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Achieving Attunement: The Evolution of the Musical Film Toward a Total Work of Art

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Achieving Attunement
The Evolution of the Musical Film Toward a Total Work of Art

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of the Arts
of Bard College

by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
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Thanks to my parents, for knowing that *a musical family is a happy family*,
and especially to my mother Jeanne, who has always believed in me.

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1.....	5
Chapter 2.....	27
Chapter 3.....	52
Outro.....	76
Appendix.....	88
Bibliography.....	108

Introduction

From the very beginning, I overextended myself. As daunting as completing a project of this size has been, there is still so much more I would have enjoyed investigating. Indeed, the study of musicals is a never-ending task, because in addition to indiscriminately connecting people to one another, musicals can at once espouse every emotional register we have, and are therefore an incredibly diverse and powerful force. Before delving into the aesthetic and historical evolution of the genre, it is pertinent to acknowledge the ambiguity of it, for how does one even define a “musical”? The very word may act as both a noun and a quality, and so for this project I have done my best to formulate a distinction: henceforth the word “musical” will be used generally as an adjective or description, while those that are capitalized and so styled as “Musical” shall refer to the conceptual genre or a specific item which belongs to that classification. Now that this semantic rule has been established, the question of what constitutes a Musical remains, as it is uniquely difficult to quantify the innumerable ways that the fundamental art of music can be exercised. Even when constrained within film, the possibilities for using music as a method of storytelling are still relatively endless, and so it is especially important to define the type of work and the rules of musical engagement that must be followed for such a work to be efficaciously realized. To comprehend the fundamental structure of a Musical, one must first be accustomed to the radical suspension of disbelief that is required for works that integrate musicality (for our purposes, understood as the main performative elements of singing and dancing) with the diegesis.

The basic logic of this theatrical arrangement relies on musicality to express emotional material that transcends bare language with its intensity of feeling, commonly understood as the

notion that song takes shape “when words fail”. However, a person does not turn to musicality only when their logos proves insufficient, and to inexorably connect the two is to unfairly promote verbal language over the others. This hierarchy can be logically traced to the higher specificity that the spoken word facilitates, but where verbosity is superior in the ability to be *understood*, the musical arts clearly reign supreme in regard to being *felt*. But before I betray a personal bias, I profess that my belief in the Musical concept as an exceptionally powerful medium is rooted in a desire to see these humanities unified instead of in competition with one another. The impulse to sing and the desire to dance has always been an innate part of my life, and although I cannot attest to the source of those whims, it is likely that (in addition to having been born into a relatively privileged situation which afforded me many opportunities to experience and engage with the arts), the time in which I entered the world was especially supportive of those endeavors. I grew up during the heart of what is now referred to as the Disney Renaissance, and thus there has never been a time in my memory that Musical films were not abundantly present and miraculously familiar. The female protagonists in these films taught me that even the most painful emotions could be channeled into something beautiful and therapeutic, and to say that I owe Musical films a debt for their invaluable influence would be a great understatement.

It is that feeling of indebted admiration which inspired this project, because while my upbringing and nature secured in me a paramount appreciation for the underlying orchestrations present in the world, it soon became glaringly apparent that not all shared in that awe. It is not the business of a critic to convert or convince, but as the Musical is an attempt to combine the most essential of the humanities, it has always seemed to me that the achievement ought to be acknowledged to a degree that is commensurate with such a grand challenge. Endeavoring to

create a Musical film is an extremely ambitious and fundamentally experimental task, and so the frivolity that is so often assumed of the genre is incredibly irksome, especially in light of the profound skill and athleticism that execution calls for. The ubiquity of the Musical in modern culture predisposes it to several detrimental assumptions, but just as the world of music balances on a line between enigmatic magic and mathematical precision, there is so much more to the genre than meets the eye. In a nearly teleological fashion the Musical film has evolved toward a more harmonious synthesis with the film medium that grew alongside it. The embracing of filmic technology in the design of musical numbers is a key factor in the march toward realizing that fuller art, as the trajectory of the century included a shift away from the imitation of live performance in favor of subtler musical integration and service to the narrative.

