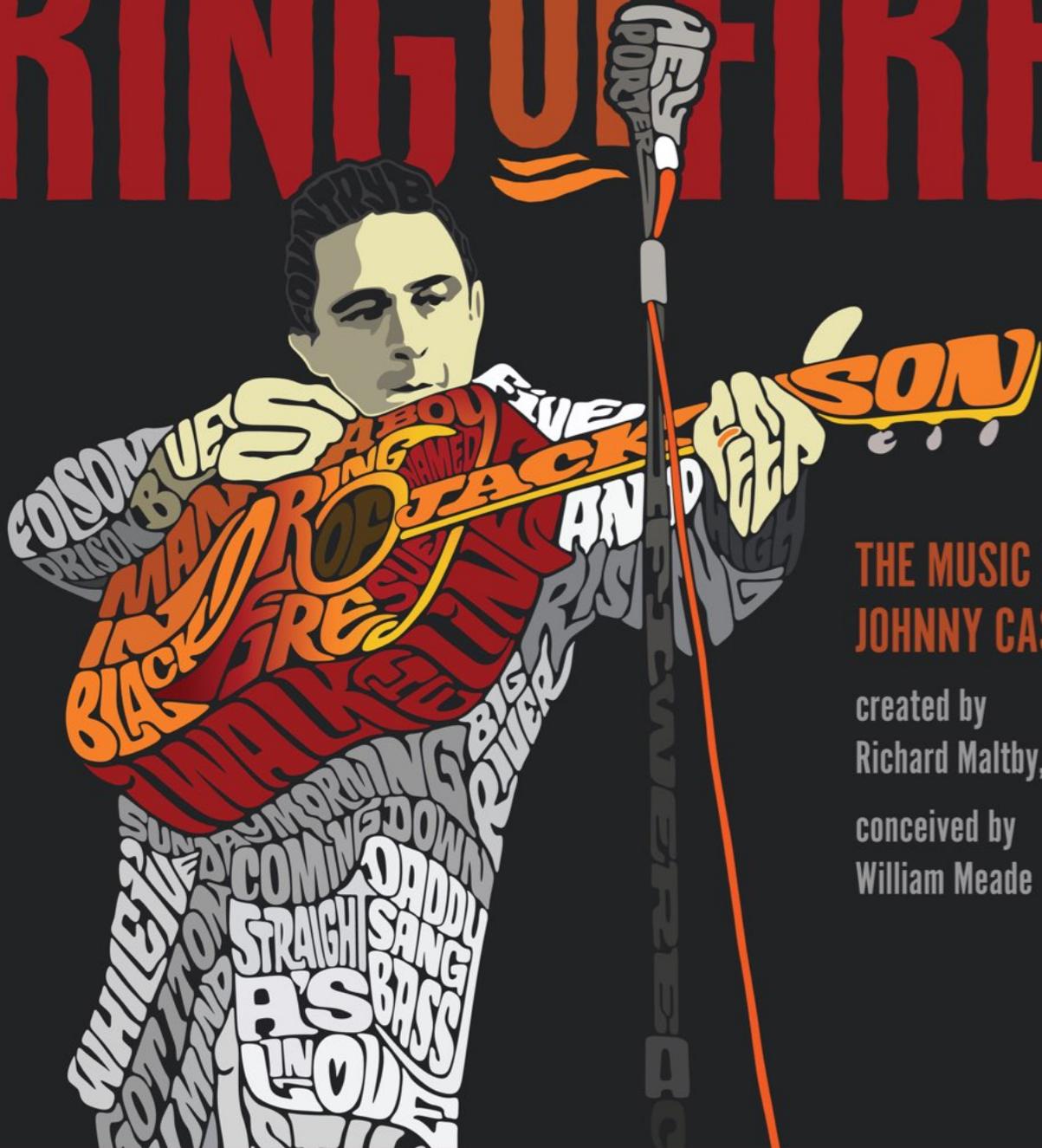


PLAY GUIDE

# RING OF FIRE



THE MUSIC OF  
JOHNNY CASH

created by  
Richard Maltby, Jr.

conceived by  
William Meade

2016



2017



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*Ring of Fire: The Music of Johnny Cash* Play Guide written by Chloe Loos, ATC Artistic Intern, and Katherine Monberg, ATC Literary Manager, with contributions from ATC Learning & Education staff.

