

# Musical humour and caricatures in *The Book of Mormon*

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## Abstract

This article examines the musical techniques used to create humour in the contemporary Broadway musical *The Book of Mormon*. Drawing on existing theories of parody, I argue that most songs initially rely on ‘straight’ and accurate imitations of other Broadway composers and pop-rock artists to set up an incongruity with the characters’ words or actions. There is a tendency then for these intertextual references to be layered or exaggerated, giving the joke in question an overblown quality. I adopt the novel label of a ‘musical caricature’ to describe such instances. This analysis thus presents a new methodological tool for studying musical humour; it also offers insights into *The Book of Mormon*’s critical success as well as the writers’ ability to evade censure for the crude and potentially offensive thematic content.

## Introduction: *The Book of Mormon*

*The Book of Mormon* opened on Broadway in 2011 to great acclaim: in addition to widely positive reviews, the show won nine Tony Awards (including Best Musical, Best Book of a Musical and Best Original Score), and continued an unbroken run at the Eugene O’Neill Theatre, New York through to March 2020. The show was conceived by a creative trio – Trey Parker, Matt Stone and Robert Lopez – who were collectively responsible for *South Park*, *Team America* and *Avenue Q*.<sup>1</sup> It should come as little surprise, then, that much of the early commentary around *The Book of Mormon* addressed its distinct comedic stylings and engagement with many facets of American popular culture. In his review, *New York Times* critic Ben Brantley described it as ‘something like a miracle. It both makes fun of and ardently embraces the all-American art form of the inspirational book musical. No Broadway show has so successfully had it both ways since Mel Brooks adapted his film *The Producers* for the stage a decade ago’ (Brantley 2011). Alongside such observations about the show’s self-reflexive nature, reviewers also highlighted the writers’ juxtaposition of sharp parodies alongside crude and scatological jokes (Brantley 2011; McNulty 2011; Vincentelli 2011; Ferguson 2013).

This article is animated by a similar interest in how instances of intertextuality intersect with and shape the comedic style of *The Book of Mormon*, with a particular

<sup>1</sup> All three are jointly credited for the book, lyrics and music.

focus on this relationship within the show's songs. In the first instance, I pinpoint the myriad stylistic references woven into the musical's score, with traces of classic rock, 1980s pop, and modern-era Disney ballads jostling alongside the 'embrace' of Broadway composers and tropes (old and new). My primary aim, however, is to examine the intertextual practices as examples of musical humour, which pertains to both the choice of references and how they are presented in songs. Drawing on Hutcheon (1985), I characterise the individual references as 'parody'. Yet the treatment and/or layering of this parodic content are frequently overblown; that is, the writers amplify the musical features and the associative implications of the source material. I therefore argue that many of the intertextual references of *The Book of Mormon* move beyond parody into *musical caricature*.

These two concepts are not mutually exclusive – rather I conceive musical caricature as an exaggerated form of parody, a transformation that is illuminated below through a range of examples. This aesthetic serves to enhance three main functions of the parodies within the musical. Firstly, the caricatures enhance script- and score-based jokes. Secondly, they embellish the satirical poses adopted by the show's writers, seemingly insulating them from criticism of the more questionable content in the musical. Thirdly, the caricatures overplay the narrative conventions and musical theatre tropes with which *The Book of Mormon* toys. Weschler *et al.* (2003) suggest that 'caricature invariably rests on the premise that outward appearances can be suitably exaggerated so as to emphasize personality traits'. So it is here, with the most prominent instances of musical caricatures of the show exaggerating and delighting in the 'personality traits' of the Broadway musical form itself.

This analytical work both aligns with and builds upon previous scholarly writing on *The Book of Mormon*.<sup>2</sup> Several authors have pursued the intertextual pathway. Rostosky, for instance, presents a number of 'models' for songs and notes the unexpected juxtapositions of this varied material (Rostosky 2017, pp. 109–10). Rush, in a similar vein, sees *The Book of Mormon* as exemplifying the modern 'bricolage musical' with its careful marriage of contrasting 'textual surfaces', each of which brings wider associations and meanings to bear on the narrative (Rush 2017b, pp. 162–96; see also Rush 2017a). Taken together, the authors compile an array of references, as pertaining to generalised stylistic elements (e.g. the song models), thematic parallels (e.g. with Rodgers and Hammerstein's Golden Age musicals) and the absurdist scattering of cultural figures throughout the show (e.g. the appearance of Darth Vader in 'You're Making Things Up Again'). While my approach is fundamentally similar to this work, I bring greater stylistic depth and precision to our understanding of the show's musical intertextuality, detailing both the overt and subtle imitations present in songs. Furthermore, I build on the work of Rostosky and Rush in aligning these findings with theories of musical humour, thus leading to a richer understanding of the show's comedic nature as a whole. These observations are also brought into contact with critiques of the lyrical content and characterisations of the Mormon missionaries and the Ugandan villagers (Cahn 2016; Hoxworth 2017). I suggest that it is precisely the distinct intertextual approach running throughout *The Book of Mormon* – the musical caricature – that conceals the problematic nature of this

<sup>2</sup> Academic interest in *The Book of Mormon* as a 'contemporary' show has been superseded only by the work conducted on *Hamilton*, which has been the subject of an edited collection (Lodge and Laird 2021) and special issues of *American Music* (see Garrett 2018) and *Studies in Musical Theatre* (see Severs 2018).

material, instead offering audiences the opportunity to indulge in the immediate pleasures of the Broadway idiom. Through my development of the caricature concept, I thus not only illuminate the idiosyncratic intertextual features of songs, but also bridge the existing themes that have emerged from scholarly and critical commentary writing about the musical.

### 'Two by Two' and a surfeit of jokes

I begin with 'Two by Two', which neatly encapsulates the general approach to musical humour in *The Book of Mormon*. Appearing soon after the prologue ('Hello'), the song presents the main characters (Elder Price and Elder Cunningham), their initial traits (the supreme self-confidence of the former; the dorky and hapless nature of the latter), and the basic premise of the story (the Mormons being told where they will be sent on their mission – which for Price and Cunningham is Uganda). 'Two By Two' broadly divides into three parts: Elder Price's recitative introduction (which later is reworked into a bridge section), up-tempo ensemble verses (in which the missionaries rejoice at their impending departure) and underscored dialogue (during which they find out their destination).

