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Splitting *Hair*: Reviving the American Tribal Love-Rock Musical in the 1970s

Bryan M. Vandevender

When Hair premiered on Broadway in 1968, the musical garnered attention for its reflection the current cultural moment. Critics acknowledged this congruence of form, content, and zeitgeist as the production's greatest asset. This alignment with the Vietnam era proved a liability nine years later when Hair received its first Broadway revival, particularly when the musical's authors replaced many of the libretto's cultural references with allusions to the 1970s, further illuminating the musical's inherently time-bound qualities.



Critics and scholars frequently cite the 1968 Broadway premiere of *Hair*, the American Tribal Love-Rock Musical penned by James Rado, Gerome Ragni, and Galt MacDermot, as a turning point in the American musical's maturation and development as it helped bring the form's much mythologized Golden Age to an end and opened the door to a new era of rock and concept musicals. Of the production's many singular traits, the most frequently recognized include a score that contained timely musical idioms such as pop, rock, soul, and folk; an episodic, pliable, often improvised libretto that relied heavily on audience interaction; the use of nudity; and staging techniques borrowed from several experimental off-Broadway theatre companies including Judith Malina and Julian Beck's Living Theatre, La MaMa's Great Jones Repertory Company, and Joseph

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Chaikin's Open Theater. These formal departures from the standard Broadway fare of the day helped to establish *Hair* as a musical of the current moment, as did its portrayal of the hippie movement—then at its zenith—and its vehement denunciation of the Vietnam War. Unlike many musicals of the Golden Age, which presented a heavily romanticized American past, *Hair* depicted the present day. The musical's Playbill confirmed *Hair*'s temporal setting throughout the duration of its four-year Broadway run. This billing not only situated the musical's action squarely within the Vietnam era, but also suggested that its historical backdrop was relatively fluid and would remain in alignment with the current year as time passed.

While the repeated casting of *Hair* as a historical watershed has ensured the title's place within the musical theatre canon, new professional stagings of the property have been infrequent and discussions of its afterlife are conspicuously absent from the extant literature on American musical theatre, presumably because the work's strong ties to late 1960s American culture have made it notoriously difficult to revive. Several critics and scholars have identified the property as an incontrovertible period piece and presented hypotheses for why *Hair*, a musical of great historical significance, has not endured in performance to the same degree as other canonized works. Former *New York Times* theatre critic Charles Isherwood conjectures that while the musical's initial contemporaneity was its most defining feature, it has also thwarted the musical's chances for revival:

[*Hair*] is . . . an interesting show that has retained its musical charm but is so deeply dyed in the sights, sounds, and smells of its era that it has also become a touchstone of 60s kitsch. *Hair* crystallized the countercultural currents of its time with a tuneful innocence and exuberance that have assured its appeal as a pop-culture artifact. But those very qualities probably doomed its chances as an enduringly resonant work of art. . . . You can't pry *Hair* out of the 1960s, give it a new perm and make it speak of things timeless. Virtually every song, and much of the scattered book too, addresses quite specifically an attitude or an experience of the here and now, which is to say the there-and-then: draft dodging, fads like astrology, and be-ins, free love, newfangled drugs, and the Hare Krishna movement. (A1)

Isherwood's assessment suggests that the musical is not only a theatrical relic, but also a cultural curiosity when viewed in the present day. In aligning *Hair* with kitsch, the critic tacitly claims that time has purged the musical of its onetime urgency and consequence, and as a result, forestalled its chances for long-term artistic value.

Hair is then a prime example of a time-bound musical, a musical that is anchored to the specific cultural moment that produced it. Theatrical works of this nature bear several strong material ties to the past, including but not

limited to setting, plot, themes, treatment of race, gender, and ethnicity, political agenda, musical idioms, or staging requirements. Audiences might have considered these properties fresh and timely at the moment of their creation, but the inevitable passage of time often causes them to read it as socially or aesthetically obsolete (if not completely incoherent) in the present day. Their numerous attachments to a bygone era routinely remind viewers of the work's age and original *zeitgeist*. As a result, several previously successful musicals such as *Babes in Arms* (1937), *One Touch of Venus* (1943), *Call Me Madam* (1950), *No Strings* (1962), *Applause* (1970), *I Love My Wife* (1977), and *Woman of the Year* (1981) have fallen out of the prevailing musical theatre repertoire due to the fact that they require spectators who can read, interpret, and appreciate their period signifiers. Revival can certainly help to deliver a musical from obscurity; however, the practice frequently reveals the degree to which the property is time-bound and the challenges associated with producing it in the present-day. In *Unfinished Show Business: Broadway Musicals as Works-In-Process*, musicologist Bruce Kirle contends that all musicals of the past "are producible, but they must be made relevant to a different cultural moment if audiences are to accept them. Far from being closed, they are unfinished, which is why musicals in revival are often re-invented, rethought, and sometimes rewritten (and the music reworked) to conform to a new audience" (14). Kirle's claim suggests that time-bound works can still enjoy an afterlife, but require that theatre artists thoughtfully and strategically prepare the musicals to be received by present-day audiences.

As a case study, *Hair* represents something of a paradox. It is a work of great historical importance that is securely canonized, but difficult to produce due to its time-bound nature. The challenges associated with reviving *Hair* arguably first came to light when the musical returned to Broadway in 1977. With the musical's primary subject matter relegated to recent history, librettists Jerome Ragni and James Rado anticipated Kirle's call for revision and attempted to make *Hair* cohere to the prevailing culture by modifying its book in a rather unexpected manner. The authors retained the musical's setting, characters, and storyline; however, they replaced several of its original cultural references with allusions to the current *zeitgeist*. As a result, *Hair* cited American culture in the late 1960s and the late 1970s simultaneously. Dividing *Hair's* temporal setting in this manner arguably distanced the musical from its original era, as did widespread antipathy for the Vietnam War and the absence of hippie movement. This article examines *Hair's* original Broadway production and first Broadway revival—their respective *zeitgeists*, libretti, direction, and critical reception—in an attempt to determine the degree to which the musical is anchored to 1960s American culture and the efficacy of Ragni and Rado's chosen method of

revision. By investigating how *Hair* made meaning in a new cultural context, we can better understand the nature and significance of time-boundedness, as well as the exigencies of reviving theatrical works that are similarly moored to the past.