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## ABOUT ATC

Arizona Theatre Company is a professional, not-for-profit theatre company. This means that all of our artists, administrators and production staff are paid professionals, and the income we receive from ticket sales and contributions goes right back into our budget to create our work, rather than to any particular person as a profit.

Each season, ATC employs hundreds of actors, directors and designers from all over the country to create the work you see on stage. In addition, ATC currently employs approximately 50 staff members in our production shops and administrative offices in Tucson and Phoenix during our season. Among these people are carpenters, painters, marketing professionals, fundraisers, stage directors, sound and light board operators, tailors, costume designers, box office agents, stage crew - the list is endless - representing an amazing range of talents and skills.

We are also supported by a Board of Trustees, a group of business and community leaders who volunteer their time and expertise to assist the theatre in financial and legal matters, advise in marketing and fundraising, and help represent the theatre in our community.

Roughly 150,000 people attend our shows every year, and several thousand of those people support us with charitable contributions in addition to purchasing their tickets. Businesses large and small, private foundations and the city and state governments also support our work financially.

All of this is in support of our vision and mission:

**The mission of Arizona Theatre Company is to inspire, engage and entertain - one moment, one production and one audience at a time.**

Our mission is to create professional theatre that continually strives to reach new levels of artistic excellence that resonates locally, in the state of Arizona and throughout the nation. In order to fulfill our mission, the theatre produces a broad repertoire ranging from classics to new works, engages artists of the highest caliber, and is committed to assuring access to the broadest spectrum of citizens.



**The Temple of Music and Art**, the home of ATC shows in downtown Tucson.



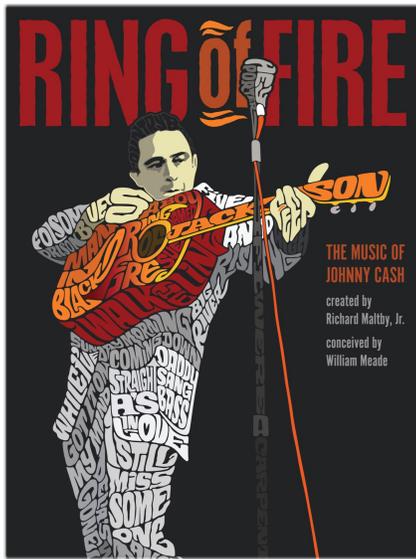
**The Herberger Theater Center**, ATC's performance venue in downtown Phoenix.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE PLAY

### *Ring of Fire: The Music of Johnny Cash*

Created by Richard Maltby, Jr.

Conceived by William Meade



Show art by Esser Design

From the iconic songbook of Johnny Cash comes this unique musical about love and faith, struggle and success, rowdiness and redemption, home and family. The show features 38 classic hits – including “I Walk the Line,” “A Boy Named Sue,” “Folsom Prison Blues,” and the title tune – performed by a multi-talented cast of ten and paints a musical portrait of The Man in Black that is a foot-stompin’, crowd-pleasin’ salute to a uniquely American legend. Johnny Cash’s remarkable life story is told through his music, climaxing in a concert that will both move and exhilarate.

## MEET THE CREATORS



Creator Richard Maltby, Jr.

Richard Maltby, Jr. (Creator) includes among his Broadway credits *Ain't Misbehavin'*, which he conceived and directed (1978 Tony Award, New York Drama Critics Award, Outer Critics Award, and Drama Desk Awards). He also won a 1999 Tony Award for Best Director and an Outer Critics Award and Drama Desk Award for *Fosse*. Mr. Maltby was the lyricist for *Miss Saigon* (Evening Standard Award 1990, Tony nomination for Best Score 1991), as well as the director and co-lyricist of Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Song & Dance* in 1986 (Tony Award for star Bernadette Peters). Along with composer David Shire, Mr. Maltby was the director and lyricist for *Baby* (seven Tony Award nominations) and the lyricist for *Big* in 1996 (Tony Award nomination for Best Score). Off-Broadway, he was the director and lyricist for *Starting Here, Starting Now* in 1977 (Grammy Award nomination) and *Closer Than Ever* in 1989 (Outer Critics Circle Awards: Best Musical, Best Score). Mr. Maltby contributes devilish crossword puzzles to *Harper's Magazine*. He is married to Janet Brenner. Mr. Maltby has five children: Nicholas, David, Jordan, Emily, and Charlotte.