There are several intertextual threads at play. The up-tempo verses sit within a relatively generic and contemporary (i.e. pop-influenced) musical theatre realm, but with hints of soul and gospel influences – the syncopated rhythmic groove and layered vocal harmonies are reminiscent of songs from, for example, *Sister Act* (e.g. 'Hail Holy Queen', 'Spread the Love Around'). The recitative introduction and bridge offer more precise intertextual clues. The contemporary Broadway style remains evident through the statement–restatement–departure–conclusion (SRDC) phrase structure and enlivened harmonic language (e.g. the use of a secondary dominant of ii and added notes to triads). Of greater significance, though, is the ascending  $\hat{2}$ – $\hat{3}$  appoggiatura motion at the end of vocal phrases, heard in conjunction with a tonic chord (see bar four of [Figure 1](#)). This feature immediately recalls a range of musical theatre songs from different eras: 'Somewhere' from *West Side Story*, 'Someone Like You' from *Jekyll and Hyde*, and 'The New World' from *Songs For a New World*. Such references share a common thematic frame – 'Two by Two' is thus not drawing on a specific historical style, so much as a generic 'yearning musical theatre ballad'. In the bridge section (2:42), this melodic motion is reversed so that the stressed second scale degree falls to the tonic – with its dotted rhythm pattern, the melody is almost a direct quotation of 'Tomorrow' from *Annie*. And right on cue, Elder Price reveals what he is yearning for: a mission to Orlando, home of 'Sea World and Disney and Putt Putt'.

In essence, this moment reveals the parodic nature of the song. Linda Hutcheon defines parody as 'imitation with critical difference' (Hutcheon 1985, p. 36). The idea of 'critical difference' does not necessarily refer to social critique (which strays into the territory of satire), so much as that the 'difference' between the original and the imitation is foregrounded. For Hutcheon, this is what distinguishes parody from pastiche – which is also imitative but foregrounds the 'correspondence' between the two works (Hutcheon 1985, p. 38). The recitative verse and bridge section can thus be read as a parody of both a 'yearning' musical theatre style *and*, for a brief moment, 'Tomorrow'. The 'critical difference' between 'Two by Two' and its original sources is one of lyrical tone. There is neither the metaphorical poetry of, say, 'The New

The most im-por-tant time in a Mor-mon kid's life is his mis-sion  
Elder Price

Pno.

Figure 1. 'Two by Two', Recitative Introduction.<sup>3</sup>

World' ('A new world calls across the ocean / A new world calls across the sky...') nor the innocent optimism of 'Tomorrow' ('Tomorrow, tomorrow / I'll love ya, tomorrow / you're always a day away'). Rather, Price is breathlessly captivated by the crass commercialism of Disney, roller coasters and mini golf. The humour thus resides in the *incongruity* between his vision of longing relative to the musical world in which he sings. It is 'a mismatch or a surprising deviation between that which we expect and that which we confront' (Brøvig-Hanssen 2023, p. 107), an idea that has found ready application to many examples of musical humour (e.g. Winkler 1988; Covach 1991, 1995; Spirou 2017; Brøvig-Hanssen 2019). Yet this lyrical and thematic incongruity is made plain only because of a fundamental *congruity*. To draw on Michael Mera (via Mel Brooks), the song's stylistic foundation '[acts] as the "straight man", or comic foil to the other elements' (Mera 2002, p. 98). Put another way, the musical precision of the intertextual imitations is required as a setup so that the lyrical incongruity will register.

This formulation underpins the other prominent musical joke of 'Two by Two'. At the end of each up-tempo verse, the melodic line and chord progression come to rest on the tonic at exactly the anticipated point of the phrase – that is, the downbeat of the eighth bar. The verse rhyme scheme follows an AABB form with the rhymes occurring every two bars: in bar 6, the lyric 'sac-ri-fice' is set up to rhyme with 'We are the army of the Church of Jesus *Christ*' in bar 8, in tandem with the melodic and harmonic closure. The only problem is that this is not the end of the line – after 'Christ' there is a one-beat pause, before the Elders rapidly add 'of Latter Day Saints' (Figure 2). Again, there is a sense of a 'mismatch' between the expected phrase structure and that which unfolds, the octave drop from 'Christ' to 'of Latter Day Saints' emphasising this metric disruption (see Huron 2004, p. 701). Adding to the humour, each verse casts this 'tag' slightly differently: the second time, there is an extra beat before the additional words; the third time, the anticipated rhyme is between 'perch' and 'Church', thus requiring a lengthier additional phrase ('of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints'). The repeated incongruities serve as

<sup>3</sup> The examples of this article draw on the Piano-Conductor scores that are available for these shows. However, it should be acknowledged that musicals frequently undergo revisions between, say, Broadway and touring versions, which may lead to discrepancies between some scores. Where I am referring to precise musical details, I have added a timecode which, unless otherwise stated, refers to the recording from the original Broadway cast as available on streaming platforms. I do not believe that any of the analytical observations made above are so specific to one version or another that they would be rendered meaningless in some contexts.

Our two-year mis - sion is our sa - cri - fice, We are the

Expected phrase conclusion

ar - my of the Church of Je - sus Christ! (Of Lat - ter Day Saints.)

'Joke' conclusion

Figure 2. 'Two by Two', up-tempo verse cadence.

the point of 'difference' between 'Two by Two' and the contemporary Broadway style in which it sits, further marking the song as a parody.

'Two by Two' – and, specifically, the 'Orlando' joke – exemplifies the parodic approach pursued in other examples from *The Book of Mormon*: faithful imitations of other styles and songs, the associations of which are set against unexpected or out-of-place lyrical content. This raises the question of how one identifies the shift from parody to caricature. While 'Two by Two' is subtler than other examples, there is some exaggeration in the treatment of the musical jokes and intertextual references. Consider the 'of Latter Day Saints' tag line – with every repetition, there is a variation that mines the initial congruity for more laughs. By the time we reach the third verse, it is, essentially, a joke upon a joke upon a joke. We can interpret the 'Tomorrow' reference in a similar manner. That is, when we hear the fragment from *Annie* (set against 'Orlando' in the lyrics), it reinforces an incongruity that had already been established through the opening stylistic allusions. To present a hypothetical alternative, Price could have sung 'Orlando' without referencing 'Tomorrow' and the humorous mismatch would have remained in place – the additional intertextual layer operates according to the same comedic structure, but in the context of the song, it is deliberately excessive. This is the basis of the caricature approach: the parodic joke is made – and then it is made again.

### Satirical parodies, caricatures and Africa

A key feature of Hutcheon's conception of parody is its 'neutral' stance. She argues that instances of parody do not have to be prescribed in their 'intent and effect'; they can be, for example, humorous, mocking or satirical (Hutcheon 1985, pp. 20, 36). The openness of this position is useful in the present context: 'Two by Two' embraces its parodic qualities, but primarily for the purposes of eliciting laughter through unexpected musical events and gently mocking Elder Price. Having established the basic form of the musical caricature, we can turn to other examples that provoke stronger – and more controversial – interpretative possibilities. 'I Am Africa' and 'Hasa Diga Eebowei' are both parodies which develop into caricatures. Compared with 'Two by Two', their humour is directed towards the 'ridicule' of others' 'shortcomings' (Thorogood 2016, p. 216), yet it is not certain whose shortcomings are being



ridiculed. This is notable given the two numbers involve crass depictions of the Mormons, Africa and the Ugandan characters of the show.