The original Broadway production of *Hair* arrived on the Great White Way on 26 April 1968 after two successive runs Off-Broadway in the final months of 1967: a six-week limited engagement at Joseph Papp's Public Theater and a forty-five performance run at a midtown discotheque known as the Cheetah. Directed by Tom O'Horgan, the musical depicted a band of hippies known only as "the tribe" as they advocated for peace, free love, clean air, long hair, communal living, psychedelics, and higher consciousness in an abandoned theatre space. Throughout *Hair's* first act, various members of the tribe introduced themselves to the audience, catalogued the primary values of 1960s counterculture in song, and made preparations for the "be-in," a protest event modeled after the "Human Be-In" held in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park on 14 January 1967 that preceded the city's widely storied Summer of Love. *Hair's* fictional "be-in" occurred at the close of the musical's first act, during which the characters voiced their opposition to the Vietnam War and famously shed their clothes. Additionally, the men of the tribe—save for the wistful idealist Claude—burned their draft cards in a marked act of defiance. A sizable portion of the musical's second act attended to Claude's inner conflict regarding his conscription to military service. Members of the tribe begged Claude to dodge the draft and take refuge in Canada; however, a drug-fueled nightmare before his scheduled induction prompted him to forsake both his friends and hippie life. The musical ended with Claude's death and the tribe's collective call for peace.

Hair's rootedness in 1960s culture is perhaps most obviously attributed to the central role that the hippie movement and the Vietnam War play in its dramaturgy. The primary assumptions, anxieties, and values that typified hippie life sit at the forefront of *Hair's* thirty-two songs and connective scenes. The musical depicts the counterculture's extreme distrust of and resistance to all forms of authority and presents a damning critique of the United States government and Selective Service System. In an attempt to illustrate these various aspects of hippie culture, members of the musical's tribe openly swear, mock their elders and government officials, manhandle an American flag, touch each other, touch themselves, consume a wide array of legal and illegal pharmaceuticals, and protest the war.

At the same time, *Hair* espouses the importance of community and demonstrates the separatist rhetoric of the hippie movement. Timothy S. Miller claims that repudiation of the Vietnam War led to wholesale rejection of the dominant culture, its metanarratives, and the status quo in order

to create an alternate, more egalitarian society (xvii). Moreover, David Farber suggests that the impulse to create new communities is evidenced by the appearance of hippie districts in cities such as Atlanta, Chicago, Austin, Lawrence, and Fayetteville: “The counterculture was about space, about taking over a few city blocks or a few acres of country side and trying to make a world out of it, a place where all the old rules were up for grabs and where, as the saying went, you could take a trip without a ticket” (169). The notion of constructing a new domain of existence is integral to *Hair* as the musical’s action rests on the tribe’s occupation of an empty theatre. In repurposing the space as a site for their congregation, Claude and his friends not only fashion a sanctuary from the dominant culture, but also design a community built upon their own values. The lyrics to “Aquarius,” *Hair*’s opening number, present this task as the tribe’s modus operandi. As Raymond Knapp notes, “Aquarius” is an incantation whose melody and lyrics present the tribe’s somewhat naïve belief that the approaching era will present a society malleable enough for them to sculpt (157). *Hair*’s original Broadway production thus provided spectators with a living portrait of fast-growing hippie enclaves and a world guided by the hippie conscience. Michael Butler, the politician-turned-producer who transferred the musical from the Public Theater to Broadway’s Biltmore Theatre, identified *Hair*’s greatest achievement as documenting “the flowering of a new society,” and in so doing concisely described the musical’s central dramaturgical premise (qtd. in Lawrenson 166). From the opening vamp of “Aquarius” to the final strains of “Let the Sunshine In,” the production revealed the tribe’s collective efforts to create their own civilization in the Biltmore Theatre.

Presenting an accurate reflection of hippie culture was of great concern to Ragni and Rado when they began to construct *Hair*’s libretto. The counterculture’s zest for life and its public promulgation of peace, love, and freedom fascinated both writers and compelled them to initiate the project. Taken as they were with the hippie movement, Ragni and Rado did not identify as hippies at the start of their collaboration and sought to learn more about the culture by observing the longhaired denizens of New York City’s Greenwich Village in 1965—monitoring and documenting the appearance, vernacular, and behavior of unwitting subjects, most frequently at anti-war demonstrations, happenings, or be-ins. The “field notes” of this ethnographic study became the raw material from which the authors fashioned *Hair*’s libretto and lyrics (Horn 24–25). Additionally, the librettists and director Tom O’Horgan recruited several members of *Hair*’s Broadway company directly from the streets of New York City. In an effort to endow the production with counterculture credibility, O’Horgan felt it best to forgo casting musical theatre professionals and instead invited

individuals who “looked right” and could convincingly interpret Galt MacDermot’s score to join the tribe (54–55). Consequently, ninety percent of the production’s ensemble had no formal performance training or experience prior to *Hair* (Thelen 161).

