

Institution: University of Wolverhampton		
Unit of Assessment: 33 Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies		
Title of case study: Empowering Marginalised Communities through Music and Musical Theatre		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2016 - 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Dr Sarah Browne	Head of School of Performing Arts	2012 – Present
Dr Sarah Whitfield	Senior Lecturer in Musical Theatre	2015 - Present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: January 2018 – December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Browne and Whitfield's research at the University of Wolverhampton (UoW) has centred on identity in music and musical theatre. The impact of this has been to empower, and bring to the fore the stories of marginalised communities in music and musical theatre, through the co-production of new cultural artefacts and by enabling professionals and organisations to adapt to changing cultural values.</p> <p>The <i>Hear Her Song</i> project has situated female composers and practitioners as an integral part of both the creative and performance process, thus allowing for a greater emphasis on female agency through phonocentrism - the prioritisation of the acoustic or phonic elements of language over the written or graphic. The work also placed girls from some of the most deprived communities at the heart of the process, allowing them the means by which they can consider their lived experience as contributing to notions of empowerment. Similarly, research for the monograph, <i>Reframing the Musical</i>, offers a way of centring previously minoritised groups in music and musical theatre. This complements <i>Hear Her Song</i>'s relevance to the fields of both music and community engagement, and has contributed both to improving the understanding of the history of Black Musical Theatre practitioners, and to changes in industry practice.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Musical Theatre research has been undertaken at the University of Wolverhampton since 2014, with a consistent emphasis being placed on empowering and centring marginalised communities. Using methodologies of Presumptive Presence, both researchers' work reveals 'lost' or unimagined histories of professional music practice and changes to cultural understandings. This research has given rise to two findings [F] as below:</p> <p><u>F1. Music can be used to empower girls and women</u></p> <p><i>Hear Her Song</i> arose out of Browne's research [R1, R2, R3]. The concept of the project was developed in collaboration with the Canales Project, an organisation founded in 2017 by Carla Canales "[t]o give voice to issues of identity and culture through music and conversation". The project features two strands:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>Hear Her Song I</i> focuses on the composer as an integral part of both the creative and performance process thus allowing for a greater emphasis on female agency through phonocentrism. 		

- b. *Hear Her Song II* offers girls from working class backgrounds the opportunity to tell their story, using this as the basis for composition and music-making.

The project also encompassed a presentation at the UN Headquarters which outlined the research's contribution to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, and was subsequently further explored at a national symposium entitled *Musical Theatre in Process* at the Other Palace, London in November 2019, which brought together academics, composers, practitioners and industry specialists. The symposium focused on empowering marginalised groups to explore the processes they engage in the creation of new work.

F2: Reframing musical theatre histories produces inclusive practice

Whitfield's research for *Reframing the Musical* [R4] enhances cultural understanding and recovers marginalised figures in historical and contemporary practice which has led to changes in professional practice across several areas. It has a particular relevance to providing a framework of recovery for the history of Black practitioners, an aspect that is essential to addressing the absences in the way the musical is understood.

Research undertaken for *An Inconvenient Black History of British Musical Theatre 1900 -1950* (forthcoming) reinstates the practice of hundreds of Black practitioners who have been written out of the history of the musical and demonstrates the need for restorative practices in historiography to change how we centre the experience of Black practitioners [R5]. Earlier work developed the basis for archival research to reframe such methodologies through calling attention to collaborative working practices [R6].

Whitfield's research has also led to collaboration with museum professionals that has expanded cultural heritage interpretation, and will result in public engagement work. For example, her research into the early records of the Royal Northern College of Music [12] showed that while women attending the college had been assumed to be attending as a finishing school, many were pursuing a professional life of music in Manchester, thus disproving this assumption.

3. References to the research

The following references have been assessed by rigorous peer review. R4 (and R3) were described by Prof Herrera (Princeton University) as "a pathbreaking volume [which] gathers emerging and established voices in the interdisciplinary field of musical theatre studies to activate new routes of critical conversation and inquiry".

R1. Browne, S. (2018) '*The Last Ship* from Broadway to Newcastle: A Feminist Political Musical for the Brexit Era', *Studies in Musical Theatre*, 12(3), pp. 377-385 (http://doi.org/10.1386/smt.12.3.377_1).

R2. Browne, S. (2018) 'Girl Talk: Feminist Phonocentrism as an Act of Resistance in the Musical, *Hair*', *Studies in Musical Theatre*, (12)3, pp. 291-303. (http://doi.org/10.1386/smt.12.3.291_1) (REF 2 Output).

R3. Browne, S. (2019) "'Dedicated to the Proposition...": Raising Cultural Consciousness in the Musical, *Hair*' in S. Whitfield (ed.) *Reframing the Musical: Race, Culture and Identity*, London: Red Globe Press, pp. 167-186 (REF 2 Output).

