

# **Understanding identity in** **the musical *SIX***

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## **Abstract**

*SIX* is a musical retelling of the lives of the six wives of Henry VIII, but as they say themselves, are the stories we know really the truth? This work will look at the way in which identity is seen throughout the musical. Firstly, the work will consider what the identity of the show is as a whole, thinking about the function the show was created for and then relating to the study of two types of musical theatre: the integrated music and the concept musical. In doing so, some key shows within those areas will be discussed including *Oklahoma!* (1943), *Company* (1970), and *A Chorus Line* (1975).

Following this, the idea of identity related to the characters, the six wives of Henry VIII will be explored, firstly the identity they have historically and then the identity that the show has crafted for them. These new personas will be looked at in terms of their individual songs and the influences of existing artists.

Finally, the piece will look at the identities of the individuals cast to portray the Queens, and how their identities influence the roles they play.

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## **Introduction**

*SIX* (2017) was written by Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss who created the show whilst at Cambridge University, studying English and History respectively. Both had an interest in musical theatre, which initiated their involvement in the university's Musical Theatre Society. It was for this society that the duo wrote an original show to be performed at the Edinburgh Fringe in the summer of 2017 rather than using a pre-existing show that would cost more money to produce. Thus, *SIX* was created; a show that uses events in the lives of the six wives of Henry VIII set to the backdrop of a pop concert in which the Queens tell their stories in their own way.

## **A History of *SIX***

Premiering in Cambridge at the ADC Theatre on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2017, *SIX* was directed, choreographed, produced, and performed by students from the University's society, all of whom transferred the show to the Edinburgh Fringe, where musical theatre producers Wendy and Andy Barnes were amongst the audiences. Both producers saw the show separately yet knew they wished to support and develop it further. Following talks with Marlow and Moss, professional showcase performances of *SIX* took place towards the end of 2017, which Barnes and Barnes co-produced. After the success of these performances, the show became the inaugural production for Global Musicals – the company run by Barnes and Barnes, who, alongside producers Kenny Wax and George Stiles, launched a small UK tour of *SIX* in 2018 which included a return to the Fringe and a six-week run at the Arts Theatre in London's West End. The cast who portrayed the Queens in the showcase in 2017 also recorded the studio album of the show, with two then returning for the UK tour. Following the conclusion of the tour, the show re-opened at the Arts Theatre in January 2019 and had a planned run through to January 2021; however, this was paused in March 2020 due to the Coronavirus pandemic, which forced the closure of all UK theatres and many other public venues. Once the restrictions placed on public venues eased, the show reopened in May 2021 at the Lyric Theatre, with a UK tour launching soon after. In America, the show had been due to open on Broadway the same day as theatres were closed due to the pandemic, but, as with London, the show opened following the easing of restrictions. Currently, in July 2024, productions of the show are taking place in London's West End with a UK and Ireland tour also

playing across the nation; Broadway with a North American tour also taking place; an Australian tour; productions in Holland, Singapore, Japan, and the Philippines. The show is also performed on Cruise ships managed by Norwegian Cruise Line as a part of their onboard entertainment.

### **A connection with *SIX***

One of my first encounter of *SIX* was during the national lockdown due to the Coronavirus pandemic when I was listening to a musical theatre playlist as background music whilst working on a university essay. Following this I listened to the studio album and from there it became one of my favourite albums to listen and sing along to. Looking back, I think it may have been due to the pop-music nature of the songs, some of which reminded me of songs I would listen to in my childhood which deepened the connection of both the songs and the show with me. Another element is the subject matter used within the show. Once I researched what the show was about, I was pleased to learn that it is based on the wives of Henry VIII, as this is one of my favourite periods of English history. I have always been interested in the Tudor era since learning about it at primary school, and I have read several fiction and non-fiction books about the era, such as the Phillipa Gregory series that covers the end of the Wars of the Roses through the Tudor dynasty, written from the perspective of women central to the events, an aspect I like about the books and also about *SIX*. I have watched numerous documentaries, films, and television series set during the Tudor era which deepened my interest in *SIX*. On a trip to London in July 2021 following the pandemic, a group of friends and I booked to see the show at the Lyric Theatre which I thoroughly enjoyed, maybe because it was the first show I had been able to see post-lockdown. Perhaps it was the fact I was finally seeing a show that I felt I knew from listening to the cast album for months before this trip, however watching the show was not how I had imagined it would be, as I had not fully appreciated the fact the musicians would be on stage, almost becoming extra members of the cast. It was because of this I left feeling extremely impressed by a show that was unlike anything I had previously seen.

### **A Dissertation on *SIX***

When it was time to choose a topic for my Masters degree, I knew I wanted to explore Musical Theatre as it has long been a passion of mine, and also an area I

had enjoyed researching and writing about during my undergraduate studies. I chose to focus my work on *SIX* as it was a show I wanted to look at in more detail, which has subsequently led to this piece of work. This dissertation will explore the idea of identity related to *SIX* in a number of ways. Firstly, Chapter One will explore the various categories of musicals and the way in which *SIX* can be identified based on these types of musicals. Chapter Two will examine who the six Queens were, how each of them have been remembered historically, and how these six individuals have been constructed and presented within the show. The last chapter will consider the identities of those cast in the various productions to play the Queens and the way the group is identified and viewed as a whole.



## **Chapter One**

This chapter will focus on the identity of *SIX* as a whole production rather than individual elements. Firstly, it will consider the way the writers, Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss worked to create the show and the outcome they wished to achieve, and how the current narrative of the show is related to the desired outcome. It will then explore the different types of musical theatre and where *SIX* fits within these categories.

### **Creating *SIX***

As highlighted in the introduction, *SIX* was created by Marlow and Moss, and written for their University Musical Theatre Society to perform at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in the summer of 2017. Then president of the society, Joe Beighton, who later became the musical supervisor for the show, said one of the aims of taking a student written show to the Fringe was “to not lose money, as we almost always did on our Edinburgh shows”.<sup>1</sup> It was hoped writing an original show would keep costs down, and Marlow and Moss were tasked to create this. Before writing on the show began, the pair established four guiding principles for the show to achieve.

It would have a cast that was predominantly female or nonbinary; it would have a famous subject matter; it would experiment with theatrical form, and the genre would be pop.<sup>2</sup>

This focus on creating roles for females and nonbinary performers was attributed to the experiences of their friends, who “were talented female and nonbinary performers who never got to sing fun songs or have fun roles.”<sup>3</sup> It is true at the time roles for such performers were limited, both in number and range, especially when compared to the different roles available for male performers, so creating these roles would help to balance this inequality.

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<sup>1</sup> Joe Beighton, Foreword in *SIX – All the songs from the Hit Musical* (London: Faber Music Ltd, 2020), 2

<sup>2</sup> Michael Paulson, “The Making of ‘Six’: How Tudor Queens Turned Into Pop Stars” in *The New York Times*, February 2020 [Online] <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/27/theater/six-broadway.html> Accessed June 2022

<sup>3</sup> David Gordon, *Listen Up, Queens! Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss Tell Us the Story of Their Hit Musical Six*, 2019 [Online] [https://www.theatermania.com/chicago-theater/news/interview-six-lucy-moss-toby-marlow\\_88893.html](https://www.theatermania.com/chicago-theater/news/interview-six-lucy-moss-toby-marlow_88893.html) , Accessed July 2022

There are several stories detailing how the idea for the show came about, the most common being that the idea came to Marlow during a poetry tutorial, and rather than making notes on the content of the workshop, they noted down ideas for the show they had been tasked to write (Figure 1).

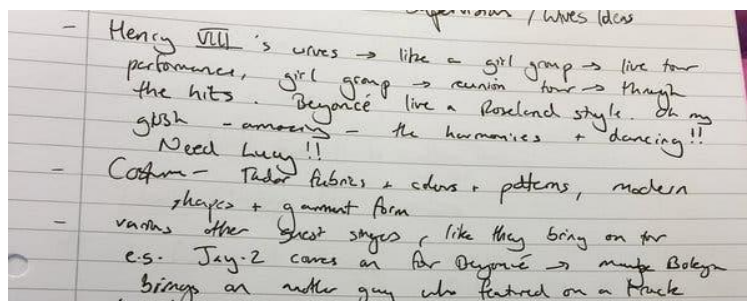


Figure 1 – A copy of the notes Marlow made during the poetry tutorial<sup>4</sup>

These initial notes detail the idea of using the six wives of Henry VIII as the famous subject matter Marlow and Moss had already identified the show would use. The six wives, Henry, and other prominent figures during the Tudor era have featured in several factual and fictional films, television programmes, and books within popular culture over many years, and it has also formed a part of the history curriculum for many school children in the UK for decades. Both facts help heighten the fame of the wives. The popularity of these indicated a show based on Tudor figures may be well received by audiences. In having a show based on the wives it would provide at least six roles for female performers, or non-binary performers who felt comfortable portraying a female role, linking back to the guiding principles the creative duo set out. Marlow's notes (Figure 1) also identify the idea that the Queens are presented "like a girl group → live tour performance" which would be a way for the creators to not only produce a show within the pop genre but also play with the theatrical form. Most musicals and theatre shows are more conventional in the way performances happen and are staged, whereas touring artists have a little more flexibility with their live shows. The pop genre influence is further strengthened by the mention of successful pop artist Beyoncé, who was also used as inspiration for one of the Queens when the show was written.

Following these initial ideas, Marlow and Moss began writing the show, using two main sources for their information about the Queens: the documentary series *SIX*

<sup>4</sup> Michael Paulson, *The Making of 'Six': How Tudor Queens Turned Into Pop Stars*

*Wives with Lucy Worsley* (2016) and the 1992 book *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* written by historian Antonia Fraser. Both sources look at the lives of the Queens as individuals rather than exclusively looking at their lives as a wife to Henry, which many other books and documentaries tend to focus on.

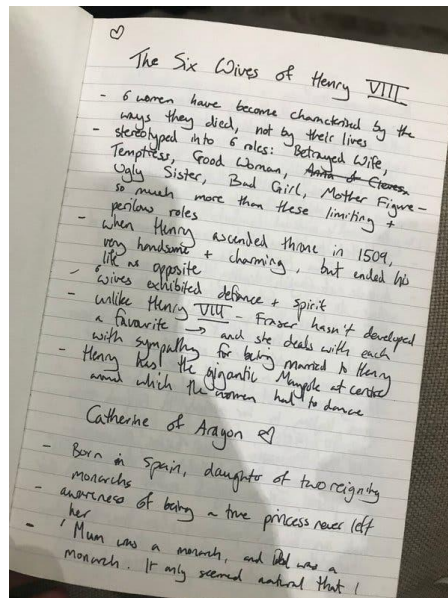


Figure 2 – Notes Marlow made during the research period<sup>5</sup>

Figure 2 outlines notes made by Marlow, indicating that they believed Fraser does not show favouritism towards any one Queen, an element mirrored within *SIX*, as all Queens are given an equal platform in the show. Describing the Worsley documentary Moss stated it was,

Fantastic because of the way it really questions historical perceptions of these women and approaches their lives with a 21<sup>st</sup> century feminist perspective.<sup>6</sup>

In their opening comments for the programme that is available to purchase at performances of *SIX*, Marlow and Moss detail their six-point plan of what they wanted to achieve with the show, which could be argued as the basic concept of the show.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Paulson, *The Making of 'Six': How Tudor Queens Turned Into Pop Stars*

<sup>6</sup> Lucy Moss in Sydney Opera House, *Transforming the Tudors – An Interview with SIX co-creator Lucy Moss*, 9 August 2019 [Online] <https://www.sydneyoperahouse.com/musical-theatre-cabaret/transforming-tudors> Accessed January 2023

*SIX*'s 'Six-Point Plan' – what we're trying to do:

1. We want to provide a different perspective on the six queens separate from their status as wives
2. We will give female historical figures a voice to tell their own experiences – experiences that have, in the past, predominantly been told by men
3. We aim to show that even 500 years later, there are still parallels to be found in the female experience
4. We will show that women can tell stories together that are interesting, engaging, clever and funny – stories told by women to not have to be about or include men in order to be entertaining
5. We plan to use the pop concert genre to enable this fun, silly, comic, and powerful story to be told exclusively by women – but not just 'for' women – and in order to facilitate our third aim
6. All of the above needs to be done whilst above all acknowledging the silliness and campness of its own genre and being self-aware of its own message; it should never be earnest or too sincere<sup>7</sup>

What resulted from their research and the above six-point plan is an 80-minute sung-through spectacular, based on the lives of the six wives of Henry VIII, to a backdrop of a pop concert in which each Queen is competing to become the leader of the band.

### ***SIX* and the Pop-concert format**

Building on the pop-concert format, the show starts with a curtained stage which is similar to the way stages are sometimes curtained for modern live performances at gigs/tours.

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<sup>7</sup> Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss, History of *SIX* in *SIX at the Vaudeville Theatre Programme*, 2021, 2



Figure 3 – Image of the pre-show curtain<sup>8</sup>

These are called drop curtains, as the curtain will quite literally be dropped from its holding at a particular moment during the performance, usually at a climactic point where the music enters, when there is the entrance of a certain instrument or a particular, well known musical riff. In doing this, the curtain drop builds a certain level of excitement and anticipation from the audience which *SIX* utilises at the start of its production. In the show, the Queens all deliver the first ten bars<sup>9</sup> of the opening song, “Ex-Wives” in front of the drop curtain, and the lighting is cleverly used here to spotlight each Queen in turn as they deliver their own lyrics

Divorced.

Beheaded.

Died.

Divorced.

Beheaded.

Survived.

And tonight, London\*,

we are live.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Rebecca Craven, *SIX* at Vaudeville Theatre, London [own image], 2021

<sup>9</sup> Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss, *SIX – All the songs from the Hit Musical*, 3

<sup>10</sup> Marlow and Moss, *SIX – All the songs from the Hit Musical*, 3

The \* denotes that the performer delivering the line should add in the appropriate location where the show is being performed. The curtain is dropped on the word “live”, which is the point at which the music intensifies with all instruments playing at the quicker tempo. Addressing the audience directly at the beginning by inserting the venue’s name provides a parallel to pop concerts/live performances, and immediately breaks the fourth wall, allowing an interaction between stage and audience, which is repeated at various stages throughout the show. One such example of this is later in this song when the character Catherine of Aragon addresses the audience to ask, “Remember us from your GCSEs?”<sup>11</sup>. “Ex-Wives” is a group number in which the audience are introduced to each Queen in turn as well as building the foundation for the remainder of the show by telling us it is based on a story we think we know, but hints there is more to be discovered. At the end of this song, the premise of the Queens being on tour is explained, as they welcome the audience to their “Divorced, Beheaded, Live Tour”.<sup>12</sup> The concept of the competition between the Queens to be the leader of the band is also explained, with each Queen having their own song to help the audience choose a winner. Using the premise of a competition relates *SIX* to a range of different reality television shows, such as *X-Factor* and *Pop Idol* in the UK (the USA and other countries have their own variations). Many audience members will be aware of these reality shows, furthering the pop genre and live performance identity of the show, and presenting the Queens as a pop group on tour, achieving Marlow’s original ideas as well as the guiding principles set out by them and Moss.

Once the idea for the competition has been established, we hear from the first Queen, Catherine of Aragon, who states “There’s only one Queen you need to hear from tonight”<sup>13</sup> before she asks the drummer, referred to as Maria, to provide the drum beat that precedes her solo song, “No Way”. Catherine adds some back story over this drumbeat, similar to the way some artists may interact with the audience at a live performance, explaining how the song was written or providing an anecdote related to the song about to be performed. In Catherine’s pre-song dialogue, she explains how she came to travel to England and the reasoning for her travel, how

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<sup>11</sup> Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss, *SIX Teen Edition* (London: Concord Theatricals: 2021), 4

<sup>12</sup> Marlow and Moss, *SIX Teen Edition*, 7

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 11

she married Henry following the death of her first husband (Henry's older brother Arthur), and the fact that years later Henry wished to divorce her. "No Way" gives Catherine the opportunity to share her side of her marriage to Henry and her reasons for not wanting a divorce, allowing her to take ownership of the events that took place. The song relies quite heavily on its percussive elements, following on from the pre-song drumbeat, which allows the transition into the song to be seamless, again akin to the way artists will link their songs during live performances.

