

# *The Jukebox Musical: An Interpretive History*

## The Spotify Playlist

[https://open.spotify.com/playlist/0xdpJbZ6Joy60kaIDku3p4?si=jXMJNpAQ\\_WcbXQMMqPERg](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/0xdpJbZ6Joy60kaIDku3p4?si=jXMJNpAQ_WcbXQMMqPERg)

This playlist is a collection of some of the songs from various jukebox musicals, taken from the available shows on Spotify and intended to accompany our book, *The Jukebox Musical: An Interpretive History*. The songs here are representative of the genre as a whole, and all are catchy, interesting, and beautifully sung. These find a way to bridge a rendition of a song made specifically for an album with the very different realm of the jukebox musical, with its narrative arc, characters, and dramatic impulse. Most importantly, they convey something distinct on their own, separate from the original versions. The following is a curated list of great songs with brief explanations of what makes them special.

--"We Got the Beat" from *Head over Heels*

An opening song that lays out plot exposition and thematic elements, this number introduces "The Beat" and how the people of Arcadia are dependent on this life force. Each character contributes to the song, revealing through their personal interjections the community that will make up the story. The tangled and untangled relationships subsequently introduced will occupy the rest of the musical.

--"If I Could Turn Back Time" from *The Cher Show*

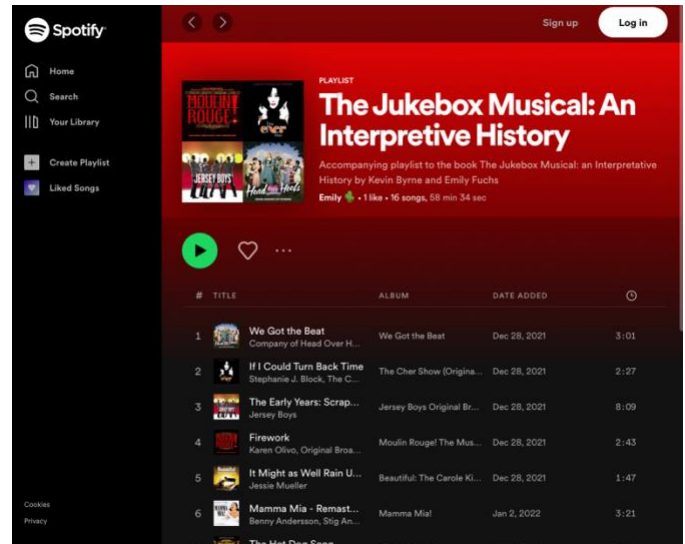
This opening song from *The Cher Show* works on a couple of levels, as do several tunes on this list. It introduces a major thematic and dramaturgical conceit, that of memory and reflection. As the show features three facets of Cher at different stages of her career, the notions of time and reflection fuel their interactions.

--"The Early Years: Scrapbook" from *Jersey Boys*

This medley of covers is a neat bit of narrative shorthand that collapses into an extended period of chronological time into a few minutes of performance time, as introduces the musical influences of the group. It is remarkable for its narrative economy which allows the cast to showcase their voices before the get into the dramatic arc of the plot.

--"Firework" from *Moulin Rouge! The Musical*

A wonderful pop song, interpreted with aching vulnerability by Karen Olivo. The number is a bit of an anomaly in *Moulin Rouge!*, a whisper in an otherwise bombastic show. Also, unlike other medleys in the musical, it's not a mashup of multiple works. The construction of the song is different from the Katy Perry original, ending on a dark and troubling note rather than triumph. Both the shape and sound perfectly match the character Satine in the show's early scenes.



--"It Might as Well Rain until September" from *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical*

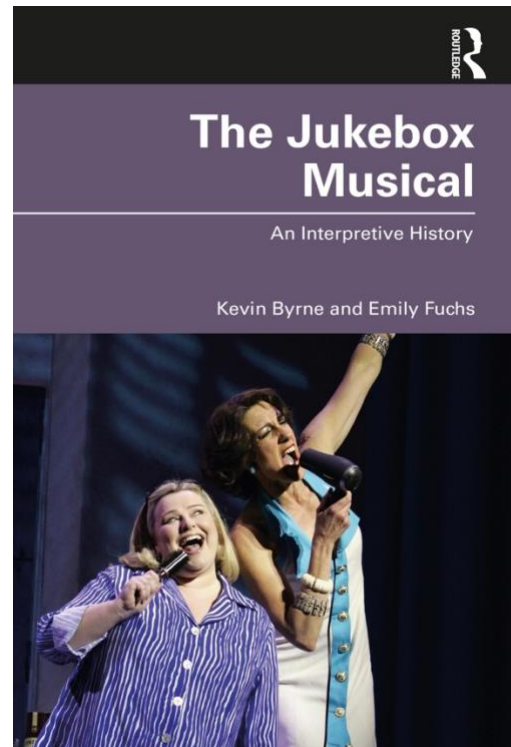
A scene that is featured in so many biographical jukebox musicals is of musical discovery and innovation. This is also when the audience gets to witness a hit song being composed in real time as it is being performed. "It Might as Well Rain until September" captures the moment best, as Carole is attempting to sell her first song to a record producer. The way Jessie Mueller jumps in mid-song to explain how strunged instruments can add a rain effect, is energetic and exciting. You can hear how a young Carole King grows in confidence throughout the number until the end.

