

Song Title: **YOU CAN'T STOP THE BEAT**

Rating: **YES: Note**

REVIEWERS' NOTE

Reevaluation: Nov 18, 2024: change from YES to YES: Note

This song remains admissible and does not contain problematic lyrics or message. The song is from the 2002 musical [Hairspray](#), which has been commended for addressing racial segregation and integration in 1960s America through an entertaining and accessible format. It brought attention to important civil rights issues and promoted a message of acceptance and equality, while giving prominent roles to Black characters which was relatively uncommon at the time.

However, the musical has also faced criticism. Regarding the diverse casting, [Daniel Greenfield](#) comments that the roles for Black cast members:

... call for the actors to act in extremely stereotypical manners. These stereotypes include language, dress, and even the ways they physically carry themselves on the stage. ... When a person goes to see *Hairspray*, [their] brain is flooded with stereotypical information about the black community.

In [The Atlantic](#), Matthew Delmon notes:

Hairspray's history of race in America suggests that racism is an issue of attitudes rather than of policies.... The story also locates racial prejudice in a single character, Velma Von Tussle, which enables the other white characters to remain largely innocent bystanders to the discrimination faced by the program's black teenagers. ... without acknowledging, confronting, or seeking to overturn the actual structures of discrimination. ... But *Hairspray* also resonates.... It shows how seemingly innocent moments in popular culture were also sites of struggle over who was worthy of being counted as a somebody in America.

Rachel Charniak writes in [Onstageblog.com](#):

While it may be well-intentioned, *Hairspray's* representation of racism and the Civil Rights Movement lacks depth, understanding, and actual representation from any people of color in its creative team. ... Tracy, a White girl, is the hero. This plays into the White Savior trope.... The musical ignores the sacrifices and contributions to the movement by numerous people of color and makes Tracy the center of the movement. The audience is shown how hard segregation was for White people when Tracy goes to jail, and we are meant to sympathize with her and keep rooting for her, instead of the actual

Black characters. While being an ally to the Black community is certainly important, it's not about you, Tracy.

Tracy is completely unaware of her appropriation of Black culture. This is most evident when she uses Seaweed's dance he taught her in detention to get noticed by Corny Collins. This dance is ultimately what gets her on the show, and she never mentions Seaweed at all or where the dance came from.

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

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What year was this song written? 2002

Who wrote the lyrics? Marc Shaiman / Scott Wittman

What did your research tell you about the lyricist?

Scott Wittman (1954 -) is an American director, lyricist, composer and writer for Broadway, concerts, and television. While directing a show for a Greenwich Village club he met songwriter and composer [Marc Shaiman](#), and the two became collaborators and professional partners. Wittman directed concerts for such artists as Bette Midler, Christine Ebersole, Raquel Welch, Dame Edna Everage, and Lypsinka, among others.

Whitman is known as an artist who conceptualizes how to present stars as themselves on the Broadway stage. In 1995, he directed Patti LuPone on Broadway and has since worked with such performers as Nathan Lane, Sarah Jessica Parker, Rufus Wainwright, and Andrea Martin. He was nominated for a Drama Desk Award in 2007 as a lyricist for *Martin Short: Fame Becomes Me*.

Marc Shaiman (1959 -) is an American composer and lyricist for films, television, and theater. A great talent who started his career in Saturday Night Live (1975), where he worked with colleagues like Rob Reiner or Billy Crystal. His first important score for cinema is *Misery* (1990), followed by a dozen others (e.g., *When Harry Met Sally*, *A Few Good Men*). He has won a Grammy, an Emmy, and a Tony, and been nominated for seven Oscars. He also wrote a satire musical, *Prop 8*, to protest California Proposition 8 (a proposal to abolish same sex marriage)

Shaiman and Wittman wrote the score for [Bombshell](#) and [Mary Poppins Returns](#), the TV series [Smash](#), and are best known for writing the music and lyrics for the musical [Hairspray](#), which won the Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Lyrics, the Tony Award for Best Original Score, and a Grammy Award.

What other material has been written by this lyricist?