Chapter One is arranged in order to examine the Golden Age of Musical films with a more objective scrutiny than is usually allotted to them in deference to their nostalgic properties. By noting the specificities of the culture from which they emerged, I hope to dispel the idea that Musicals are automatically without narrative weight and instead delineate the necessity of distancing one's work from the distractions of retroactive conformity. The Golden Age was caught up in a dizzying demand for entertainment, but while that priority made it more difficult to utilize musicality for deeper explorations, the popularity of the genre secured a steady stage for the exhibition of progressing artistry. In Chapter Two, a functional link is drawn between the epic musical experiments of the 1960s and the lull in production of Musicals that had taken hold by the 1990s, leaving alternative mediums responsible for the genre's resurgence. Finally in Chapter Three, the anachronistic and unabashedly romantic pursuits of Baz Luhrmann will be discussed, casting his films as a culminating force that are as enthralled by the offerings of the past as they are determined to forge a new path. Beyond that, the millennium's trend toward

theatrical adaptation is briefly reviewed, and in holding some of their more misguided practices accountable, the final phase of the project is focused upon learning from those mistakes so that the genre can thrive again.

Chapter 1

Fallacies of the Golden Age and the Foundations of Musical Language

Let's start at the very beginning, "*a very good place to start,*" because the films produced during the Golden Age of Hollywood musicals comprise the foundation upon which the genre as we know it rests. This statement may seem incredibly obvious, but it bears reiteration as the Musical genre, perhaps more than any other, continues to be linked with those specific foundations in a manner of intentional referentiality and a most specialized reflexivity. Regardless of the reasons for such harkening back, this tradition presents a rather vexing conundrum: how can an art form grow and evolve (in accordance with time itself, as all things must) if the modes of its early stages are considered untouchable and perennial? Some modern Musical films contain moments that are meant to explicitly pay homage to the gems of that old age, but the consistency of references to the classics of the 1930s through the 1950s (or at least an *idea* of them) makes it impossible that each is appropriately story-conscious. In those cases, it may be argued that by supplementing a scene with the motions of a preexisting number, a director reveals not only a deferring to assumed authority, but also the misconception that those motions (and the cultural apparatus from which they issued) represent the best--if not only--ways that Musicals may successfully function. While indeed setting the stage for Musicals to thrive outside of the live theater setting, the encapsulated era of Musical filmmaking in question is not a standard model to be followed at all, but instead must be considered a true product of that time--one whose formulas belong to and cannot fully function outside of it. In fact, many characteristics that stylistically bind some of the staples of the Golden Age are also those which

are extremely detrimental to the realization of a truly *musical film*, a feat further delayed by that indomitable attachment to them.

The main source of the most blatant obstacles to such fulfillment is the matter of story priority. Though often involving cinematography and script-based issues like dialogue and continuity, the likelihood that those standard elements will be insufficiently executed stems from whether or not the project's fundamental concern--the telling of a story--is subjugated to other concerns. The foremost distracting and inappropriate of these concerns is the issue of stars and the transparency of their personal brands. Theoretically, it follows that a performer whose non-diegetic persona is indulged (whether in explicit reference or by allowing it to overpower the situational realities of the character) cannot hope to convincingly or truthfully embody their role as they are charged. This result alone ought to be strictly avoided by filmmakers who aim for emotionally impactful performances, as honest portrayal is necessary for more than the upkeep of an immersive experience alone. The films of this time were often overtly responsible for more social services instead, denying the genre the introspection that yields artistic fulfillment.

