we creatively keep to what we started out to do, and that is why we are so rigid and strict about it: the fear is that it will become an ABBA concert. One of our mantras is that this is not just about jokes and the next song. I think something that is very important about the success of it, is that it does attract a repeat business. So, if you saw the show on Broadway and you were visiting London, you are likely to go to London to see it again and that has kind of been proved, especially with the two US tours and Broadway at the moment. One feeds the other.

**So audiences who are going again would expect to see essentially the same show?**

Yes.

**Do you retain fairly strict creative control?**

Yes, without taking a kind of spontaneity away. Phyllida and Anthony van Laast want actors to bring something to it but every time we improve the show, every time it is re-lit and Howard Harrison has had the chance to go in there and re-light...I mean, in Las Vegas he will probably give us even more bloody lamps and then he will come back and he will say, 'Right, I want to go into London again or Toronto and do the same.' It's the same with Mark Thompson's set, which is good because it is always getting constant care and attention. I doubt, unless you see it and scrutinize it, you would really know the differences, but it keeps it fresh.

**Is branding important in musical theatre marketing?**

Yes, definitely. *Mamma Mia!* has been part of a branding process and I guess it has moved into it quite quickly as we are only four years from the opening in London. I think it has its strong identity and its own identity which is why I am very keen to keep the visual of the logo out and not change that and we haven't allowed it to change in Japan or anywhere else.

**In what ways do you think *Mamma Mia!* is a strong brand?**

I guess ABBA is the automatic brand. I think it has very much become the musical of the millennium: it started off a whole new thinking in theatre and I would like to think in a positive way. I know some people are saying, 'Oh my God we have going to be swamped by catalogue musicals,' but I never looked at this as a catalogue musical. This was pure passion and always feeling that ABBA's music was very theatrical. I gather now in marketing meetings in big record companies, they all sit around and go, 'Could we do a *Mamma Mia!* with this catalogue?' Which is very flattering but it is also kind of 'Oh! my God, this is going to change theatre.'

**So you do think it has had a huge effect on theatre?**

Yes, but I hope in a positive sense. I would hope not in the sense that we are going to be awash with catalogue musicals. *Mamma Mia!* does attract a legit theatre audience but then it has got a very legitimate creative team in Catherine, Phyllida and Anthony and Mark Thompson etc. Having choice is wonderful in musical theatre, and it would be very sad to find out that in five year's time that you can only see Queen, Rod Stewart, ABBA, Madness and probably a few others such as Billy Joel.

**Is it important to have broad family appeal in a musical these days?**

Yes!

**In your show?**

Well, it is family without being, you know, it is not *Lion King*. Children do love it. I think parents tend to come and see *Mamma Mia!* and they go, 'Oh! well we could bring the children.' It is not *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, but it is a family show. We see families, we see mothers and daughters and grandma all coming together, so I think that it is in that sense. I think that children like it because it is not patronising to them. Visually it is not a huge spectacle, but they like the younger generation up on stage and they can relate to the older generation too; but then the thinking behind *Mamma Mia!* was those that songs fell into two generations, the younger generation and the older generation. Hence Catherine really kind of going for the mother/daughter story, and I think that gives it an appeal to a younger audience.

**How important is the tourist market?**

Very important, and very important to the theatre overall. It's kind of dependent upon it. 9/11 didn't really affect strong shows such as *Lion King* and *Mamma Mia!* that much, but the shows that were teetering on Broadway fell. But here, ever since 9/11,

you can feel the lack of tourism in the UK even though people say the Americans are back. We have been OK but you can still feel it and, although we are doing terribly well, we have to work all the time to make sure. I don't know whether we noticed it as much in other places because when you are touring the States you are not reliant on tourism as such. Of course, *Mamma Mia!* also works well with people who don't necessarily speak English, maybe because of the songs. I think all the shows around the world have attracted people that don't speak English. There was, interestingly, quite a resistance to translate the songs, in particular when we first went to Germany and Japan, so everyone thought, 'Oh, we will keep the songs in English but we will do the story in the native language.' But that was never going to be the case because the whole genius of Catherine's work is the story and the songs work as one, and the fun of the show is seeing how the song appears in the story, and it was very difficult to express that to the press when we were doing our pre-opening campaign in Germany and Japan but, now they see it, they love it. We open in Holland in September this year and, of course, English is second language to the Dutch and most people speak English there, but we are still doing it in Dutch because there are people that don't and also you have to understand the humour. It has been great fun translating it and seeing how it works in different countries.

### **How do you reach the tourist market?**

We now employ someone specifically in the States called the Travel, Trade and Tourist Industry, so we are always working on tourists, it is a very important audience. Group buyers, group sales also love *Mamma Mia!*, so they continually buy up packages for their customers; and there are always different elements whether they are getting postcards or e-mail blasts. There are always mini-videos, cast albums and CD's going out, keeping that market alive. If they didn't like it, they wouldn't buy.

### **Do you offer hotel packages etc?**

Yes, and there is a discount for groups but not a huge discount, and *Mamma Mia!* has not really had to discount yet, but I think groups are incredibly important and do have quite a voracious appetite for it. Toronto attracts huge groups from all over and Toronto has helped feed the New York market and, in fact, all those markets help feed each other. All of them have come from groups or have driven within the current six hour radius over there. Word of mouth, whether it is with the groups or the tourist market, is very important and, I think, that is why we have high hopes for Las Vegas. The fact is that it is branded in many senses and people who go to Las Vegas are tourists, so they have either seen it in Japan or Germany or London or somewhere, and we hope they will go 'Oh my God, we can see it here,' or 'We didn't get tickets on Broadway, we can see it here,' because you are completely reliant on the tourists at Las Vegas.

