



# The Megamusical (Profiles in Popular Music)

*Jessica Sternfeld*

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A megamusical is an epic, dramatic show featuring recurring melodies in a sung-through score; huge, impressive sets; and grand ideas. These qualities are accompanied by intensive marketing campaigns, unprecedented international financial success, and a marked disjunction between critical reaction and audience reception. Audiences adore megamusicals; they flock to see them when they open, and return again and again, helping long-lived shows to become semi-permanent tourist attractions. Yet generally speaking, critics either dismiss megamusicals as superficial entertainment, or rail against them as offensively simple-minded money-making scams. This audience/critic division lies at the heart of The Megamusical.

Jessica Sternfeld's long-awaited study of some of the most popular megamusicals is an important contribution to knowledge of American musical culture. Sternfeld discusses the history of the megamusical, examining both its internal, performative qualities and its external, market reception to reveal why it is so popular. She concentrates on Lloyd Webber's *Cats* and *The Phantom of the Opera*, the two longest-running musicals on Broadway, and Schoenberg and Boublil's *Les Misérables*, the most popular and internationally successful piece of music theater of all time. Each of these musicals receives in-depth treatment, including an examination of how they were created and received, as well as an analysis of their scores and staging. She also interprets several other megamusicals of the 1980s and 1990s, with an eye toward their competition and influence on other musical theater genres.

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