Rado and Ragni’s libretto to *Hair* repeatedly confirmed the Vietnam era as the musical’s temporal setting with a surfeit of references to its present day. The musical’s book and lyrics contained a total of forty-five allusions to American culture in the late 1960s and included mentions of some of the foremost filmmakers, actors, musicians, politicians, religious leaders, visual artists, fictional characters, household products, and books of the day. Among these references were Federico Fellini, Timothy Leary, Tuesday Weld, Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor, Doris Day, Annette Funicello, Andy Warhol, Kate Smith, Rabbi Benjamin Schultz, Pope Paul VI, the Grateful Dead, George Wallace, George Harrison, Mick Jagger, James Brown, Aretha Franklin, Rinso Detergent, King Korn Stamps, Halo Shampoo, Vice President Hubert Humphrey, President Lyndon B. Johnson, future President Richard Nixon, and Ophiel’s *The Art and Practice of Astral Projection*. The authors also scattered fourteen allusions to recognizable figures from the 1930s and 1940s throughout the libretto in order to highlight the growing generation gap between *Hair*’s band of hippies and their elders. These cultural figures included Margaret Mead, Betty Crocker, Tonto, Buckwheat, Mary Pickford, Calvin Coolidge, Clark Gable, Scarlett O’Hara, Wonder Woman, Veronica Lake, Little Orphan Annie, and Ethel Merman. The overabundance of period references, fifty-nine in total, suggests that Ragni and Rado sought to align the world of their musical with the world outside of the Biltmore Theatre. By continuously remarking the American present and recent past, *Hair*’s authors established and reified the musical’s temporal setting. They also, however inadvertently, tailored their libretto to the contemporaneous sensibilities of 1960s audiences. As a result, *Hair* tacitly welcomed any spectators capable of reading the musical’s cultural signifiers, regardless of their connection to the hippie movement.

Several of *Hair*’s period references emerged from moments of improvisation, which played a central role in the musical’s development. Lorrie Davis, a member of the original Broadway cast who would later become the production’s chief historian, reports that Ragni and Rado gave O’Horgan license to shape the musical’s libretto by incorporating moments of extemporaneous dialogue. However, actor improvisation was a regular feature of the director’s rehearsals and O’Horgan continuously revised the book in order to integrate the cast’s contributions. As a result, the first complete version of the Broadway libretto was not transcribed until days after the musical’s official Broadway opening (109–10). The director also encour-

aged his actors to embrace the spirit of improvisation regularly throughout the musical's run. Consequently, members of the tribe frequently abandoned the musical's established text and contrived new dialogue during performances, which meant that *Hair* was a musical without a stable text. Performances could, and frequently did, change on a nightly basis given a individual tribe member's demeanor, creative instinct, or intemperance. As drug use was a common feature of *Hair's* backstage culture, intoxicated actors routinely went off script and ad-libbed their performances, requiring their more sober colleagues to alter dialogue or modify the order of songs (Horn 91).

While the musical's critical reception varied greatly, most reviewers agreed that *Hair* reflected the turbulence and uncertainty of the historical moment from which it emerged more than any other musical to play Broadway in the 1960s and praised the contemporaneity of its subject matter and score. Those critics who defended the musical identified its congruence of form, content, and cultural *zeitgeist* as its greatest strength and most singular feature. In his enthusiastic review for the *New York Times*, Clive Barnes hailed the musical as a theatrical achievement due to the creative innovation represented by its form and the candor with which it presented its content: "The show is the first Broadway musical in some time to have the authentic voice of today rather than the day before yesterday" (289). *Time* attributed the musical's daring to its focus on the youth culture and described its features in counterculture terms: "The religion that *Hair* preaches, and often screeches, is flower power, pot, and protest. Its music is pop rock, and its dialogue is mostly graffiti" (72). Aside from Barnes and Mishkin, few critics addressed the musical's political commentary or anti-draft stance; consequently, most discussions of *Hair's* correlation to the current *zeitgeist* were generally confined to the musical's use of rock music and its depiction of counterculture values. Most critics, including John J. O'Connor of *The Wall Street Journal*, sought to warn theatregoers of *Hair's* potential to offend conservative sensibilities, but O'Connor still encouraged readers to attend the production by forecasting its historical significance:

It has to be stressed, however, that *Hair* will not be to everyone's liking. It rips into to everything from parents to U.S. "abduction centers" to Kate Smith. It propounds everything from psychedelia to ambisexuality. It has long-haired boys, a pregnant flower child, and a brief nude scene using both sexes. If any of these things are more than enough to turn you quite definitely off, stay clear of this one. No matter the reaction to the content, though, I suspect the form will be important to the history of the American musical. (289)

The critic went on to suggest *Hair* might incite an artistic revolution on Broadway and likened the musical to earlier landmark musicals including *Pal Joey*, *Oklahoma!*, and *West Side Story*. John Simon ended his assessment for *The Hudson Review* on a similar note, asserting that *Hair*'s contemporaneity was certain to rejuvenate the American musical theatre (167).

Following its April 1968 premiere, the first Broadway production of *Hair* aroused national debate, attracted a loyal confederacy of young fans, and became, in the words of Gerald Bordman, "far and away the most important musical offering of the season, possibly of the era" (658). Although the musical received only two Tony Award nominations in 1969 and failed to win a single prize, its popularity with audiences and its overall commercial success sustained a four-year run at the Biltmore Theatre, where it played 1,750 performances. Attempting to capitalize on the Broadway production's success, Michael Butler scattered the musical across the United States, installing fourteen open-run companies in such cities as Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Boston, Seattle, Phoenix, St. Paul, Miami, Detroit, and Honolulu that ran concurrently with the Broadway production. *Hair* historian Barbara Lee Horn claims that the total grosses from these companies exceeded eighty million dollars (xiv). Butler and producing partner Bertrand Castelli would go on to mount over twenty international productions of *Hair* in cities such as London, Munich, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Paris, Sydney, Tokyo, Toronto, Belgrade, Tel Aviv, Mexico City, Helsinki, Buenos Aires, Madrid, Lisbon, and Amsterdam. The musical's cast recording earned Gold Record status from the Recording Industry Association of America and won the Grammy Award for Best Score of an Original Show Album in 1969. Two years later, the recording received Multi-Platinum status after having sold over three million copies. Additionally, the National Association of Recording Merchandisers named the album the best-selling cast recording from 1969 to 1971 (Gross 32). Furthermore, approximately 300 covers of MacDermot's songs for *Hair* were recorded by popular musical artists of the day during the musical's first two years on Broadway. The cadre of musicians to record a tune from the musical included Nina Simone, The 5th Dimension, Diana Ross and the Supremes, Engelbert Humperdinck, Anthony and the Imperials, Oliver, Andy Williams, The Cowsills, Shirley Bassey, Liza Minnelli, Sergio Mendes and the Brazil '66, Strawberry Alarm Clock, and Barbra Streisand. *Hair*'s long run on Broadway, coupled with its substantial profits and undeniable presence around the world then suggest that the musical became a cultural phenomenon that saturated the global *zeitgeist*, and its corresponding ubiquity helped to cement its status as an emblem of the current era beyond its form and content.