### **Does it retain that sort of tongue-in-cheek element?**

It worked in Germany with a very clever lady who actually had never done theatre. She was very keen, but she is a very highly thought of film translator. She had worked on a lot of the big Hollywood romantic comedy movies like *Shirley Valentine*, and so she understood how to colloquialise Catherine's language. In Japan the odd few lines in some of the songs stay in English, because they just cannot

translate them, there is just not the vocabulary, so 'Honey, Honey, Let me feel it', for example, stays in English, whereas the whole of 'Winner Takes it All' is in Japanese.

**Do you think it is important that it doesn't take itself too seriously?**

Yes, very important!

**And was that always the intention?**

Yes, always. And I think Bjorn and Benny were very supportive of that and found it absolutely fascinating and hysterical and we all had hoots of laughter. I remember Bjorn in the workshop, when we did a workshop in 1998, the year before we opened in London, and he was just falling off his chair going, 'I never wrote this as a comedy song.' They now seem natural and a whole generation of people will grow up thinking 'Take a Chance on Me' is a comedy song or 'Honey, Honey' is a comedy song. When it started to work and you could see that it was going to appeal to an audience, I remember thinking, 'Well, won't it be interesting that people will think of these songs as being from a musical! They won't think of them as individual pop songs, they will think of them as a libretto.'

**Is there also 'nostalgia' appeal?**

Yes, I think so. When we started off and people didn't realise it had such broad appeal, they said, 'Oh well, I didn't like ABBA so I am not going', or, 'Oh, I can't take my children because they wouldn't remember ABBA,' but I think it doesn't matter whether you know ABBA or not and that has certainly been discovered in America because everyone said, 'Nobody knows ABBA there' and they have all come out of the closet. All the Americans say, 'Oh my God, we have always loved ABBA, and there are four shows there now. And then I think the young kids like the show because of the covers and pop music is very much of the culture now. I mean, another interesting thing of how *Mamma Mia!* landed in the position it is, is that heavy rock operas, I think, are not in fashion at the moment and pop is.

**Is the escapist element important?**

I think so, yes, there is a big escapist element. We opened a month after 9/11 and I think that the success of the show is not just because of 9/11, it is because of the whole time we are living in really. I think it would have been difficult to open any show after something so tragic and so terrible. The show is a bit of fun. I love the fact that academics like it as much as businessmen or different generations. I mean, Colin Powell has been twice! Gorbachov twice!

**Has Cameron Mackintosh affected the way you produced your show?**

Oh, a lot. I think he has had an incredibly important impact and still does. I think he has done amazing things over the last twenty odd years. Interestingly, he and the Really Useful Company kind of created this international ability, not to franchise a show out, but to roll it out across the world to the extent that people kind of expect it, although, when you think about it, there aren't that many shows that have done it, *Cats*, *Les Mis*, *Phantom*, *Saigon* to an extent. The four of them are Cameron's shows.

I remember somebody saying when we had been open a couple of months in London and they were already like looking to try to lure us somewhere in Europe or something and they said, 'Well, you had better get moving,' as if we had been a bit slow off the mark, but in fact in three and half years to have nine shows is probably beating even Cameron's record. I worked for him as an Assistant Stage Manager for quite a few years, so we always kind of chuckle now because he is my landlord! I think he always used to say to me, 'Be nice to your SM, you never know when you are going to meet them on the way up.' Cameron took a gamble on *Mamma Mia!* going into the Prince Edward- he knew that it had the pedigree but I don't think that even he knew that it was going to stay this long.

#### **4. Interview with Rob Bettinson**

##### **What was the capitalisation for *125<sup>th</sup> Street*?**

It was capitalised at £1.4 million.

##### **How was the show financed?**

Through investment, through ordinary people, through friends of ours. The lead producer is Alan Janes, because he has got more experience at that. I am also the director and writer, and I'm involved in putting the show together. We were in it to create something special, and we have created something special. The difficulty we have, I think, is marketing it because it takes a huge amount of resources to market. There was a time when we started *Buddy* where you could put a show on, you could market it effectively and the world would come. Now the media dominates everything and they are only interested in celebrities. We have a show that is full of talent, as opposed to celebrities, and that has been quite a difficult message to get across in the last ten weeks, that we are a really special show, you know. The fact that we are still here means the product proves itself, but we are hoping that people will come in droves. You can't tell: we are packed out at the weekends, whereas Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays are a little bit thin at the moment. It is not helped by all of the firemen's strike, the tube strikes, and the rail networks were down for the first part of it. Every time you walk out there is a smallpox scare or terrorist alert, the Gulf War. These are making it very sticky times for everybody. So we are doing about as well as everybody else.

##### **What are the show's running costs?**

It costs about £90,000 a week to cover its costs!.

##### **What sort of percentage of box is that?**

It is about 49%.

##### **And is it making that?**

Yes, yes. It isn't when the firemen's strike is on and stuff. To break any new show is tough these days. You don't envy people who are in this position of having the ability to create things and not having the outlet. That is kind of where we are.

##### **Does the £90,000 you mention include marketing.**

Yes!