Catherine's song is followed by a discussion between the Queens about who is to perform next. During this, Anne Boleyn (the next Queen) sits at the back of the stage, taking out a phone and imitating texting. As the other Queens finish a small musical introduction for her, Anne is revealed to still be sitting and laughing at something on the phone, and as she realises the other Queens are waiting, the actor portraying the role imitates taking a selfie on the phone (something many performers now do during live performances), again placing the show within the notion of a live performance. Anne's song, "Don't Lose Ur Head", is another up-tempo piece that is almost comical in the way it navigates the events of Anne's relationship with Henry, which ultimately ended with her beheading, described by the character following the song as "so extra."<sup>14</sup> I believe this light-hearted way of exploring what is, in fact, a rather sensitive topic allows the audience to connect with the character of Anne in a way they may not have done. It also draws the focus away from her tragic ending, focussing rather on her fun and bubbly demeanour, reminiscent of the lively identity of many pop icons past and present.

The third Queen to perform a solo song is Jane Seymour, who delivers the ballad "Heart of Stone". Unlike the first two Queens, Jane's song is more emotional; she is positive about her time with Henry whilst also expressing her feelings about the relationship, dying shortly after childbirth, and the time she never had with her son. As this is the fourth song in the show and around the mid-way point, it does seem logical to have a ballad-style song as it allows a moment of calm from the otherwise fast-paced show. At live performances, some artists choose to do a slower song around the mid-point of their set list, again allowing for a moment of calm during their performance. This is something I experienced when I saw McFly perform at

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<sup>14</sup> Marlow and Moss, *SIX Teen Edition*, 25

Nottingham's Rock City in November 2023, as Danny and Tom performed a slow tempo song that was more acoustic in nature than the rest of their setlist. By having a slower tempo song at this point in the show, *SIX* is once again placing itself within the pop concert/live performance setting, whilst also exploring another style of song within the pop music genre.

Following the conclusion of "Heart of Stone", the stage lighting is lowered whilst Anna of Cleves provides the context for what happened following the death of Jane Seymour: Henry searched out of the country for his next wife. The other Queens have all left the stage during this to collect additions to their costumes in the form of neon sunglasses and neck ruffles, all of which the performers wear for the group song "Haus of Holbein". This song is a complete change from the previous one, as it is very up-tempo, with hints of techno/dance music, particularly in the way the lighting is used, the Queens' choreography, and the additions to their costumes. "Haus of Holbein" provides further information about how Henry searched internationally for his next wife and gives information as to image expectations of the time which relate to the beauty standards of today, with lyrics such as

So what, the makeup contains lead poison?

At least your complexion will bring all the boys in"<sup>15</sup>

This gives the idea that despite the makeup of the time being deadly to wearers, the opinion was it did not matter as the resulting complexion would make the female wearer more attractive to the opposite sex. I feel the latter line of this also refers to the pop hit song "Milkshake" released in 2003 by Kelis, which includes the lyrics "My milkshake brings all the boys to the yard".<sup>16</sup> The song would have been known to Marlow and Moss, and once again reinforces the position of *SIX* within the pop music genre.

For blonder hair then you just add a magical ingredient (from your bladder)

Try these heels so high, it's naughty

But we cannot guarantee that you'll still walk at forty<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Marlow and Moss, *SIX Teen Edition*, 31

<sup>16</sup> Kelis, Milkshake Lyrics available online via Google Lyrics

<sup>17</sup> Marlow and Moss, *SIX Teen Edition*, 32



This is another example of the beauty standards of the Tudor era that can be found in society today, with the idea that blonde hair and high heels are a way to attract the attention of men, and this idea is seen a lot in popular culture, from films and television to magazines and various social media platforms. Whilst “Haus of Holbein” highlights the different ideas on beauty it does so in a mocking way, as seen in the last line of the lyrics above which is delivered in quite a serious tone, almost like a disclaimer. This supports the way the show is providing new identities for each of the Queens, breaking female stereotypes in the process.

This song cements *SIX* further within the pop music genre, as outlined above whilst also linking to popular culture by using the concept of swiping, used on the dating app Tinder, where people swipe left or right on a potential partner. This action is mimicked in the choreography of the show as the Queens either move left or right depending on the decision made by Henry, with the staging and lighting going red for a rejection and green for a match, which is what happens in the case of the fourth Queen, Anna of Cleves. The association with social media confirms the show’s identity as a 21st-century invention.

As the next chosen wife, Anna of Cleves is the next to deliver a solo song; however, at the revelation their marriage was not successful and very short-lived, she tells the audience what her life was like following the divorce. Her song, “Get Down” details the independence she enjoyed and how different her life was in comparison to the other Queens. During this song, two things happen relating to the topic of live performances from touring artists. The first is the outfit reveal. This usually happens at a poignant moment when a piece of the outfit is removed to reveal another outfit underneath. This was seen during the 2024 Brit Awards performance from artist Kylie Minogue, who had two outfit reveals. At the beginning of her performance, she is seen in a red, wet-leather look coat (Figure 4) which, at the end of the first song, Kylie removes to reveal a long black dress with white edging (Figure 5). This dress is then removed to uncover a white corset and skirt (Figure 6) which she then wears for the remainder of her set.



Figure 4 – Kylie performing at the Brit Awards 2024 in her first outfit<sup>18</sup>



Figure 5 – Kylie performing at the Brit Awards 2024 after the first outfit reveal<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Isabel Infantes/Reuters in Ben Beaumont-Thomas, Laura Snapes and Mabel Banfield-Nwachi, *Brit Awards 2024 – as it happened*, 2 March 2024 [Online]

<https://www.theguardian.com/music/live/2024/mar/02/brit-awards-2024-liveblog> , Accessed July 2024

<sup>19</sup> Karwai Tang/WireImage , *5 Iconic Kylie Minogue Outfits and Looks from the BRIT Awards 2024 Red Carpet and Stage Performances* [Online] <https://fashionation.com/5-iconic-kylie-minogue-outfits-and-looks-from-the-brit-awards-2024-red-carpet-and-stage-performances/> , Accessed July 2024



Figure 6 – Kylie performing at the Brit Awards 2024 in the final outfit revealed<sup>20</sup>

In *SIX* the outfit reveal happens during “Get Down” and is at a moment in the song when the Queens gather around Anna (Figure 7) and they remove parts of her costume to uncover another, more revealing outfit underneath. This costume consists of a shorter pair of shorts and a vest style top with the embellished cut-out sleeves that are already visible in the original costume. From my experience seeing multiple performances of the show, this moment is met with a huge cheer and a round of applause from the audience. In a production at the Vaudeville Theatre, London, in October 2022 the performer portraying the role of Anna of Cleves fully embraced the costume reveal, slowly turning to show the full outfit and revelling in the attention.

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<sup>20</sup> Max Cisotti/Dave Benett/Getty Images, *5 Iconic Kylie Minogue Outfits and Looks from the BRIT Awards 2024 Red Carpet and Stage Performances*



Figure 7 - Image shows costume pre reveal<sup>21</sup>

The second link to live performances is the interaction between Anna and the audience. During this song the actor will ask someone in the front row to get up and dance, allowing them to do so for a while before telling them to “Get Down”. This is akin to how some artists may point out people in their audiences during live performances, maybe those who are holding signs or who are singing and/or dancing along. There have been times when some artists have invited audience members to join them on stage, such as the viral video of Michael Bublé interacting with a woman at one of his live concerts and agreeing to bring her son on stage to sing with him.<sup>22</sup>

The next song, “All You Wanna Do”, is told from Katherine Howard’s perspective. Whilst an upbeat pop-style song which is at times similar to Holly Vallance’s 2002 “Kiss Kiss” with the use of a kiss sound throughout, the subject of “All You Wanna Do” is far removed from its upbeat tempo; this is a song about a life filled with manipulative men and abuse. It is certainly not the lyrical content of the song that links *SIX* to the live performance aspect, but more the cleverly constructed yet repetitive choreography of the number. In a way like most live performances, the chorus features the same choreography with small additions each time – the additions being more Queens coming into physical contact with Katherine as the song progresses, helping to reflect her unease and the building pressure as the wife of Henry VIII. Whilst there is a great deal of choreography throughout the show, the

<sup>21</sup> Gabriella Slade, *SIX* [Online] [SIX — GABRIELLA SLADE](#), Accessed May 2024

<sup>22</sup> Michael Bublé, *Michael Bublé – Singing with a Fan Live [Extras]*, 13 December 2010 [Online] [Michael Bublé - Singing with a Fan Live \[Extras\] \(youtube.com\)](#) Accessed May 2024

routine for “All You Wanna Do” is repetitive and harks back to the routines of pop bands such as Spice Girls and Steps whose fans would aim to replicate the dance routines.

“I Don’t Need Your Love” is the final solo song of the show, performed by Catherine Parr. In this song, she sings about the love she had to put aside when chosen by Henry to be his next wife, a move which kept her safe and looked after. The song begins in a ballad style akin to the way some concerts use a slow song as their penultimate track to build anticipation for the final song. Catherine’s solo remains in this style until the moment when she imagines what she would say to Henry if given the chance to reject his proposal. Unlike the other solo songs in *SIX*, “I Don’t Need Your Love” is not as closely related to live performances, however during this song Catherine makes the other Queens question why they’ve been competing based on the negative elements of their marriages to Henry, rather than their achievements as individuals. Following this, all the Queens join in for the “Remix” in which, together, they tell Henry they are “taking back control”<sup>23</sup> and that none of them need his love. At the end of the song Catherine Parr delivers countermelodic vocal lines, akin to the way in which lead singers of a band may do so in a multitude of pop songs, which again helps situate *SIX* within the genre.

The final song of the show is the group number “SIX” in which all the Queens provide their version of what would have happened had they all lived their own lives without the influence of Henry. This song also uses a repetitive dance routine in the choruses which can easily be replicated (indeed I have witnessed people joining in with the routine at various performances I have attended). As previously discussed, these simple dance routines help cement the show within the pop music and live performance genre as they allow audiences to feel a part of the show. At the end of this song the Queens all finish in a pose that has become synonymous with the show (Figure 8), and it seems to signal the end of the show, however, there is an encore song, similar to the practice of many live performers leaving, then returning to the stage for an encore song or two.

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<sup>23</sup> Marlow and Moss, *SIX Teen Edition*, 54



Figure 8 – the pose held by the Queens at the end of *SIX*<sup>24</sup>

This encore song is the “Mega-Six”, a combination of all the Queens’ solo songs rearranged to fit the tempo and style of this final song. At the beginning of this song, the audience is instructed to get their phones out to film this last song and encouraged to get up on their feet (if they have not already done so) to dance and sing along as many audiences do during live performances, particularly those of a younger generation which, from my experience, make up the majority of a *SIX* audience.

### Studying Musical Theatre

The above has outlined how the show is structured around the idea of a live performance with clear links to pop music. Because of this, I would argue that Marlow and Moss have been successful with their intention to create a show that experiments with the theatrical form and one that uses the pop genre as a foundation. This results in *SIX* being unlike many shows that we, as a musical theatre audience, may have been accustomed to. When considering the different types of musical theatre, and where *SIX* places within this world, it is important to note there is a lot more to musical theatre than just a show that contains acting, singing, and dancing in some form. Millie Taylor and Dominic Symonds summarize the study of Musical Theatre in the introduction to their book *Studying Musical Theatre: Theory and Practice* as they state, “musical theatre is an enormously complex theatre form,”<sup>25</sup> a statement which I wholeheartedly agree with. Musical

<sup>24</sup> Charley, *Review: ‘Six’ Lyric Theatre – 13/06/2021* [Online] <https://jcmg.io/2021/06/30/review-six/> Accessed My 2024

<sup>25</sup> Millie Taylor and Dominic Symonds, *Studying Musical Theatre – Theory and Practice* (England: Red Globe Press: 2014), 3

Theatre has many elements to consider, from staging to lighting and sound effects; costuming and makeup; the marketing of the production; and how audiences might respond to the show, which may differ depending on who is watching, where, and when they are watching it. As Taylor and Symonds discuss, these different elements can be studied as individual or combined aspects. Alongside this, there is the study of types of musical theatre, works from particular creatives, or the study of a show as a whole.

In her work *“Attention Must Be Paid” Cried the Balladeer: The Concept Musical Defined*, Christina Young states there are four main categories that musical theatre can be separated into, “musical comedy, integrated musical, revue, and concept musical.”<sup>26</sup> For the purpose of this work, this chapter will examine two of these categories; the Integrated musical and the Concept musical in more detail.

### **The Integrated Musical**

The Integrated musical, sometimes referred to as a Book musical, will use song and dance as a way to extend the dialogue in order to advance the show’s narrative. In his book, *The Musical as Drama*, Scott McMillin writes

The theory is that of the “integrated musical,” according to which all elements of a show – plot, character, song, dance, orchestration, and setting – should blend together into a unity, a seamless whole.<sup>27</sup>

This idea that all the elements of the musical combine as a whole is further discussed by Taylor and Symonds who write that an integrated musical

tells a story using song and scene in a way that makes dramatic sense, with musical numbers appearing as apparently naturalistic extensions of spoken scenes.<sup>28</sup>

There have been many who have written about the early years of integrated musicals, with Peter Stone stating there were musicals of the ilk in the 1920s and

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<sup>26</sup> Christine Margaret Young, *“Attention Must Be Paid” Cried the Balladeers: The Concept Musical Defined*, 2008 [Online] [https://uknowledge.uky.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1539&context=gradschool\\_theses](https://uknowledge.uky.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1539&context=gradschool_theses) Accessed March 2023, 11

<sup>27</sup> Scott McMillin, *The Musical As Drama* (United States of America: Princeton University Press: 2006), 1

<sup>28</sup> Taylor and Symonds, *Studying Musical Theatre*, 11

1930s, yet songs would not always link to the show's plot and would result in the book writer having to create a link between the songs.<sup>29</sup> The first show to use the idea that the various elements of the musical are all equal to its outcome is argued by some to be *Show Boat* (1927), written by Jerome Kern (composer) and Oscar Hammerstein II (lyricist), however, this show made use of the songs within the plot rather than all the elements of the show. Many researchers believe the format of the integrated musical was cemented by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II in their 1943 show *Oklahoma!* The impact the show had on the way future shows were formed cannot be ignored, as Stacy Wolf writes

after 1943, nearly every musical on Broadway incorporated music and dance as part of the storyline, not distinct from it.<sup>30</sup>

McMillin also discusses the impact of the creative duo regarding the integrated musical, as well as the influence of *Oklahoma!* on future musicals.

Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II were articulate proponents of this [integrated musical] idea, and the historical moment when integration arrived on Broadway is often said, not least of all by Rodgers and Hammerstein, to have been the opening of *Oklahoma!* In March 1943.<sup>31</sup>

It is clear that *Oklahoma!* had a huge impact on the way in which musicals were written after it, as Kevin David Thomas explains.

It's the first musical really of its era that integrated all of the storytelling elements. *Show Boat* yes, they had the music and lyrics further the plot and reflect the characters situation...[In] *Oklahoma!* literally every single element came together, whether it be the staging, casting of the characters...or the dance elements.... the

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<sup>29</sup> Peter Stones – “Peter Stone on Writing the Musical Book” in Laurence Maslon, *Broadway: The American Musical* (New York: Bulfinch Press: 2004)

<sup>30</sup> Stacy Wolf, *Changed for Good: A Feminist History of the Broadway Musical* (United States of America: Oxford University Press Incorporated: 2011), 19

<sup>31</sup> McMillin, *The Musical as Drama*, 3



dance literally tells the story and if you took the dance element out of the piece you would miss major, major storytelling elements...<sup>32</sup>

As the above demonstrates, *Oklahoma!* was the first major musical to use the integrated musical form, and it would be remiss to not reflect on the show further and use it as a way to consider if *SIX* is a show that also identifies as an integrated musical.

