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The Human Touch

There is something reassuring about a pat on the back or the melody hummed by a mother when her child is going to bed. There is something reassuring about the human touch. It was no wonder then that the American Federation of Musicians had such an effect when they declared a musicians strike this past Friday. Imagine a 3 hour Broadway play, a production that could easily involve upwards of 50 cast members, stage hands, conducted by ... a CD player with amplifier, something is missing. Not having an orchestra for a Broadway play just seems odd.

Since its founding in 1893*, Broadway has been an American icon of wealth and success. It has provided a chance for last century for performers to interact with their audience and for the audience to interact with each other. Replacing its human components with machines is as far fetched a notion as buying a robotic dog.... The fearful truth of the matter is that in a world where people can be substituted Broadway has been a preserve for the human interaction.

Cristyne L. Nicholas, president of NYC & Company, the city's tourism office estimated the weekend losses at about 7.2 million dollars for the 300,000 some odd employees related to the Broadway tourism industry. A more conservative estimate from the New York STAT, estimated 200,000 affected employees, still forming a base of approximately 5.5% of the city's economy In the grand scope of things, such loses are small, but producers feared that a closed Broadway would not only equal refunded ticket sales but

force audiences to pursue other forms of entertainment permanently. In a world filled with hundreds of TV stations, radios, video games, the internet, the list goes on, technological replacements for such human productions seem endless. Whereas the 1975 Broadway strike concluded after 3 weeks with all 9 shows reopening, things have changed drastically since then: the human attention span is taxed more now than ever.

Maybe not all is lost: Although producers cited encouragement as they watched stagehands voluntarily move virtual orchestra equipment into the theaters so performers could continue their rehearsals. And although Thomas C. Short, president of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE), put in his own human touch when he reassured the productions that stage hands would not strike. The human heart, or quite possibly the void of the human pocketbook won over when the Local 1, broke ranks with the IATSE and went on strike Friday with the musicians.

Fortunately, this dismal affair has since been resolved. The bargaining which had been initiated Monday at 9pm finally closed this morning with tentative resolutions. Estimates from the damages average around 7 million for the weekend. But, what if, the strike had not ended so soon? What if Roxie Hart put her jazz murders on hold for a month, if Jean Valjean never stole bread again? Is it possible that Broadway could be replaced by virtual reality, by a boob tube? For such social animals it seems unbelievable that Broadway will ever have to make its last curtain call. But, it is nice to know for the mean time, our fears are assuaged: we can continue interacting with our fellow man as we have for the past hundred years.

Although 7 of the 12 Broadway plays are still running, many smaller businesses that rely on the crowds are already turning to alternate plans.