##### **And what sort of percentage of costs is marketing?**

It will be about 10% probably when it is running, but it is not the running marketing that is the worry, it is the colossal amount of pre-production marketing that is needed on the tubes and the buses.

**If your show capitalised at 1.4 million, what was the pre-opening marketing budget?**

Probably close on a third of it. We didn't have a lot of money to market the show, to be honest. We took the risk that the show would do it on its own, and we were trying to get by and let the word of mouth get out there, to keep our costs down. I mean, if we could have raised two and a half million, we would have had it, and we would have spent the money. We didn't know then there were going to be tube strikes and chaos for the first five weeks of our show. Marketing is vital, but positioning it is not easy. You know, there is talk of *Contact* down the road spending another half a million quid in the last seven weeks. *We Will Rock You* spent fortunes: the show cost about £6million, and they have spent another million or more since then. Then fortunately the Queen's Jubilee sorted them out. If I could get one of my singers performing on Buckingham Palace I would be a happy man. That was the best publicity in the world! I don't think people realise how much of an industry a show has become now. By the time it gets to the first night, maybe three to four hundred people have worked on it to get it to that point, all of whom have invested their time and effort in it and then it comes to the opening night and the critics come along and blow the hell out of it. And you go, 'Hang on, the critics are not the people who are going to come and see it, the people who are going to come and see it might not feel the same way,' which they don't. Quite often the people come and they go, 'This is fantastic.' *We Will Rock You* got hammered by the critics, and yet it survived.

**How important is marketing to a show?**

It is about like, I would say about 50% of the game. I mean, in London you see some ordinary shows survive on their marketing. There are some pretty ordinary sort of shows out there. I mean, that *Miss Saigon* was a pretty ordinary show, even if it was marketed exceptionally well and stuff.

**Who does your marketing?**

We have got a marketing man called Chris McGill in our Theatre Partners offices in Kentish Town, and we have a group booking person. We have got it all in-house and we will sell tickets at any price. We have got a great big 1,400 seat theatre to fill and we want people to come. I would like to initiate a schools' programme because I think that this show is a great positive statement, so it would be great if every kid over fourteen had a chance to come here at whatever price and see this show, because I think it is a celebration of black music, it is an interface between black and white. It isn't anything to do with an issue, it is all to do with aspiration and also because of the fame element. Every young kid I know wants to be famous but doesn't necessarily have any talent, like *Big Brother* and all of the rest of it, and this is an issue that is discussed in the piece. It is not a big issue but it is there in the piece, it is about talent, it is all about the stage where you have to have the talent to survive.

**What is your target market?**

Everybody from nine to ninety. A catch-all situation. One of the strange things is one of our best group bookers is SAGA holidays. The SAGA people came in because they were young people when this music was done. But really, as you see, tonight the

audience is broad-ranged, everybody who wants a good time- it is not what you would call high art! It is very much a lifetime experience in the theatre. It has twenty-two hit songs in it and a story that is one evening in the Apollo Theatre in Harlem, based on fact. Ten years of the 60's of different incidents packed into one evening, woven on a thread of a story about a live TV show that is supposed to be taking place. It goes from farce to drama to all sorts of different styles. You couldn't typify the show, and one of the problems we have had in selling it that you couldn't typify it. The closest experience is *Buddy*, more than anything else. It is twenty-two individual performers singing some of the best songs every sung. By the end of this evening you will be cheering the people on stage.

**Would you describe it as a sort of 'nostalgia' musical?**

It has a nostalgic element, obviously, because the songs are thirty years old. The attempt is to make a live piece of theatre. You feel as if you are there. Actually it is a close contact sport with the audience, from the moment they walk in, because they are the live TV audience. The minute they walk in they are a live TV audience and it happens in real time. There are no cutaways, there are no flashbacks, there are no moves forward and things like that, it just happens in front of your eyes.

**Does it appeal to a family audience?**

Oh, yes, because there are twelve characters in it. What happens is that the kids get off on one of the characters and the adults get off on another one. There are twelve very, very strong characters in this piece and so it feeds in eight different story lines to each character which people latch on to and these come together in a big climax at the end.

**Was that deliberate?**

Yes. The thing was to give it a community feel. The whole thing is a community. You can drop in for two and a half hours with the Apollo Theatre community. The Apollo was famous for being a venue that was live, where the audience was as important as the performers.

**What about the show's appeal to group bookers?**

If I take a group to *Les Mis*, some of them will wish they had stayed in the pub. If I take them to *Buddy*, they are all happy, and *125<sup>th</sup> Street* is the same sort of thing.

**Guaranteed entertainment?**

Guaranteed uplift! Everyone is flying at the end of the show and everyone's happy and, at the end of the piece, many people say, 'I am going again.' We have had loads of people come out and just buy another ticket and say, 'I am going again next week,' and then they have written to us saying they enjoyed it better the second time. The show is full of incident, but not effects- the set does not do anything, it is just theatre.

**How important are group sales?**

The groups market is of massive importance to the success of the show, it counts for an awful lot and, the more we can get them in, the better it works. It is a great party night and, when a group comes, they have a great time.