Shaiman & Wittman: from *Smash* TV Show: Don't Forget Me, They Just Keep Moving The Line, Bombshell, Let's Start Tomorrow Night; from *Hairspray*: Mama I'm A Big Girl Now, I Can Hear The Bells, You Can't Stop The Beat ... and many more.

Who is the composer of this song? Marc Shaiman

Please provide a link to the song lyrics.

<https://www.google.com/search?q=lyrics+to+you+can%27t+stop+the+beat>

Who and what is this song about, as originally intended by the composer and earlier performers?

"You Can't Stop The Beat" is the finale number in the 2002 musical *Hairspray*. It is sung by Tracy, Link, Penny, Seaweed, Edna, Motor Mouth, Velma, and Amber with Corny and Wilbur as backing singers. Although the lyrics touch on sizeism and racism, the song also references broader themes of change and progression. The song pays tribute to the Phil Spector-produced 1966 Ike & Tina Turner hit "River Deep – Mountain High".

What did you learn about the history OF THE SONG?

Hairspray is an American musical with music and lyrics by Marc Shaiman and Scott Wittman and a book by Mark O'Donnell and Thomas Meehan, based on John Waters' 1988 film of the same name. The songs include 1960s-style dance music and "downtown" rhythm and blues. In 1962 Baltimore, Maryland, teenager Tracy Turnblad's dream is to dance on The Corny Collins Show, a local TV dance program based on the real-life Buddy Deane Show. When Tracy wins a role on the show, she becomes a celebrity overnight, leading to social change as Tracy campaigns for the show's integration.

The movie is based on an actual event on the *Buddy Dean Show*, one of many racially segregated regional dance shows across the country. In [The Atlantic](#), Matthew Delmon notes: "Every weekday afternoon, in each of these broadcast markets, these shows presented images of exclusively white dancers and rendered black youth as second-class teenagers. This discrimination was explicitly or tacitly supported by an array of advertisers, television stations, music producers, city authorities, and federal communications officials. ... After a surprise interracial broadcast of the *Buddy Dean Show*, WJZ-TV received bomb and arson threats, hate mail, and complaints from white parents." This caused the show to be canceled. Waters gave his story a happy ending where the protestors triumph, to the approval of the general public rather than hate mail and threats of violence.

The musical opened in Seattle in 2002 and moved to Broadway later that year. In 2003 *Hairspray* won eight Tony Awards, including one for Best Musical, out of 13 nominations. It ran for 2,642 performances, and closed on January 4, 2009. *Hairspray* has also had national tours, a West End production, and numerous foreign productions and was adapted as a 2007 musical film. The London production was nominated for a record-setting eleven Laurence Olivier Awards, winning four, including Best New Musical.

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ah4BQqTkFF8>

Does any illustration or other characteristic of the original sheet music reflect an inappropriate theme? No

Please explain why the illustrations ARE or ARE NOT problematic.

Nothing there- simply graphics

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 explain your reasoning for the answer above.

It is about integration and non-discrimination of people for race or other issues, like body size..

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

<https://www.ebay.com/itm/174482468756?epid=1702420451&hash=item289ff72f94:g:XMCAAOSw9nVfidNy>

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: **Yes**

Religion: No

Sexual Orientation: **Yes**

Visible Physical Difference: No

Other? No

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

The lyrics promote a [heteronormative](#) narrative, as well as the [gender binary](#), in its repeating lines about "a man and a woman like to shake it on a Saturday night" and "a woman found out if she shook it she could shake up a man."

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

Possibly.

Write any suggested changes to the lyrics (if applicable) or explain why changes to lyrics will not address identified categories (if applicable). *

To be more inclusive, ensembles may want to discuss and consider rephrasing using gender-neutral terms, though this would require rephrasing the several lines that reference women and men.

***These decisions are left to the discretion of ensembles based upon their assessment of member and audience sensibilities.** Please consult 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.

- For information on **important considerations for lyric changes**, especially in contest songs, see Topic II. D. in the Music Category section of the [Judging Category Description Book](#).
- *To be inclusive, it is not necessary for 100% of an ensemble's songs to be gender-neutral.*

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

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hairspray_\(musical\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hairspray_(musical))

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marc_Shaiman

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scott_Wittman

Official Website: MarcShaiman.com, YouTube and eBay