--"Mamma Mia" from *Mamma Mia!*

The titular song arrives in the middle of act one, when main character Donna runs into three men from her past. It's a great example of a jukebox musical song improving on an original by adding layers of narrative and drama. In the show, the orchestrations and vocal inflections by Siobhán McCarthy give the number a driving urgency missing from the Abba track. This makes sense, as the character's emotions are running high.

--"The Hot Dog Song" from *Bullets over Broadway*

This scene from *Bullets over Broadway* takes a rather generic tin-pan-alley tune and welds it to a very specific character, the talentless stripper Olive played by Heléne Yorke. The original lyrics are a collection of bawdy innuendos around the titular meat salesman. The comedy in the musical is how, due to Olive's general tactlessness, the penile subtext becomes the text. She is unable to hide what all the sausages and buns actually represent. By fighting against what makes the original song titillating, this version is very funny. Yorke's line reading and Jersey drawl are amazing.



--"We Built This City/Too Much Time on My Hands" from *Rock of Ages*

A good example of a mashup that simultaneously presents two parallel scenes happening together as foils to one another. The regulars of the Bourbon Room feel dejected at the demolition of their dive bar while developers are convincing the Los Angeles mayor to bulldoze the Sunset Strip. The renditions blend together to highlight the parallel progression.

--"I Want You" from *Girl from the North Country* (Original Broadway Cast Recording)

The full, round way Colton Ryan opens this song is lovely, and distinctly different from Bob Dylan's dry twig voice on the original track. Dylan's famously obtuse lyrics are toyed with and made intimate; his fractured and layered metaphors are given more feeling. Here, two lovers (Ryan joined by Caitlin Houlahan) sing to each other and eventually harmonize together. The tempo is slowed and made more romantic for it. This version also removes some of the more spikey and aggressive lyrics, leaving a beating heart.

--"Changes" from *Lazarus*

Cristin Milioti's smokey and sly interpretation of a David Bowie classic is very distinct from the original and yet deeply connected to it. By foregrounding the piano and slowing the tempo, it plumbs the well of melancholy from the album version. It lacks the youthful hope of rebellion from the

original and replaces it with a world-weariness of experience. Milioti sounds downright angry as the song builds.

--"The Weight" from *Everyday Rapture*

How do you weave together an autobiographical jukebox musical? Sherie Rene Scott does just that in *Everyday Rapture*, which traces her journey from strict Midwest religious upbringing to New York City and acting. The musical selections all capture the tension between her various feelings, none better than the Band's "The Weight." Scott seems to be singing both of and to herself in the recording, the weight of guilt and responsibility that she's carrying and the need to unburden herself. The song's lyrics of a dusty American mysticism match her journey. The vocals are crisp and lonely.

--"Private Dancer" from *Tina: The Tina Turner Musical*

Adrienne Warren absolutely channels Turner in this number, but a close comparison to the original makes clear the subtle differences between the two. The song is all about female vulnerability, the prying eyes and open wallets of the men in the strip club rule the life of the nameless narrator. Turner's version is raw and angry and *Tina*, in folding the number into her biography, adds a layer of personal anguish to it. The way Warren stresses "me" in the chorus is subtle and perfect.

--"21 Guns" from *American Idiot*

With its military overtones, this song is about giving up. It is rather dirge-like in Green Day's original but in *American Idiot*, it is given more fire as an ensemble number. It occurs in act two, as all the characters are at their nadir. Though each are alone—and, in some cases, are the causes of each others' misery—they collectively sing of common problems and frustrations. The lyrics are full of questions and questioning which, when piled on top of each other, give the tune some emotional heft. The over-orchestrations of Green Day songs in *American Idiot* do not always serve the tunes well, but it is effective here. A real banger of a number.

--"All Over the World" from *Xanadu: The Musical*

This full cast number from late in the show captures the space rock verve of the Electric Light Orchestra's original, but also better sells the fun of the song's electro-freakout. It's mostly a nonsensical listing of place names from around the globe, of all the cities that are rocking to the beat, but the cast makes it sound more impressive and inclusive than the original.

--"Roar" from *& Juliet*

"Roar" is another Katy Perry tune that makes it on the list, alongside "Firework." But this one joins in the original's celebration and it is well placed as climactic number in *& Juliet*. The musical reworks Shakespeare to add a message of personal empowerment, especially for the title character. Giving her this anthem wonderfully draws the themes together. Miriam-Teak Lee's gravelly vibrato is distinct from Perry's vocalizations, adding more weight to the number. The chorus is amplified by the rest of the cast, adding to the joyous feeling of it.

--"You Learn" from *Jagged Little Pill*

An appropriate conclusion for the Alanis Morrissette musical. "You Learn" wraps up the themes and story arcs of each character, and hints at the lessons each have discovered. The family members' vocals blend in a moment of finality and concord.