### **How have you positioned *125<sup>th</sup> Street*?**

One of the things is that, with a new show, you don't know what it is until you get there, and it changes all the time. We set out to create an atmosphere that was unique but, by that time, we had run out of money. Hopefully, if we get away with it and we run, and the people come, and they should come, then we can start to define a clearer image for the show. All we had was *125<sup>th</sup> Street*. We didn't want to call it 'Harlem', because that word has sort of connotations, all sorts of baggage. And it was a celebration of performance. The Apollo is on 125th Street, so we took that track and gave it a bit of a mystery. We took a load of shots in rehearsals and they were alright for about three or four weeks and then we took another load of show shots and they are alright, but it is never really easy to capture on film the magic that's live- they had to really go to town and set it up very cleverly.

### **What aspects of the marketing strategy were the most effective and/or innovative?**

We have a lot of great deals and offers going off all over the place and we have done a lot of groundwork out in the provinces, making it accessible, making it cheap, instead of making it expensive. Obviously, Saturday night is our top price tickets- it is very difficult to get discounts then- but there are offers all over the place and tie-ins with super-markets and magazine offers in black people's magazines such as *Black Pride*, *Voice*, and *New Nation*, and other periodicals such as *Woman's Own*, and in newspapers like *The Sun*. You have got to shoot it into every periodical you can because, for every promotion you do, you only get about a 5% take-up, depending on the appeal of the show. So you have got to scattergun it and we have a show that is not aimed at one particular audience, and that makes it more difficult to market because it is not focused in just one area. It isn't just aimed at the *Guardian* reader, for example. *Contact* would be aimed at, say, readers of *The Independent*, *The Guardian*, and *The Times*, people with intelligence and culture, you know, whereas we are a popular show so we scattergun it. We had a promotion in *Farmers Weekly* the other week, as one of our investors is a farmer, so they did a little article and put a promotion in and we got a few farmers in last week. It has a broad based appeal and you don't know how effective each part of it is until afterwards.

### **How do you analyse the success of your marketing?**

People in the office bring in the reports and sit down and go, 'Well, we didn't do so good there. We are doing great there, and this is going well. We took more money over there so let's see if we can encourage it.' The radio stations are probably our biggest marketing tool. We are on Capital Radio, we are on Classic Gold at the moment with a great big promotion. They are very keen on the show.

### **Is that expensive?**

Yes! Well, nothing is cheap, but it is not as expensive as television. I mean, somebody told me the other day that they had made a TV advertisement for *Contact* and it was £350,000 or something like that, but we haven't got that kind of money. We live and die by what is on the stage and we just keep our fingers crossed and hope the people see it.

**You billed *125<sup>th</sup> Street* as being 'From the creators of *Buddy*.' Why?**

It was the only branding we had, the only one we could use. Alan wrote *Buddy*, I directed it, and we worked on it together for years and years and took it all over the world and it was a massive success. *Buddy* went to Broadway, Australia, all over the world and it is still touring now. It was performed in German in Germany, Swedish in Sweden. We had a massive audience who thoroughly enjoyed themselves and we wanted to tap that. So we billed it as 'From the creators of *Buddy*' and 'Anyone who enjoyed *Buddy* is going to love this.' In *125<sup>th</sup> Street* you haven't just got one bloke with glasses stealing the limelight, you have got a dozen people.

**But the name *Buddy* is important to this show?**

Yes, it was in the initial stages. It won't be as we go on but, in the initial stages, it was the only thing we could use to sell it to people. We have done a show that lasted thirteen years and given so much pleasure to so many people, that we wanted them to come and have a bit of this as well.

**How important is a logo for marketing purposes?**

Very. I mean, that's what Cameron did. Cameron marketed his shows through logos, all on their own. He has a style all of his own. To compete, you have to use all the talent and all of the people you can, and sometimes you get it right and sometimes you get it wrong, but marketing is a big thing and it is a learning curve for us because, when you look at the audience, it is such a wide range of audience. With a new product you can't say it is a dance musical, it's this musical, it's that story or it's this thing.

**What effect has Cameron Mackintosh had on marketing and on the musical theatre genre?**

He is a great impresario. Initially he changed the way they were marketed. The amount of money that he has involved in marketing in some of the early shows like *Les Mis* and stuff like that, established them as national institutions very quickly, and the longevity of them has been immense. You have now got shows like *The Phantom* and *Les Mis*, lasting forever. Originally he just wanted to sell tickets, but now marketing has become an industry in itself.

**Has Cameron Mackintosh affected the way you produced your show, do you think?**

Well, it affects you because, if you haven't got the money to market at that level, it is almost as if you are non-existent. You have to match it, right! So a standard has almost been set where musicals are costing five and six million pounds. How the hell

are you every going to get that back on the seat prices! You are competing in a theatre against all the other media now, you know. It has made it more difficult. The biggest problem now is being able to break new ideas, being able to create an environment in which people and the public will embrace new ideas, without a star being in it, without a great big marketing campaign that costs a million pounds.

**You think that was Cameron Mackintosh's influence?**

No, not just his, but Andrew's as well. It is partly to do with the shows running so long. If the shows had only lasted three or four years, there would be a different turnover, but theatres have become locked-up and the expectations for every new show is that it will be a mega blockbusting thing that lasts for ever. But things aren't like that, the theatre is not like that. Some things are created just as little gems, for their own audience for a short period.

**Do you think that shows have to have elements of spectacle to be successful?**

Well, that is part of the hype, isn't it. There is a sort of myth that suggests that to get an audience you have got to spend three million pounds on a set, and fly in helicopters and all that, but you don't necessarily have to do that. The conundrum is, then, whether you can sell it? Will the audience come? So producers say, 'Well, alright, the audience won't come, so we will put stars in it.' What attracts is a whole moving feast, in the commercial theatre more than anything else. There is an expectation, I think, sometimes that shows have to be absolutely enormous to be good, but they don't. The trouble is, the audience never gets to see smaller shows, they never get to come in, because the audience tends to go 'Oh, it's not big enough, we will give that a miss,' rather than going and have a look.