*Oklahoma!* opened in March 1943, written by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II. It was the first collaboration between the pair who also went on to write many other hit shows including *Carousel* (1945), *South Pacific* (1949), and *The Sound of Music* (1959). The show takes place in the state of Oklahoma and the main focus of the show is on the love triangle between Laurey and the two men vying for her affection: Curly, the cowboy and Jud, the farmhand. There is another love triangle that features within the show, albeit not as prominent as the first, between Ado Annie and her two love interests; cowboy Will Parker and pedlar Ali Hakim.<sup>33</sup> This show has a linear narrative, the action all taking place in chronological order, and as mentioned, the songs and dance routines aide the plot, with the show beginning with Curly approaching the farm singing the opening song “Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin’”. He is headed to the farm to invite Laurey to the box social, however, she acts uninterested to his invitation despite him trying to impress her by mentioning he will be hiring a Surrey to take them to the social during “The Surrey with a Fringe on Top”. Meanwhile, Will Parker has returned from a visit to Kansas City where he has won the money Ado Annie’s father had asked Will to earn before he would permit their match, however, he has spent it on gifts for Ado. He regales those present with his adventures in the song “Kansas City”. Despite being invited by Curly, Laurey chooses to attend the box social with Jud, and Ado has chosen to attend with Ali Hakim, telling her friend Laurey about her decision during the song “I Cain’t Say No”. Learning Laurey will not go with him to the social, Curly states he will go with someone else, but Laurey acts indifferent to this (“Many a New Day”), followed by Ado’s father forcing Ali to propose to his daughter despite his displeasure

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<sup>32</sup> Transcribed from Broadway Podcast Network, *Fifty Key Stage Musicals: The Podcast. Ch 11 – Oklahoma*, 22 April 2022 [Online] [Broadway Podcast Network - Ch. 11- OKLAHOMA](#) Accessed July 2024

<sup>33</sup> Dorling Kindersley Limited, *Musicals, The Definitive Illustrated Story* (Great Britain: Dorling Kindersley Limited, 2015), 60

("It's a Scandal! It's an Outrage!"). Even though they had already agreed to attend with others, Curly and Laurey consider going to the social together during the song "People Will Say We're in Love", and following this decision Curly goes to inform Jud and tries to tell Jud how much he would be missed if he were to die – "Pore Jud is Daid". The conversation turns sour and the two of them clash over Laurey. Curly leaves and Jud sings "Lonely Room". Act One ends with Laurey dreaming of marrying Curly which is imagined in the ballet scene "Out of My Dreams/Dream Ballet (Laurey Makes Up Her Mind)", yet the wedding is ruined by Jud who beats up Curly and makes Laurey go with him instead. At the end of the dream both men appear on stage, and Laurey, who has been scared by her dream, chooses to attend the social with Jud, leaving behind a puzzled Curly. Act Two begins with the "Entr'acte" then picks up at the box-social with "The Farmer and the Cowman". Meanwhile, Ali aims to get out of marrying Ado Annie, so he pays Will the money he needs to wed Ado. An auction follows during which a hamper made by Laurey is bid on by both Curly and Jud; it ends with Curley winning after he has sold all he has. Now he has the money, Will and Ado can plan their future together, as explored in the song "All Er Nuthin". Finally, Curly and Laurey declare their love for one another in "People Will Say We're In Love (reprise)". The next scene is their wedding which takes place three weeks after the box-social, yet a drunken Jud interrupts proceedings and threatens Curly with a knife. A fight ensues in which Jud falls onto his knife and is killed. A trial follows in which Curly is found not guilty of Jud's death, leaving him and Laurey able to go on their honeymoon and start their life together, with the final songs of the show "Oklahoma" and reprises of "Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin'" and "People Will Say We're in Love".<sup>34</sup>

Musicals such as *Oklahoma!* that have a storyline following the action in order are, for many audience members, easier to understand, especially when the songs and dance routines progress that storyline rather than hinder it. This show was able to successfully implement this approach, and if a song or dance routine were to be removed then it would halt the development of the narrative. Taking into consideration the way in which *Oklahoma!* is structured, this work will now examine if *SIX* is structured in a similar way, using the elements of the integrated musical.

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<sup>34</sup> Synopsis created using information from Dorling Kindersley Limited, *Musicals, The Definitive Illustrated Story*, 60/61 and Fred Zinnermann, *Oklahoma!* (United States: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Studies: 1956)

## **SIX as an Integrated Musical**

As outlined earlier, the narrative of *SIX* introduces the Queens in the order they were married to Henry during the opening number “Ex-Wives” which also makes use of the well-known rhyme many use to recall their fates – ‘Divorced, Beheaded, Died. Divorced, Beheaded, Survived.’ again in chronological order. The show then features a solo song from each Queen, in the order of their marriages, which makes sense as having the Queen’s songs performed in a different order would seem confusing to those familiar with the wives of Henry VIII, as many audience members may be. In structuring the songs in this way, *SIX* does seem to have a linear narrative, however, if it were to be truly linear, the first three Queens would not be present for the songs of the last three Queens as they would have all died before the later marriages took place. In the same way, the Queens whose marriages took place later may not have been present for the marriages of the first Queens, such as Katherine Howard, who would not have been born at the time of the first marriage.

As already identified, the songs and dance routines in an integrated musical help to further the development of the narrative and if any of these were to be removed it would halt the flow of the show, yet would this be the case with *SIX*? Looking at the show as a whole, the songs do help to move the show along in terms of allowing the Queens to retell their stories as this provides the basis for their competition; however, their songs are all strong individual solo songs that could be performed in another setting and work. This point I have personally seen proved when Claudia Kariuki performed “Heart of Stone” at the end of the first day of MusicalCon 2023,<sup>35</sup> and whilst it is a song that Kariuki was comfortable performing as they had played the role of Seymour on the West End for some time prior to this performance, the setting and location was completely removed from that of the show, yet it still held the same power and gravitas as it does within the staged production. Whilst a good proportion of the dialogue relates either to songs that have taken place or to the idea of the competition running throughout the show, it is not used to drive the plot forward; instead, it is used more to fill the time between the different songs. It is also important to consider if any songs were removed from the show if it would have a bearing on the progression of the show. I believe it would not be possible to remove

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<sup>35</sup> A convention held at the London ExCel for fans of Musical Theatre

any of the individual Queen songs as it would prevent the competition from happening. Removing the opening and closing group songs would also stop the Queens from taking ownership of their stories and in turn their identities, which is the final point made in the show. With that said, I also feel that the songs all work out of the setting of the show as previously discussed. It would be possible to remove “Haus of Holbein” as this song does not advance the narrative in the way the other songs do, and the relevant information it provides could be done with dialogue. Taking this into consideration it is not just how songs are used to develop the narrative in integrated musicals, but all elements including dance routines. As discussed, the dances in *Oklahoma!* particularly the ballet scene, aid the plot of the show, yet I would argue the dance routines in *SIX* do not have as strong an impact on the storyline. Whilst the choreography is impressive, and certain lyrics are supported by movements, such as the Queens forming the moving carriage during “Get Down” that Anna is singing about, or when the Queens imitate being guests at Anne’s wedding in “Don’t Lose Ur Head”. In my opinion, the routines do not aid in developing the plot, and therefore *SIX* does not sit within the integrated musicals category. This opinion is formed by the fact the songs work as individual songs, and the show does not have an accurately linear narrative for a show based on historical figures. Furthermore, I believe the show is closer to identifying as a concept musical rather than an integrated musical.

### **The Concept Musical**

What is a concept musical? Compared to an integrated musical that is usually “structured by a significant forward-moving plot”,<sup>36</sup> concept musicals “focus on a particular issue of thematic idea and examine it from a variety of perspectives.”<sup>37</sup> Whilst both types of show make use of the various elements of musical theatre; dialogue, singing, dances, staging, etc, it is the way in which these aspects are incorporated with regards to the narrative that differs.

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<sup>36</sup> Michael Bennett “A Chorus Line – The Benetton of Broadway Musicals” in Warren Hoffman(ed), *The Great White Way: Race and the Broadway musical* Second Edition (United States of America: Rutgers University Press, 2020), 145

<sup>37</sup> Larry Stempel, *Showtime, A History of the Broadway Musical Theatre* (United States of America: W.W Norton and Company, 2010), 519

The result of early debate in identifying the first concept musical and determining how the category originated reveals one significant attribute on which several musical theatre scholars agree: the concept musical emphasizes theme over story.<sup>38</sup>

There is much debate that surrounds the origins of the concept musical as outlined by Young, with Bradley Rogers stating the 1948 Kurt Weill and Alan Jay Lerner musical *Love Life* has “long been understood as one of the earliest examples of the genre, even arguably its origin”.<sup>39</sup> *Love Life* was described by Lerner as “a cavalcade of American marriage”.<sup>40</sup> The show centres on the Cooper family over a period of 150-years that sees some poignant events in American history between 1791 and 1948, yet despite the passing of time the family do not age.<sup>41</sup> This idea of a show built around a central idea, in this case, a family dynamic and marriage, where the structure alternates between scenes and time periods with the use of vaudeville-esque interludes, is a key convention of the concept musical. Indeed, Young argues,

A concept musical possesses non-linear structure, utilizes situations unified by theme, and employs the characters and songs to comment on the specific thematic issue.<sup>42</sup>

When taking these ideas into consideration, some musical theatre historians and critics argue the 1947 Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *Allegro* was the first concept musical, as Stephen Citron writes about the show

With no character standing out, none being given more than one song, one comes away with the idea that Joe’s [the show’s protagonist] particular story is secondary to the concept that success corrupts.<sup>43</sup>

Other critics became much more accustomed to using the concept musical term in the 1970s, particularly in reference to works from Stephen Sondheim. One such

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<sup>38</sup> Young, “Attention Must Be Paid” Cried the Balladeer: *The Concept Musical Defined*

<sup>39</sup> Bradley Rogers, “The Concept of the Concept Musical: *Love Life*, *Cabaret*, *Company*” in *Modern Drama*, Volume 63, Number 4, Winter 2020, pp415-434, 416

<sup>40</sup> Alan Jay Lerner in Mark N Grant, *Synopsis of Love Life* [Online] <https://www.kwf.org/works/love-life/>

<sup>41</sup> Mark N Grant, *Synopsis of Love Life*

<sup>42</sup> Young, “Attention Must Be Paid” Cried the Balladeer: *The Concept Musical Defined*,

<sup>43</sup> Stephen Citron, *Sondheim and Lloyd-Webber – The New Musical* (New York: Oxford University Press: 2001),41

critic, Martin Gottfried, used the term in his review of the Sondheim musical *Follies* (1971).

“Follies” is a *concept musical*, a show whose music, lyrics, dance, stage movement and dialogue are woven through each other in the creation of a tapestry-like theme (rather than in support of a plot).<sup>44</sup>

Despite the term being mocked by Sondheim himself, it has continued to be used by many critics and researchers within the musical theatre world. For example, in his book *Showtime*, Larry Stempel argues,

The term “concept” has long been used in the theatre to describe a unifying approach to the many elements of a production, a governing idea without which a production might lack focus. A concept may precede the writing of a script or it may bring a certain stylistic consistency to bear on a given reading of a script.<sup>45</sup>

Another Sondheim show widely regarded as a concept musical is *Company* (1970), which Citron describes as “an exemplary concept musical”<sup>46</sup> that paved the way for other concept musicals such as *A Chorus Line* (1975), *Cats* (1981) and *Starlight Express* (1984).<sup>47</sup> *Company* explored the idea of marriage through the perspectives of its key characters, all of whom are linked to the central character of Bobby. During the show, it is unclear if the stories and experiences shared are done so in chronological order, which helps place it within the concept musical category. When *Company* was first released in 1970, the different relationships examined were all from a heterosexual perspective. The 2018 revival production in the West End made changes however; firstly the male character Bobby became female whilst one of the couples who featured in the song “Getting Married Today” were changed to a male couple, providing a different perspective to the relationship and a new identity for audience members to consider and perhaps relate to. As Lehman Engel identified, *Company* is “about the concept of “company”, what it means to be in a relationship

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<sup>44</sup> Martin Gottfried, “Flipping Over ‘Follies’” in *The New York Times*, April 1971 [Online] <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/98/07/19/specials/sondheim-flipping.html> Accessed May 2022

<sup>45</sup> Larry Stempel, *Showtime – A History of the Broadway Musical Theatre* (United States of America: W. W Norton & Company: 2010), 517

<sup>46</sup> Citron, *Sondheim and Lloyd-Webber – The New Musical*, 163

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* 173

with someone, what it means to be alone.”<sup>48</sup> With this in mind, the changes made for the 2018 production would not alter the show, as the theme of relationships is still being explored, but now in a way more relatable to an audience in today’s society than that of an audience in 1970.

The theme of *A Chorus Line* is based on the experiences of dancers auditioning for a forthcoming Broadway show. The choreographer has managed to reduce the auditionees down to seventeen, and in order to select the eight dancers required, the director asked those remaining to share a personal story about themselves. The show then showcases these different personal stories, and at the end, the final eight dancers are selected. Despite having been chosen for the show being cast within *A Chorus Line*, the final eight are joined again on stage by the rejected dancers for the finale “One (reprise)” in which all cast are dressed in gold outfits and top hats, making any member of the cast difficult to identify. By bringing all the cast back together, it helps the show refocus on the theme of the show, rather than providing a wholesome ending as is used in other types of musical theatre shows.

### **SIX as a Concept Musical**

As previously explored in this chapter, *SIX* uses the format of the pop concert / live performance, and because of this, I would argue *SIX* would belong more in the category of concept musical rather than integrated musical. The beginning of this chapter focussed on how each song had elements that related to the idea of a pop concert or live performance, yet it did not consider some of the whole-show elements. The fact the show is a sung-through production without an interval is alike any concert or gig from a touring artist who would usually perform without a break. The way in which the lighting is used in the show is also similar to lighting used at a concert and on competition television shows. An article about what makes a good concert states

Lighting plays a big role, no matter the genre or locale... Typically, vibrant and dynamic lighting that adjusts to the mood of a performance (subdued movement and mellow colors for ballads,

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<sup>48</sup> Lehman Engel, *Words with Music – Creating the Broadway Musical Libretto*, revised Howard Kissell (New York: Applause Theatre and Cinema Books: 2006)

hectic movement and lighter colors for songs with faster tempos-for example).<sup>49</sup>

This creative use of lighting is evident throughout the show, with more subtle lighting used during “Heart of Stone” to reflect the more sombre nature of the song and to ensure Jane Seymour is the focal point on the stage, rather than the other Queens who provide backing vocals. (Figure 9)



Figure 9 – Image of the cast for “Heart of Stone”<sup>50</sup>

What follows is a complete change, with the stage lights complementing the green neon ruffs and glasses the Queens don for “Haus of Holbein”. The lighting here also reflects the music choice of the techno/dance music genre which is something that would be considered at a live performance.



Figure 10 – Image of the cast for “Haus of Holbein”<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Chris, “An Inside Look on What Makes a Good Concert” in *Features, Obscure Sound*, January 2020 [Online] <https://www.obscuresound.com/2020/01/an-inside-look-on-what-makes-a-good-concert/> Accessed February 2022

<sup>50</sup> Pamela Raith in Robin Johnson, Hira Desai, *Six ways Six stunned us*, 2021 [Online] <https://officiallondontheatre.com/news/six-times-six-stunned-us-111413640/>

<sup>51</sup> Sara Krulwich in Michael Paulson, *The Making of ‘Six’: How Tudor Queens Turned Into Pop Stars*



There have been a number of shows in which the band are on stage and can be seen during the performance, such as *The Rocky Horror Show* (1973) where the band are raised and placed behind the film roll so they are present but also not clearly seen. In *Come From Away* (2013) the band are placed in the wings, yet some members of the band join the cast on stage to become the band from the bar and are on stage for the finale, yet the way in which *SIX* has the performers referred to as the Ladies in Waiting, on stage throughout aligns the show more with the pop concert rather than a musical theatre performance. This is because the instruments are what we as an audience would expect to see at a concert; drum kit, guitar, bass guitar, and keys, which are also key pop music instruments, and the way they are placed on stage, clearly a part of the performance rather than partially hidden by the set reinforces a pop concert feel.



Figure 11 – The stage set for the UK Tour of *SIX*<sup>52</sup>

As the image above shows, the band are placed on platforms, ensuring they are seen during the show and allowing each of them to interact with the Queens at various stages of the show, thus reinforcing the sense they are a band performing for a live artist rather than the cast of a musical. The sense of being at a live performance is strengthened as each musician is introduced at the start of the show, and then referred to again by the Queens at the end for their own cheer from the audience.