R4. Whitfield, S. (ed.) (2019) *Re-framing the Musical: Race, Culture and Identity*, London: Red Globe Press (Palgrave Macmillan/Macmillan Education) (REF 2 Output).

R5. Whitfield, S. (2020) 'Disrupting Heteronormative Temporality through Queer Dramaturgies: *Fun Home*, *Hadestown* and *A Strange Loop*', *Arts*, 9, 69 (<http://doi.org/10.3390/arts9020069>)

R6. Whitfield, S. (2016) "Next You're Franklin Shepard Inc.?": Composing the Broadway Musical, a Study of Kurt Weill's Working Practices', *Studies in Musical Theatre*, 10(2), pp. 163–76. (http://doi.org/10.1386/smt.10.2.163_1) (REF 2 Output).

4. Details of the impact

Through reframing historiographic methodologies and performance practices, Browne and Whitfield's research has led to the discovery and promotion of historical and contemporary composers, lyricists, directors, works and lineages, and as such has impacted upon both key participants within the musical theatre industry and academic curricula. In addition the work has been expanded to incorporate the local community, directly informing and shaping attitudes towards the involvement, engagement, and empowerment of young girls in making music, thereby increasing the understanding of gender roles in specific contexts. The findings of both researchers have led to two impacts [I] on a) Creativity, Culture and Society, and b) Understanding, Learning and Participation, as follows:

I1. Co-production of new cultural artefacts [F1, F2]

Browne's work on *Hear Her Song* promoted new approaches to creative practice that placed marginalised groups at the centre of the process. The first iteration of the project involved co-production with The Canales Project to commission songs written by British female composers, resulting in a series of songs that celebrated the achievements of remarkable women. Engagement with public arts venues included most notably: the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC – March 2019, the Public Theatre, New York - May 2019, and the Arena Theatre, Wolverhampton - June 2019. At all venues, staged performances of the songs were held which focused on placing the voice of the composer at the centre of the practice. Browne's work in the field of feminist phonocentrism allowed the project to centre on how integral the voice of the female composer was to both creative and performance practice. This significantly influenced the structure and purpose of the project. Carla Canales stated:

"Without question, their personal delivery of the songs they wrote was invaluable to the project. Seeing this has made me reimagine the future of this project for many reasons. First and foremost, I felt that there is nothing as powerful as seeing the composer use her voice to celebrate her honoree. There is an intrinsic authenticity to this that cannot be achieved any other way" [C1].

The 10 female composers from the UK involved in this project noted the impact of their role as performer-composer on their own practice:

"I don't think I can remember feeling so contented before taking to a stage. Usually the discord is in my belly and manifests the next day as a headache. Usually, there is a fear of failure that is nearly level with excitement. On this occasion, I just felt I was with "my people"" (Composer A, 22 June 2019);

"...such a privilege to be involved with such an important and inspiring project, to swap stories and hear your diverse and powerful voices" (Composer B, 24 June 2019) [both C2].

Since November 2018, the work of the *Hear Her Song* UK project has been performed in the US (San Jose, California, Washington DC, New York), the UK (Wolverhampton) and at the Headquarters of the United Nations in New York.

I2. Professionals and organisations have adapted to changing cultural values [F1, F2]

The second *Hear Her Song* project was conducted with girls from areas that according to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) are predominantly classed in quintile 1 and 2, i.e. the most deprived areas nationally. The participants had the opportunity to create and produce their own song, centring on their lived experiences and celebrating their own voices. These songs were then recorded, allowing girls to work in a space which is traditionally biased towards males. This research project allowed girls to see themselves in aspirational spaces. One of the teachers involved in the project commented:

“I think just to get them here, and involved, and doing things like we’ve done, so they can see it in action and to see what is there for them and what they could achieve. It’s all raising the aspirations and getting them to realise they could be here the same as everybody else can be” (Teacher A, 12th June, 2019) [also C2].

This project increased the girls’ understanding of gender roles. One participant felt that of all the lyrics she wrote, the most resonant was ‘I want to speak’. Explaining why, she stated: “....because I think not a lot of people do speak. [...] Mainly girls. [...] I think it’s confidence, and with girls it’s about being judged” (Student A, 12th June, 2019) [also C2]. One student participant also shared the added pressure that girls experience as a result of social media. She observed that this form of media places too much importance on the visual aspects of being a girl, which results in being more “self-conscious” and “doesn’t help them [girls] to find their voice”. As a result of the project, she found that music took her to a “different world”, and remarked that when performing “I feel I can be myself and use it to express yourself more” (12th June, 2019). She observed that other girls would benefit from participating in the project as it would “help them to express themselves more” [also C2].