The parodic content of each song is straightforward. 'I Am Africa' is founded on a musical bed of electric piano, foursquare phrasing, direct tonal movement and luscious chord sonorities (e.g. the 'soul' dominant and add2 tonic harmonies). These details place it straight into the world of a 1980s pop ballad. And not just any type of pop ballad – 'I Am Africa' apes a 1980s charity pop song, with the Mormon missionaries playing the roles of singing celebrities. This connection is made plain from the very first note, with the electric piano chord supported by a tonic chime, a timbral nod to the opening of 'Do They Know It's Christmas?' As the song progresses, the modulations, the contrapuntal vocals, and the repeated 'We are Africa' lyrics forge a link to 'We are the World'. Throughout the song, the Mormons sincerely intone their saccharine and non-sensical lyrics – for instance, 'I am Africa ... we are the tears of Nelson Mandela'; 'I am Africa, with the tears of the cheetah, my native voice will ring' – many of which make little sense, poetic or grammatical. The song emerges as a caricature partly through the lyrical content, which steadily becomes more absurd and tone-deaf: 'We are Africa, the Zebra and the Giraff-rica'; 'We are Africa, we are deepest, darkest Africa'. The indulgence in harmonic clichés also elevates the song beyond parody: where 'We are the World' features the obligatory step-up modulation for the final chorus, here there is a modulation after almost every section.<sup>4</sup>

'Hasa Diga Eebowei', as has been well noted (Cahn 2016; Hoxworth 2017; Rostovsky 2017, p. 109), takes a direct cue from *The Lion King's* 'Hakuna Matata'. The parallels are obvious: the use of marimba and imitation of 'African' drums; the call-and-response structure of the melody in four-bar phrases with the title line repeated as either the call ('Hakuna Matata') or the response ('Hasa Diga Eebowei'); and the myriad lyrical references to *The Lion King* made by Elder Cunningham ('Does it [hasa diga eebowei] mean no worries for the rest of your days?'). Further underscoring this relationship, the verse melody of 'Hasa Diga Eebowei' – ascending through the tonic triad and coming to rest on  $\hat{5}$  – closely imitates the instrumental theme of 'I Just Can't Wait To Be King'. It is also clear that the parody emerges through the deeply offensive lyrics sung by the Ugandans, incongruously set against the optimistic and cheerful associations of 'Hakuna Matata'. Rather than 'no worries', the Ugandans list off everything that may be of concern, before declaiming the titular lyric (which 'translates' to 'Fuck you, God!') as a resentful rejoinder about their current state. Much like the increasing ridiculousness of 'I Am Africa', there is an escalation of vulgarity through 'Hasa Diga Eebowei': from impoverishment, to AIDS and female circumcision, to paedophilia; and with increasing frequency of swear words, 'Fuck you God ...' (and extensions thereof) featuring almost constantly within the vocal polyphony for the final two choruses. The oppositional contrast between lyrics and music is established from the outset. It is as if the writers know, however, that there is no nuance to add to the joke – instead, as 'Hasa Diga Eebowei' progresses, the incongruity is continually and crudely magnified.

If it is clear how humour is *constructed* musically in these two songs, it is more ambiguous as to how this humour might be *interpreted*: who is the object of the joke?

<sup>4</sup> A number of the modulations are *descending* (i.e. from A to G $\flat$  major after the first verse), but allow the melodic line to be sung by the male ensemble at a higher octave, thereby matching the 'uplifting' sentiment.

One reading is that the songs stray towards satire. In the second verse of 'I Am Africa', Cunningham sings, 'I am Africa, just like Bono, I am Africa / I flew in here and became one with this land'. The joke continues as per the Mormons' first verse (in terms of ridiculous metaphors), but there is a clear dig at the colonialist naivety of 'celebrity aid', as epitomised by 'We are the World' and the 'enormous feelgood exercise' that was Band Aid's 'atrocious' 'Do They Know It's Christmas?' (Stanley 2013, p. loc. 10039). The parody, from this perspective, aims at Bob Geldof and others, with the banality of 'I Am Africa' referencing the pitifully inaccurate and empty lyrics of 1980s charity singles.<sup>5</sup> This kind of interpretation is akin to those who hear 'Hasa Diga Eebowei' as satirising Disney's 'romanticised' vision of Africa from *The Lion King*. While Rush is quick to note that *The Book of Mormon's* vision of Africa and Uganda is no less constructed and mediated (and problematic) than Disney's, he concludes that the show 'satirises political correctness by referencing *The Lion King* as a way of emphasising our cultural reliance upon such safe representations of other cultures' (Rush 2017b, pp. 179–80; see also, Cahn 2016). In this light, the parodies are not read as offensive because they ridicule the misguided actions and beliefs of the charity pop singers and Disney.

Hoxworth puts forth an alternative view in a forceful critique of the show, arguing that *The Book of Mormon* 'creates an impression of Mormons as representative figures of unusual "belief" and Africans as effigies of racial "difference"' (Hoxworth 2017, p. 367). The former are seen to espouse nonsensical religious beliefs, while the latter 'have nothing to be optimistic about, nothing in which they believe' and are understood as 'rationalizing their negative affect [in "Hasa Diga Eebowei"] as a putatively logical response to their everyday lives' (Hoxworth 2017, pp. 370–81). While Hoxworth does not address 'I Am Africa', it aligns with his wider argument: the missionaries' ignorant statements about Africa are just as misguided as their farcical attempts to 'sell' Mormonism to the Ugandans in 'All-American Prophet'. It is the Mormons at whom we are laughing, then, just as 'Hasa Diga Eebowei' (and the show, in general) fosters a belief in the abjection of Africans. Hoxworth makes clear that his reading of the show does not necessarily implicate audiences (who presumably derive pleasure from the humour) as racist or bigoted. Rather, crucial to his argument is that *The Book of Mormon* succeeds in 'conceal[ing] its investment' in 'American secular rationalism', which thus paints both Mormons and Africans as outsiders (Hoxworth 2017, pp. 368, 383).

