

Song Title: **POPULAR**

Rating: **YES: Note**

REVIEWERS' NOTE

Reevaluation: May 8, 2023: change from YES to YES: Note

This song is admissible because its lyrics/message are not problematic. There are issues with the source material of the musical from which the song originates. The 2003 musical *Wicked* is based on the 1995 Gregory Maguire novel *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West*, which is in turn based on L. Frank Baum's 1900 novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and its 1939 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer film adaptation. As the owner of the Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer in 1890, Baum authored two problematic editorials about Indigenous peoples, referring to them as a "pack of whining curs," claiming that "the Whites....are the masters of the American continent,...the best safety of the frontier settlements will be secured by the total annihilation of the few remaining Indians," and urging the government to "wipe these untamed and untamable creatures from the face of the earth." The Wounded Knee massacre occurred within days of the editorials. In 2006 his great-great grandson, whose master thesis was devoted to the impact of Baum's writings, apologized to the surviving descendants of the massacre for Baum's calls for genocide and their role in the massacre. See [reference 1](#) and [reference 2](#).

The Encyclopedia of Racism in American Film (2018, ed. Salvador Jimenez Murguia), points out that "race has always been a central issue in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* from the historical and metaphysical points of view." The Oz story contains parallels to the colonialism implicit in Baum's editorials, one in which unworthy populations must assimilate into the dominant culture or be "marginalized or destroyed." Oz can be viewed as an uncivilized land, with Dorothy and the wizard as foreigners and conquerors sharing their "superior" American virtues. This "opposition of the American self and others" is demonstrated in the movie through visual differences, e.g., in contrasting the human-like characters with the Munchkins or the green-skinned Wicked Witch of the West.

At the same time, as noted in [this PBS piece](#), *The Wizard of Oz* is multifaceted and open to many interpretations -- from "[a populist take on the plight of Western farmers in the late 19th century](#) [to] [a pro-capitalist parable of industrialization and consumerism](#) [to, as Salman Rushdie notes, a humanist] world in which 'nothing is deemed more important than the loves, cares and needs of human [and other] beings.' But perhaps Rushdie's most perceptive observation is his point about the MGM *The Wizard of Oz*'s unusual focus on a triangle of powerful female characters—Dorothy, Glinda and the

Wicked Witch of the West. The Wizard's influence, which seems so huge at the beginning of the story, eventually melts away. In an oft-quoted line, Rushdie observes that in the film, 'The power of men is illusory...The power of women is real.'

In fact, "latter-day artistic adaptations of the Oz story, of which there are many, have gone in such different directions—from the 1939 MGM musical's fun and joy, to *The Wiz*'s 1970s Afrofuturist vision of New York City, to the *Wicked* books' dark story of authoritarianism and resistance, and the *Wicked* musical's exploration of female friendship. The fantasy of Oz has served as a frame [giving] viewers and theater-goers a wealth of alternate worlds helpful for thinking through their own. Though Baum may not have intended to provoke any of these latter-day meditations on power, friendship and humanity, he created a story that gave them ample room to grow."

GENERAL NOTE RE: Innocuous Songs from Problematic Movies/Musicals or Source Material/Author

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What year was this song written? 2003

Who wrote the lyrics? Stephen Schwartz

What did your research tell you about the lyricist?

Stephen Lawrence Schwartz (1948 -) is an American musical theater lyricist and composer. In a career spanning over five decades, Schwartz has written such hit musicals as *Godspell*, *Pippin*, and *Wicked*. He has contributed lyrics to a number of successful films, including *Pocahontas*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *The Prince of Egypt*, and *Enchanted*. Schwartz has won the Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Lyrics, three Grammy Awards, three Academy Awards, and has been nominated for six Tony Awards. He received the 2015 Isabelle Stevenson Award, a special Tony Award, for his commitment to serving artists and fostering new talent.

What other material has been written by this lyricist?

Godspell: Good Gifts, Day by Day, Learn Your Lessons Well. *Pippin*: Magic To Do, Corner of the Sky, Spread a Little Sunshine. *Wicked*: Defying Gravity, For Good, Popular. *The Baker's Wife*: Meadowlark. *Pocahontas*: Colors of the Wind (lyrics), Listen With Your Heart. *The Prince of Egypt*: When You Believe.

Who is the composer of this song? Stephen Schwartz

Please provide a link to the original song lyrics. [Kristin Chenoweth – Popular Lyrics | Genius Lyrics](#)

Read the lyrics as a poem or a story. Who and what is this song about, as originally intended by the composer and earlier performers?

The song is supposed to be a very comical and lighthearted song regarding Galinda who is trying to help Elphaba feel more confident about herself. She gives her a "makeover" while insisting that she knows how to help anyone to become more popular and feel more confident in themselves. The song is in the first half of the musical *Wicked* and it helps the two characters to bond more in the story.

What did you learn about the history OF THE SONG?