In the midst of *Hair*'s considerable success, Peter Schjeldahl of the *New York Times* reviewed the musical for third time in September 1970 and declared the musical obsolete. In his estimation, the American cultural landscape had changed dramatically since the *Hair*'s premiere, particularly in the wake of Richard Nixon's inauguration. He then suggested that hippie culture was in a state of decline and growing discord between *Hair* and the current *zeitgeist* had caused the musical's initial charm to diminish:

The three years of history that have changed me along with everyone else have also left a perceptible patina of age on *Hair*—a patina which no amount of newly minted anti-Nixon-and-Agnew jokes can dissipate. . . . [*Hair*] was America's first "relevant" musical. Unfortunately, relevance as a style is treacherous; it does not age gracefully, but rather passes from youth to senility without intermission. Watching the vividly real, passionate young folks of *Hair* today, one is repeatedly shocked by the rusty creak of allusions to Be-Ins, by the quaint ritual strewing of daises, by the sanguine vision of easy interracial harmony, and by innumerable other instant relics of an already doddering sensibility. (2-1)

Numerous historians confirm that the hippie movement was alive and anti-war demonstrations continued throughout the early 1970s, thereby refuting Schjeldahl's assessment of current events. His premise, however, deserves some credence as President Nixon gradually reduced the number of American soldiers stationed in South Vietnam in 1969—a process that would continue until the suspension of the draft in January of 1973. Furthermore, Schjeldahl's pessimistic evaluation of *Hair* arguably forecast the dilemma that the musical's contemporaneity would pose in later years. Viewing the musical as tied to a fleeting present, the critic shrewdly predicted that the passage of time could strip *Hair* of its relevance and meaning. Given this argument, it is perhaps fitting that when the Broadway production of *Hair* finally closed on 1 July 1972—seven months before Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho's signing of a cease-fire agreement in Paris that would begin the process of bringing the Vietnam conflict to an end—the era that produced the musical was on the verge of closing as well.

Hair's firm roots in 1960s culture would prove their strength when the musical received its first Broadway revival in 1977, five years after the original production's close. Michael Butler financed and oversaw the new staging, and according to Lorrie Davis, had come to approach the work of producing *Hair* as a spiritual calling (40). In an interview with the *New York Times*, Butler admitted that his motives for bringing *Hair* back to Broadway were ultimately selfish: "I wanted to see it again" (qtd. in Sandrow D26). In order to realize this desire, Butler reassembled the musical's original creative team and charged them with the task of restaging the

original 1968 production as authentically as possible. Reviving *Hair* in this manner allowed Butler to advertise the production as “historically accurate” and market the production to two distinct audiences. Theatre-goers who did not see *Hair* during its initial Broadway run would now have the opportunity to experience the musical in its original form, and *Hair* enthusiasts could relive their previous encounters with the musical (Hosefros C16). Butler’s promises of accuracy and authenticity, however unwittingly, suggested that the musical and its era were now consigned to history and the new production’s central conceit would differ than from that of the original production. Instead of reflecting the current *zeitgeist* and presenting a contemporaneous event, the revival would aim to resurrect a past era and replicate a past performance.

In guaranteeing accuracy and authenticity, Butler disregarded *Hair*’s time-bound nature and presumed that the musical as performed in 1968 would resonate with audiences in 1977. His pledge also suggested the bonds that once tied the musical to American culture were still viable or could be restored easily. The cultural landscape at the time of *Hair*’s first Broadway revival, however, differed greatly from that of its original production. The Vietnam War ended two years prior with the capture of Saigon and the United States. Jimmy Carter, the newly-elected president whose campaign promises included a vow to restore the American populace’s trust in the presidency and government institutions, enjoyed a high approval rating. Moreover, the communitarian spirit that guided *Hair* and the 1960s counterculture writ large gave way to what journalist Tom Wolfe identified as “The Me Decade.” According to Wolfe, the 1970s American populace eschewed concern for collective bodies such as family, community, and country, and focused instead on personal improvement and introspection, an impulse that resulted in widespread preoccupation the self (26–40). Christopher Lasch observed similar behavior throughout the decade and expanded on several of Wolfe’s claims in *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*. By his charge, the unpopular Vietnam War and a series of recent cultural flashpoints such as the Watergate scandal and the resignation of Richard Nixon caused the American people to lose their faith in the government, their trust in institutions of authority and power, and their concern for the nation’s continued wellbeing (5). As a result, they abandoned the utilitarian rhetoric of earlier decades and focused instead on their own self-preservation.

Furthermore, Peter N. Carroll contends that the Vietnam War had begun to disappear from American public discourse by the late 1970s. In an attempt to forget the atrocities of the previous decade and the decisive loss that the United States’ participation in the Vietnam conflict represented, the American people declined to discuss the subject of war openly (314). Con-

sequently, the war remained relatively unacknowledged in the popular culture outside a smattering of published memoirs including Michael Herr's *Dispatches* (1977) and Phillip Caputo's *A Rumor of War* (1977) and feature films such as Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter* (1978) and Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979). In 1978, the Reverend Theodore Hesburgh, President of the University of Notre Dame, theorized that the cause of this distinct and wholesale reticence in the 1970s could be attributed to the fact that the Vietnam War permeated all aspects of American life in the 1960s:

The American people tend to put unpleasant and unsuccessful events far behind them as quickly as possible. While the decade was in progress, one heard or spoke of the war many times a day every day. It was an omnipresent incubus. Now one rarely speaks about the war or hears about it unless something unusual happens, like, another presidential pardon or a commission to search for those still "Missing in Action." (xi)

Moreover, Carroll contends that 1970s American youth were decidedly apolitical, anti-social, and susceptible to the charms of the social mainstream. The same distrust of authority that prompted self-interest also bred a malaise among adolescents that manifest as a pursuit of materialism and conformity in some corners of youth culture, and a predilection for anger, violence, and vandalism in others (264–266).