In considering these arguments, I am hesitant to label *The Book of Mormon* as satire, given that this imitative category implies a 'didactic' attitude alongside the sense of scorn (Brøvig-Hanssen 2023, p. 40; see also Thorogood 2016, p. 216). Contra Rush, I hear *The Book of Mormon* examples as parodying Disney and Bob Geldof, but with only hints of satiric (i.e. disdainful, ridiculing) impulse. That is, the parody invites us to laugh *at* the intertextual sources, but with no impetus towards changing attitudes or behaviours to achieve an 'ameliorative' moral outcome (Hutcheon 1985, p. 43). Instead, having established the general direction of the humour, the songs delight in the vulgar incongruity between words and music. This is not to dismiss outright Rush's general argument – namely, that the musical succeeds in deflecting attention away from the mockery of Mormons and

<sup>5</sup> As Stanley wryly notes, 'Gregory Peck and Ava Gardner could have jogged [Midge] Ure's memory about *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* in reference to the lyric "There won't be snow in Africa this Christmas time"' (Stanley 2013, p. loc. 10061)

Ugandans, just as Hoxworth intimates. Indeed, it is precisely the musical caricatures that facilitate this process. In overloading the parodic elements of the songs, they magnify the mockery of the external figures (Bob Geldof, Bono, Disney) by constantly reinscribing their 'shortcomings'. From Hoxworth, this is the 'concealing' process at work. What I have suggested thus far is that the caricature overemphasises the features of a particular joke, while *simultaneously* keeping the initial source of humour intact. Our focus thus shies away from what might be offensive and turns towards the *process* of exaggeration. Put another way, as 'I Am Africa' or 'Hasa Diga Eebowei' unfolds, one may find increasing amusement in the caricatured take on either the charity song – 'what trite metaphor will they come up with now?' – or the lyrical incongruity with *The Lion King* – 'how crude will the next verse be?' But this does nothing to override the parodic joke (trading on Mormon naivety and Ugandan misery) set up in the first place; the musical caricature simply helps this more problematic interpretation slip into background.

### Musical caricatures and the tropes of Broadway

The final three examples are the most elaborate articulations of the musical caricature concept. Indeed, they invite a granular level of analysis to unpack the extensive comedic compositional choices that sit alongside the parodic lyrical content. In doing this, it becomes evident that 'You and Me (But Mostly Me)', 'Man Up' and 'Tomorrow is a Latter Day' are also united by a change in direction of their humour. The writers turn their attention back to the tropes and conventions of Broadway itself and exaggerate specific song types: the 'I want' song, the 'Act 1 climax', and most extensively, the 'showstopping finale'. In magnifying the idiosyncratic features of these archetypes, these numbers are at once parodies *and* celebrations of the musical theatre idiom. As I argue further in the conclusion of this article, this is crucial because it further facilitates a sense of distraction from the musical's offensive content. These caricatures, therefore, demonstrate that the 'concealing' process is at play across the show more broadly than the individual songs discussed above.

'You and Me (But Mostly Me)' combines structural details (summarised in Table 1) and gestural tropes from 'The Wizard and I' and 'Defying Gravity' from Stephen Schwartz' *Wicked*. Each begin with a quasi-*rubato* section that leads into a verse defined by the following features: mid-tempo rock groove; harmonic pedals set in consistent quaver rhythms; ascending harmonic progressions with accents anticipating the downbeat; and the use of open-voiced harmonic sonorities (Figure 3a–c). The similarities continue within the songs' respective structures: a 'dreamy' bridge-section with a *moto perpetuo* pattern in the treble register, a sudden and unprepared modulation and a repeated lyrical motif; the presence of post-bridge sections that broaden in tempo before an *accelerando* into the closing choruses; and a final climactic phrase featuring a textural cut, an *cappella* vocal gesture and a Hollywood-style chromatic cadence (Figure 4a–c).

'The Wizard and I' is a logical reference point. In *Wicked*, it is Elphaba's 'I want' song – the number appearing near the start of the show that establishes the central character's narrative quest. In Schwartz' hands, this song type has a particular musicodramatic arc: a hesitant opening, a build in momentum through the verses, a contemplative shift in the bridge, before a triumphant ending to confirm Elphaba's goal and resolve. The contrast between the 'orchestral rock' world of the primary verses and the filmic dreaminess of the bridge underscores this emotional journey



Table 1. Comparison of structural details: ‘The Wizard and I’, ‘Defying Gravity’ and ‘You and Me (But Mostly Me)’.

Structural Features	‘The Wizard and I’	‘Defying Gravity’	‘You and Me’
Rubato introduction	<i>Freely</i> <b>0:50</b>	<i>Dictated; colla voce</i> <b>1:17</b>	<i>Freely</i> <b>0:00</b>
Up-tempo rock verse	<i>Pulsing with excitement</i> <b>1:16</b>	<i>Allegro</i> ; 154 bpm <b>2:10</b>	<i>Bright rock</i> ; 152bpm <b>0:30</b>
Bridge section with striking modulations	<i>Più mosso</i> ; C major to A major <b>2:47</b> and <i>Dreamily</i> ; C major to Gb major; “Unlimited, my future is unlimited” <b>3:34</b>	<i>Moderato, dreamily</i> ; Db major to Gb major; “Unlimited, together we’re unlimited” <b>3:00</b>	<i>Dreamy</i> ; C major to A major; “Something incredible, I’ll do something incredible” <b>1:13</b>
Concluding choruses	<i>Broadly then accelerando</i> ; B major to C major <b>4:20</b>	<i>Allegro, triumphantly</i> ; Db major <b>4:24</b>	<i>Majestically then accelerando</i> ; C major to Db major <b>1:43</b>

(a)

Pno.

(b)

Pno.

(c)

Pno.

vocals in

Figure 3. Verse accompaniment patterns: (a) 'The Wizard and I', (b) 'Defying Gravity' and (c) 'You and Me (But Mostly Me)'.

and magnifies the epic scope of the adventure awaiting the heroine of *Wicked*. And so it is with 'You and Me', in which Elder Price tells us of the destined glory that awaits him – 'I'll do something incredible / I'm going to be the Mormon who saves all of mankind'. There is a further resonance between the pair of songs insofar as both sets of lyrics are framed around a partnership: Elphaba believes her rewards will come when she meets the Wizard of Oz; Price has been paired with Elder Cunningham on their mission and it is these two, 'you and me', who are going to fulfil the church's wish.

Well, almost – for the joke of 'You and Me (But Mostly Me)' is that Price does not see this as an equal relationship. His bumbling and self-deprecating sidekick is

(a)

The wi-zard and I  
Elphaba

(b)

...down Ah!  
Elphaba

Piano accompaniment (Pno.) for both pieces is shown in grand staff notation. Part (a) is in 4/4 time with a key signature of one flat. Part (b) is in 4/4 time with a key signature of three flats. Both pieces feature complex piano textures with arpeggiated figures and sustained chords.

Figure 4. Song ending gestures: (a) 'The Wizard and I', (b) 'Defying Gravity' and (c) 'You and Me (But Mostly Me)'.

treated as exactly that – as the pair put it, '[Price] every dinner needs a side dish / [Cunningham] on a slightly smaller plate'. The Mormon duo are a team, but Price is the captain and star player, as he continually reminds us through the song: when Price states that 'I can do most anything', Cunningham eagerly replies, 'And I can stand next to you and watch!' It is in this regard that the references to 'Defying Gravity' become important. The parodic nature of the song is evident already through Price's inflated sense of 'wanting'; this becomes further overblown via the second intertextual thread. Admittedly, it is difficult to disentangle the features of 'Defying Gravity' from those of 'The Wizard and I' – in *Wicked*, both songs are stylistically connected and feature near-identical bridge sections (built around the 'Unlimited' motif). Nonetheless, several details showcase its specific influence on 'You and Me'. The first is the repeating quaver harmonic pedal in the mid-treble voice through the verse section (see Figure 3b and c); the second is the phrase construction of the verse (16-bar SRDC in 'Defying Gravity'; 22-bar SRDC in 'You and Me'); the third is the climactic verse (played 'triumphantly' in

(c)

you. But most - ly me!