**So, are you saying audiences aren't prepared to take a risk?**

Not with fifty pounds a ticket! *We Will Rock You* is going to go up to £50 a ticket. I mean, for my four kids and my wife and me to come to London, we are talking about £300 before we even get off the train, and that is difficult. As the price goes up, I think there will be a resurgence of the performer musical- that is what we have got here, a performer musical. The money isn't in the set, there are no great tricks, there are only the performers, putting the emphasis back on what happens between the actors. I always think, in some of the big shows, all you have to do is turn up and sing the score. Whereas, the shows that are exciting are the ones where the actor has the power to do something, to change people, to make them feel different. I mean, we had a bout of 'flu about three weeks ago and we have had nearly all of our understudies on in eight weeks, which is unbelievable, unheard of, and yet for the audience there was no difference, because the power is in the characters.

**Has market entry become more difficult?**

Hell, yes, it is very, very difficult to market a new idea. The last five or six years have been full of revivals, like *My Fair Lady* and what you would call 'known' products. Like the Queen musical is a musical of Queen and *Our House* is the musical of Madness. But the only star in our show is the Apollo Theatre. It is very difficult to get that message across. It is the nature of the business. We capitalised at £1.4million

because that was all we thought we could raise to do it. Normally shows this size would be capitalised at £2.5million to £3 million. Musical theatre has become a big, big money game and, like with everything, it is difficult to get new ideas through the system. It becomes like television and film where, you know, new ideas get thrown away straight away because they are not commercial or the right star doesn't get in them. It tends to kill itself slowly. When we did *Buddy*, there was a repertory system in which you could float some big shows, but they have been starved of cash for the last ten years. It has become a massive industry and that is the biggest factor, the money. It is expensive to go to the theatre and it is expensive to put it on. So less and less new product comes through. There was a time, twelve years ago when there would be eight shows a year here, all different styles, different standards, different things. Like when we did *Buddy*, we expected it to run only about eight months and we would have been happy with that. We never expected to run thirteen years. Whereas now, with the big shows running, people tend to plan for them to run ten years and it is usually devastating when they only run a few months. Products have become homogenized and less experimental. The experimental stuff starts to get moved out into small venues. The risks are so high, it is like, 'Go and experiment elsewhere.' The problem is that, with reps system disappearing, you can't experiment anywhere. They haven't got enough money to do what you want to do. You know, they haven't got the money to employ the choreographers and the writers and the different people to put things together, or the top quality actors. So the product only half survives. You need a freer environment and more cash, more than anything, to have a go.

**What do you think about the current state of the musical theatre genre?**

I would like to see more money pumped in. First of all I would like to see them doing new shows at the National, instead of doing revivals there. I think the place for the revival is the commercial world. To be honest, you have to try real hard not to sell tickets for *My Fair Lady* and shows like that, but on a new show you need a place which nurtures the talent, you need an environment where people can experiment without being at risk, and that is what the subsidised theatre can give them. Unfortunately, in the last 10 years we have more revivals coming out of the subsidised theatre, so where do the new composers or songwriters make mistakes? Unfortunately, they have to make them in the West End on a commercial stage where, if you make too many mistakes, you are out of work. You look at some of the great song writers and lyricists and musical theatre people, they did some real bums, some real horrible things, and luckily they kept coming back until they got it right and did some great things. If we are not careful, our young up and coming talent will not have a place to work. The reps are concentrating on things with five or six people in. Well, that is OK, if you want to do it in a little studio or little place like that but, if you want to fill a 2,000 seat auditorium, you have got to learn skills that are bigger and broader and stronger and more commercial and more appealing, and I would like to see the money come that way. I would like to see people being able to cut new stuff. There is no shortage of ideas, there is just shortage of opportunity and, the more we create that sort of environment, the happier we will all be.

**Would you say that there has been a 'dumbing down' of theatre in London?**

Well, you have to fill seats, and you are only as dumb as the audience you have got. The things that survive are the things that find their audience. I mean, *Mamma Mia!* isn't exactly the most brilliant brain surgery, it looks like a 70's play with ABBA songs in it. It is no great play, but it captures a kind of nostalgic element in the audience that keeps them coming in droves. But unfortunately, people look at *Mamma Mia!* and then they go, 'We will write another one of them and we will use Madness music or we will use that music,' so you end up with this homogenized product. As in television, you end up with somebody having one good idea for a series and then you have five bad ones afterwards. I think you need to be braver than that, and that is what New York went through: they came through with some cracking products in the last few years and it goes in cycles. You go through this terminal kind of thing where things that should work don't work and then somebody will come up with some new ideas. But the danger is the money side of it: it is getting seriously expensive for people to come. That is why we discount the tickets. We have got like 49% to break even, but we can still afford to discount tickets at our show.

**What sort of discounts are they?**

Well the lowest is £10, which is great.

## **5. Interview with Paul Nicholas**

### **What was the capitalisation for *Grease*?**

2.3million pounds

### **How was that raised?**

It was basically gathered together between Robert Stigwood, myself and a few other private investors, and a number of small punters or 'angels' as they call them. Stigwood was the largest investor and I was the second.