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<sup>52</sup> Rebecca Craven, *SIX* at Theatre Royal, Nottingham [Own image], July 2022

Further to this, there is the way in which *SIX* correlates to concept musical theory and research. John Kenrick writes that

Concept musicals go beyond the traditional linear narrative. Every character has a story to tell, and all of them can comment on and/or illustrate different aspects of the concept.<sup>53</sup>

As previously discussed, *SIX* does not have a traditional linear narrative as the Queens are all present throughout the show, despite history informing us some would not have been alive for certain events. This is done so they are able to be there to add details and opinions on what is happening within the show as Kenrick points out, the characters comment on the different parts of the show's concept. The Queens do this in *SIX* by competing with each other using the one thing they have in common – Henry and the burdens they had as his wives. This unifying idea allows each Queen to comment on her experience as his wife, but also towards the end of the show reclaim her story and individual identity. If the show were performed in a more linear way that is true to history, the views of the Queens on their own and each other's lives would not be possible. Young also discusses the concept musical and the lack of a common definition;

While the definitions do not explicitly agree with one another, they contain commonalities providing a basis for developing a cohesive definition. The focus on theme, use of non-linear structure employing related situations instead of an overarching linear storyline, unique use of character, and self-commentary through song coalesce to distinguish the concept musical. The basic elements of the musical are distinctively arranged and utilized so that structure, theme, character, and song are the primary components that identify this category.<sup>54</sup>

These are all clear features of *SIX*. The theme is the lives of the six wives of Henry VIII with the backdrop of a pop concert, the non-linear storyline allows for all Queens to be present and jump between their stories, such as when the first three Queens are all able to compare their experiences of motherhood, something that could not

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<sup>53</sup> John Kenrick, *Musical Theatre, A History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing: 2017), 260

<sup>54</sup> Young, "Attention Must Be Paid" *Cried the Balladeer: The Concept Musical Defined*,

have happened due to Anne and Jane's early deaths. The unique use of character is evident in the fact the cast is just the Queens with no appearance of Henry or other relevant characters, which in turn allows for the self-commentary rather than commentary from others who may not be relevant to the situation. Unlike the integrated musical, where all elements of the musical are used to drive forward the narrative, in *SIX* the characters, songs, and concept of the show are the key components.

Another way in which *SIX* can be identified as a concept musical is that it creates a link between itself and the audience. Rogers writes about how concept musicals

generate an effective link between the spectator and the narrative material, an affective link that can then be manipulated so as to transform a visceral response into an intellectual one.<sup>55</sup>

This idea is evident in *SIX* as the characters interact with the audience at various points throughout the show, both in a direct and indirect manner. There are many small comments and remarks made by the Queens that will resonate with the audience, that may trigger a memory of their own or something they have read about or seen in the news, such as Katherine Howard commenting it was a different time during the Tudor era of men manipulating the women that worked for them, which as a modern day audience many of us know is still prevalent today. Having seen multiple performances of the show and having listened to the cast album on many occasions, I know I find the way I react to the lyrics and dialogue has changed, highlighting what Rogers describes as the response altering from visceral to intellectual. At first, I enjoyed "Heart of Stone" as it was similar in style to Adele who I am a fan of, yet the more I heard it and saw it performed, the more I felt and understood the emotions being conveyed. Whilst all audience members will be different, and not all will have seen the show multiple times, the way in which theatre is being consumed is changing, and with the highly anticipated release of the pro-shot alongside countless streams of the two cast recordings, many more people will be able to listen to and watch the show numerous times which consequently will create a change to their initial response.

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<sup>55</sup> Rogers, *The Concept of the Concept Musical*, 426

A final reason as to why I believe that *SIX* sits within the concept musical form rather than any other is the way in which one of the co-creators, Lucy Moss, described the writing process in an interview: “we definitely started with the concept: six wives as a pop concert.”<sup>56</sup> This sums up the entire concept of the show, it uses the six wives as the performers at a pop concert whilst providing them all with the opportunity to tell and reclaim their own story which for hundreds of years have been told on their behalf. Another reason I am of the belief the show is driven by the concept more than the narrative is the idea would work if the subject matter had been different. The idea of using the Queens is witty, and as explored earlier does touch on prior knowledge of many people through several ways, yet it is the fact the show has a pop concert style and genre that allows it to work so well, not the subject matter. The six wives of Henry VIII could have as easily been the children of Queen Victoria all vying for her attention, or the children of Johann Sebastian Bach arguing over who would be his successor if their stories were set to the same format and soundscape as is used in *SIX*.

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<sup>56</sup> Moss in Sydney Opera House, *Transforming the Tudors*

## **Chapter Two**

This chapter will look at the idea of identity in relation to the individual characters featured in *SIX*. Firstly, it will examine how each Queen has been remembered historically and explore how they have been presented within the show, considering the different influences used by Marlow and Moss when creating each Queen's characteristics. The chapter will then consider how the Queens have been able to reclaim their identities throughout the show, and if those identities match the way they are remembered historically. It is important to note at this point that whilst there are recognised and well accounted alternative spellings of the Queens' names, this chapter will continue to use the spellings used within *SIX* to maintain consistency.

As mentioned in Chapter One, the lives of significant Tudor figures have been used in a multitude of films, television shows, documentaries, and books for many years, as well as forming part of the history curriculum across British schools. One of the main areas of Tudor history that is a prominent feature of these films, shows and books is the second Tudor King, Henry VIII, who is remembered mostly for his six wives, his desperation to have a male heir, and his break from the Church in Rome.<sup>1</sup> The topic of Henry and his wives has been a key element of history lessons in many British schools, and the rhyme 'Divorced Beheaded Died, Divorced Beheaded Survived' became etched in memories as a method to recall the fate of each wife. Considering the subject matter has been used in many different projects before, have Marlow and Moss created a musical that was true to Tudor history, or were they able to write a show where they could mold and develop the identities of the Queens in the way they wished to, particularly when one considers the goals they set themselves to achieve with this show: giving females a chance to tell stories together.<sup>2</sup>

During an interview with Michael Paulson, Marlow and Moss shared they had originally considered adding other characters relevant to the wives, such as the three children: Mary, Elizabeth and Edward. During these discussions the pair agreed Henry would not appear in the show as it would prevent the Queens from being able to take

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<sup>1</sup>Crystal Ponti, *Who Were the Six Wives of Henry VIII?*, 11 August 2023 [Online] <https://www.history.com/news/henry-viii-wives> , Accessed June 2024

<sup>2</sup> History of *SIX* in *SIX at the Vaudeville Theatre Programme*, 2021, 2

ownership of their stories.<sup>3</sup> It was decided the cast would consist of the Queens, supported onstage by their 'Ladies-in-waiting'.<sup>4</sup> In having the show concentrate exclusively on the wives it was clear the writers wished to ensure the focus was on their stories. This was also evident in an interview the pair did with CBS New York ahead of the 2022 Tony Awards, in which Moss explained, that when re-reading the wives stories to create the show, they noticed the stories had always been told through the male lens and the challenge would be for them to re-frame the stories from the voice of the women.<sup>5</sup> This challenge would not be aided by the fact audiences will already have their own ideas regarding who these women are based on their appearances and the way they have been represented in various films, television shows and books over a period of years.

'History is told by the victors' is a phrase accredited to Winston Churchill and can be applied to this idea that the Queens' stories have been told via the male perspective, as during the Tudor era, it was the male population who were more prominent in society and most likely in a position to have made and kept written accounts of the events taking place. When considering the term victor within the phrase, this can again be applied to the males, in particular Henry, as the Queens were not the victors in their stories, with two being divorced and another two beheaded upon the orders of their husband. As with many other areas of history, we cannot be 100% certain everything we know about the Queens is true, yet *SIX* does not aim to be an accurate retelling of the Queens' lives, but rather a vessel providing each of them with the chance to reclaim their story in their own voice.

### **Catherine of Aragon (1485-1536)**

Catherine of Aragon was a Spanish princess who travelled to England to marry Prince Arthur, son and heir of King Henry VII. After Arthur's premature death, Catherine remained in England rather than returning to Spain, and years later became wife to the new King Henry VIII (her late husband's brother). They were married for twenty-four years, and despite several miscarriages (a fact mentioned

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Paulson, *The Making of 'Six': How Tudor Queens Turned Into Pop Stars*, 27 February 2020 [Online] <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/27/theater/six-broadway.html> Accessed 2022

<sup>4</sup> This is the way in which the onstage band are referred to

<sup>5</sup> CBS New York, *Meet the nominees: Lucy Moss and Toby Marlow discuss "Six: The Musical"*, 2022 [Online] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jv00-slWA0k>

within *SIX*), still births and infant deaths, one of their daughters, Mary, survived into adulthood (later becoming Queen Mary I). A devout Catholic throughout her life, Catherine refused to separate from Henry when he wished to end their marriage to allow him to marry Anne Boleyn. Despite Henry's insistence their marriage was never legitimate due to her previous marriage to his brother, Catherine remained steadfast in her refusal for divorce and swore she was his true wife, all of which culminated in her speech directly to Henry during the inquest into their marriage at Blackfriars. Although it was not the outcome she wished for, the pair were divorced; however Catherine remained a loyal subject to the King and still saw herself as Henry's true wife and Queen until her death in 1536. The programme for *SIX* lists that Catherine was remembered for

Her refusal to accept that her marriage was invalid; her faith; her dramatic speech to Henry at the court to judge the annulment of their marriage.<sup>6</sup>

This strong religious belief is certainly mirrored in the way Catherine of Aragon is portrayed in *SIX*, with part of her opening introduction to the audience telling us her "loyalty is to the Vatican",<sup>7</sup> the home of the Catholic Church in Rome. Faith is mentioned again in the spoken preamble to her solo song "No Way" which also features aspects of her famous speech at Blackfriars within the lyrics.

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<sup>6</sup> "A little bit of Her-story" in *SIX at the Vaudeville Theatre Programme*, 2021, 19

<sup>7</sup> Marlow and Moss, *SIX – All the songs from the Hit Musical*, 10

Lyrics from “No Way” <sup>8</sup>	Words from the Blackfriars speech <sup>9</sup>
You must agree that, baby / In all the time I’ve been by your side / I’ve never lost control / No matter how many times I knew you lied.	that I have been to you a true and humble wife... that never said or did anything to the contrary thereof, being always well pleased and contented with all things wherein ye had any delight of dalliance... I never grudged in word or countenance, or showed a visage or spark of discontentation
If you can just explain / A single thing I’ve done to cause you pain.	Alas! Sir, wherein have I offended you, or what occasion of displeasure have I designed against your will and pleasure?

It has been widely reported that Catherine was on her knees pleading with Henry as she delivered her infamous speech, a fact emulated in the song with the lyrics “You’ve got me down on my knees / please tell me what you think I’ve done wrong.”<sup>10</sup> At this point the choreography mimics the lyrics as the character kneels on stage as if asking the audience for clarity on her supposed faults. “No Way” is a feisty and defiant number that is vocally strong and challenging. It also provides musical links to Catherine’s faith such as in bars 66 and 67 which have a choral sounding harmony akin to hymns you would hear in church.<sup>11</sup>

During the creative process, Marlow and Moss drew inspiration from existing artists for each of the six Queens. These influences, or ‘Queenspiration’ as they are often

<sup>8</sup> Marlow and Moss, *SIX – All the songs from the Hit Musical*, 115

<sup>9</sup> Susan Abernethy, *Catherine of Aragon’s Speech at Blackfriars – June 1529*, 14 April 2017 [Online] <https://thefreelancehistorywriter.com/2017/04/14/catherine-of-aragons-speech-at-blackfriars-june-1529/> Accessed March 2024

<sup>10</sup> Marlow and Moss, *SIX – All the songs from the Hit Musical*, 25

<sup>11</sup> Marlow and Moss, *SIX – All the songs from the Hit Musical*, 23



referred to, provided an opportunity to give each Queen her own identity and musical sound within the show. Beyonce and Shakira are listed as the inspirations for Catherine of Aragon and their influences can be heard in “No Way”, a song that features a prominent drumbeat, similar to Beyoncé’s “Crazy in Love” and Shakira’s “Hips Don’t Lie”. As mentioned, the vocal ability required for “No Way” is challenging in the same way songs from Beyonce and Shakira are vocally demanding, from the range required to the sheer power needed to deliver parts of the songs. By having this within her song, it allows Catherine to be portrayed as a woman with a strong will, who is loyal and steadfast in her beliefs.

### **Anne Boleyn (1501?-1536)**

The daughter of an ambitious courtier and granddaughter of one of the most powerful men in the country at the turn of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, Anne Boleyn spent her early years at Hever Castle in Kent before moving to France, first as a companion for her sister Mary, then later as a member of the household of Queen Claude, wife of King Francis I.<sup>12</sup> Upon her return to England she was placed in the Royal court and there caught the attentions of King Henry VIII, who at the time was growing desperate for a son and heir since his only legitimate child was his daughter Mary. There has been speculation for many years if Anne purposely sought the King’s affections or not, but it is known she did not agree to be his mistress, instead waiting for an offer of marriage. Her refusal did not diminish Henry’s interest but rather spurred him into finding a way to extricate himself from his marriage to Catherine, which led to the break from the Catholic Church in Rome and the formation of the Church of England, of which Henry would be the Supreme Head.

In popular culture, Anne has been referred to as scheming, very free with her affections and body outside of marriage alongside the possibility of her being a witch, whereas the programme for *SIX* states she is remembered for “headlessness; bringing about the break with the Pope; having a sixth fingernail”.<sup>13</sup> It is with this level of humour Anne is presented within the show; never fully focussing on the serious and gruesome nature of how she died and the accusations made against her. Her musical influences are Lily Allen and Avril Lavigne, both of whom have their own

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<sup>12</sup> Historic Royal Palaces, *Anne Boleyn* [Online] <https://www.hrp.org.uk/tower-of-london/history-and-stories/anne-boleyn/#gs.cb5t7j> Accessed June 2024

<sup>13</sup> A little bit of Her-story in *SIX At the Vaudeville Theatre Programme*, 202, 19

distinct style. Allen wrote songs with witty and comical lyrics, such as the way she describes a bad physical relationship in her 2008 hit song “Not Fair”. This openly honest yet comical way with lyrics is replicated in Anne’s pop-punk inspired song “Don’t Lose Ur Head”, with the chorus making light of the fact she is beheaded.

Sorry not sorry ‘bout what I said  
 I’m just tryna have some fun  
 Don’t worry, don’t worry, don’t lose your head  
 I didn’t mean to hurt anyone  
 LOL  
 Say oh well  
 Or go to hell  
 I’m sorry not sorry ‘bout what I said  
 Don’t lose your head.<sup>14</sup>

Unlike Catherine, who is portrayed similarly to how she is viewed historically, Anne is given a different persona in the show to her historical one. Gone is the woman who was the catalyst for the break from the Catholic church, the woman seen as adulterous and scheming, replaced by a playful woman who does not take life too seriously despite the sombre path her life takes.

### **Jane Seymour (1507 or 1508–1537)**

Whilst she is the Queen who provided Henry with his much longed for son and heir and is viewed throughout history as his true love, little is known about Jane Seymour. Despite their short marriage and the intervening years, Henry was buried with Jane at Windsor Castle which does support the belief that she was the one he loved most of all his wives. The *SIX* programme states that Jane is remembered for “being the ‘only one he ever loved’: having two troublesome brothers who fought over the regency of the young Prince after King Henry’s death.<sup>15</sup> Neither of these points provide information as to the type of person Jane was or what her characteristics

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<sup>14</sup> Marlow and Moss, *SIX – All the songs from the Hit Musical*, 36

<sup>15</sup> “A little bit of Her-story” in *SIX At the Vaudeville Theatre Programme*, 202, 20

were, however it does allow her to have a slight air of mystery to her character in the show. Her solo song “Heart of Stone” is the big ballad style song of the show, with its sound rooted in the influences of Adele and Sia, both artists well known for their songs in this style. Whilst Jane may be quiet historically, this song is quite the opposite, allowing her to have a voice in which all the emotions are shared in a controlled yet powerful way. The vocal range and control that is required for this song are certainly akin to the influences of Adele and Sia, and the way in which the dynamics, texture, and pitch of the song all build mirrors the anguish that Jane feels by not being there for her newborn son. Unlike the other Queens, the identity that Jane creates for herself does not remove her as Henry’s wife, rather she embraces what she considers as the positive aspect of her marriage: motherhood. All of this helps to create a strong motherly identity for Jane, a character who is sorrowful that she was unable to raise her child, yet still someone who has their own voice.

### **Anna of Cleves (1515-1557)**

Like Catherine of Aragon, Anna of Cleves was brought from a European country to England to be married. Destined to marry Henry who had only seen a portrait of her which he had deemed flattering, this was not his viewpoint when they finally met in person and, despite his disapproval, the marriage between the pair took place but was not to last. Accepting a divorce, Anna went on to live a peaceful and comfortable life, well cared for thanks to her close friendship with the King, and she was referred to as the ‘King’s Sister’.