Elder Price

Pno.

Pno.

Figure 4. (Continued)

'Defying Gravity', 'majestically' in 'You and Me') with ringing open fifth chords in the upper register in D-flat major (Figure 5a, b).

While these details may be heard as adding to the overall *Wicked*-ness of 'You and Me', we can pull the interpretative thread a little further. 'Defying Gravity', at the end of Act 1, is Elphaba's turning point: she spectacularly decides to abandon others and go alone, having witnessed the prejudices and injustices of Oz. Price, on the other hand, simply believes he is the chosen one from the outset. The injection of 'Defying Gravity' is crucial then in over-emphasising the self-absorbed delusions of the character, which is what constitutes the caricature. 'You and Me' begins as a parodic imitation of the 'I want' number from *Wicked*, but through its layered musical references, the level of desire on Price's behalf takes on comic proportions. In *The Book of Mormon*, it is not just an 'I want' song, but an 'I really, really, really want' song, with the compositional stylings fostering this joke.

This theme of striving continues in 'Man Up', the Act 1 finale. This song typically represents the moment of firming resolve for a central character and, here, Elder Cunningham takes over the responsibilities of the mission after Price leaves him. Cunningham opens with a recitative-like verse, immediately establishing the

(a)

(b)

Figure 5. Climactic verse accompaniment pattern: (a) 'Defying Gravity' and (b) 'You and Me (But Mostly Me)'.

lyrical vein of the song – 'what did Jesus do when they sentenced him to die? Did he try to walk away? Did he just break down and . . . cry?' The emotive weight and magnitude of Jesus' sentencing is offset by the rhyming punch line, which evokes either a sense of childlike silliness or 'new age' psychological babble, but both of which pale in gravitas to its biblical inspiration. Cunningham continues to demonstrate his inept understanding of religious history, adding a line that might conceivably spring from a mediocre sports interview – 'Jesus dug down deep' – which, in turn, leads us to the crux of what he had to do: 'man up'. The remainder of the song is full of similarly clichéd lyrical statements – either describing Jesus' undertakings or Cunningham referring to himself, usually followed by a self-motivating cry of 'man up', the frequency of which highlights its triviality.

The accompanying musical style feeds into this humour. One of the characteristics of the initial verse and chorus sections is the strong harmonic motion – built on circle-of-fifths and ascending bass patterns (verse) and a descending stepwise bass line (chorus) – that drives towards a perfect cadence at the end of each phrase. 'Movement from tonic to dominant' is not exactly a marker of a specific style, however; in considering the particular contour of the phrases – the climb in the verse counterbalanced by the stepwise descent of the chorus – there is a line drawn back to the stadium rock style of Queen and Meat Loaf. Consider, for instance, Queen's 'We are the Champions': the emphatic pre-chorus is marked by a stepwise descending bass line from tonic to dominant, while the chorus concludes with a rousing chromatic ascent in the bass towards the section-ending dominant harmony. Queen's 'Save Me' and its chorus progression is also pertinent: its



second phrase moves through a stepwise chromatic descent comparable with 'Man Up'. Alternatively, we could point to Meat Loaf's 'Bat out of Hell', which ends its verse on extended dominant harmonies, building anticipation of a massive harmonic release at the onset of the chorus with an equally punchy title lyric, and which also ends each chorus with an extended harmonic descent through the major scale. The presence of mixed-mode  $\flat VII-V$  cadential motion in the verse 'Man Up' aligns with this stylistic era (e.g. the B section of Meat Loaf's 'Two Out Of Three Ain't Bad', for a  $\flat VII-IV-V$  cadence; or a variation,  $\flat III-V$ , in the pre-chorus of 'Paradise By the Dashboard Light'), but there is also resonance with the contemporary Disney style. Alan Menken favours this section-ending cadential movement in a number of his best-known ballads, such as 'Part of Your World', 'Beauty and the Beast', 'Colours of the Wind', 'A Whole New World'; it is also employed in Elton John's 'Can You Feel The Love Tonight?'

These reference points have a pleasing stylistic symbiosis that amplifies the thematic joke of 'Man Up'. On the one hand, the anthemic qualities of the stadium rock style (see Dockwray 2005) mirror Elder Cunningham striving forwards at this crisis point. On the other hand, rock power ballads are associated with the display of 'large, indiscriminate and immediate' emotions, the form being 'the ideal vehicle for such ecstatic experiences' (Metzer 2012, pp. 454–5). Furthermore, the intertextual references are to artists renowned for their theatricality – Queen through their 'epic' musical gestures and Mercury's onstage persona (see Braae 2021; Hawkins 2015) and Meat Loaf by virtue of his soaring vocal capacity and Jim Steinman's evocative lyrics. The Disney references – coming via the mixed mode cadences – resonate in this context too. The harmonic feature comes not only from a (more literally) theatrical idiom, but also from narrative contexts imbued with heightened sentimentality, desire and determination within a fantastical setting.

The sense of caricature is thus evoked via the stylistic setting from the outset of the song. One style conveys overblown and grandiose displays of emotional performance (stadium rock), while the other reinforces the intense longing of this moment (Disney). Cunningham recounts to us just how big and important his challenge is, as may be expected at the end of Act 1 in the show; and as with 'You and Me', his empty lyrical statements reflect the song's parodic nature. This parody shifts into caricature, though, because the musical accompaniment is continually telling us *exactly the same thing*. To drive this point home, when the song moves into its rock tempo, there is a variation on the opening verse phrases (0:49). Chugging electric rhythm guitars play an E Aeolian riff, each two-bar unit punctuated by crotchet hits in sync with the title lyric. Cunningham's melodic line is comparatively static, emphasising the flattened seventh and third scale degrees. The song's style – for this moment – unequivocally shifts to the 'heroic' end of the stadium rock scale, with the soundtracks for *Rocky III* and *Rocky IV* appearing as the source of inspiration (e.g. Survivor's 'Eye of the Tiger' or 'Burning Heart', Touch's 'The Sweetest Victory' or Vince di Cola's 'Training Montage'). As Moore has written, the use of the Aeolian mode in such rock contexts connotes emphatic determination and overcoming the odds (Moore 2012, pp. 148–9).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> There is also a sly reference to Parker and Stone's previous work on *Team America*, in which they adopt this 1980s boxer rock style for 'Need a Montage' – a meta-commentary on the manner in which a montage demonstrates self-improvement and the passing of time; the joke structure is the same as