Beyond shifts in collective thought, the figure of the hippie and the counterculture ethos had begun to fade from American culture by the late 1970s. Miller claims that aspects of the counterculture endured after the movement's end due to the fact that markers of hippie life—long hair, colorful clothing, rock music, profane language, concern for the environment, drug use, and sexual freedom—influenced fashion, art, and behavior in the United States for years to come (144). Even so, the reformist ambitions, communitarian spirit, and separatist ethic that characterized *Hair* and the hippie movement contradicted the 1970s youth culture. The cynicism and self-interest of the moment rendered the hippie, an idealist and advocate of peace and love, quaint if not entirely absurd. Thus, *Hair's* ties to American culture had atrophied in the five years that separated its original Broadway production and its first Broadway revival. The absence of a war, disinterest in remembering the Vietnam era, widespread narcissism, and the dissolution of the hippie movement meant that Butler's desire for authenticity was impractical and the revival's creative team would need to reconsider their approach to *Hair* if the production was going to have any chance of cohering to the current cultural moment.

The task of restoring *Hair's* links to the American *zeitgeist* fell to Ragni and Rado, who elected to revise portions of their original libretto. The

musical's original wartime setting, cast of characters, narrative, and depiction of the hippie movement remained unchanged; however, the authors traded several of the book's now dated cultural allusions for references to figures that 1970s spectators would more easily recognize. Among these substitutions were mentions of singer Anita Bryant, electronics retailer Crazy Eddie, current first daughter Amy Carter, current Ugandan President Idi Amin, and Unification Church founder Reverend Sun Myung Moon. A passing reference to transgender tennis star Renée Richards was relatively topical, as she had been denied entry to the US Open in 1976. Even more current was a mention of Jedi Master Obi Wan Kenobi, a character from George Lucas's *Star Wars* which opened to critical and commercial acclaim five months before the start of *Hair's* return engagement. Earlier allusions to Veronica Lake and Little Orphan Annie were replaced with references to Farrah Fawcett and Andrea McArdle respectively. Having risen to fame in 1976 with the premiere of ABC Television's police drama *Charlie's Angels*, Fawcett gained notoriety, much like Lake, for her distinctive and identifiable hairstyle. The naming of McArdle proved to be a reference to the current Broadway season as the young actress made her Broadway debut in Charles Strouse and Martin Charnin's new musical *Annie*, based on the "Little Orphan Annie" comic strip, at the Alvin Theatre four months earlier. The amended libretto also included allusions to recent events including the San Clemente Fire of 1976, the New York City Black-out of 1977, and the current Broadway revival of *The King and I* starring Yul Brynner. Members of the tribe mentioned these events and carried new protest signs with such slogans as, "Only You Can Prevent Wildfires," "Con Ed Goofed," and "See Yul Brynner in *Hair*" (Horn 111).

Ragni and Rado updated a fair number of *Hair's* cultural references, but several of the original libretto's allusions endured as the public figures mentioned were still familiar to the American public. As in the 1968 production, members of the tribe cited Doris Day, Annette Funicello, Wonder Woman, and Buckwheat as persons they admired for their signature hairstyles. While these figures remained with the 1970s cultural consciousness, their meaning and significance as culture signifiers had arguably shifted since 1968. Day and Funicello cultivated a public image of wholesome and youthful femininity throughout the 1950s and 1960s vis-à-vis a series of successful romantic comedies and beach party movies respectively. By the late 1970s, both actresses had left their film careers and made only sporadic appearances on television programs. While still recognizable names, both Day and Funicello were most closely associated with American culture between the Korean War and the Vietnam War. Moreover, their current ages meant that both actresses now represented the generation of Americans that *Hair's* tribe actively distrusted and opposed. Similarly, Buck-

wheat continued to live in the popular culture as *Our Gang* short films aired on syndicated television throughout the 1970s; however, the character was arguably a relic from a forgotten era, having first appeared onscreen in 1934. Wonder Woman, an abiding American icon since the 1940s, was arguably the only figure who earned new cultural visibility and significance in the 1970s when she appeared on the first cover of *Ms.* in 1972 and became both a symbol of second-wave feminism and an object of analysis by several feminist scholars (Lepore 294). Widespread enthusiasm for the heroine led to the 1975 premiere and three-season run of ABC Television's *Wonder Woman* series starring Lynda Carter.

The result of Ragni and Rado's approach to revision was temporal ambiguity. The introduction of allusions to the current *zeitgeist* and retention of references to *Hair's* original milieu—several of which now carried new connotations for audiences—caused the musical to reference two eras simultaneously. Where the original libretto's period signifiers helped to align the musical, its audience, and the present-day, the revised signifiers created slippages of meaning that separated them. Further contributing to this divided nature was the fact that Rado and Ragni composed new dialogue for *Hair* that allowed members of the tribe to address social issues of the present day. Sheila, the tribe's political activist, explicated some of the chief concerns of second-wave feminism (Horn 111). Likewise, tribal leader and drug enthusiast Berger referenced current cultural dialogues over the gay rights movement. The character's only true political critique in *Hair's* original libretto took the form of a direct-address monologue in which he impersonated a middle-aged society woman who advocated for the execution of drug addicts. Berger's persona cited a crisis in morality as justification for this proposal and expounded her position by recounting a lunch conversation with her more liberal-minded friend, silent film star Mary Pickford (Ragni and Rado, 1968 version, 43). In identifying his alter ego as a contemporary of Pickford, Berger referenced an American culture long since passed. Moreover, his monologue served to not only highlight the ever-increasing generation gap, but also paint his elders as pugnacious and murderous. Ragni and Rado's revised monologue for the 1977 revival also gestured to a fissure between the generations, but used a different social issue to do so. Berger's alter ego identified anti-gay activist Anita Bryant as her lunchtime companion and described their shared anxiety over not being able to single out members of the queer community through visual signifiers. She then proceeded to enumerate the ways in which her own son's effeminacy mirrored conduct historically attributed to gay men and used the term "faggot" seventeen times to describe a wide array of stereotyped behaviors (Ragni and Rado, 1977 version, n. pag.). On its surface, this amendment to *Hair's* text merely invoked Bryant's recent