Known for “staying alive”<sup>16</sup>, Anna is the Queen in the show who is viewed a little differently from the others as her life was not ruined by her union with Henry, but rather the opposite. “Get Down” is her way of turning what could be deemed as her sad story of rejection into one of female empowerment in which she lists all the positives in her life post-divorce. This strength and independence are also seen in the songs of her ‘Queenspirations’, Nicki Minaj and Rhianna, the latter being a self-made billionaire due to her music and acting careers alongside her role as an entrepreneur creating beauty and fashion lines. The almost storytelling nature of “Get Down” is similar to how Nicki Minaj uses particularly the verses of her songs to tell a story, such as in “Super Bass” and “Starships” all of which are delivered in a

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<sup>16</sup> “A little bit of Her-story” in *SIX At the Vaudeville Theatre Programme*, 202, 20

more sung-spoken or rapped nature. In comparison to these more complex verses, the pre-chorus and chorus are simpler and repetitive in nature, usually sung rather than spoken or rapped. The table below highlights the repetitive nature present in these songs.

<b>“Get Down”</b>	<b>“Super Bass”</b>	<b>“Starships”</b>
(You) You said that I tricked ya / (Cos I) I didn't look like my profile picture / (Too) Too bad I don't agree / So I'm gonna hang it up for everyone to see / And you can't stop me cos / I'm the queen of the castle / Get down you dirty rascal / Get down, get down / Get down you dirty rascal / Get down, get down / Cos I'm the queen of the castle. <sup>17</sup>	Boy you got my heartbeat running away / Beating like a drum and it's coming your way / Can't you hear that / Boom, ba-doom, boom-boom, ba-doom, boom bass? / He got that super bass / Boom, ba-doom, boom-boom, ba-doom, boom bass / Yeah, that's that super bass <sup>18</sup>	Starships were meant to fly / Hands up and touch the sky / Can't stop 'cause we're so high / Let's do this one more time, oh / Starships were meant to fly / Hands up and touch the sky / Can't stop 'cause we're so high / Let's do this one more time <sup>19</sup>

As mentioned, the identity Anna is given within *SIX* is more empowered than her historical persona, as she has taken ownership of her situation and in turn is happy with the outcome. By linking her with such modern day, self-made successful and

<sup>17</sup> Marlow and Moss, *SIX – All the songs from the Hit Musical*, 117

<sup>18</sup> Nicki Minaj, *Super Bass lyrics* [Online] <https://genius.com/Nicki-minaj-super-bass-lyrics> Accessed July 2024

<sup>19</sup> Nicki Minaj, *Starships lyrics* available via Google search

powerful women, Anna is strongly placed in a modern identity as someone who is happy with her life and does not need a man to make her happy (although she was supported financially by the King). Due to her happier outcome, it is agreed that she cannot compete with the other Queens in the competition to be the leader of the band as they are using the problems that arose because of their marriage to Henry as the common factor between them all; however, Anna is presented in a way that this does not matter to her, as she is in control of her own life.

### **Katherine Howard (1523?–1542)**

As with some of the other Queens, it is not certain when Katherine Howard was born, but it is known that she was young when she caught the eye of the much older King Henry, perhaps only aged between 17 and 19 years old. Raised in the household of her father's stepmother, she would have been educated in reading, writing and music as most women from noble households were at the time.<sup>20</sup> Katherine is often viewed historically as a young woman, who, similar to Anne Boleyn, was free with her affections and also her body. This view could be attributed to the fact both were charged with adultery and sentenced to death by beheading. The fact that she was manipulated by older men from a young age cannot be ignored in today's society; however, it is not a fact widely reported on historically, and would not have been viewed in the same negative way then as it is now, due to the patriarchal society of the time deeming it appropriate for men to be the ones making decisions and women holding very little power themselves, even over their own bodies. Indeed, it is this the *SIX* programme states she is remembered for "being completely used (and abused) by those with more power".<sup>21</sup> Her immaturity is evident in the belief she spent the night before her execution practicing how to lay her head on the block, so she would not get it wrong when the time came.

The way Katherine is portrayed in *SIX* is far removed from the immature, easily influenced young girl that history and popular culture have created. Instead, the show provides us with a Katherine Howard who shares her story in a way that acknowledges her innocence in a situation someone so young should never have been in and emphasises her distress and frustration with the lack of control she has.

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<sup>20</sup> Historic Royal Palaces, *Catherine Howard* [Online] <https://www.hrp.org.uk/hampton-court-palace/history-and-stories/catherine-howard/#gs.ccjx4u> Accessed June 2024

<sup>21</sup> "A little bit of Her-story" in *SIX At the Vaudeville Theatre Programme*, 202, 21

As her song, “All You Wanna Do” progresses, she is able to highlight how her treatment mirrors that of women in the modern day, with the notion that men are interested in women for their attractiveness and sexual availability. The ability to acknowledge this gives Katherine a more mature identity than she has previously had, and the situation she was exposed to is something that was incredibly prevalent at the time the show was written, as this was the year the Me Too movement went viral. In 2006, sexual abuse survivor and activist Tarana Burke founded the Me Too Movement to support other victims of sexual abuse and to “build a community of advocates determined to interrupt sexual violence wherever it happens.”<sup>22</sup> The use of this phrase, “Me too” went viral when actress Alyssa Milano took to her Twitter feed, posting



Figure 12 – The tweet from Alyssa Milano in October 2017<sup>23</sup>

This tweet encouraged people to use it to “demonstrate the pervasiveness of the problem”<sup>24</sup> of sexual harassment and assault in the wake of the dozens of female celebrities who came forward to accuse producer Harvey Weinstein of such behaviour. Such a high-profile case meant a lot of news coverage, and it also led to others coming forward to lodge accusations against men in similarly powerful

<sup>22</sup> Me too, *History and Inception* [Online] <https://metoomvmt.org/get-to-know-us/history-inception/>

<sup>23</sup> Alyssa Milano, *Me Too* tweet taken from her X (previously Twitter) page, 15 October 2017 [Online] [https://x.com/Alyssa\\_Milano/status/919659438700670976](https://x.com/Alyssa_Milano/status/919659438700670976) Accessed June 2024

<sup>24</sup> Laurie Collier Hillstrom, *The #MeToo Movement* (United States of America: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Turning Points, ABC-CLIO, 2019), 1

positions as Weinstein of similar behaviour. What had started as “local grassroots work had now become a global movement”<sup>25</sup> although it was not without its criticism. Just as Katherine was, these women were victims of abuse at the hands of men in a powerful position – Katherine’s was her music teacher and then a man in the employment of her step-grandmother, both men much older than her, with the celebrities all in positions that were deemed as beneath that of the successful producer Weinstein and others of his ilk. While this tweet and the allegations became public after the show had been written, the parallel between the growing feminist idea of standing up and calling out misogynistic and abusive behaviour, and the way in which Katherine also stands up for her own treatment cannot be ignored. In doing this, Marlow and Moss have created another element to the identity of Katherine, one that audiences may consider a feminist approach when considering the current climate around reporting such behaviour.

There are also moments throughout the show that give Katherine the identity of being the most erudite Queen, with factually correct lines such as “The Thomas Cromwell amongst the royal ministers between 1532 and 1540”<sup>26</sup> and being able to give the correct answer when asked who the wife of Henry V was, which none of the other Queens are able to answer.<sup>27</sup> It is also Katherine that highlights the problem of the Queens comparing themselves and being just one of the six wives of Henry VIII.<sup>28</sup>

The influences used by Marlow and Moss for Katherine are Ariana Grande and Britney Spears, both of whom found fame at an early age similar to how Katherine was made Queen at a young age. As mentioned in Chapter One, “All You Wanna Do” has a similar sound to the song “Kiss Kiss” by Holly Vallance (who also found fame at a young age as a model and then as an actress on Australian soap drama *Neighbours*). The song is strongly rooted in the young pop-princess sound which both Grande and Spears have built their careers upon. The other similarity between Katherine and these two artists is the way in which all have been overly sexualised from a young age, and in the case of Britney Spears, as audiences are now aware,

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<sup>25</sup> Me too, *History and Inception*,

<sup>26</sup> Marlow and Moss, *SIX Teen Edition*, 9

<sup>27</sup> Marlow and Moss, *SIX Teen Edition*, 52

<sup>28</sup> Marlow and Moss, *SIX Teen Edition*, 52

her life has been overly controlled by her father. By linking these two child stars with Katherine, both musically and in her image (the costuming of the characters will be further explored in Chapter Three), it presents a character to the audience who we believe to be innocent despite what she is convicted of and heightens her vulnerability.

### **Catherine Parr (1512?-1548)**

Known by many as being the wife who survived, Catherine Parr was much more than just the final wife of Henry VIII. She had been married twice prior to her union with Henry and although many historians have cast her as “the King’s saintly nurse”<sup>29</sup> she was much more. During her marriage to Henry, she was able to repatch the otherwise broken relationships he had with his daughters, Mary and Elizabeth, which also saw both women added back into the line of succession (without which British History could have been very different should neither have ruled). She was also an advocate for the religious reforms that began with the introduction of the Church of England, as well as being an advocate for the education of women. Catherine was also an author in her own right and had portraits of herself painted by female artists – facts she highlights in her solo song which in turn is a way in which she takes ownership of her story.

Accredited with being remembered for “surviving” in the *SIX* programme, the version of Catherine we are presented within the show appears at first to be more meek and mild than the others until her solo song “I Don’t Need Your Love”. As mentioned, Catherine lists her achievements within this song which features a musical nod to the Destiny’s Child song “Independent Women, part 1” on the line “So all my women could independently”<sup>30</sup>. The link to this song once again gives the sense of a woman with an identity that is her own and independent of her husband. Highlighting her own achievements is something that none of the other Queens have touched upon within their own songs (even Anna of Cleves was provided with her riches by divorcing Henry). In doing this, it strengthens this identity of a woman who has made her own way in the world and used her position as a Queen to springboard herself to

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<sup>29</sup> Historic Royal Palaces, *Katherine Parr: Scholar, Stepmother, Survivor* [Online] <https://www.hrp.org.uk/hampton-court-palace/history-and-stories/katherine-parr/#gs.ccrwdj> Accessed June 2024

<sup>30</sup> Marlow and Moss, *SIX – All the songs from the Hit Musical*, 96



where she wishes to be, rather than relying on a man to help her. The use of the phrase “all my women”<sup>31</sup> could also have been an acknowledgement of how Catherine used her position to help other women gain independence and knowledge as if feeling she has a responsibility for them.

### **Reclaiming their identity**

In Chapter One, this work examined the identity of *SIX* as a whole production, considering its pop-concert format and where the show is best placed in terms of being either an integrated or concept musical. This chapter will now expand on some of the ideas raised, related to the notion that *SIX* sits within the concept musical category in terms of how the characters are portrayed and how, more importantly, the Queens are able to reclaim their stories. To do this, the opening and closing songs of the show, “Ex-Wives” and “SIX” will be compared to show how the way the Queens refer to themselves has changed throughout the course of the show, as they have been able to retell their own stories.

As explored within this chapter, each of the Queens has something specific which they are remembered for historically, and this is also underpinned by a section of the programme for *SIX* that briefly states (sometimes comically) what they are remembered for.<sup>32</sup> As noted before, one of the reasons I believe *SIX* to be a concept musical is because the songs work as stand-alone pieces that could be performed out of context of the show and still work. This is very much the case for the opening song, as whilst within the show it introduces the Queens and is a basis for how the show will continue, the content of the song allows it to work as an individual, stand-alone piece. The song has a short musical introduction which is the opening notes of “Greensleeves”, a piece believed to be from the Tudor era which many thought Henry had composed himself for his second wife, Anne Boleyn. This has since been disputed and many now believe the piece to have originated in the Elizabethan era.<sup>33</sup> By using this snippet of music that has been linked to one of the Queens, the music immediately creates a sense of reclaiming their narrative, as the song is being used by them in their show. “Ex-wives” then starts with the famous rhyme used to recall

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> “A little bit of Her-story” in *SIX At the Vaudeville Theatre Programme*, 2022, 19-21

<sup>33</sup> Classic FM, *Who was Greensleeves – and did Henry VIII really write the song?*, April 2020 [Online] <https://www.classicfm.com/discover-music/greensleeves-did-henry-viii-write-song/>, Accessed May 2022

the fates of the Queens: ‘Divorced, Beheaded, Died. Divorced, Beheaded, Survived.’ The Queens are barely seen at this point under the dimmed stage lights which helps to break the connection between each Queen and a corresponding word in a rhyme, instead providing each individual with the chance to claim ownership over their word in the rhyme. Even though the words are repeated numerous times throughout the song, each repetition is not used to label the Queens, quite the opposite as just explored. This idea is something that is highlighted within the lyrics of the song, with Katherine Howard singing “I’m done, cos all this time / I’ve been just one word in a stupid rhyme”,<sup>34</sup> and is followed by “So I picked up a pen and a microphone / History’s about to get / Over-throne”.<sup>35</sup> The choice of the adjective stupid to describe the rhyme shows the Queens’ exasperation with being represented in such a childish fashion, and their desire to put forth their own identities.

As an opening number, “Ex-wives” immediately sets out the concept of the show being a pop concert with its pop music sound, but also that the show is themed around providing a voice for these historical women who have previously not had the opportunity to tell their own stories.

Welcome to the show, to the histo-remix  
 Switching up the flow as we add the prefix  
 Ev’rybody knows that we used to be six wives  
 Raising up the roof til we hit the ceiling  
 Get ready for the truth that we’ll be revealing  
 Ev’rybody knows that we used to be six wives  
 but now we’re, ex-wives<sup>36</sup>

Once the premise for the show has been set, the Queens finally introduce themselves one by one, with the others adding their relevant rhyme word as an introduction to each Queen.

QUEENS – *Divorced*

ARAGON - My name’s Cath’rine of Aragon

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<sup>34</sup> Marlow and Moss, *SIX – All the songs from the Hit Musical*, 4

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Marlow and Moss, *SIX – All the songs from the Hit Musical*, 5-6

Was married twenty four years

I'm a paragon of royalty

My loyalty is to the Vatican

So if you try to dump me...

You won't try that again

QUEENS – *Beheaded*

BOLEYN - I'm that Boleyn girl and I'm up next

See I broke England from the Church,

Yeah. I'm that sexy

Why did I lose my head?

Well my sleeves may be green

But my lipstick's red

QUEENS – *Died*

SEYMOUR - Jane Seymour "the only one he truly loved"

QUEENS – *Rude*

SEYMOUR - When my son was newly born, I died

But I'm not what I seem... or am I?

Stick around and you'll suddenly see more

QUEENS – *Divorced*

CLEVES - Ich bin Anna of Cleves

QUEENS – *Ja?*

CLEVES – When he saw my portrait, he was like,

QUEENS – "*Ja!*"

CLEVES – But I didn't look as good as I did in my pic

Funny how we all discuss that,

But never Henry's little pr...

HOWARD – Prick up your ears, I'm the Katherine who lost her head

QUEENS – *Beheaded*

HOWARD – For my promiscuity outside of wed-

lock up your husbands, lock up your sons,

K-Howard is here and the fun's begun

QUEENS – *Survived*

PARR – Five down, I'm the final wife

I saw him to the end of his life

I'm the survivor: Catherine Parr

I bet you wanna know how I got this far<sup>37</sup>

This introduction provides the basic information as to what the Queens are historically known for, discussed earlier within this chapter, but each one provides a hint that there is more to her story than first identified. To begin with, this helps to cement the different identities of each Queen as they are able to provide their information themselves, an opportunity only afforded to women in this era and during their own time, and also in a way that hints as to their character, such as Anne Boleyn referring to herself as “sexy” and Anna of Cleves being slightly nonchalant regarding Henry rebuffing her.