The most adduced symbol for the glory of the Golden Age is surely the dynamic duo of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, whose celebrity is of course deserved as a reaction to their unmatched skill in couples dance. Like many established stars of the studio era, their renown was prone to not only puncture the membrane of their films' narratives but could totally overwhelm them. *The Barkleys of Broadway* (1949), their last film together, aligns so tacitly with the pair's own career (Feuer [99-101]) that even the film's promotional trailer is more focused on the event of the dancers' reunion and the promise of spectacular musical sequences than in relaying anything about the plot. A blanket excuse for narratively wayward films like these is that their initial goal as artistic ventures likely *was* just to create an opportunity for

standalone entertainment, akin to filming a Musical revue so that its live-performed joys can be shared continually and on a larger scale. But even for the films of this era that more attentively concealed the underlying motivation of musicality exhibition by taking place outside of any diegetic showbiz, the notion that the Musical genre had a steadfast formula and purpose left it vulnerable to outside concerns that may seek exorcism on the screen.

Preconceived notions and a predestination of the performer are antithetical to the developmental nature of narrative, and yet the Musical machine of Hollywood during this time seems to have capitalized on the ritualism that Musicals often embodied. What is meant by ‘ritualism’ is the societal demand for the characters portrayed and the trials which they must cycle through to be recognizable as archetypes of the [assumed universal] human condition, allowing audiences to relate to them almost cathartically. Musicals may indeed have sometimes been written with these stock scenarios in mind, but Rick Altman addresses in the very first chapter of his analysis of *The American Film Musical* how cult recognition of the performers themselves could supersede and spoil a film’s trajectory before it could even be introduced:

In terms of traditional plot analysis we might say that this scene serves to initiate the love plot, which will eventually culminate in the couple’s final embrace. If this, however, is the sole function of the scene, then it is wasted indeed. What moviegoer in 1940 needed a preliminary infatuation scene to inform him that Eddy and MacDonald would ultimately fall in love? *New Moon* was the seventh movie in five years to pair the two as lovers (Altman [19]).

The culture of limited and therefore standardized media awareness that made this framework possible belongs entirely to the world outside of the film, and so while viewers removed from this awareness will hardly be at a true disadvantage, the fact that the precondition was so central to these productions makes it plausible that a director might neglect those practices which would

otherwise compensate for it. Why develop a blossoming of romance when the couple is already destined to unite? Such speculation may seem of little importance overall, but it nonetheless begins to illustrate the domino-like effects that emit from these willful deviations from a film's inner world. In fact, Altman's thesis is that the central theme and purpose of Musicals was a "dual-focus narrative" (nominally a marriage plot that reconciles classes and genders for the benefit of society), and this theory is well supported in the frequency of conforming examples. Conceding that his observations are inexorably tied to reality in a kind of feedback loop, Altman admits that "the plot...has little importance to begin with" (Altman [27]) for what he considers to primarily be vehicles for those reconciliatory exercises.

If this site-specific arrangement is truly the function of the American film Musical, it would seem that any forward-thinking analysis of that age would be useless, and so while I cannot contradict Altman's tirelessly compiled evidence that the Musical film genre was appropriated so, I consider it a duty to decry that widespread operation as a grave miscarriage of musical sovereignty. The issue of celebrity and performance-awareness is equally important to the study conducted by Jane Feuer in her book *The Hollywood Musical*, where she concurs with Altman that a major hurdle for the Musical films of the Golden Age was the transfer of performance from the long-familiar stage/theater setting to the supposedly deceptive realm of celluloid and screens. Understandably, the position occupied by the Golden Age on the historical timeline necessitates the task of facilitating the then-delicate transition. Not insignificantly, this very shift is the subject of *Singin' In the Rain* (1952), which is popularly considered to be the greatest Musical film of all time. Much of Feuer's analysis details methods that aimed to either lubricate that transition or provide an artificial substitute, but the adoption of

those techniques may also have inadvertently predicted the treatment of performance as *expression* instead of as entertainment.

One of the most consistently exercised procedures of the Studio-era Musical is the great care that is taken in making acts of musicality performance (at least those that are not appearing on a diegetic stage) appear spontaneous. The benefits of the proposal are numerous, and while the concept is integral to any instances of musicality-as-language, it too sprung from more socio-economic concerns of the Golden era. Pointing to the admittedly awkward relationship that suddenly existed between entertainer and audience, Feuer articulates part of why it was so important for those entertainers to present their exceptionality with a guise of surprised humility:

An illusion of spontaneity ultimately serves to cancel out the place musicals occupy in the history of entertainment as mass art becomes folk art. We are never allowed to realize that musical entertainment is an industrial product and that putting on a show (or putting on a Hollywood musical) is a matter of a labor force producing a product for consumption. If we were to think about that, if we were to think at all, it wouldn't be entertainment anymore (Feuer [13]).