### **What were the running costs?**

On a weekly basis, it was in excess of £130,000 pounds per week [at the Dominion Theatre]. That was the break-even mark. It was about £110,000 when it went to the Cambridge [Theatre]. We are taking a tour of *Grease* out now and our break-even is £88,000. You obviously have to get back the cost of the set and cost of the costumes and the weekly running costs, which are about £65,000.

### **How important was the logo for marketing purposes?**

I think the logo is very important because it is the first thing people see before you get the photographs up- you've got to sell the show on something. It would have been great if we had had Adam Garcia up front for *Saturday Night Fever* but, at that stage, we didn't know who was going to be in it so, in order to get some profile for the show, you need a logo. Basically the idea for this logo [for *Grease*] came from the logo that was used in 1974, but redesigned. Not the same logo but the same idea, which incorporated the letters of the show into a drawing that was applicable to the show, which was of a guy with sunglasses on and a big quiff. I came up with the logo. All we did was modernise it somewhat. I borrowed that idea to some extent and redid it with Dewynters.

### **What do you think the logo said to the public?**

I think it said sort of 'cool', it said *Grease*. They probably found it eye-catching. There are some logos that are eye-catching, some that aren't. The logo for *Oliver* was quite good- again, it was using the letters and using Fagin's face within those letters which I thought was quite good. I don't think it says a lot- you can't sell a show on a logo alone, but it gives it an identity very early on, which you then carry through. For example, the tour of *Saturday Night Fever* which we are about to do, when we were in London, towards the end of the London run, it was felt that the poster should change from what was originally that kind of dancing man into a picture of the boy, Ben Richards, who was in it, looking moody. It looked a bit like *Tango Passion*. It was deemed to be quite a good idea but, of course, when you went out on tour and you tried to give the theatres that particular poster of Ben in this rather sexy kind of Tango-ish pose, they didn't want to use it because, of course, any recognition from their punters or their theatre-goers was of the dancing man which they'd seen in the

national press. They scotched the idea of using Ben Richards's picture and they wanted the original dancing logo.

### **How have you used the logo as a marketing tool?**

The logo established the show's identity. I think that's important. The key to the *Grease* logo was getting the pink the right colour, because it's black on pink. I wanted a baby pink like that but, of course, there are many different versions of baby pink, so we spent endless hours just looking at pink backdrops. We went for the one we did because we felt it was the most eye-catching. It was the same with *Saturday Night Fever*. I did the logo for *Saturday Night Fever*. I didn't actually draw it. There were many many different drawings. In some the flares were too big, in others the flares were too small, or the hair wasn't quite right, or there wasn't enough movement in the hair- it took forever. There must have been at least twenty five to thirty drawings of that. Then we had to get the colour right- you know, the orange kind of burst- that took forever. When I saw the American version of that, I thought it was too red. So, if you've got a bit of an eye and are in to that kind of thing, then you can take a long time. The original version that Dewynters came up with themselves was appalling, it was dreadful. It was of the pose, but it was a drawing of a man rather than a characterisation of that very famous pose of the man with his finger in the air, and it just looked naff, but I think we got there in the end on that one.

### **Why do you think *Grease* was successful commercially?**

It is a family show in the true sense of the word. Unlike *Saturday Night Fever*, you can take your kids to see it, they all know the show from the video. It is every kid's favourite musical. It has credibility with young people, it does not date, the music is great, it is funny and every kid in the world can relate to it. Even if you are old, you can relate to what it was like being in that situation, you know, romance at school. It will be around in a hundred years, that's why I was very keen to keep going with it. The only slight problem that we may have on the tour is that it is going out a bit early. It went out last year, and we are taking it out again at the end of this year, which is probably a bit early. We had to do that to reacquire the rights before someone else whipped in and nicked them! So we had to get in quick and get the tour out there. So it will be interesting to see. Over two years it could probably return 100% profit, probably more. In London we did about 120% to 130% on it overall. That doesn't include royalties and things like that, that's just a straight return on the investment. *Saturday Night Fever* ran for two years at the Palladium and returned about 45%. That is still a nice profit- the show cost £3.5million, so its return was half of that basically.

### **Was the Broadway production of *Saturday Night Fever* much more expensive?**

I didn't have much to do with the show in America. Robert Stigwood basically owns the rights, although we had an involvement. If you want to make real money, you have to take the show round the world. I thought that they miscast the lead boy in the show. There was a lot of hype and they had a huge advance, about \$12million, and they kept telling everyone that they had a \$12million advance.

### **Is it an advantage to create hype in this way?**

Well, it's a double-edged sword: if you are in any way a weak show and you are creating all this hyperbole about how great you are and knowing how important American critics are, much more important than they are here- people listen much more there- you are setting yourself up to be knocked down. I think the problem for *Saturday Night Fever* in America was that, first, it was an English production doing something that was to a large extent an American icon, so at the end of the day it is a put-together show, but it wasn't written originally as a musical, so it went in with a bit of a weakness in that it was never really a show. And then you put in a boy to star in it who is not as good as he should be, not that he was bad as a singer actor or dancer, he just wasn't good enough at any of those individual skills. Another major problem was that physically he didn't look sexy and, unless that guy in the middle of the stage looks the most charismatic, most attractive man on the stage who can do all the dancing, you have a problem. The problem with the American boy was that he couldn't dance, he had to be trained up, so you're not really at square one, are you, and you leave yourself open to the critics. At which point, the show got a very bad set of reviews, from which it is having a great deal of trouble recovering.