For one final intertextual reference, during this 'heroic' verse, there are several ascending flute gestures – four demisemiquavers that land on the minor third scale degree on beat four (0:52, 1:02). To some, this may recall Paul McCartney and Wings' 'Live and Let Die' (0:53), another appropriate reference given the James Bond associations of this song. Yet one can also locate a very similar *rhythmic* and *timbral* gesture in the 'Overture' of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, just prior to the 'Heaven on their Minds' excerpt (1:33).<sup>7</sup> Here the flute/piccolo gestures descend in a flurry of demisemiquavers. This subtle intertextual reference intimates that Cunningham sees himself not only as 'the hero' in this song – emphasised by the myriad other stylistic gestures – but also as a modern day, glasses-wearing reincarnation of Jesus himself. Again, much like 'You and Me', the writers of *The Book of Mormon* have completely magnified the narrative features of this moment in the musical's structure. This is not the steely determination of Jean Valjean and the French people in 'One Day More' (*Les Misérables*), nor is it the poignant resolve of Kim in 'I'd Give My Life For You' (*Miss Saigon*). This is an exaggeration of such sentiments that become more overblown with each passing section of the song. We enjoy a musical overload of intertextual connections, layer upon layer of styles and gestures, each of which contributes to the caricature by reinforcing the same 'heroic' and 'striving' tone.

*The Book of Mormon* closes with 'Tomorrow is a Latter Day', an even more extravagant caricature of Broadway conventions. Throughout the song, the missionaries and Ugandans (now converted to Mormonism) trumpet the value of their work ('I am a Latter-Day Saint / I help all those I can') and exhort others not to get too preoccupied with the 'big' questions and issues of one's existence today, instead focusing on the fact that 'tomorrow is a latter day' and everything will get be better. The song serves limited narrative purpose, beyond demonstrating the now-unified relationship between the characters (the 'others' having been assimilated into the 'American' way of life). In this respect, we can identify traces of show-ending numbers such as 'Don't Feed the Plants' from *Little Shop of Horrors*, or, more pertinently, 'Spread the Love Around' from *Sister Act* and 'You Can't Stop the Beat' from *Hairspray*. These latter songs bring the full cast together into a joyous declaration of unity, even if the sincerity of such a moment can be questioned. In *Sister Act*, for instance, the message is little more than 'spread the love around', to which the show's villains also agree, ridiculously appearing out of nowhere halfway through the song and singing in counterpoint to the heroic nuns. It is this triviality that 'Tomorrow is a Latter Day' latches onto, with all such problems being immediately cast out of hand. Notwithstanding the ideals of racial harmony espoused in *Hairspray*, it is clear that these types of songs function primarily in terms of a spectacle: the ensemble finales provide an up-tempo and high energy conclusion to the musical.

'Tomorrow is a Latter Day' follows 'Spread the Love Around' and 'You Can't Stop the Beat' partly through its lyrical tone, noted above, and also through its adoption of several key musical traits. Firstly, *The Book of Mormon* finale initially appears to be built in a broad two-part structure. The song opens with underscored dialogue between Price and Cunningham, with the former recognising the completion of his

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*The Book of Mormon* insofar as the song's narrator communicates the same message as that carried by the stylistic imitation.

<sup>7</sup> This timecode references the Original Studio Cast recording from 1970.

narrative journey and acknowledging his missionary partner, who guided him along this path of self-discovery. This mirrors the conversation at the end of *Sister Act* between Deloris and Mother Superior, who occupy analogous roles to Price and Cunningham, respectively. In both instances, the dialogue leads into a *rubato* verse sung to the protagonist, with Cunningham and Mother Superior reminding their fellow characters of the ‘moral of the story’. This verse ends with a textural crescendo before shifting into the up-tempo song ‘proper’.

At this point in ‘Tomorrow is a Latter Day’, ‘You Can’t Stop The Beat’ enters into view as the primary intertextual reference. In Shaiman’s song, the opening verses are preceded by a syncopated horn lick that is itself an amalgamation of the instrumental tags from ‘River Deep, Mountain High’ and ‘Proud Mary’ (note the minor pentatonic foundations, the scalar movement, and the relentless offbeat hits). In Parker, Stone and Lopez’s hands, we hear a near-identical figure, but it serves not as a ‘1960s soul’ trope, so much as a ‘contemporary Broadway finale’ trope, further placing *The Book of Mormon* number in this musical world (Figure 6a, b).<sup>8</sup>

Several other details of these finales are relevant to ‘Tomorrow is a Latter Day’. The focal point of ‘You Can’t Stop the Beat’ is an energetic chorus that opens and closes with the title lyric. This section is divided into two eight-bar phrases, each of which spends six bars in a I–IV shuttle before landing on V for two bars. Compared with the blues-derived progression of the verses (sung by individual characters) and the pre-choruses, which move from vi through IV towards a big dominant chord, the choruses are harmonically static. They exemplify what Nobile (2020) has identified as a *telos* chorus – a term hitherto applied only to pop-rock repertoire but equally relevant in this musical theatre context. This formal unit achieves its harmonic goal from the outset, typically occurs after a pre-chorus and serves to prolong the tonic chord, often through repeated melodic motifs and/or harmonic riffs. Further, the *telos* model, in its prolongation of harmonic energy, encourages audiences to dance or ‘rock out’ in celebration of its immediate structural arrival (Nobile 2020, p. 86). There is clear resonance between this formal archetype and the ‘Broadway finale’ archetype, the sole point of which, having completed the narrative journey, is ‘rocking out’ in an all-singing-all-dancing extravaganza.

This sense of energetic prolongation also emerges through the form of ‘You Can’t Stop the Beat’ and ‘Spread the Love Around’. In both songs, there are numerous sectional variations that appear to milk the showstopping sensations as much as possible (see Table 2). In ‘Spread the Love Around’, the body of the song comprises three main sections – a ‘pre-verse’ (built around a static harmonic pattern with vocal ‘oohs’ and ‘aahs’), a verse and a chorus. After two cycles of these sections, there is a series of variations on segments of material (namely, the pre-verse and chorus patterns), with frequent modulations and changes in textural patterns (such as the stop-time chorus). ‘You Can’t Stop the Beat’ is similarly economical in its material, relying for the most part on the verse, pre-chorus and chorus material, presented in different keys (to suit each character’s vocal range). After the fourth iteration of this sectional

<sup>8</sup> Although written after *The Book of Mormon*, the ‘Bows’ cue from *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical* opens with an identical type of figure, which probably would have been composed by the show’s arranger, Steve Sidwell. Given such a figure does not appear elsewhere in *Beautiful*, it emphasises the fact that it has become established as a ‘contemporary Broadway finale’ trope rather than a narrative-driven intertextual reference.



