# West End romcom musicals fuel nostalgia but spark calls for original theatre works



The proliferation of romantic comedies translated into musical form has captured the imagination of the theatrical community, particularly in London's vibrant West End. Titles like "Mean Girls", "Clueless", "The Devil Wears Prada", and "Pretty Woman" dot the landscape, creating an expansive chorus of familiar narratives now accompanied by song and dance. In a landscape already saturated with nostalgia, the upcoming adaptation of “50 First Dates”, while commercially promising, raises eyebrows given its status as a lesser-known film compared to its illustrious peers.

The trend of turning hit films into stage musicals is not entirely recent; it has been an evolving genre that traces back to productions such as "Billy Elliot" and "Hairspray". However, it was the Broadway success of "Legally Blonde" in 2007 that ignited a wave of Nineties and Noughties romcom adaptations. This recent surge has sparked conversations about the declining emphasis on original storytelling within the theatre industry. New works struggle for attention as they compete against the alluring familiarity of adaptation-fueled productions.

Emerging composers like Hayley Canham have entered the scene, having created original musicals like “Medea the Musical”. At the recent BEAM showcase—an important platform for new musical theatre ideas—Canham expressed a desire for more original content. “The critical landscape is daunting,” she acknowledges, “but I’d jump at the chance to adapt a romcom if it came my way.” Her ambitions echo a broader sentiment among creatives who yearn to infuse fresh narratives into an industry increasingly reliant on established intellectual property.

The reaction to this phenomenon is mixed among industry professionals. Evie Press, a musical maker and director, recognises the joy of seeing new talent but lamented a "bittersweet feeling" from knowing that many shows may fade into obscurity if not picked up. Press argues that the trend towards popular adaptations is not inherently problematic, but the industry's prioritisation of existing stories over new ideas could stifle innovation. “How do we expect musical theatre to look in 20, 30, 40 years if we don’t support new writers?” she asks.

Fellow creators are similarly concerned about the sustainability of these adaptations. Abbie Freeston, who is currently workshopping her original musical, is wary that nostalgia-driven productions may ultimately prove fleeting. The example of "Cruel Intentions", which recently transitioned to the West End after a less-than-stellar Off-Broadway run, looms large in her mind, reminding her that the appeal of such adaptations may dwindle once core audiences have indulged their nostalgia.

The conversation shifts as Matthew Bugg—a seasoned actor, writer, and composer—argues that the individual and artistic integrity should not be sacrificed on the altar of commercial success. While he appreciates the tradition of adapting stories, he calls for more original works that reflect the multifaceted nature of contemporary society. Similarly, Max Mason, an opera director and musical theatre maker, highlights the risks taken by past productions and challenges the notion that adaptations are the only viable path forward during economically strained times.

Inside this tumultuous creative landscape, some productions still shine brightly. “Operation Mincemeat”, a musical based on a World War II mission, has garnered acclaim, demonstrating the potential for original narratives in the musical theatre realm. Critics may have panned adaptations like "The Devil Wears Prada" and "Pretty Woman" as shallow, but audience enthusiasm suggests that, at least for now, there remains a vibrant intersection between nostalgia and musical theatre.

As the countdown to "50 First Dates" approaches, one must consider not only the commercial impulses driving these adaptations but also the artistic choices that will determine the future of musicals. Will the West End continue to echo with the lyrics of forgotten romcoms, or will it find room beneath the limelight for original creations that challenge and inspire? The industry's answer to this question may reshape the very foundation of musical theatre for years to come.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/features/romcom-musical-adaptations-west-end-b2759294.html), [[2]](https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/features/romcom-musical-adaptations-west-end-b2759294.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[2]](https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/features/romcom-musical-adaptations-west-end-b2759294.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/features/romcom-musical-adaptations-west-end-b2759294.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[2]](https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/features/romcom-musical-adaptations-west-end-b2759294.html)
* Paragraph 5 – [[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Mincemeat_%28musical%29)
* Paragraph 6 – [[3]](https://www.broadwayworld.com/westend/article/ROMAN-HOLIDAY-Will-Have-UK-Premiere-at-Theatre-Royal-Bath-in-June-2023-20221114), [[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Little_Big_Things_%28musical%29)
* Paragraph 7 – [[4]](https://www.westendbestfriend.co.uk/news/new-cole-porter-musical-roman-holiday-to-receive-uk-premiere-at-theatre-royal-bath)
* Paragraph 8 – [[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Mincemeat_%28musical%29)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/features/romcom-musical-adaptations-west-end-b2759294.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/features/romcom-musical-adaptations-west-end-b2759294.html> - The article discusses the trend of adapting romantic comedies into musicals in London's West End. It highlights productions like '50 First Dates' and mentions previous adaptations such as 'Mean Girls', 'Clueless', 'The Devil Wears Prada', 'Pretty Woman', and '10 Things I Hate About You'. The piece also touches upon the challenges of original storytelling in the theatre industry and features insights from creatives like Hayley Canham and Evie Press.
3. <https://www.broadwayworld.com/westend/article/ROMAN-HOLIDAY-Will-Have-UK-Premiere-at-Theatre-Royal-Bath-in-June-2023-20221114> - This article announces the UK premiere of a new stage adaptation of the classic film 'Roman Holiday' at Theatre Royal Bath from 10 June to 1 July 2023. The musical features Cole Porter's songs, including 'Easy To Love' and 'Night and Day', and is directed by Jeremy Sams. The adaptation is by Kirsten Guenther and Paul Blake, who co-wrote the stage version of 'White Christmas'.
4. <https://www.westendbestfriend.co.uk/news/new-cole-porter-musical-roman-holiday-to-receive-uk-premiere-at-theatre-royal-bath> - This piece provides details about the upcoming UK premiere of the 'Roman Holiday' musical at Theatre Royal Bath, running from 10 June to 1 July 2023. The adaptation includes Cole Porter's classic songs and is directed by Jeremy Sams. The article also mentions the adaptation team, Kirsten Guenther and Paul Blake, known for their work on 'White Christmas'.
5. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Little_Big_Things_%28musical%29> - This Wikipedia page details 'The Little Big Things', a musical based on Henry Fraser's memoir. The show premiered in London's West End in September 2023 and received critical acclaim, including three Laurence Olivier Award nominations. The production was directed by Luke Sheppard, with music by Nick Butcher and lyrics by Butcher and Tom Ling.
6. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Mincemeat_%28musical%29> - This Wikipedia entry covers 'Operation Mincemeat', a musical that began previews in London's West End in March 2023. The production has been extended multiple times due to positive reviews and is currently the best-received show in the West End, having received numerous five-star reviews. The show is based on a World War II mission and has also been staged on Broadway.
7. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Two_Stranger_(Carry_a_Cake_Across_New_York)> - This Wikipedia page provides information about 'Two Strangers (Carry a Cake Across New York)', a musical that had its world premiere in 2019. The production was co-produced by the New Wolsey Theatre and Royal & Derngate, directed by Tim Jackson, and starred Tori Allen-Martin and Alex Cardall. The show received positive reviews for its charming romantic comedy narrative.