If purely escapist entertainment is really the purpose of the era's Musicals, then why would its audiences require such deception? In an interesting reversal of the common notion that an "excuse" must be found for the enactment of a musical number within a plot, it appears that the underlying contract was actually that of narrative acting as a lure and excuse *for* the entertainment. Regardless of how conscious audiences may have been to the structure of the conglomerate genre at the time, their feelings of status were apparently of great concern, prompting a disguise of amateurism to be donned as the entrances into numbers were conceived. "Stardom came in with the emergence of popular and mass entertainment out of communal folk art. And the profit motive represents the economic side of such celebrity. Amateur entertainers,

on the other hand, can't exploit us because they *are* us," Feuer explains. "By eliminating professionalism within films, the more exploitative aspects of professionalism appear to be eliminated between the film and its spectator" (Feuer [14]). The redeeming quality of pretend amateurism is clearly connected to the relatability of the protagonists (usually a desired condition in any film), but what Feuer's analysis approaches by associating stardom and celebrity with the air of professionalism that must be subdued is the concession that intrusions from and of the real world are a great disservice to the legitimacy of a Musical film. Contrived spontaneity may have been employed as a device to distance the performer from the alienating effort involved in their professional practice, but the resulting charade is also useful for reimagining that practice as an informative and meaningful thing in and of itself.

While few would choose to watch (or hear) a lackluster rendition over a skillful one, the level of training that the captured person possesses was never truly under investigation in the metaphysical experience of the film--it was already implied. Far from conceptually significant enough to require some complex scheme of falsification, the ability to execute the prescribed musical feats (singing, dancing etc.) ought to be considered exclusively in the casting process and not after. Once non-performance singing and dancing occurs, the idea that these elements are emotional manifestations is agreed upon, and so while a limited human being is indeed needed to create them in the physical plane, executing something well (truly, completing something as it is essentially meant to be) is, in a film, the same thing as executing it at all. For further clarification, consider this hypothetical demonstration: if it is written that Joe begins to dance a ballet--ostensibly as an expression of joy, say--then it can be assumed that the choreography of this endeavor was designed to be fully (properly) realized. When the actor portraying Joe executes the steps, he is fulfilling the initial vision of an expression being

translated into dance form, and thus there should be no preliminary question or fear of whether or not he is capable of doing that. For a film whose focus is on the story and not the irrelevant, societal realm of the mortal performer, there should no longer be an issue of splitting one's awareness between that which the viewer has come to see (a story that takes place within a realm of musicality) and the pseudo-live event of performance that must be captured in order to present it.

Although the basic concept of “spontaneously” transitioning to musicality was understood and utilized in many of the films of the Studio era, the star most closely associated with the technique is doubtlessly Gene Kelly, whose choreography was first put to film in *Thousands Cheer* (1943) via a now legendary dance with a suddenly personified mop as a partner. What separates Kelly from other performers who could hypothetically replicate his improvisational innovations is the difference in character which made him so exceptionally popular. The persona of Gene Kelly in comparison to his predecessors and contemporaries (namely Fred Astaire) is one of a working-class masculinity and casualness, as even his dancing style is evidently more grounded than the lithe, light-stepping style of classical dancers. His popularity is surely linked to his rugged relatability (a solid metaphor in itself for the professionalism versus amateurism addressed above) and the role it had in concocting a truly “American” style of dance. The significance of these aspects of his persona can be illuminated by situating them within the overarching rivalry of the more elitist, Eurocentric styles that most artistic mediums were rooted in and which Hollywood seemed poised against. Although the skill of most dancers was and is customarily measured in part by the ability to make their moves look easy, it seems that the brashness of Kelly's personal technique allowed him to surpass the believability of his fellow stars. Perhaps it is not actually plausible that he or his contemporaries

could truly make a viewer believe that their work was as simple as they attempted to make it appear, but something about Kelly's performance--maybe the way his features never lost the playful surprise of being carried away into dance when others might eventually assume the neutral posture of a master's unthinking grace--brought such a feeling closer.