“Save Our Children” Campaign, which began in June 1977 and led to the revocation of anti-discrimination ordinances in Dade County, Florida. More significantly, it introduced an undisguised acknowledgment of queer identity that did not truly exist in the previous Broadway production. In *Hair*'s original text, several characters espoused a belief in free love and admitted to having sexual relations with a variety of gendered partners. Tribe member Woof confessed an attraction to Mick Jagger and was often coded as gay in performance throughout the musical's first Broadway run; however, none of *Hair*'s principal characters openly identified as queer and any discussion of sexual identity prior to the 1977 revival was decidedly apolitical (Johnson 68). Berger's revised monologue then recognized, however briefly, queer identity and current anti-gay animus, and in so doing, provided the tribe with a contemporary political cause to protest in addition to the Vietnam War.

While Ragni and Rado's textual revisions attempted to endow *Hair* with contemporary relevance, the hippie movement's objection to the Vietnam War still served as the musical's conflict and the threat of a draft summons continued to motivate character behavior. These aspects of the *Hair*'s dramaturgy kept the musical securely anchored to its original era. The revival's temporal ambiguity then derived from the revised libretto's anachronistic cultural signifiers and the material contradictions between the musical's setting and the current *zeitgeist*, particularly the fact that hippies no longer represented the American youth culture. In an attempt to rationalize this discord, Ragni and Rado provided the following justification in the 1977 production's Playbill: “It is the nature of *Hair*, born in the 60s to live in the present, and, in its free form, to make reference to today.” This statement not only confirmed the revival's use of anachronism as intentional, but also publicly acknowledged the inherent paradox that *Hair*'s synchronicity with the 1960s presented. The burden of tracking time now rested with spectators. Without a specific milieu to ground its narrative, *Hair* vacillated between decades, rendering the musical and its revival temporally adrift and historically incoherent.

Rather than follow Ragni and Rado's impulse for revision, O'Horgan complied with Butler's demand for authenticity and worked to reproduce his original staging using the 1968 production's prompt script to resurrect stage pictures and bits of physical comedy that had developed organically in rehearsal nine years earlier. In an interview with *The SoHo Weekly News*, O'Horgan defended this approach to revival, claiming that he wanted to revisit his original process in order to gain a deeper understanding of how *Hair* was created (Harris 23). Expressing similar thoughts in an interview with *Cue Magazine*, the director stated, “If you make a movie or a tape of something, it's done. It exists. You can put it in and can play it back to

remind yourself, anytime you feel like it. But to relive a show, you have to go back in time and examine every moment, every choice” (qtd. in Stasio 11). O’Horgan’s justifications, however, relied on somewhat faulty rhetoric as his direction of *Hair* in 1968 involved collaboration alongside the musical’s authors and original Broadway cast. Butler’s demand for authenticity stood counter to O’Horgan’s original direction as it forced the him to intentionally restore staging rather than to create new moments with new actors over the course of an extended rehearsal process. Improvisation was still a feature of the revival, but in a much more intentional and highly structured manner. Furthermore, reproducing *Hair* as a museum piece required the director to work from a more stable edition of the musical’s libretto. The fluid nature of *Hair’s* original libretto caused the 1968 production to resist fixedness. Thus, the conscious attempt to create a single, definitive book arguably hardened what once was amorphous and transformed the musical’s open libretto into a more distinctly closed text.

According to Lorrie Davis, the actors assembled for the 1977 production represented the most significant deviation from the musical’s original production (Horn 112). Where *Hair* originally served as a performance vehicle for members of the counterculture, the dissolution of the hippie movement prohibited O’Horgan from selecting performers in the manner he had nine years earlier. Moreover, the paltry two-month rehearsal process that Butler provided required the director to hire musical theatre professionals who could metabolize *Hair’s* book, music, and staging quickly. These actors did not necessarily share *Hair’s* counterculture values, and as a result, the synergy that the musical once shared with its original cast dissipated. Instead of genuinely embodying the counterculture ethos as O’Horgan’s original tribe had in 1968, the revival’s actors presented the facsimile of a hippie commune with the aid of period costumes, as well as choreography and staging developed nearly ten years prior. The brief rehearsal process also forestalled the creation of a community among *Hair’s* new tribe. Having first come together for the musical’s workshop at the Public Theater, the original tribe could convincingly project intimate relationships as they had performed together for over a year before appearing on Broadway. Most of the actors cast in the revival, however, came to *Hair* with no prior ties to the musical or each other. Butler later conceded that the revival’s cast did not unify as a result of the accelerated rehearsal period: “The tribe was totally professional and they had no real love for the piece. They weren’t really anchored to it. Tom was directing it, but we didn’t have that time of being together. You really need that time” (qtd. in Johnson 177). The company’s lack of camaraderie and personal investment in *Hair’s* message was then another condition of the revival that thwarted the authenticity Butler desired. Emptied of their original ideology and

urgency, the musical's hippies were reduced to stereotypes and *Hair* itself represented a hackneyed vehicle for performed anachronisms rather than the contemporaneous artistic achievement it had once been.