Figure 6. Opening horn riffs: (a) 'You Can't Stop the Beat' and (b) 'Tomorrow is a Latter Day'.

Table 2. Structural outlines of 'Spread the Love Around' and 'You Can't Stop the Beat'.

'Spread the Love Around'	'You Can't Stop the Beat'
Rubato verse	Horn Riff
Sectional Unit (Bb major)	Sectional Unit (Ab major)
Pre-Verse – A	Verse – A
Verse – B	Pre-Chorus – B
Chorus – C	Chorus – C
Post-Chorus Refrain + Modulation	Horn Riff + Modulation
Sectional Unit (C major)	Sectional Unit (G major)
Bridge/Pre-Verse A'	Horn Riff + Modulation
Bridge/Pre-Verse (D major) A''	Sectional Unit (C major)
Dance Break Chorus (E-flat major) C'	Sectional Unit (G major)
Stop-Time Chorus (E major) C''	Breakdown + Modulation Passage
Four-to-the Floor Chorus + Interrupted	Ensemble + Stop-Time Chorus C'
Cadence + Refrain (E major) C'''	Stop-Time Chorus + Interrupted Cadence C''
	Echoed Refrain + Horn Riff + Hits C'''

unit, the song shifts into prolongation mode – again, we hear a series of modulations, choruses with textural variations and extended sections via interrupted cadences and instrumental riffs. Each fresh attempt to finish the song is cast aside in favour of sitting for a little bit longer in the ecstatic energy of the characters (and, one hopes, the audience).

With this in mind, I now turn to how such details are imitated in 'Tomorrow is a Latter Day'. Once the up-tempo section of the song begins, the characters sing through effective verse and pre-chorus sections in a structural pattern roughly analogous with 'You Can't Stop The Beat'. The 16-bar verse completes a functional harmonic progression over its two phrases, reaching a strong V chord in bars 7–8, before cadencing to I at its close; the pre-chorus then begins off-tonic on IV (1:21).

'Tomorrow is a Latter Day' does not feature a distinct chorus section, but there is a refrain-like figure appearing after the pre-chorus: 'We're saving it for a latter day / Tomorrow is a latter day' (1:30). The sense of contrast (i.e. between pre-chorus and chorus) comes through in the shift to a new textural layout – the band drops out leaving 'tribal' tom drums and ensemble voices – and to a ♭VII-I shuttle. It serves, therefore, as a punctuating climax to the pre-chorus progression. And with its punchy harmonic unit and repetition of the melodic-lyrical motif, we can hear it as a short example of a *telos* chorus. Much like 'You Can't Stop The Beat', there is a change in energy at this moment; compared with the teleological phrase structure of the verse and pre-chorus sections, the refrain 'rocks out' in the musical present.

Thus far, we could read 'Tomorrow is a Latter Day' as a parody of 'contemporary Broadway finale' – the slightly silly lyrics play against the 'straight' foil of the faithfully imitative accompaniment. After the second cycle of the verse-chorus pattern, the caricature starts to emerge. 'Tomorrow is a Latter Day' now slips into 'megamix' mode by reprising the title line of Price's 'I Believe' over the top of the ensemble (2:18). As Alexis Soloski (2019) notes, the 'megamix' typically creates a medley from previous songs in the show and occurs *after* the bows. It serves to elongate the spectacle without any new narrative or musical material. If in a different temporal location, we can hear 'Tomorrow is a Latter Day' as engaging with a specific trope that is precisely designed for *artificial* prolongation. We might say that *The Book of Mormon* writers outbid Marc Shaiman – they see his ensemble chorus and raise him one 'megamix'.

Yet there is more that speaks to this caricature aesthetic. As Price launches into his first 'I believe', the ensemble sing 'Tomorrow is a latter day' in block chords through a new harmonic progression, I-♭VII-IV, which lasts two bars and repeats. When Cunningham joins Price for the same 'I believe' line, but up a minor third, the ensemble sing in block chords through *another* short and repeating harmonic progression, I-♭III-IV-V (2:30). These riff-like patterns do not engender any harmonic directionality, so much as embellish the local tonic chord on which they start. In other words, they are the equivalent of new *telos* chorus material. Granted, these 'choruses' are short, but each has a distinct harmonic identity, which is reinforced by the modulations between each iteration. There is a clear impression, therefore, of the spectacle stakes being raised once more in this finale – not just a full ensemble number, but also a 'megamix'; not just one *telos* chorus, but three.

To complete the caricature, *The Book of Mormon* also exaggerates the aforementioned feature of prolonged closure. Having returned to the original verse-chorus material after the 'megamix' interlude, it appears that the song (and the show) is finally getting ready to wrap up. There is a short instrumental break (again, *telos*-like with its repeating rhythmic horn licks and static tonic chord; 3:00), before the characters move into a seemingly final set of rhetorical questions – 'What does tomorrow bring? What does the future hold?' (3:05). Combined with the Lydian-infused harmonic embellishments (C-D/C-♭B/Ab-G/F) and an ascending melodic sequence, it gives the impression of building to climax. The characters proclaim 'I can almost see it now' over a rich A<sup>7</sup> harmony and textural pause – perhaps a secondary dominant ready to usher in the final cadence?

It is not to be. The A<sup>7</sup> resolves D major, there is a ring on the doorbell, and the full ensemble breaks into a reprise of 'Hello!', the opening number, now with the Americans and the Ugandans playing the role of the travelling Mormon missionaries (3:17). Rather than end the show, the cast essentially start over with two full verses of



the song. At the conclusion of the second verse, the characters sing the line 'Have you heard the story of our Prophet Arnold Cunningham?' and layer his name in a canon-like texture over a dominant chord – another closing gesture (4:17). Elder Cunningham steps forward to belt the title line 'Hello', landing on the high tenor A of the tonic chord. This only spurs on the ensemble, who proceed through a further verse and canon-styled cadence (this time with the lyric 'This book will change your life'). Finally, the singers present an *a cappella* rendition of 'The book of Arnold' over four bars with plagal harmonic motion, elongating the typical 'Amen' cadence (4:48). If only for good measure, there is a textural cut, the ensemble and orchestra join forces for a glorious tonic chord and reiteration of the word 'Hello', and *The Book of Mormon* duly finishes.

Table 3 summarises the extravagant structure of 'Tomorrow is a Latter Day' as exhaustingly described above; compared with Table 2, we can clearly see how the traits of this song archetype have been grossly extended. Looking back through musical theatre history, the likely genesis for this type of show-stopping ensemble finale is 'Superstar' from Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Jesus Christ Superstar*.<sup>9</sup> In the hands of Menken and Shaiman, this approach is developed such that the composers utilise a combination of textural and harmonic variations to extend the revelry of the final song without adding any further narrative content. We might say that this is already a form of exaggeration, in which case 'Tomorrow is a Latter Day' should be understood as nothing short of an *exaggerated* exaggeration. With its multiple *telos* choruses, multiple Broadway finale style tropes, multiple structural additions, multiple interrupted 'final' cadences and multiple apparent 'final' lyrics, it comes across as a ridiculously and magnificently extended showstopper. It is the consummate caricature of the Broadway world to which it belongs.

