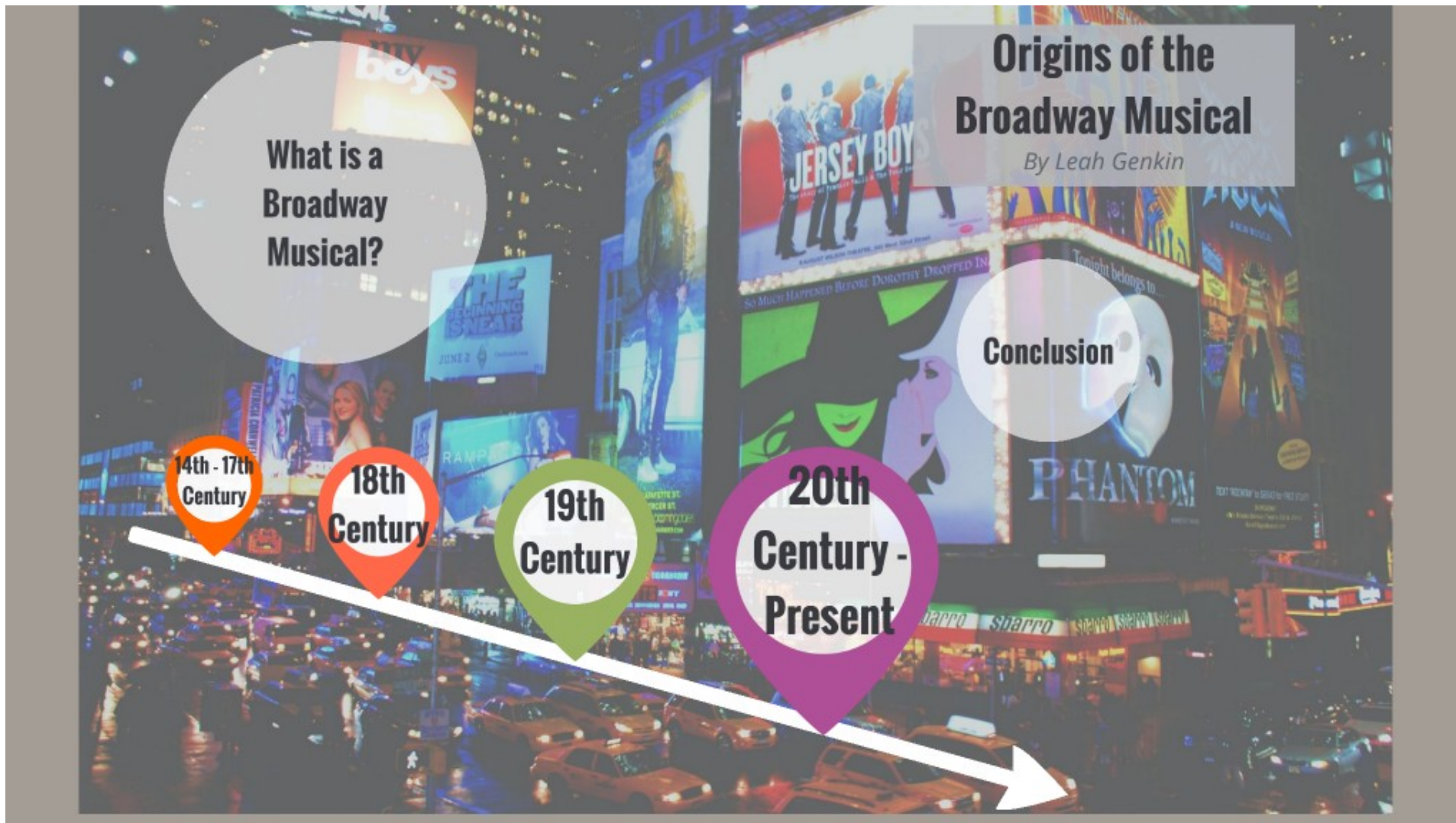


What is a Broadway Musical?