The 1977 Broadway revival of *Hair* opened on 5 October 1977 to eight categorical pans from the major New York theatre critics. Headlines such as "Bald," "Defoliated," and "Revived *Hair* Shows Its Grey" demonstrated their collective antipathy. While none of the reviewers acknowledged Rado and Ragni's textual revisions, nearly all of them questioned *Hair's* cultural relevance and the timing of its revival. Richard Eder of the *New York Times* aptly summarized the critical consensus when he declared *Hair* "too far gone to be timely; too recently gone to be history or even nostalgia" (183). Jack Kroll of *Newsweek* echoed this appraisal: "A lot has happened in the decade since *Hair* first blew in our eyes, and the Revelation According to St. Hippie is both too close chronologically and too distant emotionally to work now" (185). Most critics addressed the musical's dated content, pointing to the moribund hippie movement as proof of the musical's obsolescence and questioning the need for *Hair* during peacetime. John Beaufort of the *Christian Science Monitor* also attended to the musical's form and argued that *Hair's* previously shocking qualities had "degenerated into banalities, as unattractive as ever" (185). Similarly, Eder chided the tribe's use of improvisation and audience address, professing that the musical's moments of "planned spontaneity" were no longer startling or novel (183).

Hair's cultural viability in the present day was also of concern to Howard Kissel of *Women's Wear Daily*, who insisted that the musical had become a period piece before the end of its first Broadway run and dismissed the revival with little justification. T. E. Kalem of *Time* magazine, however, offered a slightly more nuanced assessment of why the musical's dramaturgy appeared outmoded in revival. Without a politically engaged, morally enraged, and mobilized youth culture to mirror, *Hair's* tribe read as incoherent:

The show's major bolstering prop was always offstage—the Vietnam War—and its only emotional cohesion was the passions that the war aroused. Those passions are spent, the war has ended, and even more pertinently, it was lost. That is a psychic national wound from which the U.S. certainly has not recovered and which most Americans are extremely reluctant to probe. (185)

The revival's short run of 43 performances lends some credence to Kalem's claims, as do the unenthusiastic reviews that Milos Foreman's 1979 film adaptation of *Hair* received. Per Kalem's rhetoric, future revivals of the musical would require a cultural moment comparable to the era that occasioned *Hair*. It would also benefit from an offstage social cause analogous

to the Vietnam War that would make the passions and protest of *Hair's* tribe more relevant to the theatergoing public.

This confluence of timing and cause would not occur for another thirty-one years, when *Hair* returned to Broadway in a widely celebrated 2008 revival directed by Diane Paulus. The production occurred in tandem with the conclusion of George W. Bush's second term as president, and the prevailing social milieu seemed to exhibit symptoms of distress analogous to the 1960s. Following the 2001 attack on New York City's World Trade Center, the United States entered the longest period of military conflict since the Vietnam War. War with Afghanistan gave way to war with Iraq. While the threat of a government-sponsored draft was virtually nonexistent, both campaigns received sharp criticism from the political left, including the Democratic Congress and the youth culture. Moreover, Bush's prolonging and broadening of the conflicts aroused animus for both the president and his cabinet (Bennett 252). The financial crisis of 2007—triggered by the collapse of the housing market and resulting in a national recession—polarized Americans on both sides of the political spectrum. The 2008 presidential election, a tumultuous campaign that featured the first African-American presidential nominee and the second female candidate for vice-president, incited cultural dialogues on race and gender, and escalated national debates on a variety of social issues including immigration, reproductive rights, and same-sex marriage—particularly among American youth. The timing of the musical's return thus proved remarkably opportune, particularly as Barack Obama, the country's "hope and change" candidate, assumed the presidency three months before Paulus's production opened on Broadway. Several major New York theatre critics confirmed this and claimed that *Hair* read as surprisingly fresh in the current *zeitgeist*. As Jeremy Gerard of *Bloomberg* stated, "*Hair*, for all its references to hippies, Vietnam, free love, and the revolution, feels utterly of the moment in its exuberance, its power to involve, and, in Diane Paulus's entrancing production, to move us" (Gerard). *Newsday's* Linda Winer similarly noted, "[*Hair*] grows again into an important, lovable, achingly timely piece about the horrors and the marvels, the burdens and the wild fun of young social change. Despite all that is different since 1967 . . . the show finds a modern pulse of fury and hope without betraying the specifics of a period piece about Vietnam and all flavors of liberation" (B4).

In addition to a more hospitable social milieu, the musical seemed to benefit from the fact that forty years had passed since *Hair's* Broadway premiere. Enmity for the Vietnam War presumably dissipated in the interim and allowed spectators familiar with the conflict to view the musical with some critical distance and perspective. For theatregoers less acquainted with the 1960s, however, *Hair's* age presented new barriers to intelli-

bility. In 1977, the musical represented the recent past and much of its content, while outdated, remained within the American collective consciousness. In 2008, *Hair* depicted an undoubtedly bygone era and featured subject matter, characters, and cultural allusions that would surely read as arcane to young audiences. In order to prepare *Hair* for present-day spectators, Paulus collaborated with Rado to revise the musical's libretto once again and began by excising thirty-nine of the original libretto's fifty-nine period references. The twenty cultural allusions that remained referenced the major political figures of the 1960s (Lyndon B. Johnson, Richard Nixon, and Hubert Humphrey), entertainers of the era who continued to live in the public consciousness (Mick Jagger, James Brown, and Aretha Franklin), or constituted lyrics to songs such as "Manchester, England," "Ain't Got No," and "Hair." By eliminating two-thirds of the musical's 1960s signifiers, Paulus and Rado increased the probability that spectators of various ages and various levels of cultural literacy would be able to understand and appreciate the musical's book.