### Turn it off: conclusions

I have seen *The Book of Mormon* three times. The first time, I am almost certain I did not 'get' all the caricature jokes. As my analysis demonstrated, there is seemingly a high degree of stylistic competence required to appreciate this particular form of humour – 'Man Up' only 'works' if one recognises the myriad 1970s/1980s rock references; 'You and Me' achieves its caricature state through an understanding of its archetypal form (an 'I want' song) and its amalgamation of *Wicked* numbers. I have little doubt that for many audience members (particularly those who see the show more than once), such nods and winks can be identified and processed. Yet this is not to imply that those less familiar with such touchstones would be excluded from the music-based comedy. For what I have argued and demonstrated throughout is that the this concept of the caricature can be understood as an *extension* of the parodic approach that is the foundation of the show's humour. Crucially, as the musical caricatures come into focus in specific examples, the fundamental parody – in terms of an imitation with difference – does not recede from sight. Put another way, an audience member may not pick up on the precise *Wicked* references of 'You and Me' – and thus 'miss' the musical caricature as I have identified it – but they would probably still find mirth in the absurd and out-of-place lyrical content. I

<sup>9</sup> This song gains much of its length from the I–bVII–IV–I riff that closes the show. Above the ensemble's repeated lyrics, Judas is given free rein for soul-infused vocal *ad libs* in a manner that is reminiscent of the extended guitar solos of early hard rock tracks (e.g. 'Freebird', 'Stairway to Heaven', 'Layla').

Table 3. Structural outline, 'Tomorrow is a Latter Day'.

<b>'Tomorrow is a Latter Day'</b>	
Rubato verse + horn riff	
Sectional Unit (G major)	
Verse	A
Pre-Chorus	B
Telos Chorus	C
Sectional Unit (C major)	A+B+C
Megamix <i>Telos</i> Chorus (F# major)	D
Megamix <i>Telos</i> Chorus II (A major)	E
Pre-Chorus (C major)	B
Extended Chorus + Instrumental Break	C'
Cadential/Breakdown Passage (C major to A7)	F
'Hello!' Verse (D major)	G
'Hello!' Verse II + Cadential Canon	G'
'Hello!' Verse III + Cadential Canon II	G''
Cadential Phrase ('The book of Arnold')	G'''
Final Gesture ('Hello!')	G''''

noted in my initial analytical vignette that this 'formula' – a faithful style imitation with silly lyrics – is relevant to most songs in the show. The humour is thus constructed in layers which allow jokes to materialise according to the degree of inter-textual knowledge held by an audience member.

Even if interpreting these musical caricatures is contingent on specific stylistic awareness, it is also important to note that such an aesthetic is not limited to the compositional aspects of *The Book of Mormon*. 'Turn It Off' similarly takes its cue from the stylistic world of Broadway, but the caricature lies in its combination of relevant musical gestures with an excess of performance-oriented gestures – namely, the sequined costumes and the extravagant tap dancing routine. 'Spooky Mormon Hell Dream' is a parody of metal music tropes (e.g. Phrygian and Locrian progressions, palm-muted guitars) with the overload coming from the panoply of cultural figures who appear in 'Mormon Hell'. Thus while the musical caricatures can be understood as a key feature of the compositional style, this trait of exaggeration infuses the fabric of *The Book of Mormon*, lending the show its distinct humorous aesthetic. Relative to the world of contemporary Broadway musicals, *The Book of Mormon* stands apart from other comedy musicals, such as *Something Rotten* or *Avenue Q*, by virtue of the caricature approach, which elevates the musical content from straightforward parodic imitation. Moreover, while there is a long history of musicals that self-deprecatingly turn back on the idiom (Garber 2007), it is not done here with the camp playfulness of *The Drowsy Chaperone* (Rostosky 2017, pp. 95–106) nor with the lightly satirical bite of *Urinetown* (Beggs 2010). Relative also to broader world of musical comedy, *The Book of Mormon* stands apart. In terms of the caricature style, there is a parallel with The Lonely Island, whose parodies often operate in multiple domains concurrently (e.g. song style and music video) and frequently rely on the increasing absurdity of misplaced lyrics as a song progresses (e.g. 'Jizz in My Pants'). But even in this context, the parody/caricature is being utilised to critique aspects of contemporary popular culture (see Spirou 2017; Parashar and Tewari 2021).

This is decidedly not the case with *The Book of Mormon*. If these other composers and artists have used parody to poke fun at their predecessors and contemporaries, then Parker, Stone and Lopez choose instead to highlight some quirks of Broadway shows, but mostly just embrace the form with exuberant eagerness. The caricatures are fundamental to them '[having] it both ways', to return to Brantley, because it allows for a degree of gentle mockery and, simultaneously, an unabashed celebration of musicals. More critically, the caricatures align with the writers' political stance. In the context of *South Park*, Parker and Stone described themselves as 'Equal Opportunity Offenders' (Thorogood 2016, p. 216), a badge they do not appear to have relinquished in tandem with Robert Lopez.<sup>10</sup> This plea to 'equality' overlooks both the power and status disparities between those on the receiving end of the jokes and the privileged platform afforded to the writers to do their offending. Yet in adopting such a stance, as Thorogood suggests, it becomes difficult to critically 'pin down' the writers to a particular ideological or political standpoint. Building on Hoxworth's (2017) critique, the musical overload of 'I Am Africa' and 'Hasa Diga Eebowei' 'conceals' the troubling cultural implications of these songs – the increasingly overblown extent of the lyrical jokes essentially distracts viewers from the potential offensiveness of the songs' content. The other caricatures of the show also speak to this 'concealing' process, particularly those songs which amplify their function, narrative or otherwise, within a musical theatre context. As an audience, we are encouraged not to question the implications of any jokes – 'should we feel bad for laughing at a gag about AIDS?' – but instead to indulge in the magnified celebration of the musical theatre idiom. The strategy I have identified and analysed is thus critical within *The Book of Mormon* not only for distinguishing the comedic stylings of the show, but also for providing a mechanism by which the writers can evade censure for their deliberately crass and provocative sense of humour. The caricatures facilitate a shared affective bond between the cast, the band and the audience; all participants are invited to partake in the joy of a Broadway musical. Any concern about vulgarity recedes into the background, something to be addressed on a latter day.

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<sup>10</sup> While Lopez does not appear to have talked as extensively about his political views, he cited Parker and Stone's *South Park: Bigger, Longer & Uncut* as a primary influence on *Avenue Q* (Simakis 2013). This suggests, at the very least, a clear aesthetic affinity between the trio.

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