Popular is from *Wicked*, a 2003 musical with music and lyrics by [Stephen Schwartz](#) and book by [Winnie Holzman](#). It is based on the 1995 [Gregory Maguire](#) novel [Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West](#), in turn based on [L. Frank Baum](#)'s 1900 novel [The Wonderful Wizard of Oz](#) and its 1939 [Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer film adaptation](#). The original Broadway production won three [Tony Awards](#) and seven [Drama Desk Awards](#), while its original cast album received a [Grammy Award](#). On April 11, 2023, with its 7,486th performance, it surpassed [Cats](#) to become Broadway's fourth-longest running show.

The story is told from the perspective of, and focuses on, the witches of the Land of Oz; its plot begins before and continues after [Dorothy Gale](#) arrives in Oz from Kansas. *Wicked* tells the story of two unlikely friends, [Elphaba](#) (the (the [Wicked Witch of the West](#)) and Galinda (later [Glinda](#) the Good Witch), whose relationship struggles through their opposing personalities and viewpoints, same love-interest, reactions to the [Wizard](#)'s corrupt government, and, ultimately, Elphaba's fall from grace.

The song *Popular* is one of many that were written for this 2003 Musical and it is performed in the first half of the musical. Schwartz has compared the song to the movie "Clueless" before. Schwartz wrote the song with the intention of making it more bubbly and naive, a bit like Galinda (who's also a bit full of herself), but with a comical side to it that makes it not to be taken seriously.

"Popular" was sampled in "Popular Song" by English singer [Mika](#) featuring American singer [Ariana Grande](#) from their albums *The Origin of Love* (2012) and *Yours Truly* (2013), respectively. It was also sampled by the producer [Pheelz](#) in his song "Popular" which features the artiste Vector for his "#A7" audio - visual album.

On July 31, 2013, Kristin Chenoweth performed a lyrically modified version of "Popular" on *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*, about [New York](#) politician [Anthony Weiner](#). In it, she tells Weiner how to be "the right kind of popular," and also his wife to "take a page from Hillary and become independent of her hubby, while [Weiner sports] a chat room chubby." Some of the original lyrics are also present.^[3]

In late 2014, Chenoweth included a multilingual version of the song in her live album *Coming Home*. This new rendition includes lyrics from the Japanese and German versions of the song.

In 2015, the song was covered in the sixth season of the TV series *Glee*. It was sung by Lea Michele and Chris Colfer as Rachel Berry and Kurt Hummel in the episode "2009".

Satirical singer [Randy Rainbow](#) made a version called "Unpopular", critical of US Pres. Donald Trump.

Share a link to the earliest performance of this song that you can find.

[Show Clip - Wicked - "Popular" - Original Cast](#) | [Popular \(From "Wicked" Original Broadway Cast Recording/2003\)](#)

Look up the original sheet music to this song. No

Please explain why the illustrations in the sheet music ARE or ARE NOT problematic (or note that there are no illustrations; enter N/A if you couldn't find the sheet music). Also, please provide a link to the song's original sheet music cover or upload it in the last question (if available).

It is the cover of the Musical with Galinda and Elphaba on it. As seen in the preview pic for [this video](#).

Did this song, originally or subsequently, demean a marginalized racial/ethnic group (a group considered at a social disadvantage) through idiomatic expressions, metaphors, jargon, or message? And/or does the song present a sanitized/idyllic or false narrative regarding the American South and the life of the enslaved or newly freed OR of other marginalized racial/ethnic groups and their history? No

Please supply the links to any sources you used for this section of research.

<https://stephenschwartz.com/about/full-bio/>

<https://galaxymusicnotes.com/pages/the-story-behind-the-popular-musical-wicked>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Popular_\(Wicked_song\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Popular_(Wicked_song))

Additional Questions to Consider (do not pertain to Admissibility)

The remaining questions pertain to Diversity, Equity & Inclusion issues other than those of race. As such, **THESE QUESTIONS DO NOT AFFECT A SONG'S ADMISSIBILITY**. They are provided to encourage your group to consider factors that may affect members of your audience and/or your performers with regard to religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, and more. **Please refer to the Music Choices section of [Chapter Choices to Address Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#)** (in the [Chorus Toolkit](#)) **for details and strategies related to these factors**.

Could the message/lyrics of the song, original or subsequent, limit any singer or audience member's ability to engage, related to the following? A YES answer does not imply that the song is demeaning or exclusionary. [Please see instructions here](#).

Age: No

Disability: No

Gender: No

Religion: No

Sexual Orientation: **No**

Visible Physical Difference: No

Other? No

Please explain your reasoning for YES/UNSURE answers and any NO answers you wish to explain.

While the sexual orientation of the third party in the song is implied (*I'll teach you the proper poise when you talk to boys*), there are no implications for the narrator (singers).

Are there any adjustments to the lyrics that would make it more inclusive or current to our chorus culture or societal norms?

No, I did not identify any lyrics that might be addressed.