The female composer and writer who participated in leading some of the workshops commented that it was “wonderful” to see the schools “flourish” through this project:

“the final outcome (the recording of their songs) was particularly thrilling, but the students’ levels of participation, interest and creativity during the whole process (from initial ideas to development of full song) was truly inspiring throughout” [also C2].

The response from composers involved in the international *Hear Her Song* project [C3] indicates that as a result of the project professionals have adapted their performance approach. Arising from their ownership of the material and how this material - along with their voice - can be used to empower women and influence cultural values, our research led to changes in their approach to working with other female performers, by considering their energy and contribution integral in interpreting, and subsequently performing material [C4].

Reframing the Musical (edited by Whitfield, with contributions from both Browne and New York-based music director, pianist and educator Sean Mayes) as both methodology and praxis has influenced a range of practitioners and organisations in contemporary musical theatre, (musical directors, educators and archivists). As C5, C6 and C7 demonstrate, professional methods and ideas have been influenced by this research. The research originally focused on changing approaches in scholarship to centring marginalised voices in discourse around the musical and in education practices and in disseminating this through a book and a series of international public events - Wolverhampton Arts Festival (10 attendees); New York Public Library, New York (40 attendees – including C7); Neptune Theatre, Halifax, Canada (45 attendees).

The project has had an impact in professional collaborations in music, and in musical theatre specifically. This project proposed a shift in the discipline of musical theatre studies towards a radically inclusive critical practice, establishing inclusive approaches to historiography that recovers the labour of people with marginalised and intersectional identities, and centring academics with marginalised identities in the discipline. The editing process of *Reframing* specifically invited submissions from international academics of colour, from LGBTQ+ individuals and from those with intersectional backgrounds. Whitfield’s wider research uncovers and frames this work through interventions into historiography and contemporary practice, and methodologies of presumptive presence. This has had an impact on Black theatre professionals, specifically on Sean Mayes, a practicing Broadway and Canadian musical director whose understanding of the history of Black Musical Theatre practitioners has developed as a result of this work. Our research has led to a change in his practice in the importance of establishing spaces for People of Colour professionally.

Mayes notes that he has used the methodology to “directly inform [his] inclusive practice for Broadway theatre [including] Broadway for Biden [...] where [he has] advocated for equitable

casting and artistic distribution". He also notes that the work led to his hiring "a pit band of all musicians of colour" for his production of *The Color Purple* in Canada. He cites Whitfield's research work as "increasing [his] knowledge of historical Black practitioners and bringing them into [his] work of collaboration with companies such as the Stratford Festival of Canada and the Canadian Musical Theatre Project" [C6]. Other practitioners who have changed their working methods as a result of this research include a Cameron Mackintosh Resident Award Winning composer, who has developed a new methodology for her own work [C7].

Reframing the Musical has also contributed to changes in the higher education curriculum, and provided space for discussions around race and identity, specifically at Sheridan College (a pioneering musical theatre college) in Canada. The Program Lead at the college notes 'her work is integral for those of us working internationally in higher education institutions' [C8]. This point is echoed by the curator for the New York Public Library Performing Arts division: "her work is globally well regarded in musical theatre studies" [C9].

Reframing the Musical explicitly establishes an anti-racist and inclusive approach to retelling the history of the musical and imagining what is possible for the future. The impact on professional practice and understanding has been immediate. It has also led to significant new research findings about the role of Black practitioners in the development of British musical theatre which will go on to change the understanding of the role Black creative producers played in the form. This has made concrete changes to professional practice and to the curriculum at international institutions.

Whitfield's collaboration with museum professionals has expanded cultural heritage interpretation. The resident archivist at the Royal Northern College of Music noted that Whitfield's work with the early records of the college "drastically changes the narrative of the college's early activity and purpose" and will influence and inform public attitudes to women's work as professional musicians; and highlight the need for research into women's 'lost' roles, playing "a vital role in the design and delivery of resources for the network "Connecting Manchester's Music Archives"" [C10].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- C1. Testimonial from founder of The Canales Project (30th June, 2019)
- C2. Transcripts of interviews with participants and teachers involved in 'Hear Her Song II'
- C3. The Canales Project URL - detailing the *Hear Her Song* initiative (<http://thecanalesproject.org/hear-her-song>)
- C4. Testimonial from founder of The Canales Project, from 1:59 – (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sFQqCbXcaSI&feature=emb_logo)
- C5. Transcripts of interviews with composers involved in 'Hear Her Song'
- C6. Testimonial from US and Canadian music director
- C7. Statement from freelance composer
- C8. Testimonial from Professor of Voice and Text, Sheridan College, Canada
- C9. Testimonial from curator of the Billy Rose Theatre Division at New York Public Library
- C10. Testimonial from resident archivist, Royal Northern College of Music