Throughout his career in Hollywood Musicals Kelly would repeat the mop stunt, utilizing the environment and all of its everyday resources. While the motivation behind some of his constructed 'improvisations' was surely to enhance the exhibitions with props and situational gags, the approach--especially once its frequent use gained traction in the genre and in the eyes of viewers--pronounced a bridging between the real world and the version of it that is projected in a Musical film. This is perhaps one of Kelly's greatest cultural achievements, not least for the obvious effect of encouragement to those who may have considered the performing arts an unreachable pursuit. It is this concept of generosity that often accompanies testimonies of applause for his work, with one documentary tellingly closing with acknowledgements from his first wife Betsy Blair and collaborator Leslie Caron (both professional dancers). The reverent study of his life places a discernible premium on the aspect, and Blair's assertion that he could "express the most complex and also the simplest emotions, and make the audience feel that they could do the same," is echoed by Caron's statement that "the legacy he left us--his understanding and promotion of modern dancing--[that] normal people, everyday people...the way they express themselves through dancing--he's the one who brought this to film" (*Gene Kelly: Anatomy of a Dancer*).

Again, few would truly be naive enough to believe that the technical skill and charisma of performance that Kelly embodied is achievable by all, but Caron's description differs from Blair's in significantly more than just phrasing: she does not simply say that he bestowed models

for this form of expression, but that his performances are actually modeled *on* its place in life. A professional dancer could be thought of as the agent for this otherwise universally human *ability* of expression through movement, and by articulating this standing condition Caron attests that the business of Musicals is, at heart, the embracement of those abilities in any context. In other words, Musicals are the arena in which humanity's innate connection to music is extrapolated and celebrated, tailored for narrative by channeling it into a language. Kelly's innovations in theory and execution laid the groundwork for this understanding to be adopted by (and visualized for) the remaining forms of musical expression, a key factor in the realization of a truly synthesized work of musical art.

Yet as he championed the art of dance for the screen, Kelly's ideas regarding its role in storytelling is sometimes problematic for that achievement. Contrary to the view of musicality elements being situated outside of the physical world of their execution in favor of a more symbolic identity, Kelly's philosophy is one of secondary translation. In his own words:

“If you are...doing *An American In Paris* and you're talking about a girl and you're saying she's wonderful, you sing 's'wonderful, s'marvelous, she should care for me'. You're telling the other fellow about it; you state the thesis, you state the idea, then you further it in dance form. ...You state it; now you prove it. You further your thesis by dancing it” (Feuer [49]).

The secondary position of dance that Kelly articulates here is represented frequently in his Musical films, from the contextual cause-and-effect that begins the iconic title number of *Singin' in the Rain* (in which Kelly's character deposits his love interest at her home and then revels in the lasting effects of her affection), to the more entirely dichotomous Ballet of *An American in Paris* (1951). These roles, though commendable for their fearlessness in singularly featuring dance on its own, illustrate the assumption that expressive information can indeed be embodied

by wordless means, but only in relation to a primary, traditionally rendered counterpart. This is not to say that entering into musicality cannot be designated as a *response* to something, but when a musical number is conceptualized as language, it requires a confident independence from any synonymous influences that may signal it is part of some extra-diegetic space. Kelly may not have been conscious of the implications that the arrangement of his work had on the formula of musical films, but the limitations that this order perpetuated are redeemed by his constant implication that music exists everywhere. From the professional sphere of concert performance to the casual manipulation of a creaking floorboard, it is always present, and the only barrier to its domain (or, perhaps, that which separates the rest of us from the artists who actively cultivate it) is one's level of attunement to this truth.