Whilst each Queen has her own influences as already explored, there are some references within this song to one of the ‘Queenspirations’ – Beyonce. The first is in the introduction of Catherine Parr as in the above lyrics which imitate the line “I’m a Survivor” from the chorus of “Survivor” by Destinys Child, of which Beyonce was a founding member. This imitation is not just done lyrically, but the rhythm of both lines are exactly the same: a set of triplet crotchets followed by 2 crotchets, however in “Survivor” this is done over two bars whereas in “Ex-Wives” it is done in one bar,

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 10-13

which in turn shifts the emphasis of the phrase. Whilst the pieces are in different keys, the melodic movement of this phrase remains the same, with the fourth crotchet of the set of five being higher in pitch than the other four which are all the same pitch. The second reference to Beyoncé is in the line all the Queens sing, “You want a Queen Bee?”<sup>38</sup> a reference to Beyoncé’s fans who call her ‘Queen Bey.’ This early likening of the Queens to a modern day female icon like Beyoncé who is known for being a strong and empowered woman conveys to the audience that they are trying to emulate that same sense of power and independence.

Towards the end of the song there is a small interlude in which the Queens welcome the audience and discuss the fact their lives have been the topic of discussion (and arguments) for hundreds of years, with each Queen stating how each of them is perceived to be the best Queen, summed up in a short and snappy sentence.

ARAGON – Who lasted the longest was the strongest

BOLEYN – The biggest sinner is obvs the winner

SEYMOUR – Who had the son takes number one

CLEVES – Who was most chaste shall be first-paces

HOWARD – The most inglorious is victorious

PARR – The winning contestant was the most (*said to rhyme with contestant.*) Protestant... (*Correct pronunciation*). Protestant...<sup>39</sup>

This again provides the Queens with an opportunity to begin to shun their historical identities with the delivery of these lines almost mocking the viewpoints that have been held about them for centuries. These new personas the Queens are showing on stage are most evident in the final song of the show, “SIX” in which they are all provided with the opportunity to give their perspective of how their lives would have ended if they were given the choice. This opportunity has only arisen in reaction to the realisation that happens at the end of “I Don’t Need Your Love”, the solo song from Catherine Parr.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 14

<sup>39</sup> Marlow and Moss, *SIX Teen Edition*, 9

In a moment where Catherine is sharing what she would say to the King if she were given the chance to refuse his offer of marriage, she becomes more animated in her delivery of the song. Following this moment of honesty, Catherine realises she would not be able to say what she truly wants to the King, and instead begins to backtrack on herself, ending this section of the song, “Cos in history / I’m fixed, as one of Six / and without him, / I disappear / We all disappear...”<sup>40</sup> before she stops singing altogether, mirroring the fact that without being known as a wife of Henry, she is silenced and forgotten about.

At this point there is some confusion between the Queens as they are all unsure of the point Catherine is making. This leads to some discussion between them until she states

PARR – The point is, the only reason any of these people have come here tonight is because once upon a time...

ARAGON - ...the same guy fell in love with us

PARR – Right.<sup>41</sup>

This is followed with the Queens discussing how they compare themselves when they’re all together, and viewed as one of ‘SIX’ which they all sing despondently,<sup>42</sup> until Anne Boleyn, who has up until this point not been as forthcoming with ideas as much as the other Queens, and instead acted in a more immature manner, states

Omg I get it – since the only thing we have in common is our husband, grouping us is an inherently comparative act, and as such it necessarily elevates a historical approach ingrained in patriarchal structures – yeah, I read.<sup>43</sup>

This statement is followed by some awkward silence between the Queens as they’ve realised they have wasted their time in competing with each other. This silence is broken by Katherine Howard, who begins the next discussion,

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<sup>40</sup> Marlow and Moss, *SIX Teen Edition*, 51

<sup>41</sup> Marlow and Moss, *SIX Teen Edition*, 52

<sup>42</sup> Marlow and Moss, *SIX Teen Edition*, 52

<sup>43</sup> Marlow and Moss, *SIX Teen Edition*, 52

HOWARD – Do you know what?

CLEVES – What?

HOWARD – I wish that like *before* we spent the whole show competing, we'd realised it would turn out to be such a mess

ALL – Yeah same / Hmm yeah / Ugh that would've been good

PARR – Yea cos if we *had* realised, then we could've just done something else...like maybe even a *fake* competition to *show* everyone how messed up comparing us is

ARAGON – Ugh yeah and *then* we could've found some cool way to like, I don't know 'reclaim our stories' and like 'all become the leading ladies'

BOLEYN – (*Disappointed*) Awww we could have done that as a song!

SEYMOUR – Ugh that would have tied things together so neatly

CLEVES – If *only* we'd thought of that before...<sup>44</sup>

The mention of all the Queens being leading ladies ties back to the idea from Citron that no one character stands out more than another in a concept musical.<sup>45</sup>

Throughout the show each of the Queens has had their own song and opportunity to share their story, yet not one Queen has been singled out as more important than another, despite the idea of the competition between them, which has not prevented the show from allowing each Queen her own identity, which is fully explored towards the end of the show.

Following the dialogue outlined above, the Queens all turn to look at the audience and pause, giving the audience time to consider the point that has just been poised – how messed up it is to compare them. This is followed by the end of “I Don't Need Your Love”, referred to as the “Remix” by Catherine Parr, in which the Queens address Henry directly,

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<sup>44</sup> Marlow and Moss, *SIX Teen Edition*, 53

<sup>45</sup> Citron, *Sondheim and Lloyd-Webber – The New Musical*, 41

Henry, yeah I'm through  
Too many times it's been told  
and I have had enough  
love stories soon get old  
and you might think it's tough  
but I've got to let your love run cold  
we're taking back control  
you need to know: /<sup>46</sup>

At the conclusion of this song, the Queens all agree they have a voice and smile at each other, insinuating that the competition idea was fake all along and they have actually been in control throughout the show. They agree to leave the audience with one final song, a "history rewrite"<sup>47</sup>. The table below shows how each Queen tells her rewritten story, now fully reclaiming her own identity as a woman, rather than a wife of Henry VIII.

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<sup>46</sup> Marlow and Moss, *SIX Teen Edition*, 54

<sup>47</sup> Marlow and Moss, *SIX Teen Edition*, 57



Queen	Rewritten Story as told in the song “SIX” <sup>48</sup>
Catherine of Aragon	He got down on one knee but I said “No Way” / Packed my bags, and moved into a N-n-nunneray / Joined the Gospel Choir / Our riffs were on fire / At the top of the charts is where I’m gonna stay
Ann Boleyn	Henry sent me a poem all about my green sleeves / I changed a couple words, put it on a sick beat / The song blew their minds / Next minute I was signed / and now I’m writin’ lyrics for Shakesy P
Jane Seymour	Since my first son, my fam’ly’s grown / we made a band and got quite well known / you could perhaps / call us the Tudor Von Trapps / Only Kidding / We’re called the Royalling Stones...ha
Anna of Cleves	What a shame that my face / It cost me the crown / So I moved to the Haus of Holbein / In my hometown / His mates were super arty / But I showed them how to party / Now on my tour of Prussia, ev’rybody gets down
Katherine Howard	Music man tried it on and I was like “bye” / so I thought “who needs him? I can give it a try!” / I learned ev’rything / now all I do is sing / and I’ll do that until I die
Catherine Parr	Heard all about these rockin’ chicks / loved ev’ry song and each remix / so I went out and found them / and we laid down an album / now I don’t need your love / all I need is Six.

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<sup>48</sup> Lyrics are all taken from Marlow and Moss, *SIX Teen Edition*, 57-58

The above helps to give a clear indication of the identity each Queen has ended the show with, compared to the one she began with now that she has had the chance to reclaim her story throughout the course of the performance. Catherine of Aragon has taken ownership of her path in life and refused Henry's proposal, instead moving into a nunnery to remain loyal to her faith. This helps to solidify her identity as a woman with strong faith and personal conviction, turning the fact she was sent away to a nunnery into her own choice. Anne Boleyn has also shunned Henry's advances, using the words to a poem he wrote for her (potentially a reference again to the idea that "Greensleeves" was composed by Henry for Anne) to create an updated version which has propelled her forward to working with "Shakesy P". This could be a play on words referencing the famous playwright, William Shakespeare, indicating the long life Anne expected she would have without Henry, as it is believed Shakespeare was born around thirty years after Anne's death. Unlike the grisly way her life ended, Anne has been able to reclaim her story and provide an idea of how successful her life would have been without Henry. In stark contrast to the first two Queens who do not mention their children, Jane remains focused on her identity as a mother, explaining that instead of dying after childbirth, her family continues to grow following the birth of Edward. Whilst some may not view the way in which Jane is presented as empowering as the other Queens, as it conforms to the stereotype of women being only suitable for childbearing and motherhood, it is sending the message for those who wish to concentrate on their family and being parents then that is an acceptable thing to do. Anna of Cleves continues to take ownership of the way in which she was dismissed by Henry for her looks and details her return home to party with Hans Holbein (the person who had created her portrait for the King). This solidifies her carefree and independent character. Her demand at the end, "ev'rybody get down"<sup>49</sup> shows that despite no longer being Queen, she still expects obedience and a readiness to lead others that one would have with being a Queen. Despite her young age, Katherine is able to refuse the advances of the first manipulative man in her life, her music teacher Henry Maddox, and instead teaches herself what she needs to know in order to live a successful life, underlining how she is now a confident, intelligent woman who does not need others. Catherine Parr is the only

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<sup>49</sup> Marlow and Moss, *SIX Teen Edition*, 57

Queen who relates her life back to the other Queens, stating “all I need is Six”.<sup>50</sup> This also helps to reclaim the idea of the six wives as six individuals who all come together to be successful in their own rights. She also states, “I went out and found them”<sup>51</sup> which denotes that she has made this choice; a choice that was taken away from her when ordered to marry Henry, as she had been unable to choose the man she wished to marry. The way in which both Katherine and Anne are able to reincarnate their image as successful individuals is far removed from the way they are remembered in history, and this harks back to the idea that Marlow and Moss aimed to give these women a voice with which to tell their own stories. All the Queens have been able to tell a story that is “interesting, engaging, clever, and funny”<sup>52</sup> as set out by Marlow and Moss.

Within the song “SIX” the individual identity of each Queen is realised in the way the music changes ever so slightly for each Queen, despite it being a group song that references the style of their earlier solo songs. Whilst the melodic movement for Aragon, Boleyn, Cleves and Howard are similar, there are nuances within each Queen’s version; the more melismatic moments in the melody for Catherine of Aragon; the mimicking of a “sick beat” and resulting rhythmic change for Anne Boleyn; the use of spoken elements for Anna of Cleves; the ad lib riff used for Katherine Howard. Again, the melodic content for Seymour and Parr are similar, yet the way in which both of their sections end is different, particularly in the accompanying music with a held chord at the end of Catherine Parr’s section which is not used at the end of Jane Seymour’s. Music is also now the unifying aspect for all the Queens, as each one has mentioned a link to music within the lyrics of this song, which not only forms a part of their individual identity but also the identity of the show being set within the pop-concert format.

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<sup>50</sup> Marlow and Moss, *SIX Teen Edition*, 58

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Marlow and Moss, *History of SIX*, 2

### Chapter Three

This final chapter will explore the theme of identity from the viewpoint of the individuals cast to portray the Queens in various productions, and if in turn their own identities are reflected within the way they deliver their performances. It will also consider how the six Queens are identified as a group, and how this links back to the concept of the Queens as a girl group on their live tour as previously explored in Chapter One.

As already discussed earlier in this work, there have been many iterations of the Queens in various book, film, and television projects over the years. For many of these ventures, those cast have been selected because of their resemblance to what the Queens are believed to have looked like, based on portraits from the time. This way of casting is to be applauded for its attempts to match historical accuracy within the realms of looks and in some cases race, culture, and ethnicity; however, it may result in a performance that is not as strong or fully realised as it could be. This method of casting individuals who bear a resemblance to the subject being portrayed can be seen in the way the Queens were cast for the television series *The Tudors* (2007-2010) and also the documentary *Six Wives by Lucy Worsley* (2016). The following set of figures (Figures 12 - 29) show the portrait of each of the Queens alongside an image of the person cast in each of the television shows that depict them.



Figure 12 – Portrait of Catherine of Aragon<sup>1</sup>



Figure 13 – Catherine in *The Tudors*<sup>2</sup>



Figure 14 – Catherine in *Six Wives* with Lucy Worsley<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Unknown artist, *Katherine of Aragon*, - *National Portrait Gallery* [Online]

<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portraitConservation/mw01144/Katherine-of-Aragon>

<sup>2</sup> Imdb, *The Tudors* – *Photo Gallery* [Online]

[https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0758790/mediaviewer/rm2814286080?ref\\_=ttmi\\_mi\\_nm\\_pbl\\_5](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0758790/mediaviewer/rm2814286080?ref_=ttmi_mi_nm_pbl_5)

<sup>3</sup> IMDB, *Six Wives with Lucy Worsley* – *Photo Gallery* [Online]

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6321326/mediaviewer/rm451906817/>



Figure 15 – Portrait of Anne Boleyn<sup>4</sup>



Figure 16 – Anne in *The Tudors*<sup>5</sup>



Figure 17 – Anne in *Six Wives with Lucy Worsley*<sup>6</sup>



Figure 18 – Portrait of Jane Seymour<sup>7</sup>



Figure 19– Jane in *The Tudors*<sup>8</sup>



Figure 20 – Jane in *Six Wives with Lucy Worsley*<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Unknown English artist, *Anne Boleyn* – *National Portrait Gallery* [Online]  
<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw00142/Anne-Boleyn>

<sup>5</sup> Imdb, *The Tudors* – *Photo Gallery* [Online]  
[https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0758790/mediaviewer/rm2797508864?ref\\_=ttmi\\_mi\\_nm\\_pbl\\_34](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0758790/mediaviewer/rm2797508864?ref_=ttmi_mi_nm_pbl_34)

<sup>6</sup>IMDB, *Six Wives with Lucy Worsley* – *Photo Gallery* [Online]  
[https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6321326/mediaviewer/rm1677102337?ref\\_=ttmi\\_mi\\_nm\\_sf\\_3](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6321326/mediaviewer/rm1677102337?ref_=ttmi_mi_nm_sf_3)

<sup>7</sup> After Hans Holbein the Younger, *Jane Seymour* – *National Portrait Gallery* [Online]  
<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw272045/Jane-Seymour>

<sup>8</sup> Imdb, *The Tudors* – *Photo Gallery* [Online]  
[https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0758790/mediaviewer/rm3164048128?ref\\_=ttmi\\_mi\\_nm\\_sf\\_5](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0758790/mediaviewer/rm3164048128?ref_=ttmi_mi_nm_sf_5)

<sup>9</sup> Tiny-librarian.tumblr.com on Pinterest, *Extremely Salty About Ancient Dead Kings* [Online]  
<https://sk.pinterest.com/pin/299911656426780386/>



Figure 21 – Portrait of Anne of Cleves<sup>10</sup>

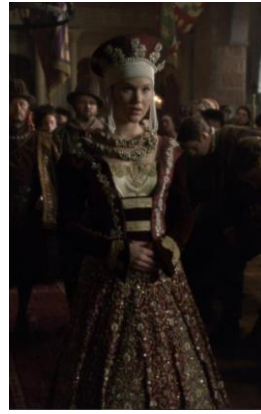


Figure 22 – Anne in *The Tudors*<sup>11</sup>



Figure 23 – Anne in *Six Wives with Lucy Worsley*<sup>12</sup>



Figure 24 – Portrait of Katherine Howard<sup>13</sup>



Figure 25 – Katherine in *The Tudors*<sup>14</sup>



Figure 26 – Katherine in *Six Wives with Lucy Worsley*<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Cornelis Martinus Vermeulen, *Anne of Cleves* – *National Portrait Gallery*, 1707 [Online]

<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw16227/Anne-of-Cleves>

<sup>11</sup> Imdb, *The Tudors* – *Photo Gallery* [Online]

[https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0758790/mediaviewer/rm445364481?ref\\_=ttmi\\_mi\\_nm\\_sf\\_6](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0758790/mediaviewer/rm445364481?ref_=ttmi_mi_nm_sf_6)

<sup>12</sup> IMDB, *Six Wives with Lucy Worsley* – *Photo Gallery* [Online]

[https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6321326/mediaviewer/rm3207040257?ref\\_=ttmi\\_mi\\_nm\\_sf\\_3](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6321326/mediaviewer/rm3207040257?ref_=ttmi_mi_nm_sf_3)

<sup>13</sup> After Hans Holbein the Younger, *Unknown woman formerly known as Catherine Howard* – *National Portrait Gallery* [Online]

<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portraitConservation/mw01146/Unknown-woman-formerly-known-as-Catherine-Howard?>

<sup>14</sup> IMDB, *The Tudors* – *Photo Gallery* [Online]

[https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0758790/mediaviewer/rm397231872?ref\\_=ttmi\\_mi\\_nm\\_pbl\\_33](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0758790/mediaviewer/rm397231872?ref_=ttmi_mi_nm_pbl_33)

<sup>15</sup> IMDB, *Six Wives with Lucy Worsley* – *Photo Gallery* [Online]

[https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6321326/mediaviewer/rm4012346625?ref\\_=ttmi\\_mi\\_nm\\_sf\\_2](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6321326/mediaviewer/rm4012346625?ref_=ttmi_mi_nm_sf_2)



Figure 27 – Portrait of Catherine Parr<sup>16</sup>



Figure 28 – Catherine in *The Tudors*<sup>17</sup>



Figure 29 – Catherine in *Six Wives with Lucy Worsley*<sup>18</sup>

As these images show, the individuals cast in these roles were, in most respects, close to the original Queen's age, race, body type and looks, and it has allowed for a more historically accurate aesthetic to be achieved; however, this approach is not the one used in casting *SIX*.