Creator William Meade.

William Meade (Creator) began his career as a musician. He has been a featured soloist with numerous orchestras, including the Zurich Philharmonic, Prague Philharmonic, and Jacksonville Symphony. He has produced concerts throughout the U.S. and Europe with artists ranging from Arlo Guthrie to BB King. Television credits include: The Miss America Pageant, The Superbowl Half Time Show, *Sex in the City*, *Love Monkey*, and *Sesame Street*. On Broadway, he has been involved with more than 50 musicals. Mr. Meade is a Grammy-nominated record producer with a wide range of theatrical releases to his credit, from *Hello, Dolly!* with Carol Channing to *Elegies* with William Finn.

## MEET THE ACTORS



Tenna Barnes, who plays a Principal in ATC's *Ring of Fire*.



Allison Briner-Dardenne, who plays a Principal in ATC's *Ring of Fire*.



Michael Monroe Goodman, who plays a Principal in ATC's *Ring of Fire*.



Brian Mathis, who plays a Principal in ATC's *Ring of Fire*.



Walter Hartman, Ensemble member and Drummer in ATC's *Ring of Fire*.



Ben Hope, Ensemble member and Guitar, Mandolin, and Harmonica player in ATC's *Ring of Fire*.



Brantley Kearns, Ensemble member and Fiddle player in ATC's *Ring of Fire*.



Jeff Lisenby, Music Director, Ensemble member, and Accordion and Keyboard player in ATC's *Ring of Fire*.



John W. Marshall, Ensemble member and Upright Bass player in ATC's *Ring of Fire*.



Brent Moyer, Ensemble member and Guitar and Trumpet player in ATC's *Ring of Fire*.

## SONG LIST

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### ACT I

- "Country Boy" (1957)
- "Flesh and Blood" (1970)
- "While I've Got It on My Mind" (1974)
- "Five Feet High and Rising" (1974)
- "Straight A's in Love" (1970)
- "Big River" (1958)
- "Far Side Banks of Jordan" (Terry Smith, 1977)
- "Daddy Sang Bass" (Carl Perkins, 1968)
- "I Still Miss Someone" (co-writer, Roy Cash, 1958)
- "Get Rhythm" (1956)
- "Flushed from The Bathroom of Your Heart" (Jack H. Clement, 1968)
- "Egg Suckin' Dog" (Jack H. Clement, 1966)
- "Oh Come, Angel Band" (Jefferson Hascall and William Bradbury)
- "If I Were a Carpenter" (Tim Hardin, 1970)
- "Ring of Fire" (June Carter and Merle Kilgore, 1963)
- "Jackson" (Billy Edd Wheeler and Jerry Leiber, 1967)

### ACT II

- "Hey Porter" (1955)
- "Sunday Morning Coming Down" (Kris Kristofferson, 1972)
- "Going to Memphis" (co-writers Hollie Dew and Alan Lomax, 1960)
- "Delia's Gone" (folk song, 1962)
- "Cocaine Blues" (T.J. Arnall, 1971)
- "Orleans Parish Prison" (Dick Feller, 1973)
- "Folsom Prison Blues" (1957)
- "Man in Black" (1971)
- "Why Me, Lord?" (Kris Kristofferson, 1994)
- "A Boy Named Sue" (Shel Silverstein, 1969)
- "Tear-Stained Letter" (1972)
- "Tennessee Flat-Top Box" (1961)
- "Cry Cry Cry" (1957)
- "I Walk the Line" (1957)
- "Ragged Old Flag" (1974)
- "I've Been Everywhere" (Geoff Mack, 1996)

# JOHNNY CASH BIOGRAPHY



Singer and songwriter, Johnny Cash.

Singer and songwriter Johnny Cash was born J.R. Cash on February 26, 1932 in Kingsland, Arkansas, as the middle of seven children. When he was three years old, the Cash family moved to Dyess Colony to find work as part of President Roosevelt's New Deal farming programs. The family farmed 20 acres of crops for the next 15 years, working in the fields together - this lifestyle and engagement with guitar, folk songs, hymns, and work songs inspired the lyrics and musicality of many of Cash's future songs.