Lars Von Trier's *Dancer in the Dark*--one of the most explicit film experiments in musicality--is concerned with depicting the experience of such an attuned but covert artist, and its chosen setting of the early 1960s is significant because it allows the diegesis to engage with the conventions and legacy of the Golden Age without acknowledging the evolution of the genre since that time. Released in 2000, the film is situated on the brink of the millennium and thus at an interesting historical moment. We have skipped ahead from the 1950s and so glossed over the forty years worth of Musical film history that is so vital to the understanding of how a synthesized work of musical art is reached. Such a flight from the influences of those ages may be impossibly brash, but considering the director now in question, a brazen disregard for precedent seems fitting. Von Trier's adaptation of his rather melodramatic story is audaciously dependent upon its period setting as it cancels the following block of history and wipes away all that separates his contemporary production (including its diegetic inhabitants) from the era that he is most explicitly responding to. *Dancer in the Dark*, at least in basic story and structure,

might have more plausibly been made during the time in which it is set, because from the very beginning, it appears to be conceived as an anti-Musical, totally in opposition to the tropes of the trade and to the desires of effect upon the viewer that gives rise to these tropes. But to call it an 'anti-Musical' in or after the year 2000 would be a misnomer, as by then the definition of the Musical had so variably shifted and expanded. As if in accordance with my earlier assertion that the Musical film's Golden Age permeates beyond its actual scope and perhaps hijacks the idea of what a Musical film is, it is specifically the format of this age that Von Trier cites and subverts. Considering the many instances in which the film's main use of musicality as a coping mechanism is shown to be glaringly ineffective at improving the protagonist's situation, one can imagine the film as Von Trier's rebuff of the distracting hypnosis that classical Musicals embodied in both practice and consumption. Yet, as the director's turn at attempting a Musical, *Dancer in the Dark* holds several similarities to the formulas of the era it so heartily wishes to destabilize.

One must be very careful about how the character of Selma Jezkova is regarded, for while it is commonplace for Von Trier's female subjects to suffer appalling retributions, Selma is expressly portrayed as a victim; her downfalls may be the results of her own, sometimes baffling foolishness, but one gets the feeling that each injury is not a deserved punishment, but instead a reinforcement that people like her (selfless, innocent, whimsical, unassuming) cannot fit and live in the world as we know it. The apparent final conduit of Von Trier's *Golden Hearts* trilogy that began with Bess McNeill in *Breaking the Waves* (1996), the similarly childlike Selma's infatuation with Musicals is not merely an additive that distinguishes her from other women. Instead, her affinity illustrates the purity in nature that distinguishes her from *all* others. She is not the only heavily accented immigrant at play in the film, but she is indeed a foreigner in spirit,

and watching her blunders begins to feel like watching a spritely little fish flopping hopelessly on land. The coping mechanism that she employs in response is the film's musicality conceit, and beyond execution the device is uniquely able to work for the needs Selma has as a kind of alien. She politely rejects the romantic advances of a genuine suitor (breaking with the tradition that musicals are meant to pay almost ritualistic homage to erotic love and marriage), and is totally satisfied with the mundane materials she has to work with when "constructing" her numbers. Selma is uninterested in the facet of Musicals that, like her desperate landlord, capitalistically worships opulence. "She is able to see life through a musical filter which she imposes," Von Trier describes. "But where that music would normally celebrate the great, the perfect, it is the little human errors that are celebrated here. She cultivates what is human" (Von Trier). Indeed, the world of the Musical should not simply provide a fantasy of translocating escape, but is instead meant to be a *perspective*, a musically-colored lens through which one sees and experiences reality. It is usually the audience of a Musical film who is allotted this filter, but as Selma displays her affinity for romantic ideals, it is clear that the Musicals she loves--with their dedication to and eliciting of joyousness--are the most kindred artifacts of an otherwise unwelcoming American reality that are available to her. Like the pious Bess, Selma harvests her own life for the sake of a male beloved (her son), and though Von Trier may refrain from composing explicit statements (as he does in the shockingly unambiguous finale of *Breaking the Waves*) Selma's difference is presented as a rare superiority. When she answers that her reason for having her genetically disadvantaged child was the potently innocent desire to simply "hold the little baby in my arms," the "I love you." that this admission elicits may really be coming from the director himself.