- "The Czech theorist Ivo Osolsobe put it well when he summarized the subject...as *The Theatre Which Speaks, Sings, and Dances*." (Larry Stempel in *Showtime: A History of the Broadway Musical Theater*, Page 3).
- It is important to note that a Broadway show is not necessarily a musical. For example, *A Dolls House Part II* is a Broadway show but it only had dialogue. To be considered Broadway, the show must be presented in one of the professional theaters with 500 or more seats in the Theater District of Manhattan.
- However, with the above in mind, most Broadway shows are a story-telling musical. They are "operas of a certain popular bent" (Stempel 4). This presentation will focus on the evolution of Broadway musicals from operas.



The Renaissance

- The Opera emerged from Italy and spread to the rest of Europe. It was generally attended by the upper class of society.
- The performance is sung from beginning to end with the plot often based on dramatic history or myths.
- An opera also incorporates elements from theater such as acting, scenery, and costumes.
- The opera introduced the idea of combining text and music in a dramatic plot in a theater setting.

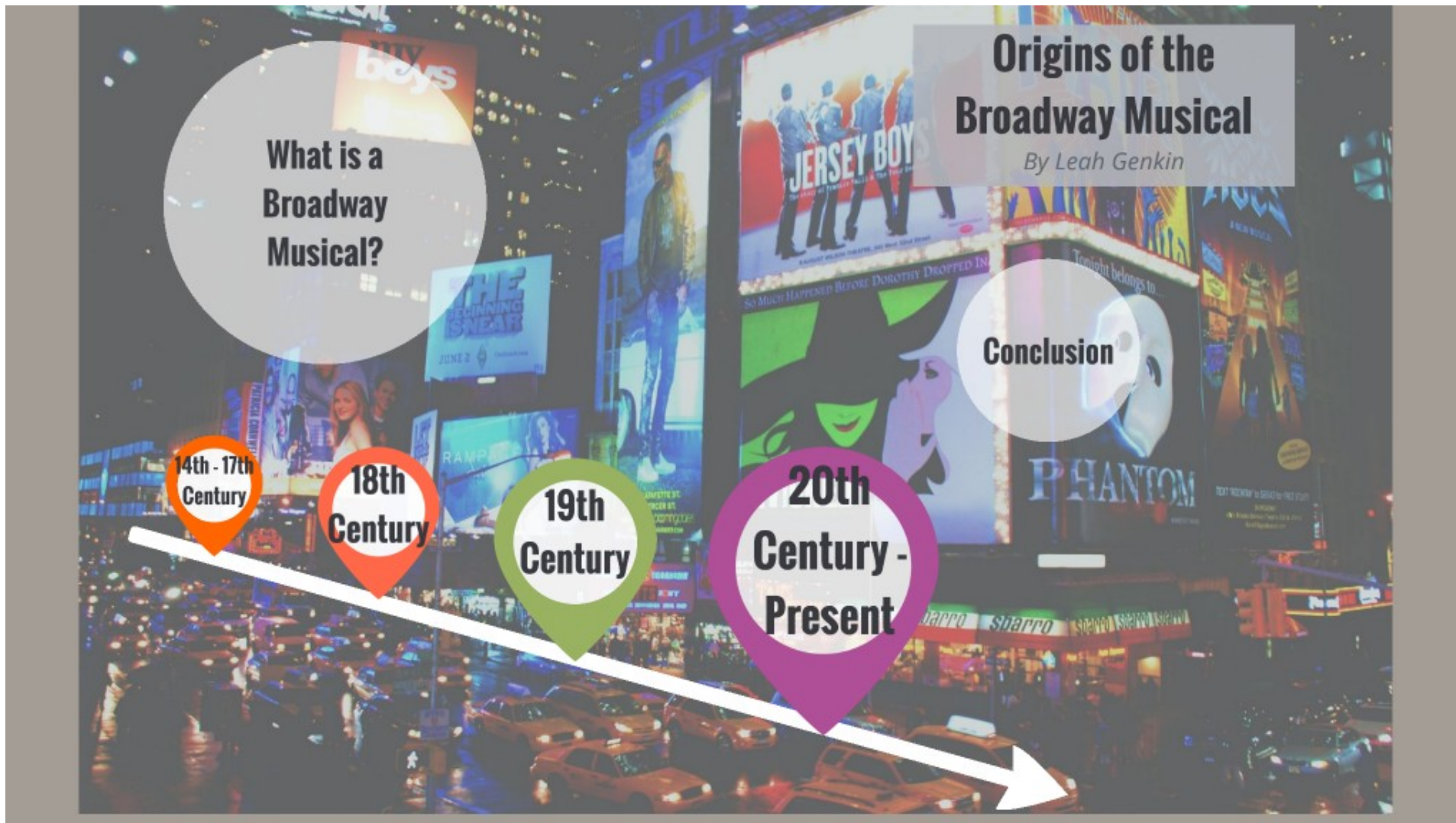


La favola d'Orfeo (The legend of Orpheus), composed by Claudio Monteverdi in 1608.

Watch first 25 seconds.

This is one of the earliest classic operas still performed today. Notice the elements of theater; singing, acting, scenery, and costumes. These elements are also present in Broadway musicals.





18th Century

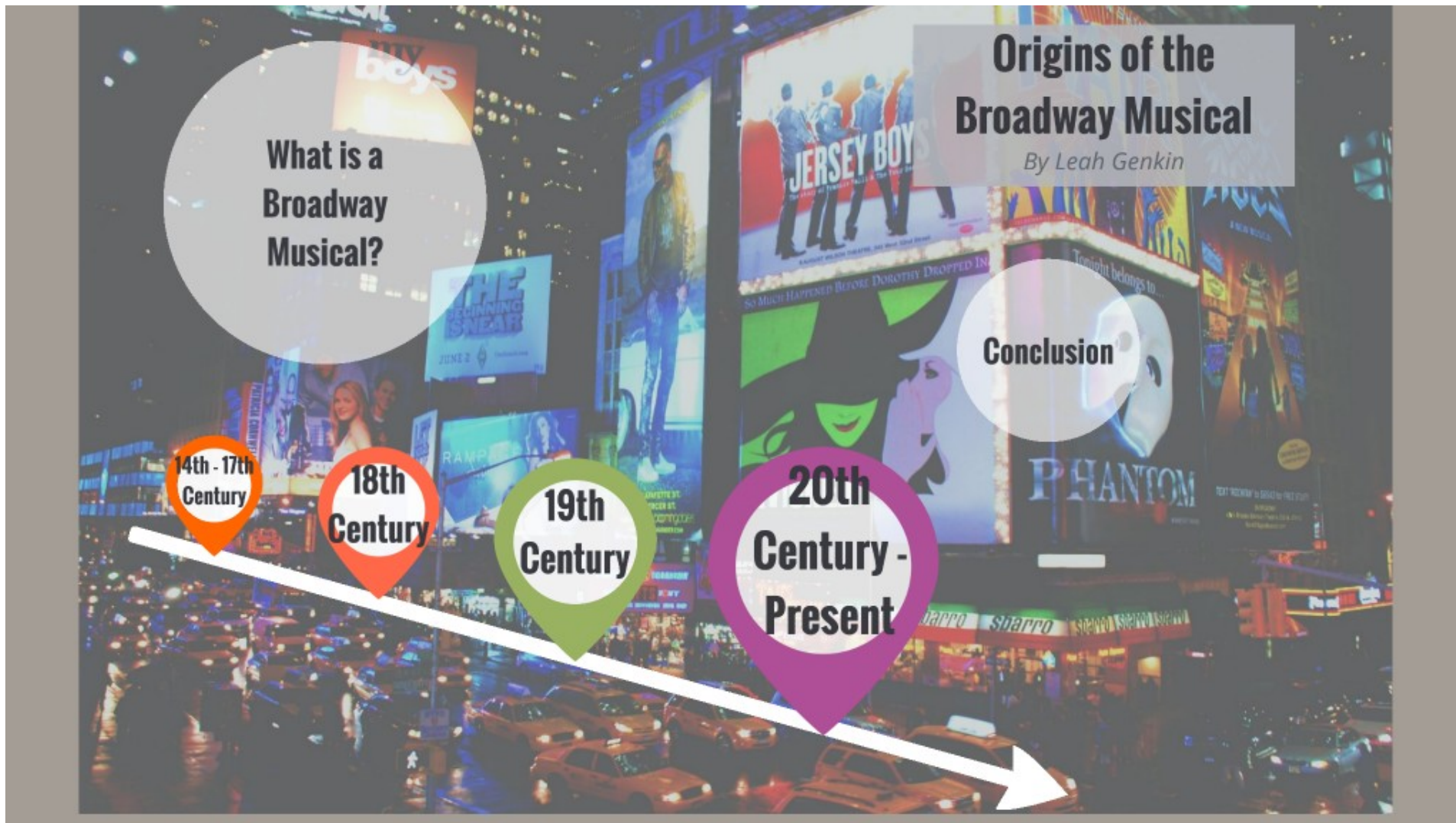
- Opera genres begin to develop; one of them is the opera buffa - the comic opera.
- The ballad opera, a development of the English theatre, is an opera buffa.
- It includes spoken dialogue, and is light in nature typically with a happy ending.
- Released in 1728, *The Beggar's Opera* became one of the most famous ballad operas.
- John Kenrick explains in "Musicals on Stage: A Capsule History," that it introduced the idea of combining popular tunes and political/social satire to achieve an opera that is more relatable and not only for the upper class.