**Will it make a profit?**

I doubt it. It cost \$9million, considerably more than in the West End. It was essentially the same show as in London. The person who got most of the bad reviews was the boy.

**What were the running costs [at the Palladium]?**

You can take a lot of money at the Palladium- you can take about 350,000 a week, but the costs were high, about 210,000 pounds per week, but they got reduced later on.

**Did you need a high audience attendance to recoup?**

Yes, it was pretty high- we needed over 80%, which we got.

**How long did it take to recoup the costs in the UK?**

It took about ten months to a year.

**Were you very involved in the marketing?**

Yes, I was very interested in the marketing. As I said, I spent a lot of time on the logos, and colours and how things looked and, indeed, in terms of the costumes and how the costumes looked, all that sort of stuff.

**What aspects of marketing were important?**

The most important thing with *Saturday Night Fever* was getting the lead boy some profile before the show opened, because he was a very strong card. He is a very good-looking young man, and a very talented guy who is perfect for that part. The important thing was to have a single out there that gave him some general exposure,

and that is the quickest way of doing it, and we succeeded in doing that. He released 'Night Fever' and it got to number ten in the charts and, of course, being on Top of the Pops opened the doors to teen magazines, which was great for the show.

**Did you try to broaden the appeal of your show?**

It was a difficult one to sell actually. When we put in an advert for *Grease*, we had literally hundreds of people wanting to audition, but when we put on an open audition for *Saturday Night Fever* in *The Stage*, there was a very poor response, because first the film wasn't as big a success here as *Grease* was, in terms of profile; secondly, people didn't know what it was because it had never been done as a musical, even if you did know it, and it was also not a family film, it was X-rated. This was reflected when we first put it on sale: it didn't do much business at all. Whereas, when you put *Grease* on sale, with a bit of advertising, you get a very good response in terms of ticket sales. We didn't get that at all when we put *Saturday Night Fever* on at the London Palladium. It wasn't until we got nearer to the time of opening, when we had built Adam's profile up a bit- he had a hit record, he was on *Top of the Pops*- that a sense of what might be coming on became apparent to the public. Then the previews happened and the audiences liked the show a lot, and the word of mouth began to kick in. The reviews overall could have been dreadful, but actually there were enough really good ones to sell the show on, and then it kind of took off.

**Did it appeal to a younger audience?**

I still don't believe it is a family show because the matinees were never that good and that was the problem with it, because you can't really take children to see a show like that. There are other alternatives to a show that has a girl who gets screwed in the back of a car. You're also talking about abortions and things like that. It's not really family fare, is it!

**You get that in *Grease* though, don't you?**

In *Grease* it is very late on in the show.

**The choreography for the car scene in *Grease* was quite sexy though?**

Yes, but it was still kind of built round a fairy tale, an apple-pie kind of existence, and it is surrounded by a lot of comedy, and characters that are being a little bit silly, whereas *Saturday Night Fever* was kind of right on the nose, there is no two ways about it, so it did put off the audiences a bit.

**Were group bookings important?**

Groups were very important. One wonders how Cameron is going to sell his show [*The Witches of Eastwick*] to the groups, for the very reasons that we have said. I went up and did a launch for a panto that I am doing, and you go along and meet all the group bookers and they are invited to the launch of the show because they are extremely important people. They control... I am not sure the exact percentage of the tickets involved... they organise tours from factories and schools, so they are very important people. [As a producer] you are very keen to treat them with some respect.

Now, obviously, when you come to *Saturday Night Fever*, which is opening in Edinburgh over the Christmas period, they are going to be looking for a great night out for their groups, for the people that they represent, their families or whatever. I noticed when I last saw *Saturday Night Fever*, that there was a little bit too much bad language creeping into the show, I thought, and also a couple of the people were pretending, not instigated by us I hasten to add, to take cocaine. Now those elements you don't need. First of all, I was very pissed off that they left the language in. Here we are presenting ourselves at the Palladium, in one of the biggest family venues in the world, and you've got the odd bit of bad language. It is totally unnecessary, you don't need to have it. Why do you want to piss people off? Why do you want to kill your Wednesday matinee off? You have got enough things about abortion in there, why put bad language in? Then when I went [to the show] I saw that there were kids pretending to sniff cocaine, because they thought it looked hip. Even though they were in an environment, a disco, where kids really do that, you are alienating a potential section of the audience, which is stupid and doesn't make any sense at all. The family audience is very important, otherwise you won't get any of the matinees filled.

### **Were the lyrics and the book important?**

Robert Stigwood always described *Saturday Night Fever* as a play with music, whereas I tend to think of it more as music with a story. What I am saying is that the most important element of *Saturday Night Fever* is the music and the dancing, not the story. The story is still important, but the show could survive more easily without the story than without the music and the dancing.

### **Will it therefore appeal to a tourist audience?**

Yes, as they all know the songs. I thought Arlene did a very good job on the choreography, although she got slammed by the critics in America, which I personally thought was very unfair. The thing was to try and find a thread that brought the elements of the song and dance into what was supposedly a dramatic story. The most difficult part was weaving that story, and bringing the songs in at the right time, and making it so that it wasn't boring between the music, because the story is okay, but I don't think it is that strong to be honest with you. I have heard stronger stories: guy is not particularly happy at home, works at a paint store, and really comes alive at the disco, and in the course of that meets girl. That's a perfectly adequate story, and the fact that I can tell it to you in two sentences is good, but dialogue-wise it is not that funny, it is not like a *Grease* which has some really good funny lines and some good comic situations. It isn't that.