Yet Selma's taste is not totally exclusive (although her exchange with an apparently expatriate doctor again signals a link between Musical lovers and outsiders), and Von Trier includes in a cinema scene borrowed footage of a Busby Berkley spectacle for Selma to enjoy--with the help of her companion Kathy, not insignificantly played by 1960s screen legend Catherine Deneuve. Deneuve's casting marks a moment in which Von Trier's production can be seen slipping into some of the very habits that it aims to critique. Yet Von Trier has stated that it was Deneuve who approached him for a part (Von Trier), and while her presence in the film is certainly a kind of nod to her role in the canon of Musical films, Von Trier does not utilize her the way a bearer of celebrity might have been used in a Studio-era endeavor. In fact, the catalyst for the first musical number in *Dancer in the Dark* is Kathy's proclamation that she "will dance when there is music." The voice of the song is directed at Kathy as Selma encourages her to do what viewers aware of Deneuve's career know she is all too capable of. But Von Trier plays with the viewer's knowledge of the Musical canon again by casting Joel Grey as the fictional Czechoslovakian Musical star Oldrich Novy. Grey is only on camera for a little over four minutes and his performance is not so complicated that another would be unable to easily fulfill the role. Thus at a technical level his involvement is puzzling: why was this actor, known and lauded for his work in musical theater and film (including the role of Master of Ceremonies in the esteemed Musical *Cabaret* (1972), for which he won the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor) recruited for so small and undemanding a role? The answer seems to *be* his credentials, with the parallels between him and Novy--stars of Musicals in a time gone by--creating an intentionally disorienting effect as viewers have ostensibly been programmed to associate him with spectacular performance.

The role of Novy had originally been intended for Donald O'Connor ("Joel Grey Steps Up"), who had starred alongside Gene Kelly in *Singin' in the Rain*, and indeed Von Trier's sense of musical possibility reveals a great influence from the hooper. Most apparent in the first number when the rhythms of the factory's machinery lull Selma into a fantasy that utilizes them more dynamically, all of the film's musical numbers are generated from the real-world beats that Selma has at her disposal. Her preference for tap dancing is illuminated by this rule, and she verbalizes the importance of percussion once it is taken away. The dialogue between Selma and sympathetic prison guard Brenda crystallizes the philosophy behind the device:

BRENDA: ...Why don't you try to think of something nice, alright?

SELMA: It's just so quiet here...

BRENDA: What's that got to do with it, Selma?

SELMA: You know when I used to work at the factory, I used to dream that I was in a musical. Because in a musical, nothing dreadful ever happens. But it's so quiet here...

Percussive introductions are actively sought out at the advent of that which Selma is not capable of facing, such as the clacking of a passing train when her secret affliction is guessed or the scratching pencils of courtroom sketch artists when her idol Novy exposes her lie. This version of inspiration is directly descended from Kelly's involvement of the environment, and indeed the camera attends to Selma's face during these catalysts to focus on her dreamy expression, so like that of Kelly whenever the spirit of dance overtakes him (Images 1-4). However the film differs in regard to the way such numbers progress. Where the utilization of a commonplace object was meant to facilitate a segue into the performance for Kelly, Von Trier constructs an entirely separate method of capture for *Dancer's* musical numbers so that while they might be induced

by real-world happenings, they exist on a totally separate plane. In addition to clues like the repeated dialogue that bookends the “I’ve Seen It All” number, no room is left for ambiguity about how each song is an extrapolated cerebral fantasy. Von Trier establishes through the use of an exclusive, consistent style of transition the entrance into the fantasy. Having placed one hundred handheld cameras around their sets, the musical numbers were recorded from myriad angles before being spliced together in post production. The rhythmic, seemingly aimless cutting that this facilitates is soon a recognizable signal that a musical number has begun. One may be able to interpret from these choices that Von Trier hopes to relay the widespread transformation that Selma’s reimagining of reality entails, but on a totally technical level, the method is viscerally effective because it explicitly demarcates the altering difference that the visualization of widespread musicality requires.