Cash began songwriting at the young age of 12. Aware of her son's musical ability, his mother saved enough money to enroll him in singing lessons. His voice teacher was so impressed with his vocal ability that she advised him after only three lessons to stop, and never forsake his natural vocal style.

Cash graduated from high school in 1950 and sought employment at an auto body plant in Pontiac, Michigan, before joining the United States Air Force later that summer. While training at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas, he met Vivian Liberto, who would become his future wife. Cash spent most the next four years in West Germany, working as a Morse code operator and radio interceptor. He formed a band called the Landsberg Barbarians with some of his Air Force buddies, and began playing live shows while improving his guitar and songwriting skills.



Luther Perkins, Johnny Cash, and Marshall Grant, c. 1955.

Following an honorable discharge from the Air Force in 1954, John and Vivian were married and moved to Memphis, Tennessee, where he sold appliances and worked a variety of odd jobs. While in Memphis, Cash focused on his music in the evenings with some of his older brother's coworkers, Marshall Grant and Luther Perkins. Cash became the front man for their musical group, which produced a blend of blues and country western styles.

Later in 1954, Cash and his friends auditioned for Sun Records owner Sam Phillips, who felt that their gospel style would limit their potential and asked them to return with an original song. The trio returned with "Hey Porter," written by Cash, and Phillips signed the group as Johnny Cash and the Tennessee Two.

Cash followed up with a streak of successful singles and albums, but felt dissatisfied with the only 3% royalty earned under his current contract. In 1958, Cash left Sun Records and relocated to California to work for Columbia Records, taking his bandmates with him, and adding drummer W.S. Holland in 1960 to become Johnny Cash and The Tennessee Three.

While on tour in 1955, Cash met June Carter, a performer in the Carter Family musical group, with whom he maintained a close friendship. She co-wrote “Ring of Fire” in 1963, which would become one of his most popular songs. Cash also began to perform in prisons after a landmark 1969 live performance at San Quentin State Prison, and the subsequent live records rose to great popularity. Cash also enjoyed a brief foray into acting, starring in some Western television programs and the movie *Five Minutes to Live* in 1961.



Johnny Cash and June Carter.

However, Cash’s stardom and stretched schedule, combined with a growing dependency on drugs and alcohol, began to affect his personal life. Vivian, now mother to the couple’s four daughters, filed for divorce in 1966. Other public incidents involving drugs and alcohol followed, until his old touring companion, June Carter, helped him get treatment and renew his commitment to his faith. Cash proposed to June during a live performance in 1968, and their marriage sparked a simultaneous shift in his career. In 1969, Cash began hosting a two-year run of *The Johnny Cash Show*, on which he booked popular performers such as Neil Young, Louis Armstrong, Bob Dylan, and Roy Orbison. He also used his show to comment on social issues of the time, and cemented his image as “The Man in Black,” in contrast to his flashier musical contemporaries. He expressed that his black garb was a sign of mourning for the poor, hungry, and those who have been hurt from the events of history and the recent past.

Cash’s somewhat lagging musical popularity was reinvigorated when he received two Grammy Awards in 1969 for his live album *Johnny Cash at Folsom Prison*. The following year, Cash and June Carter welcomed their first and only child, John Carter Cash.

After *The Johnny Cash Show*, Cash remained involved with other media pursuits, including co-starring with Kirk Douglas in the film *A Gunfight* (1970), and authoring a best-selling autobiography, *Man in Black* (1975). He also produced, co-wrote, and narrated a film with Billy Graham about Jesus entitled *The Gospel Road*, and appeared on numerous other television shows and specials.

In 1980, Cash became the youngest living musician to be elected to the Country Music Hall of Fame, the same year that Cash's band reorganized to become known as The Great Eighties Eight. Cash began to team up with other musicians, including Kristofferson, Willie Nelson, and Waylon Jennings to comprise the country music supergroup, the Highwaymen, and notably collaborated with U2 in the early 1990s. Such partnerships helped return him to popularity and gather fans from different genres, especially through his recordings of cover songs, the most famous of which is arguably his cover of "Hurt" by Nine Inch Nails.

However, despite his successful musical endeavors, Cash continued to struggle with his health and addiction problems, undergoing abdominal surgery and a double-bypass heart surgery, in addition to spending time in rehab.