### Casting *SIX*

As outlined in Chapter Two, the cast of *SIX* is made up of six individuals, each of whom portrays one of the six Queens, with the four ladies-in-waiting who are the on-stage musicians. Having a show that represents women as seen in *SIX* is unlike other shows that have been seen within musical theatre, due to the fact that women's' roles have predominantly been "denied their own identity or any complexity."<sup>19</sup> *SIX* breaks this stigma by giving each Queen her own story, each one has an individual identity, and importantly, the individuals portraying each Queen are representative of the wider world. For the initial performances in Cambridge and at the Edinburgh Fringe, the six wives were portrayed by students from Cambridge University's musical theatre society, and when the show moved to the West End and began its UK tour, the cast understandably changed to include those who were trained in musical theatre.

<sup>16</sup> Attributed to Master John, *Katherine Parr – National Portrait Gallery* [Online]

<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portraitConservation/mw01957/Katherine-Parr>

<sup>17</sup> IMDB, *The Tudors – Photo Gallery* [Online]

[https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0758790/mediaviewer/rm1083942657?ref\\_=ttmi\\_mi\\_nm\\_sf\\_7](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0758790/mediaviewer/rm1083942657?ref_=ttmi_mi_nm_sf_7)

<sup>18</sup> IMDB, *Six Wives with Lucy Worsley – Photo Gallery* [Online]

[https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6321326/mediaviewer/rm3425144065?ref\\_=ttmi\\_mi\\_nm\\_sf\\_4](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6321326/mediaviewer/rm3425144065?ref_=ttmi_mi_nm_sf_4)

<sup>19</sup> Barnes, *Her Turn on Stage*, 12

Since its inception, the show has never cast individuals to look like the six Queens; those cast have always been chosen as they are able to portray the Queen in the way the show wishes to present these famous women from history to the audience. Each cast from the various productions since its initial West End performances represents different people, showcasing performers regardless of their race, age, body image, and gender identity. The original West End Cast, who also recorded the studio album of the show, were the first to embody this method of showcasing the performer and their ability to portray the role, rather than the ability to recreate the historical figure. Figure 30 shows some members of the original cast alongside co-creators Toby Marlow (bottom left) and Lucy Moss (bottom right), missing from the image is Genesis Lynea who portrayed Anna of Cleves.



Figure 30 – Image showing the original and album cast of *SIX*. From L-R (Back row) Renee Lamb (Aragon), Christina Modestou (Boleyn), Izuka Hoyle (Parr) (Front Row) Toby Marlow, Natalie Paris (Seymour), Aimee Atkinson (Howard), Lucy Moss<sup>20</sup>

Since this initial cast, the creative team of *SIX* has continued to employ performers who provide a different dynamic within their portrayal than others have done before them due to the different identities of the performers. These personalities are

<sup>20</sup> Giverny Masson, *Original cast of musical Six reunites to celebrate album's 100,000 sales*, 29 October 2021 [Online] <https://www.thestage.co.uk/news/original-cast-of-musical-six-reunites-to-celebrate-albums-100000-sales> Accessed July 2024



consequentially reflected within the version of the Queen they create, and this is achieved in a number of ways. First of all, following the confirmation of their casting, performers in *SIX* are required to carry out research and give a presentation on the Queen they are portraying.<sup>21</sup> In a filmed interview with Marlow, Moss and the 2021 Broadway Queens,<sup>22</sup> co-creator Lucy Moss explains this process helps with allowing each actor to build a connection with the Queen they are portraying, understanding what each Queen experienced and building a relationship with them.<sup>23</sup> The importance of this research cannot be ignored or downplayed. Whilst the show is not designed or promoted as an educational experience to learn about the Tudor era, it does provide “a chance not only to reassess the reputations of Henry’s wives but to set the record straight.”<sup>24</sup> By building a better understanding of who their character was as a person, the performer can add this to their preparations to give a more informed presentation within the show, and it also allows them to fashion their own identity for their version of the Queen(s) by picking which characteristics they wish to highlight or exaggerate.

Another way in which the cast of *SIX* creates a sense of identity is its casting process which differs to other shows currently being performed within the Musical Theatre industry due to its nature of being inclusive of many protected characteristics. In a casting call for a production of *SIX* for two of the Norwegian Cruise line, the casting agent, Pearson Casting, stated they were searching for

Sensational triple-threat singer/actor/dancers required to perform the *SIX* wives of Henry VIII as they reunite to tell their stories in the form of a pop concert.

Must have great contemporary pop voices, good comedic instincts, and be able to interact with an audience well. Gigging experience is a plus.

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<sup>21</sup> *SIX, A Royal Roundtable with SIX The Musical*, June 2022, YouTube [Online]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JRn6a7DJkRU&t=169s>, Accessed August 2022

<sup>22</sup> Adrianna Hicks (Aragon), Andrea Macasaet (Boleyn), Abby Mueller (Seymour), Brittney Mack (Cleves), Samantha Pauly (Howard), Anna Uzele (Parr),

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> John Nathan, *Hit musical Six creators Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss talk making Henry VIII’s wives into pop stars* <https://www.standard.co.uk/culture/theatre/toby-marlow-lucy-moss-interview-six-west-end-a4001191.html>

These roles are not solely limited to cisgender women; they are also open to transgender women, non-binary people and other people in the trans community who feel comfortable performing on stage as characters who are women. We are looking to cast the most exceptionally talented group of people, regardless of body type, ethnicity or height.

We are very keen to see performers who have played or covered lead roles. Please note we are also looking for offstage swings for this. All swings will be expected to learn all six tracks and be able to cover all roles within the show as required.<sup>25</sup>

This casting call shows the qualities required in the cast members are based on their performance ability; “sensational triplet threat singer/actor/dancers”,<sup>26</sup> and the way in which they are able to portray the role will be a deciding factor, rather than their ability to portray each of the Queens as she would have looked and conducted herself in the 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> Century. The statement that the roles are open to transgender women, non-binary people, and other people in the trans community who feel comfortable performing as female characters further supports one of the initial guiding principles set out by Marlow and Moss when the show had yet to be written. By having this remain a key part of the casting process it allows for the cast to remain diverse across the various productions of the show around the world. Whilst there has been a real drive on the diversity of the casting within shows, both Musicals and straight plays, not all shows have taken the same approach as *SIX*, which is evident in the open casting call for the production of *Mamma Mia* (1999) which will take place onboard Royal Caribbean Cruise ships. Whilst the advert does state members of the ensemble can be from “all ethnic and racial background”,<sup>27</sup> it does not make the same stipulation for the principal or support roles, and there is no mention as to if performers from non-binary or gender fluid communities would be welcome to audition for any of the roles. In specifically stating that performers with

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<sup>25</sup> Pearson Casting, *SIX Norwegian Cruise Line* [Online] <https://www.pearsoncasting.com/six-the-musical-ncl> Accessed November 2023

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Royal Caribbean Entertainment, *Royal Caribbean Productions Upcoming Auditions – Mamma Mia* [Online] <https://royalcaribbeanentertainment.com/productions/upcoming-auditions/> Accessed July 2024

protected characteristics are welcome to audition for the roles if they wish to, as *SIX* does, it provides opportunities for these performers with diverse identities to appear on stages where in other shows they may not have the same prospect.

It is not just within the casting of the Queens that diversity is encouraged, but also those wishing to be one of the Ladies-in-Waiting (the onstage band). This can be seen in the open call for musicians posted by one of the shows previous West End Musical Directors on their Instagram page.



Figure 31 – Image to show open call for musicians to audition for *SIX*<sup>28</sup>

Not explored in the previous chapter were the identities of the ladies-in-waiting, all of whom are incredibly important to the show. As they do not explore their identities or reclaim their stories in the way that the Queens do, considering their role within the show was not relevant to the work of Chapter Two. With that said, the role they play is important and should be highlighted within the discussion of casting and the identities of those on the stage. The ladies-in-waiting are always referred to by name; Joan on the keyboard (this is also the musical director for the show); Bessie on the bass guitar; Maggie on the guitar; and Maria on the drum kit. These names are not randomly selected but instead represent real people who were linked to the Queens. For example, Maria de Salinas was one of Catherine of Aragon's ladies-in-waiting and was a dear friend of hers,<sup>29</sup> which may be why Catherine has the most interaction with her during the show. In casting those who identify as female or non-

<sup>28</sup> Taken from Lauren Hopkinson Instagram post [Online] <https://www.instagram.com/p/C0rodcdLuPs/>

<sup>29</sup> Tudorhistory.org, *Maria De Salinas* [Online] <https://tudorhistory.org/people/salinas/> Accessed July 2024

binary and happy to play a female presenting musician, the show once again provides a voice to a group who would have historically not had one, whilst also cementing the show within the pop-concert format by having live musicians on stage.

By employing the same approach to casting the ladies-in-waiting as the principal and swing roles, the creative team of *SIX* is ensuring they have the best suited people on stage to convey the identities of the Queens as explored in Chapter Two, whilst also platforming and celebrating the individual identities of the performers, be it they are from a different race, ethnicity or background, have a particular body image or indeed accent.

In order to demonstrate how this casting approach has allowed for diverse casts, the following images will show some of the casts of different productions since 2018.



Figure 32 – Original UK West End Cast<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Idil Sukan in Lucy Davies, *The Joy of 'Six': how the Fringe show became a global phenomenon*, 3 June 2022 [Online] <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/theatre/what-to-see/joy-six-fringe-show-became-global-phenomenon/> Accessed June 2024

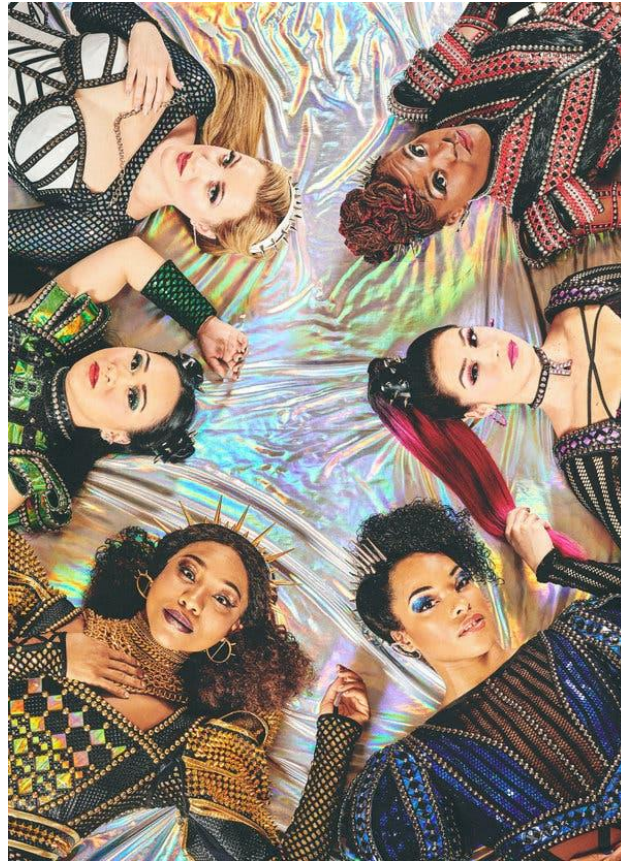


Figure 33 – Original Broadway cast<sup>31</sup>



Figure 34 – the 2022/2023 West End cast for SIX<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Paulson, *The Making of 'Six': How Tudor Queens Turned...*

<sup>32</sup> SIX Twitter page, *It's happening Queendom!!!*, 2022 [Online] <https://twitter.com/sixthemusical>



Figure 35 – 2022/2023 UK Tour Cast<sup>33</sup>



Figure 36 – 2024 Australian Cast<sup>34</sup>

All these casts have had performers with their own identities, and it is the experiences that every performer has that many bring into the way they portray the Queen or Queens, they have been cast as.

One of the elements of *SIX* that I particularly enjoy each performance I attend is the way in which most performers will use their own accents when playing their allotted role(s). This has resulted in the versions of the Queens I see each time to differ slightly

<sup>33</sup> The Lowry, *The International smash hit musical SIX announces new cast for the UK Tour*, 11 February 2022 [Online] <https://thelowry.com/2022/02/11/the-international-smash-hit-musical-six-announces-new-cast-for-the-uk-tour/> Accessed July 2024

<sup>34</sup> Queensland Performing Arts Centre, *SIX The Musical crowns its new Australian Queens!*, 14 May 2024 [Online] <https://www.qpac.com.au/newsroom/2024/six-the-musical-1> Accessed July 2024

whilst still holding onto their central identity as sculpted by Marlow and Moss. Over the last few years, I have seen an Australian Anne Boleyn (as portrayed by Baylie Carson at the Vaudeville Theatre, October 2022), an American Catherine Parr (as portrayed by Alana M Robinson at the Theatre Royal Nottingham, July 2022), and a Glaswegian Katherine Howard (as portrayed by Leesa Tulley at the Theatre Royal Nottingham, July 2022). Allowing performers to keep this element of their identity does not distract from the show in any way, and in my opinion, I think it adds a different dynamic to the characters, making them more accessible as they may be performed with an accent we find is similar to our own. With this said, there is one song in the show for which the performers purposefully alter their accents, and that is during “Haus of Holbein”. This is performed with mock German accents due to the fact the song is full of German references that sound similar to English words, such as the German number four (vier) which is pronounced similarly to the English fear, or because of their usefulness in rhyming, such as the German for no (nein), all of which appears in the song

Ignore the fear and you'll be fine/  
 We'll turn this vier into a nine /  
 So just say ja and don't say nein  
 Cause now you're in the Haus /  
 IN THE HAUS OF HOLBEIN JA!<sup>35</sup>

Again this alteration makes the characters accessible, whilst bringing a comical element to a song which is in turn aiming to point out the stupidity of beauty standards of the time. By performing the song in this way, it helps to prevent the Queens from identifying with the standards in this song, thus giving them a sense of empowerment.

Another element of how the different identities of performers is body type/shape. When considered in musical theatre, the performer's body can cause some controversy as Ryan Donovan writes “Casting practices have historically favoured normative bodies for all roles, even those calling for non-normative bodies.”<sup>36</sup> In their cast requirements *SIX* makes no mention to body type or ability, it is more implied that the performer be a dancer and be capable of fulfilling this element of the role. This has meant there

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<sup>35</sup> Toby Marlow et al, *SIX*, 56

<sup>36</sup> Ryan Donovan, *Broadway Bodies: Casting, Stigma and Difference in Broadway Musicals since A Chorus Line (1975)* (United States: ProQuest: 2019), 10

have been performers of all body shapes and sizes performing in many of the various shows globally, which links back to the point of the song “Haus of Holbein” and breaking down the beauty standards and stereotypes that women were, and still are, held to.

Previously, this work has looked at the way the show is based on a mix of a pop concert and a reality television show, bringing the show into a more modern-day context, yet the pop influences used at the time the show was being written are not as current or perhaps as relevant to modern-day audiences. For example, Beyonce (mentioned previously in this work as a source of inspiration for the Queens, particularly Catherine of Aragon), has been in the public eye since 1997 when she was part of the successful girl band Destiny’s Child. When cast, some performers in the various productions of *SIX* across the globe take inspiration from more contemporary artists. Andrea Macasaet (who portrayed Anne Boleyn on Broadway) took inspiration from Billie Eilish who is a much more recent artist. This is in contrast with Britney Mack (who portrays Anna of Cleves on Broadway) who took inspiration from both Janet Jackson, whose career spans many years, as well as Lizzo<sup>37</sup> who is a much more recent figure in the public eye, known as much for tackling stigma on body positivity as for her music career.