### **Do you think that shows have to have elements of spectacle to be successful?**

We produced *Grease* at a time when you felt that visual spectacle was necessary, where you felt that audiences were expecting that. *Grease* had grown into a major movie with John Travolta and Olivia Newton John which became a huge world-wide hit, had four new songs, and this movie became a mega-hit, so the expectations from the audiences that came to see the show at the Dominion was to see basically what they had seen on screen, and to do that you had to kind of make the thing a lot bigger. So that's what we tried to do to some extent. We incorporated those songs that had

never been incorporated in the show before. Audiences expected 'You're the One that I Want' at the end of the show, because of the film's profile. You had had the helicopter in *Miss Saigon*. *Cats* had started it with the turning stage. You felt at that particular time that it was important to make sure that there were two or three key moments in the show- the car moment, when the car goes from the old 1950s machine into a futuristic vehicle- a spectacular transition with lasers. But, at the end of the day, I think *Grease* works with even a small cast of about twelve people. We are now going out and presenting the West End version, so that is why it is so expensive.

### **What is your major role as a producer?**

My major role was basically a financial one, in the sense that first of all I started this company with David Ian. David did all the day to day work in terms of business, my role was really helping to put the show together in the sense that, you know, someone has to have the idea. *Grease* was my idea, the casting of how it is. In terms of *Saturday Night Fever*, putting the book together with Arlene, making sure that it wasn't a boring evening, if possible, and really the casting and how it looked, liaising between the business and Robert [Stigwood], which wasn't always easy.

### **So you are pretty 'hands on'?**

Yes, very much so, although I was not at all hands on in America. If I had been hands on in America, I do not think that boy would have been playing the lead. I would have been very unhappy, because he just wasn't right for the part and, if you miss those things, there is a terrible dishonesty when people do start running for cover and people start looking for scapegoats, and you do need to have one person who actually says, 'That's it', but that one person needs to be there and needs to be on the ball.

### **Would you call yourself a creative producer?**

Yes, I have good nose, and I have a good sense of the overall picture and a good sense of the numbers, but I don't 'phone up people and say, 'Can we have him?' I am no good at all that stuff. David did all that.

### **How was Robert Stigwood involved?**

Robert had the rights [to *Grease*]. When he came back to this country ten years ago, *Grease* was the first thing he did. I think he needed people who worked within the industry and who knew who were good people and who were bad people. I was that link. He also needed someone, or an office, which could run the day to day (business), which of course we had. So it was a very good combination, because David was dealing with the day-to-day things, I was the link artistically between the business and Robert and also the creative side and the financial side. It was a good team. I was in the middle between David and Robert, both artistically and business-wise, which was a good thing and made it work. The thing is that, if you then disregard some of the elements, sometimes the product does not come out like you want it to.

### **Has your role as a producer changed or developed?**

It hasn't changed. David and I still have a company, [and] we have got *Grease* going out. For me really it has always been about the product rather than the business, so if you brought a show to me and said, 'Put it on,' or, in other words, 'Do the day to day business and the running of the office,' it is something I could not possibly do, it is just not within my gift to be able to do that. But if you said to me, 'Find me a show, bring it to me, let's talk about it,' and I can do it in tandem with someone who can pick up the 'phone and call the production people, then it is absolutely fine. So, in that sense, my role has not changed at all. I guess, at the end of the day, I could do it, but really there are better ways to live your life than to sit at the end of the 'phone talking to agents.

**What effect has Cameron Mackintosh had on the marketing of musical theatre?**

These days shows are sold much more professionally, because the competition is far greater. You are competing against all sorts of other shows, and there is a diminishing market to some extent, so I think the professionalism regarding the selling and marketing of shows has gone up, like everything else has. I think Cameron has been most influential in the way that he has bought some very good shows from Boublil and Schoenberg and isn't afraid to spend money on shows like *The Witches of Eastwick*. There aren't that many people who produce brand new shows- most of the shows that you see are revivals, particularly big musicals, because people know that the titles give them a certain audience, hopefully, before they even begin. *The King and I* is a good example of a show that is nearly fifty years old, and you can revamp it and give it a big star. Cameron, however, has been prepared to go with new stuff- he can afford to do so but, when he first started, he was doing revivals as far as I remember although, having said that, I was in a show that he did called *Blondel* which didn't do terribly well. So Cameron and Andrew Lloyd-Webber, and Robert Stigwood to some extent, have been very good at bringing the British musical to the forefront over the last twenty to thirty years, particularly Andrew Lloyd-Webber because, without the material, a producer can do nothing.

**Do you think *We Will Rock You* will be a success?**

I think it is a good idea. I'm not sure if you need a story, but I think that the music is so strong that theatrically it is made to be performed. You could perform it within a theatrical context, because the songs are very descriptive and very theatrical numbers. I would like to do it as a concert tour first, to see what the reaction was, because there are a lot of tribute bands doing Queen songs, but I like the idea of utilising their music in a theatrical context, because I think it would suit it.

**Would it attract a tourist audience?**

Well, they all know the songs. I haven't seen *Mamma Mia!* but people laugh at the book. It is so bad that people think it is good! I think it is supposed to be for real, that book. It is an amateurish book, but people love the songs.