In 1992, Cash was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and won a 1995 Grammy Award for Best Contemporary Folk Album with his release of *American Recordings*. He also released a second memoir in 1997, entitled *Cash: The Autobiography*.



The Highwaymen: Willie Nelson, Kris Kristofferson, Johnny Cash, and Waylon Jennings.

Cash's health continued to decline into the 1990s. He was misdiagnosed with autonomic neuropathy - a syndrome that affects regulation of automatic body functions such as blood pressure, temperature, and digestion – and was hospitalized with pneumonia in 1998, though he continued to make music throughout his health challenges.

Still suffering from his own ill-health, Cash was devastated by the death of his wife, June Carter, in May 2003. He then completed the final track on his album *American V: A Hundred Highways* just one week before his death from diabetic complications in Nashville on September 12, 2003. After his death, he was honored at the 2003 CMA Awards where he won Best Album, and his life was dramatized in the 2005 film *Walk the Line*, starring Joaquin Phoenix and Reese Witherspoon as Johnny and June. His influence on American music continues to reverberate; he will be forever remembered as "The Man in Black."

## Johnny Cash Influence

### Music

In addition to his prolific musical creation – music critics estimate that Cash wrote hundreds of songs, and has sold over 90 million records worldwide – Cash was widely known for his support of artists with the potential to cross genres, and who may not have necessarily fit into mainstream contemporary music scene, such as musical artists like Bob Dylan. Cash's lasting influence on American music have been honored with numerous tribute albums and awards, such as the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award, high rankings in music albums, and even commemorative postage stamps. He is also featured in the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame, the Country Music Hall of Fame, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, GMA's Gospel Music Hall of Fame, and the Memphis Music Hall of Fame: a diverse testament to his musical diversity and appeal.



The Johnny Cash U.S. postage stamp.

### Celebrity Activism

In the 1960s, Cash developed a strong moral interest in the tragedy of colonization and violence directed toward the Native American communities of North America. In contrast to country music's frequent depiction of the noble cowboy as a hero, Cash released *Bitter Tears: Ballads of the American Indian* in 1964, despite numerous attempts from his musical contemporaries to persuade him to cancel the album's release. Cash continued to advocate for justice on *The Johnny Cash Show*, performed in musical benefits near Wounded Knee, and helped raise money to build a school. Cash and June Carter were also both strong supporters of SOS Children's Villages, an international organization dedicated to caring for and protecting children.

### Public Awareness of Addiction

Cash's prolific rise to fame paralleled an increasingly serious drug addiction. Cash was arrested multiple times for the possession of controlled substances though he never served a prison sentence, while his stage costuming contributed to his portrayal as a "romantic outlaw." Cash's seventh and final arrest occurred in 1967 following a car crash and the subsequent discovery of his stash of prescription pills. The sheriff in LaFayette, Georgia, encouraged Cash to change his ways, and was later credited by Cash for his eventual turnaround and the simultaneous revival of his faith. However, Cash resumed his drug habit in 1977, thus beginning a difficult cycle of addiction and rehab, with his final stint in rehab occurring in 1992.



## AMERICAN FOLK MUSIC

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American folk music is a category which combines numerous musical genres either native to or developed in the United States. Roots music, while heavily related, is a larger umbrella term that includes blues and country, in addition to genres like bluegrass, gospel, and Native American music.

Roots music came from a wide variety of people, paralleling the wide variety of cultural traditions that began to blend throughout American history. For example, early folk songs were brought to the U.S. by colonists from the United Kingdom, and African rhythms and musicality were introduced to the U.S. through the extension of the slave trade in the 17th century. Music developed and proliferated rapidly from 1900 until 1930 as a result of the mass migration of people affected by the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl; thus, roots music has strong regional ties in some of its genres, such as the relationship between Cajun traditions and the Louisiana region. By the 1950s, roots music had developed into numerous genres, such as rockabilly, rock and roll, R&B, and country. Strong roots influences are also found in bluegrass, gospel, and blues music.

Bluegrass originally developed in Appalachia from the folk music of British and Irish settlers, which included ballads and dance songs. One common bluegrass trait is that of breakdowns, which are solo improvisations surrounding the melody, made by individual instruments. Traditionally played on hand-picked acoustic strings, some bluegrass music features harmonicas or accordions. Vocalization is often present in harmonies about everyday narratives of difficult lives. The music accompanied rural dancing styles, and eventually grew into its own genre following World War II.