Most of the people in this image from a ballad opera have a smile on their face. Overall, the atmosphere relayed is a happier and lighter one.



This is a scene from *The Beggar's Opera*. Notice the movement and expressions captured in this image. Similar to Broadway musicals, it is more dynamic than the classical opera. *The Beggar's Opera* can be viewed "as a forerunner of the modern musical" (Stempel 22).



19th Century

- Stemming from the comic opera, operettas become popular in America.
- They have popular dances and music in their production.
- Operettas were meant to amuse and not only intellectually stimulate as operas were intended to in the past.
- Gilbert and Sullivan's operettas were imported to New York and became extremely popular, especially their work *H.M.S Pinafore*.

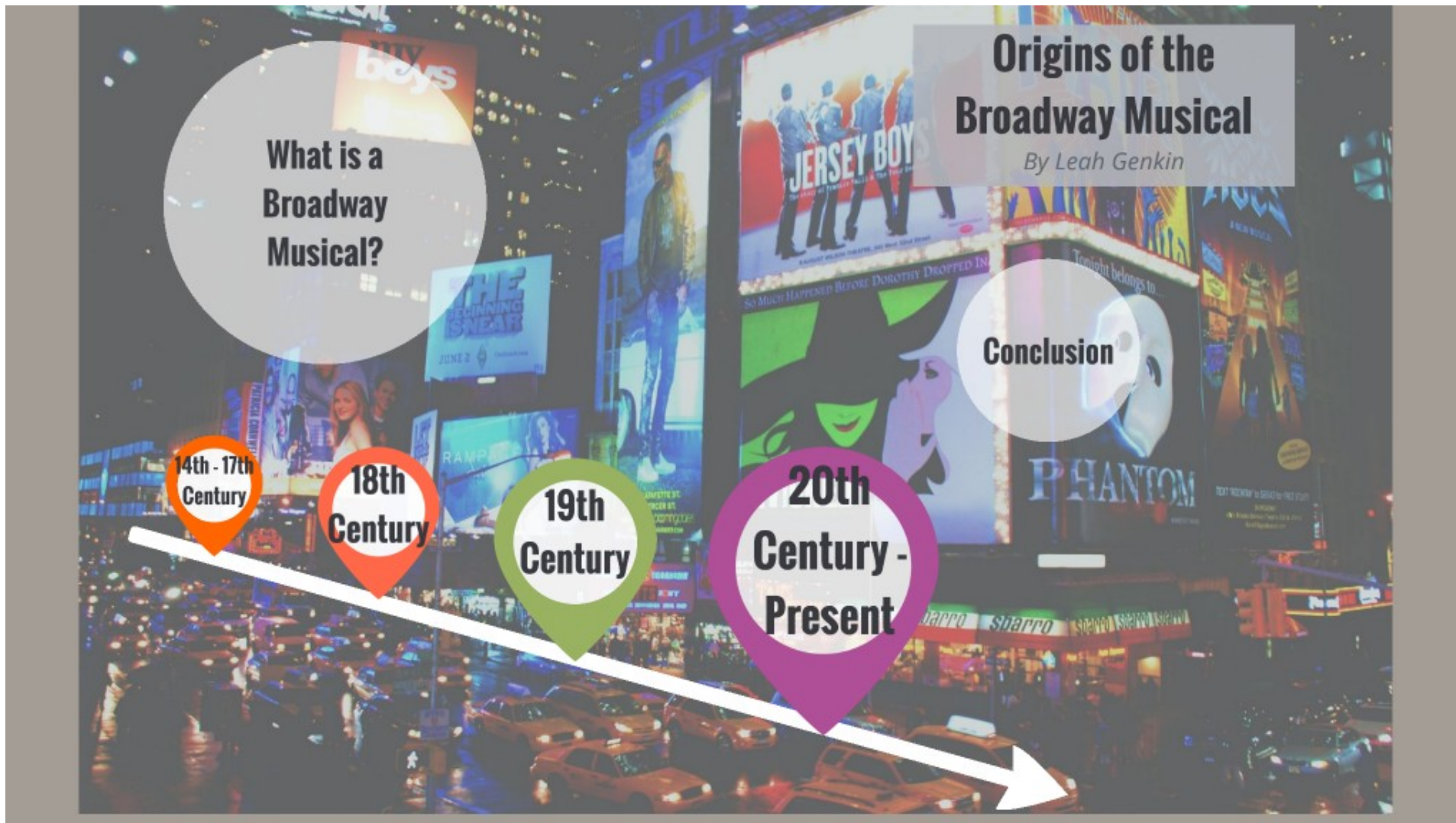


This is an image of a scene from Gilbert and Sullivan's famous operetta *H.M.S Pinafore*. Similarities to Broadway musicals are becoming more apparent, especially that dances are included in the performance.



This is a clip of "When I Was a Lad" from *H.M.S. Pinafore* (watch first 15 seconds). One sees that the performance is amusing instead of serious/ dramatic and intellectually stimulating.





1900s and on

- The American musical comedy evolves.
- It is a play with dialogue and inserted musical numbers. They were generally frivolous and lacking elements of a skillfully created performance. Songs and dances were the focus of these shows.
- Kern and Oscar Hammerstin II collaborated to create the musical *Show Boat* which was released in 1927. It quickly became a major hit and shaped the format of the Broadway musical we know today.
- It blended elements of the superficial musical comedies with elements of the more serious operettas. The more relatable characters, emotions, and situations present in the musical comedy were combined with the carefully crafted music and lyrics present in an operetta. The result was a skilled production, that was also realistic and entertaining.



In this preview of *Show Boat*, observe that the music of operettas, and the plot, humor, and characters of American musical comedies were well blended in a theatrical work. The result was a show that more closely resembles the Broadway musicals of today.



