

*Big New Musical.
Big. Huge.*

**PRETTY
WOMAN** **THE MUSICAL**

STUDY GUIDE



PRETTY WOMAN THE MUSICAL

The National Theatre
December 12–17, 2023

Music & Lyrics by Bryan Adams and Jim Vallance
Book by Garry Marshall and J.F. Lawton
Directed & Choreographed by Jerry Mitchell
Music Supervision, Rearrangement, and Orchestrations by Will van Dyke
Direction Recreation by D.B. Bonds
Choreography Recreation by Rusty Mowery
Packet Prepared by Dramaturg Lindsey R. Barr

Pretty Woman: The Musical, based on one of Hollywood's most beloved romantic stories of all time, springs to life with a powerhouse creative team led by two-time Tony Award®-winning director and choreographer Jerry Mitchell (*Hairspray*, *Kinky Boots*, *Legally Blonde*). *Pretty Woman: The Musical* features an original score by Grammy® winner Bryan Adams and Jim Vallance ("Summer of '69", "Heaven"), and a book by the movie's legendary director Garry Marshall and screenwriter J. F. Lawton. *Pretty Woman: The Musical* will lift your spirits and light up your heart. "If you love the movie, you'll love the musical!" (*BuzzFeed News*). Featured in the musical is Roy Orbison and Bill Dee's international smash hit song "Oh, Pretty Woman," which inspired one of the most beloved romantic comedy films of all time. *Pretty Woman* the film was an international smash hit when it was released in 1990. Now, 30 years later, *Pretty Woman: The Musical* is "Big romance and big fun!" (Broadway.com). "Irresistible! A romantic fantasy. A contemporary fairy tale," says *The Hollywood Reporter*. *Pretty Woman: The Musical* delivers on all the iconic moments you remember. Get ready to experience this dazzling theatrical take on a love story for the ages.

Are you ready to fall in love all over again?



For almost 200 years, The National Theatre has occupied a prominent position on Pennsylvania Avenue—"America's Main Street"—and played a central role in the cultural and civic life of Washington, DC. Located a stone's throw from the White House and having the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site as its "front yard," The National Theatre is a historic, cultural presence in our Nation's Capital and the oldest continuously operating enterprise on Pennsylvania Avenue.

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Written and Curated by Lindsey R. Barr, Dramaturg
Designed by Carolyn Donarski

1321 Pennsylvania Avenue NW Washington, DC 20004
www.nationaltheatre.org

A LETTER FROM THE DRAMATURG

There are a lot of fantasies at play in the film *Pretty Woman*, the hit romantic comedy that transformed Julia Roberts into one of the biggest stars in Hollywood virtually overnight 33 years ago. It's a fantasy about a humble Georgia girl getting her fairytale ending. It's a fantasy about upward mobility on the streets and in the salons of Beverly Hills. It's a fantasy about turning Roberts herself into a modern-day Audrey Hepburn, prim and elegant and absolutely certain which type of fork is appropriate for each dinner course.

But while *Pretty Woman* now holds rom-com emeritus status, the film and now the musical adaptation deserve to be considered significant cultural products with serious concerns about women, men, sex, class and power, among other things. When the movie premiered in 1990, many of the male-dominated reviews focused on the film's frivolity, a criticism regularly applied to rom-coms, which are often viewed as a genre that appeals to women and is therefore less serious than, say, a wartime drama. Still, the film and musical continue to resonate with audiences. The rise of *Pretty Woman* is also the rise of a new female Hollywood icon. This is *her* story, and as a result, it can be ours too.

The story transcends decades because of its focus on the everywoman: the social experiences many women face by simply existing in a world often dominated by and engineered for men. The lens through which the musical engages in this idea—namely by following Vivian and her lived reality as a sex worker—requires us to think about how power and upward mobility have, at times, been linked to sexual activity and proximity. They are rather unavoidable truths in a society that prizes heterosexual couplings and money as the ideals of familial success in the United States. So, while the musical doesn't take these themes head on as its main point, it dabbles in notions of gender that are still widely discussed today. Packaged in a charming story, *Pretty Woman the Musical* shows that two very different people have more in common than appears on the surface, though it is important to remember that their relationship only comes about by way of the gender discrepancies between them: the handsome successful suitor hiring the beautiful down-on-her-luck sex worker with a heart of gold.

I'm always struck by my own complicated feelings about *Pretty Woman* and *Pretty Woman the Musical*. In some ways, the story feels like a liberation for Vivian: she's worthy of love and companionship despite what society tells her about her worth based on her job! She gets to have her cake and eat it, too—something women in popular media don't often experience. However, there are moments when I'm torn between the charming love story unfolding and the realities of the uneven power dynamic that makes that love story possible. Regardless, there is a reason the story persists in popular media. It's a story of dreams. It's a story of hope. It's a story of love. And at the end of the day, isn't that what a lot of us dream about, too?

Chase Wolfe and Ellie Baker



Matthew Murphy for MurphyMade

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dramaturgical Essay	4
The Creative Team	5
Bryan Adams and Jerry Mitchell on Adapting <i>Pretty Woman the Musical</i>	7
Sex Work Throughout Time	9
Exercises & Activities	11
Extra Resources & Content	13
Bibliography	13