Gospel is Christian praise music with strong ties to African oral traditions. Common traits include call and response, a capella, physical percussion, strong harmonies, and vocals about Biblical themes and ideas. Contemporary gospel originated in the 19th century as a result of the mass revival movement and the Pentecostal movement, which was an emotionally-charged method of worship largely embraced by African American communities.

Blues music is also based in African American culture, and thus is very closely related to gospel. It is uncertain whether blues or gospel developed first, but blues can be thought of as the secular counterpoint to gospel, as its lyrics primarily focus on melancholic stories about life. Blues music features call-and-response, bass lines, the blues scale, blue notes, and particular chord progressions. The genre itself dates to the end of slavery in America, and is followed soon after by ragtime and jazz. Since then, the blues have grown into an important influence on the country and R&B musical genres.

Following these styles, country music first emerged in the early 1920s in Atlanta, as residents of rural Appalachia began to move to more urban areas. Eventually, country led to the rockabilly style, and eventually to rock and roll. Innovations in earlier iterations of folk music often influenced various styles, which then induced stylistic evolutions in folk music to continue a cycle of American musical development.

## INSTRUMENTS IN THE SHOW

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An accordion.

### Accordion

Accordions comprise a broad group of musical instruments that are played by manipulating the bellows while utilizing a keyboard that allows air to come into contact with reeds. They are found around the globe and used in a wide variety of music styles ranging from Latino countries to Europe and some specifically North American music, such as Cajun and zydeco. The first patent of the accordion has been traced back to Cyrill Demain of Vienna in 1829, although the instrument has undergone serious alterations to reach its modern form.



An upright bass.

### Upright Bass

Related to the development of violins in Italy, basses are the lowest-pitched and largest string instrument, standing at approximately six feet tall, and which can be played with either a bow or by plucking. Outside of classical music, the instrument is called the upright bass, bass fiddle, or bass violin to distinguish it from bass guitar and other classical connotations.



A modern drum kit.

### Drums

Drums are the world's oldest and most widespread instrument, and have been used for a variety of purposes. Part of the percussion group, the modern drum kit includes a snare drum, a bass drum, at least one tom, a hi-hat, and at least one cymbal. Previously, multiple percussionists were necessary to play certain instruments. Various attempts were made to condense the necessary manpower, especially by jazz musicians; thus, the modern kit emerged.



A fiddle.

### **Fiddle**

A fiddle is a colloquial name for a violin, but the term is often used to refer to folk musicians. Fiddling emphasizes quick note changes, in contrast to the classical violinist's use of vibrato and suspended note. The instrument is likely based on the Byzantine lira from approximately the 9th century, and the modern form was developed in Italy in the early 16th century.



An acoustic guitar.

### **Guitar**

Guitars are string instruments that typically have six strings, although the number can range from four to eighteen. While there are many types of guitars, they can be classified into acoustic guitars, which project sound through a hollow area in the instrument, or electric guitars, which use an amplifier and speaker. Chordophones are a classification of instruments that make sounds through the vibration of strings, and thus includes most modern string instruments. The term "guitar" was first used in Spain in the 13th century, though the origin of modern guitars is uncertain. It is generally agreed that the modern form was influenced by the European lute and the oud, which was developed in Iberia.



A harmonica.

### **Harmonica**

Harmonicas come in many types, but always produce sound by blowing air into holes along the mouthpiece with the intention of vibrating a pre-tuned reed. They were developed in Europe in the 19th century, but are based on historical free reed instruments from Asia. Harmonicas were first produced en masse by German clockmaker Matthais Hohner, who is also responsible for sending them to America where they quickly proliferated and became featured in a wide variety of roots genres.



An electric keyboard.

### **Keyboard**

Keyboards are similar to pianos, but are electric rather than analog instruments. Their key structure can vary, but range from approximately 61 keys for home keyboards to 73 keys on professional keyboards, to contrast with the 88 keys of a traditional piano. Musical keyboards are found on many instruments, but the term is



A mandolin.

generally applied to electronic keyboards that have a similar structure to that of a piano. While the first electric keyboard instrument was created in 1760 by Jean Baptiste Thillaie de Laborde, the modern electronic keyboard has undergone a series of developments, notably the invention of the synthesizer in the 1960s.