The Golden Age of Broadway

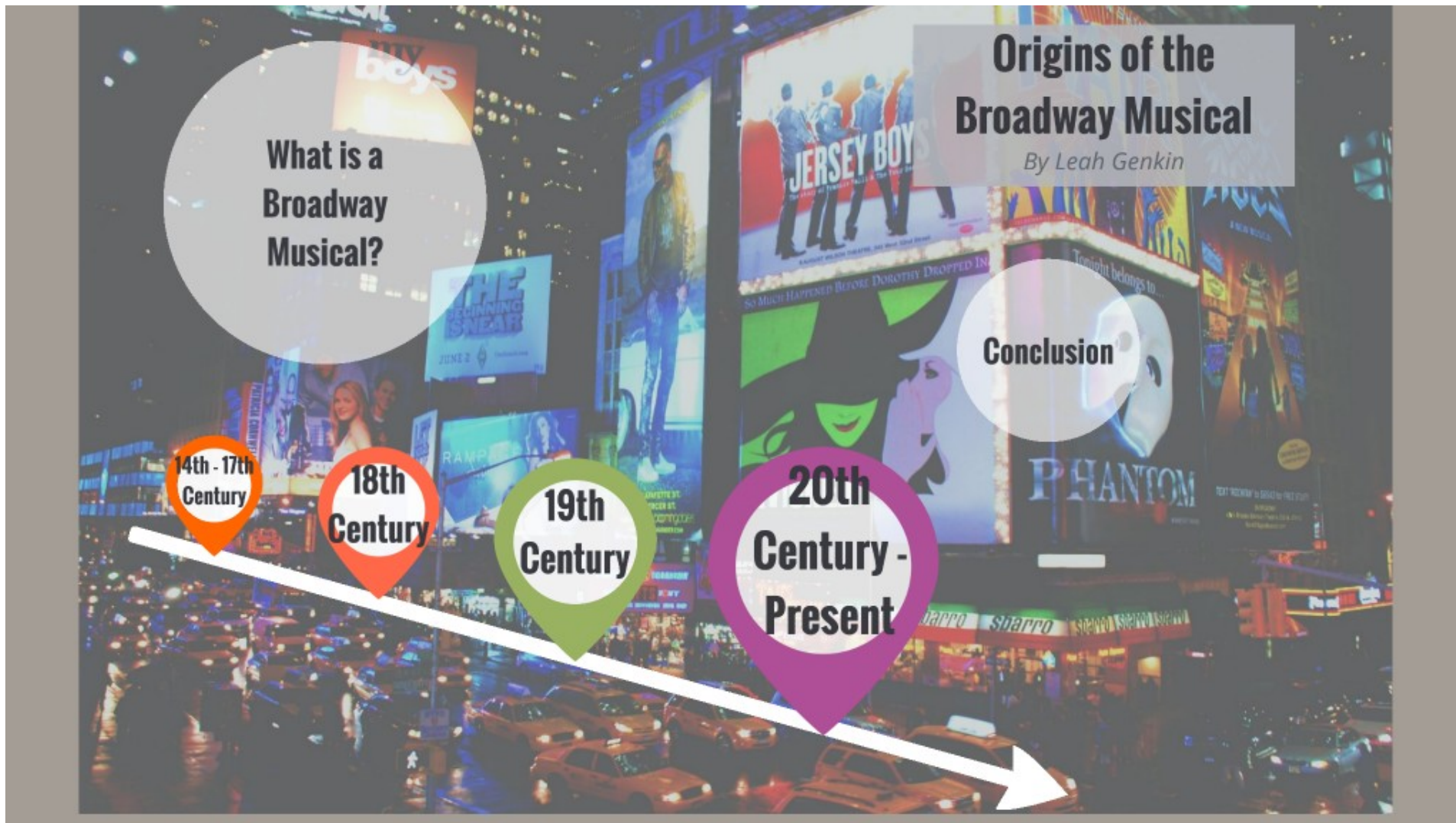
- The next musical which further developed Broadway musicals was *Oklahoma!* created by Rodgers and Hammerstein and first performed in 1943.
- Jeff Malet in "*Oklahoma!* - A Historical Perspective" explains that it became so popular since the music, lyrics, and dance, were completely integrated into the show and integral in developing the plot and characters. To further explain, "*suppose you have a dramatic scene with a rising emotion where nothing could top the spoken word except a song?*" (Stempel 308).
- In the past, showgirls would pop onto stage in glitzy costumes and perform dances not connected to the plot.
- Basically, it developed what *Show Boat* did into a performance where every element was seamlessly part of the story.



Watch first 15 seconds.

In this preview of *Oklahoma!*, the costumes for the dances/songs and the choreography are in the southern style, thus relevant to the play. The music and dance of operettas are now a fundamental part of the plot instead of being individual pieces. Look how far entertainment has developed from Opera.





Conclusion

As operas evolved through time, they paved the way for the creation of Broadway musicals. It began with establishing the concept of singing and acting in a performance with theatrical elements such as costumes and scenery. The opera then progressed to include dialogue, be more comical, and not only for the elite of society. Next, it became operettas which included dances in the production and were more amusing. Finally, through *Show Boat* and *Oklahoma!* the above aspects of the opera were integrated with the American musical comedy to create the genre of Broadway musicals.

Conclusion

Yet, as Broadway musicals develop through time, there is little external resemblance to operas. When one watches Hamilton, they don't associate it with opera. The uninformed viewer will watch it and think "cool!" - there's rap, singing, dancing, and acting. However, if one looks at Broadway musicals on a deeper level, they all have elements opera introduced to the world. The singing, dancing, and acting perfectly combined in one show to entertain, slowly developed from operas into Broadway musicals.







The End