Paulus also insisted on situating *Hair's* action one year earlier, in 1967. Viewing the year as a prelapsarian moment in the Vietnam era's historical narrative, the director wanted her revival to illustrate the hopeful idealism that spawned the hippie movement, spurred the Summer of Love, and was perhaps even more aligned with America's current year of "hope and change" (Grove 141–42). In order to clarify the musical's new milieu, Paulus and Rado expanded *Hair's* exposition and restored dialogue from the libretto used in the 1967 Public Theater production of *Hair*, directed by Gerald Freedman. One such reinstatement involved Sheila describing her participation in the 1967 march on the Pentagon, claiming that she and her compatriots (which would have included Allen Ginsburg, Jerry Rubin, Todd Gitlin, Abbie Hoffman, and other members of the Students for a Democratic Society) attempted to levitate the building through meditation and chanting. In another scene, Claude's parents castigated the tribe for their lack of patriotism and willful ignorance of foreign relations. Resurrecting this dialogue assisted in further illustrating the 1960s generation gap by articulating Cold War anxieties over communism, the nuclear arms race, and the imminent sexual revolution. The tribe's collective meditation, occurring in tandem with the parents' tirade, further telegraphed the counterculture's rejection of rhetoric and politics purported by their elders. Paulus and Rado's textual amendments also included new content aimed to provide spectators with additional historical context. One such addendum detailed the penalties for burning draft cards. All prior iterations of *Hair's* libretto contained a discussion of draft dodging or tampering with a draft summons; however, no one edition acknowledged the legal ramifications of these acts. Paulus and Rado's revised book cited the penalty as

five years of hard labor in a federal prison. Additionally, a new preface to “Colored Spade” provided Hud with an opportunity to justify the song’s presentation of racial slurs. Hud’s delivery of the lyrics is consistent with the black power movement of the 1960s and its attempt to reclaim such slights; however, the song as written utilizes language that has been all but banished from the collective American parlance (Farber 204). The new preamble then framed Hud’s solo number as a linguistic history of the black experience in the United States and allowed spectators unfamiliar with the black power movement to better understand the song’s larger dramaturgical function.

A hospitable *zeitgeist* and strategic textual revisions arguably slackened the bonds that once anchored *Hair* to its original era. Paulus’s revival still presented an ensemble of professional actors performing a facsimile of hippie life. Herein lies one of the greatest obstacles to reviving *Hair*: the musical’s intelligibility rests largely on the cultural legibility of the hippie. Naturally, the hippie was most coherent in the late 1960s as the hippie movement had reached its apex. The inevitable passage of time continuously distances audiences from the hippie movement and renders the image of the hippie strange or culturally indistinct. When *Hair* returned to Broadway in 1977, the hippie was still legible, but also obsolete. The hippie had been absent from American culture for nearly forty years when Paulus’s revival opened on Broadway in 2009 and was therefore a vestige of yesteryear. Dan Kois of *New York Magazine* praised the Paulus’s revival, but also avowed that the members of *Hair*’s new tribe were not true disciples of the counterculture as their presentation of self belied the hippie ethos:

The hairless armpits and pecs; the gym-toned six-packs diving into low-rise jeans; the highly polished smiles; the high notes bursting with melisma: All are reminders that this time around, the hippies are being played by ambitious actors and singers, some of whom are wearing shining, gleaming, streaming, flaxen, waxen wigs. I don’t mean to suggest that *Hair*’s bouncy young cast members are insincere; everything about their wide-eyed performances suggests they’ve bought into the show’s vibe in a big way. But though the cast’s astrology-larded *Playbill* bios are cheerfully slapdash, more than one makes room for personal-website URLs. (78)

The critic’s observation gestures to the fact that the hippie movement’s primary beliefs and aesthetics are ultimately incongruous with twenty-first-century Broadway production values, and further suggests that future Broadway revivals of *Hair* will only continue to present ensembles that imitate the American counterculture. Even so, Paulus’s revival found critical and financial success. The production ran for 519 performances,

grossed \$50,570,863, and earned the Drama Desk Award, the Outer Critics Circle Award, and the Tony Award for Outstanding Revival of a Musical.

The 1977 revival of *Hair*, while a critical and commercial failure, is informative as it helps to illuminate the degree to which *Hair* is time-bound. Michael Butler ordered an authentic replica of *Hair*'s first Broadway production, but Ragni and Rado's revisions to the musical's libretto repudiated any claims of authenticity, as did the fact that the open and improvisational nature of O'Horgan's original staging resisted reproduction. Consequently, the revival did not fully reflect the 1968 production in any manner other than its mise-en-scène. Ragni and Rado's choice to update *Hair*'s many cultural references illustrated an attempt to preserve the musical's presentism and to force congruence between the work and the current *zeitgeist*. These textual amendments, however, caused the musical to reference two different eras simultaneously, thereby rendering the work historically incoherent. Conversely, the intentional preservation of *Hair*'s form undermined the authors' attempts to modernize the musical and reified the work's strong aesthetic, thematic, and ideological connections to its original era. A study in contradictions, the production represented two contrasting strategies for revival, both of which were impeded by the musical's time-bound qualities and an incompatible *zeitgeist*.

Hair's profoundly time-bound nature indicates that additional approaches to reviving the musical will need to be developed as the work continues to age. The musical's period vernacular, aesthetics, themes, and ideologies will only continue to read as foreign to future audiences. Paulus's production, which featured crucial textual amendments and a complementary social milieu, represents one model for successfully reviving *Hair*. Its many accolades suggest that *Hair* can indeed resonate with contemporary audiences when both the directorial approach and the prevailing culture support the musical. As of this writing, NBC plans to broadcast a live televised production of *Hair* in 2019. The musical, presumably chosen because for its themes of political resistance, will play to a national audience of various ages and will undoubtedly require thoughtful revision in order to resonate with viewers. Helping a theatrical work to find congruence with future eras undergirds the project of revivals. Therefore, devising more strategies for making *Hair* and other popular, but time-bound works such as *Chess* (1988), *Rent* (1995), *Avenue Q* (2003), and *Dear Evan Hansen* (2016) coherent, compelling, and vital in later years is imperative. □

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