### **Mandolin**

Mandolins have five to ten strings, usually eight, and are typically played with a pick. There are three different versions of mandolin, with the carved-top variety featured prominently in American roots music. The instrument evolved from 17th century and later Italian lutes, which have roots in ancient history.



A trumpet.

### **Trumpet**

Trumpets can play the most high-pitched notes among the brass family; they are played by “buzzing” the lips to send an air vibration into the instrument. They have historically been used for battle signaling in military conflicts since at least 1500 BC, but they developed from brass instrument design improvements in the late-14th century.

## **JUKEBOX MUSICALS**

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A jukebox musical is a musical that uses popular songs as its score. While the music often relates to the body of work of certain artists, the songs are organized into a plot that usually echoes the life of the creator. The unique challenge of the art form is figuring out how to fit songs into the story while maintaining the relevance of the plot. Johnny Cash released over ninety albums over the course of his career, so there were many songs to choose from for *Ring of Fire!*

## **GLOSSARY**

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**Acre:** land area equal to 4,840 square yards, or 0.405 hectares.

**Adversity:** difficulty or misfortune.

**Aggravation:** intensification of a negative quality or aspect.

**Buckeye bead:** a handcrafted glass bead that looks like a nut from a buckeye tree.



**Cabaret:** a nightclub or restaurant with live entertainment.

**Cardinal:** an American songbird or finch; males of the species have bright red plumage.

**Cavort:** to jump or dance around enthusiastically.

**Confederacy:** the Confederate States of America, an alliance of mostly southern states that fought for national sovereignty in the American Civil War.

**Depression:** a period of economic crisis, the Great Depression began in October 1929 and continued through most of the 1930s.

**Emergency Relief Administration:** the first relief operation of Roosevelt's New Deal, designed to alleviate unemployment by creating new unskilled jobs in local and state government.

**Grand Ole Opry:** a weekly country music concert in Nashville, founded in 1925.

**Hock:** to sell or pawn goods.

**Honky-tonk:** a style of country western music popularized in the 1950s; can also refer to a cheap of disreputable establishment where country music is typically played.

**Parish:** in the Christian church, a small administrative district typically having its own church and pastor.

**Ritz:** reference to the Ritz-Carlton luxury hotel chain; also used to refer to swanky or luxurious circumstances.

**Ryman Auditorium:** live music venue in Nashville, known as the home of the Grand Ole Opry.

**Sherman:** William Tecumseh Sherman was a General in the Union Army during the American Civil War.

**Tennessee flat top box:** a regular acoustic guitar with steel strings.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & ACTIVITIES

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### Discussion Questions

1. How does music inspire you?
2. How does music narrate the story in this play?
3. Do you see your story in this play?
4. Which characters do you relate to the most? Why?
5. Does this musical remind you of experiences with your own family & loved ones?
6. How interactive are the musicians on stage?
7. How do the characters change throughout the play?
8. What characteristics indicate these changes?
9. Which song stood out to you the most? Why?



## Activities

1. Divide the class into groups, and have each group pick a song written by Johnny Cash. Each group should listen to their song and think about the story it depicts. Stage a scene using the story in the song, and present to the rest of the class.
2. *Ring of Fire* falls into a genre of musicals commonly known as "Jukebox Musicals." These musicals are written featuring the music from a specific singer or band that predates the musical. Sometimes these musicals tell the story of the creation of that particular band (examples include *Jersey Boys* and *The Buddy Holly Story*, or they tell an original story that is created through a selection of songs by that artist (examples include *Mamma Mia!* and *American Idiot*). Think of your favorite singer or band and create the outline of a musical based on their music. Start by picking four to ten songs that can be used to create a story. In your outline, think about where each song would go in the plot, and which characters sing each song.
3. Pick a character from the story that particularly interested you, and write two additional scenes about that character's life. Your first scene can happen before the action of the play, and the second can after the play ends.
4. Choose a scene or a song that you enjoyed from *Ring of Fire*. Write your own adaptation of this moment in the play as if it happened in 2017. Talk to your classmates about how the scene changed and how it stayed the same after being modernized.