Allowing performers to bring their own inspirations into the role is another way in which their own identities are portrayed, as perhaps these artists have had an influence on them and shaped them into the performer they are. With each cast member providing their own references, as well as the written script and original references, the show can constantly evolve and reconceptualise, allowing each fresh audience a new perspective, which is an aspect I have witnessed in seeing different productions. This is only made possible by the fact those cast are able to bring their own identities into the way they play the role. Each cast I have seen have all given different incarnations of the characters, which is an element about the show I enjoy, as I feel audiences receive a different experience with each cast they see. For me, the best example of this was during the production I saw at the Vaudeville in October 2022, Baylie Carson played the role of Anne Boleyn, and I found their portrayal to be one of the more interesting that I had seen as they brought an energy level to the

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<sup>37</sup> Official London Theatre, *Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss...*



performance that was fresh and gave a completely different aesthetic to the character compared to others I had seen before. I think Carson's performance really inhabited the fun, carefree "sorry not sorry"<sup>38</sup> attitude of the Boleyn character as presented in *SIX* and the way in which they interacted with not only the other Queens but also the Ladies in Waiting, cemented this. Following this performance, I read the programme and saw some of Carson's posts on Instagram, and I think the fact they are neurodivergent and identify as non-binary is part of the reason they created their version of Boleyn in the way that they did.

### ***SIX and Hamilton***

One of the primary areas of diversity within the casting of *SIX* is race and ethnicity which again has been a topic of controversy for some years within the musical theatre industry.

Issues of race also pervade the question of casting a Broadway musical. Whether or not the plot involves topics of race or ethnicity, a show's creators must decide how to cast the show: with "realism," if the show is set in a particular place and time? With "color-blind" casting, disregarding historical incongruities to cast the best voices and actors? With intentional "miscasting," choosing to use performers of color in traditionally white roles to make a statement about biases in casting and provide work for minorities"<sup>39</sup>

The points here raised by Jessica Sternfeld and Elizabeth L. Wollman in their chapter *Reading the Musical through Race and Ethnicity* poignantly sum up the issues with casting that are faced by many musicals, and indeed other theatre shows, films and television programmes today. Do you cast the person who is best suited for the role based on their resemblance to the person they are portraying or do you disregard this to cast someone who would do a better job or to intentionally cast those who are underrepresented? As already mentioned, *SIX* chooses to cast in a way that does disregard the historical facts in favour of a performer who will portray the role well. This is in comparison with a show that has used intentional 'miscasting', *Hamilton*

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<sup>38</sup> Toby Marlow et al, 33

<sup>39</sup> Jessica Sternfeld and Elizabeth L. Wollman, *The Routledge Companion to the Contemporary Musical* (New York: London: Routledge: 2019), 183

(2015). The show has been applauded for its diverse re-casting of historic white figures with a diverse cast that showcases performers from various ethnic backgrounds. The writer, Lin-Manuel Miranda, never specified ethnicities for the role when the show was originally cast, and in the same vein as *SIX*, he assigned influences for each role, such as Hamilton being a mix of American rapper Eminem with musical theatre character Sweeney Todd and American president George Washington as a mix between Disney character Mufasa and singer John Legend.<sup>40</sup> This approach has been marked by many as revolutionary, yet as Warren Hoffman asks, “Has the show [*Hamilton*] truly revolutionized the Broadway musical,”<sup>41</sup> or does it still present problems despite its approach to cast people of colour? The success and popularity of the show cannot be denied, with its large social media following, continued high ticket sales, and recorded performance being added to Disney+ combined with the fact that it communicates with those who might not usually be fans of musical theatre because of its diverse casting and representation. Hoffman argues that whilst the casting speaks to many Americans who do not see themselves in American history, does this appeal do enough “to free the story from its white roots?”<sup>42</sup> So whilst the show has been revolutionary in terms of its diverse casting, the show is still a story about white men, many of them slave owners, so it could be argued that recasting the race of these roles has not really changed anything. Would a stronger revolutionary show not push the boundaries further by using a subject matter, event, or theme that has a non-white focus? Or is the point that the show is giving a voice to those who have historically had their voices repressed, and whilst they are not telling a story that is directly theirs, the relevance is there. One of the songs in *Hamilton* asks “Who tells your story?”<sup>43</sup> This exaggerates the point that future generations have the creative license over who and how people from the past are represented, relating to *SIX* in terms of the Queens reclaiming their own stories as they were not previously able to choose.

The point about the show giving a voice to those previously repressed could be applied to *SIX*; after all the show is based on the lives of six white women and their marriage

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<sup>40</sup> Eric Kohn, *How ‘Hamilton’ Became a Color-Conscious Casting Trailblazer, Before It Was Cool*, 2020 [Online] <https://www.indiewire.com/2020/07/hamilton-cast-casting-directors-diversity-1234571127/>

<sup>41</sup> Warren Hoffman, *The Great White Way, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (United States of America: Rutgers University Press, 2020) 214

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* 217

<sup>43</sup> Lin Manuel Miranda, *Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story lyrics*, available from Google lyrics

to a white man and is designed to give the women, a group who have also historically been without their own voices, a chance to tell their story. And yet, there is evidence to suggest the casting of *Hamilton* has been praised more highly than the diverse casting opportunities awarded by *SIX*. Perhaps it could be because, unlike *Hamilton*, *SIX* creatively retells the stories of the Queens, mixing up fact and fiction, instead of the truer representation of the events that surrounded Alexander Hamilton that are portrayed in *Hamilton*. Conversely, it could be because when the roles are recast, it is not always similar people stepping into the roles, but rather performers who are right for the part and able to portray the character in their own individual style. Regardless of the differences, the casting choices for both shows have meant they are incredibly popular with a diverse audience base, and both shows have reached out and resonated with many who might not usually access musical theatre. These are both shows where the audience can see themselves represented on stage more than they may have seen in previous shows.

As discussed in this chapter, the way in which *SIX* is cast allows for individual representation, and in turn, these individual identities can appear on stage whilst also showcasing the identities of the six Queens. In considering the way in which *SIX* has cast race and ethnicity in comparison with *Hamilton*, a show that is also about a historic figure, it again proves that the theme of identity is a key element to the show, as is giving a voice to these women who for so many years have not had the opportunity to share their stories themselves.

### **The group identity in *SIX***

Whilst each individual Queen has her own story to reclaim and identity to be shared with the audience, the Queens do spend virtually the entire show on stage as a group, and the element of how this group identity plays a role within the show cannot be ignored. As we know, the show is based on the concept that the Queens are all on their “Divorced, Beheaded, Live Tour” and they are all competing with each other to be the leader of the band. This instantly places the Queens into the idea of a girlband which in turn supports the pop concert format.

The format of the girlband has been around for decades, from more recent groups such as Little Mix, Girls Aloud, and The Spice Girls through Bananarama and The Nolan Sisters to The Supremes and even the Andrews sisters. This idea of a group

of women who perform together, usually with a specific sound to their music and a cohesive look, particularly when performing together is not a new phenomenon, and is certainly something that people will see when looking at the Queens in *SIX*. The link to pop groups is already evident in the use of the 'Queenspirations', some of whom have been members of pop groups, and the influences of these individuals were explored in Chapter Two regarding the musical influence on each Queen, yet the way in which each individual is presented in terms of the costume was not examined as it is better discussed in terms of the group identity.

Costume designer Gabriella Slade, who worked on the costumes for the Spice Girls Spiceworld tour in 2019, created a "unique aesthetic for the pop band that is the six wives of Henry VIII."<sup>44</sup> In her designs, Slade used recognisable shapes of the period, such as the ruffs that are seen in "Haus of Holbein" as well as the more squared necklines, the use of lacing and geometric shapes. There are similarities between the costumes of all the Queens, such as the studded details to their boots, which in turn are synonymous with rock and pop-punk or pop-rock outfits, styles of music that are used throughout the show. There is the practical inclusion of a belt loop for the microphones to be placed in when the Queen is not singing, as there are no microphone stands in the show, and unlike other musical theatre shows, the performers do not wear radio microphones, an aspect that again links the show's identity more to pop concerts as many artists may use a handheld microphone on stage.

As mentioned, the costumes of the Queens all have similar elements, and this is replicated in the costumes worn by the alternates and swings, some of whom will have a replica of a particular Queen's costume, whilst others will have something that can be adapted to work for all roles. The costumes worn by the ladies-in-waiting are also similar in style to the Queens, which gives all those on stage a combined look and allows for a sense of group identity.

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<sup>44</sup> Gabriella Slade, *Costume design: SIX the Musical – Catherin of Aragon* | V&A, 2022 [Online] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9zIIX6CY9U&t=4s>



Figure 37 – Catherine of Aragon's costume in SIX<sup>45</sup>



Figure 38 -Amanda Lindgren as Anne Boleyn in SIX <sup>46</sup>



Figure 39 – Claudia Kariuki as Jane Seymour in SIX<sup>47</sup>



Figure 40 – Dionne Ward-Anderson as Anna of Cleves in SIX<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Kelly Taub, "Six" Costume Designer Gabriella Slade Breaks Down Tudor Fashion Creations [Online] <https://wwd.com/fashion-news/fashion-features/gallery/six-costume-designer-gabriella-slade-breaks-down-tudor-fashion-creations-1203537162/six-costume-designer-gabriella-slade-breaks-down-tudor-fashion-creations-8/>

<sup>46</sup> SIX Wiki fandom, *Anne Boleyn – Gallery* [Online] [https://six-the-musical.fandom.com/wiki/Anne\\_Boleyn](https://six-the-musical.fandom.com/wiki/Anne_Boleyn)

<sup>47</sup> SIX Wiki fandom, *Jane Seymour – Gallery* [Online] [https://sixthemusical.fandom.com/wiki/Jane\\_Seymour/Gallery](https://sixthemusical.fandom.com/wiki/Jane_Seymour/Gallery)

<sup>48</sup> Pamela Raith in Alex Wood, *Six the Musical extends West End run at the Vaudeville Theatre, 2022* [Online] [https://www.whatsonstage.com/london-theatre/news/six-the-musical-extends-west-end-run-vaudeville\\_55811.html](https://www.whatsonstage.com/london-theatre/news/six-the-musical-extends-west-end-run-vaudeville_55811.html)



Figure 41 – Katherine Howard's costume for *SIX*<sup>49</sup>



Figure 42 – Meghan Dawson as Catherine Parr in *SIX*<sup>50</sup>



Figure 43 – Orange swing outfit in *SIX*<sup>51</sup>



Figure 44- Swing outfit in *SIX*<sup>52</sup>

As Figures 37 – 44 demonstrate, there is a similarity in the costumes, such as those previously mentioned, which helps to give the idea of a girl band aesthetic whilst also allowing each member to have their own identity, such as was done with the Spice Girls. Each member of the band had a trait which they would be identified with; Mel B was Scary Spice and was usually dressed in leopard print, Emma was Baby Spice and mainly wore pink with her hair styled in bunches; Geri was Ginger Spice due to her hair colour; Mel C was Sporty Spice and her outfits would consist of something

<sup>49</sup> Kelly Taub, "Six" Costume Designer

<sup>50</sup> SIX Wiki fandom, *Catherine Parr – Gallery* [Online] [https://sixthemusical.fandom.com/wiki/Catherine\\_Parr/Gallery#Bliss\\_Cruise\\_Productions](https://sixthemusical.fandom.com/wiki/Catherine_Parr/Gallery#Bliss_Cruise_Productions)

<sup>51</sup> Leesa Tulley, *Leesa Tulley Instagram Page* [Online] <https://www.instagram.com/Leesa/>

<sup>52</sup> Harriet Caplan Dean, *Harriet Caplan Dean Instagram Page* [Online] <https://www.instagram.com/p/ChXbNv3jRpH/>

deemed sporty, such as trainers, tracksuit bottoms etc; Victoria was Posh Spice and would have the more glamorous and high fashion outfits.

In *SIX*, these identities are given from the colour each Queen is assigned. Catherine of Aragon has gold and black, which not only signifies her Spanish and Catholic roots, but are colours that Beyonce, one of the musical influences for Catherine, is known for wearing. Green is the colour used for Anne Boleyn. This choice of this colour is linked back to the idea that Henry wrote “Greensleeves” for Anne, and the skater style skirt is influenced by Avril Lavigne. There is also a play on Anne’s famous ‘B’ initial necklace, this time as a large green letter B attached to a choker. Katherine Howard is the only other queen who wears a chocker, hers sporting a pink K initial. This is linked to the fact that both queens were beheaded. Jane Seymour has a fuller skirt and sleeve, with the pattern of the corset inspired by the thatched style of the Tudor home. White has connotations as the colour of peace. The costume for Anna of Cleves contains shorts and a jacket that are removed during “Get Down” to reveal a pair of red hotpants and a top with a harness of beads. She is also the only queen to wear thigh thigh-high boots which are studded in a similar fashion to the other Queens. The boots are like those worn by Rhianna, one of the musical influences for Cleves, which were a part of the Givenchy designed outfit that included hotpants, worn on her 2013 Tour.<sup>53</sup> For Cleve’s costume, the jacket has a fur detail to it, referencing her wealth. The use of pink for Katherine Howard is an interesting aspect, as pink is used a lot with love hearts and things synonymous with love, which is what Howard believes she has with the men in her life as explored in her solo song. Ariana Grande is one of the musical influences for the character of Howard and this is most clearly represented in the long ponytail hairstyle, a style that Grande is well known for. Catherine Parr has a blue colour pallet to symbolise her wisdom and intelligence. This is the only costume for the main cast to feature trousers which could represent her stance as someone who believed in the equality of women and female empowerment and at the time women would not have been able to wear such garments.

The individuality of each costume is clear and helps to represent each Queen as their own person, yet the way in which they are all inspired by Tudor fashion, colours

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<sup>53</sup> Glamour, *Insta-Winter Blues Cure@ Rhianna’s Smokin’-Hot Givenchy-Designed Tour Costume*, 2013 [Online] <https://www.glamour.com/story/a-closer-look-at-rihannas-give>

and shapes helps to unify them and create the girl band aesthetic. Each of the Queens also have a set of earrings, usually in a hooped style which contains a Roman numeral related to which number wife they were. Whilst some may argue that this is almost a way of labelling the Queens as a wife, I believe it is a way for the Queens to take ownership of who they were in terms of one of Henry's wives whilst presenting their version of their story.



## **Conclusion**

Throughout this work, identity has been explored related to the musical *SIX* in a way to understand how identity is constructed within the show, yet the definition of identity has never been used. This was a deliberate choice to not create a preconception as to what identity is, or indeed what role the term has when used in the way it has been. Identity is defined as “the fact of being who or what a person or thing is” or “a close similarity or affinity”.<sup>1</sup>

When taking the first definition into consideration, this has been explored through the Queens’ identities. If you were to remove *SIX* from the discussion, then the Queens would still have their historic identities as they have done for hundreds of years and these women will probably stay within the society conscious for many years to come due to the events that happened in their lives and the person that links them all together, Henry VIII. What this work has done is to look at how *SIX* has taken the identities of these Queens and acknowledged them before using a musical theatre show in the guise of a pop concert to create new identities for them. Not only does *SIX* provide the Queens with an individual identity that is steeped in their sound, the way they look, and the story they give, they have also been given a fresh identity as a group. No longer are they the women only recalled as being the fated six wives of Henry VIII, remembered by many because of an overused rhyme, but they are six powerful, independent, and successful women who have their own voices, own achievements to share, and stories to shout about.

The show as a whole has also been examined in terms of its identity within the wider musical theatre industry, which is the definition of a close similarity or affinity. By looking at key shows within both the integrated and concept musical categories, this work has considered what affinity, if any, *SIX* shares with shows of these categories. The guiding principles co-creators Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss set out to achieve have also been explored with regard to the impact on the identity of the show as a whole.

Whilst my own thoughts are that the show is a concept musical, there are elements that relate it back to being an integrated musical as discussed within this work. There

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<sup>1</sup> Definition on Google taken from Oxford languages

are also other types of shows that this work did not have the scope to consider – could *SIX* be a biographical musical such as *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical* (2013) or *Evita* (1978), is it the British answer to *Hamilton* as some reporters have labelled it, or is *SIX* unable to conform to any category as it has fulfilled its purpose and is a pop-concert rather than a piece of musical theatre?

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