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Bootlegs and the Accessibility of Broadway

Victoria Naile

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Bootlegs and the Accessibility of Broadway

Broadway shows aren't an artform that is accessible to everyone, between the economic and geographic barriers, millions of people cannot experience live shows. Some theater lovers turn to illegal recordings of the show, called bootlegs, to access shows that they may not be able to see otherwise. The making and consuming of bootlegs are hotly debated amongst the theater community with most discussions regarding if the practice helps or harms live theater. The purpose of this study is to analyze the effect that bootlegs have on a Broadway show's popularity, Broadway actors, and possible alternatives to bootlegs. I analyzed statistics of Broadway audiences, as well as experiences of Broadway actors and the bootleg creating community to gain insight into how these videos affect Broadway shows. Contrary to what is often assumed, bootlegs do help Broadway in some ways. These recordings make the art form more accessible to individuals outside of the typical Broadway audience member statistic and the circulation of these shows can make a work more popular. Broadway actors seem to be divided on the topic with some stating that an audience recording distracts from their performance while others watch bootlegs themselves. The individuals who film these bootlegs have an entire culture of selling, trading, and distributing these recordings that leads to further divide for bootleg watchers. Additionally, the alternative of professionally shot and distributed shows proves that making Broadway more accessible does not mean a decrease in ticket sales.