This segregation of musicality from diegetic reality (although specific to the film’s plot) is one of the strongest indications that *Dancer in the Dark* is exclusively focused on and reflects an antiquated format of the Musical film. After all, the view of the Berkeley extravaganza serves as the only concrete example of what inspires Selma and informs her idea of what a “musical” is, and “Busby Berkeley musicals rope off the show as a separate universe...[and each] number epitomizes the show as secondary diegesis” (Feuer [69]). The numbers of *Dancer* are meant to be Selma’s recreation of such pieces, and so several are choreographed to resemble those symmetry-heavy spectacles and their use of parallel planes and dual diegesis for an unproblematic presentation of musicality (Images 5-6). Yet Selma’s final song, though stirringly cut short, is not an internal distraction from the latest trauma of her imminent execution, but a serenely accepting response to the information that her son’s operation was successful, and it is imperative that this distinction is recognized. Her powerful, lilting outpouring is the only

instance in which Selma's inner music actually breaks the surface to enter diegetic reality, and the sympathy that she retains is juxtaposed against the incensed institution that bluntly puts a stop to it. The forces that suppress Selma's voice are not Von Trier's (who mercifully displays her unfinished lyrics as text), and he appears to state that the Selmas of the world--the benevolent artists who dare to deliver their gifts across from the veiled dimension of creativity--are prone to a most undeserved punishment for their exceptionality. The contrast of the song from the previous construct is presented almost like a revolution, and while the imagery of the gallows' curtains being drawn is rich for a number of possible interpretations (the perverse spectacle of killing, the cycle of victimization etc.), this lone depiction of a seated audience--itself a staple of the theater-imitating musical films of yore--may intend the death of the musical film itself.

Yet the camera's ascent to the rafters, though sorrowful, reenacts the procedure of musical finales on film that was earlier described by Selma, and is thus a self-identification that places *Dancer in the Dark* within the genre's canon. But, does such a canon really exist? Can the world's offerings of Musical films escape the segregating effects of borders and nationality the way that music is thought to contravene the barriers of language? Most prominent during Selma's trial (in which the Red Scare appears to be in full swing), *Dancer* makes several explicit references to American culture in comparison to Europe, one exchange between the prosecutor and a witness even producing the [compound] statement "she had nothing but contempt for our great country--apart from its musicals. She said the American ones were better." Honored with the Palme d'Or (and the award for Best Actress) at the 2000 Cannes Film Festival, the film obviously challenges such a judgement, but one must consider also the possibility that Von Trier himself shared the appreciative desire to emulate the United States' wealth of classics that is so

central to his heroine. If this was indeed his motivation, then he is certainly not the first non-American director to so directly respond to that collection.

Jacque Demy's *The Young Girls of Rochefort* (1967) appears to belong more in the realm of Golden Age fare, relying heavily on backstage-culture entertainment, preconditioned couplings and a charming self-awareness that includes direct addresses to the viewer. Berkeley-esque arrangements are also fabricated, but most notably reflective is the dance sequence allotted to the one and only Gene Kelly, who, though technically playing a character, enacts a routine that explicitly references and recreates highlights of his career in Hollywood's Musicals. After a meet-cute that once would have surely been matched by the female perspective, Kelly's performative reaction to newfound infatuation consists of a series of moving tableaux that signify the dancer's famous phases: he taps flanked by a pair of passing sailors (*On the Town, It's Always Fair Weather*), and clownishly instructs a gaggle of little boys (*An American In Paris*). Demy frames this excerpt with a centered distance that unmistakably quotes the performance-focused sensibility of that bygone era (Images 7-8), likely engaged as homage but nonetheless pronouncing Kelly's age and place in the past. Yet in the end Demy denies his audience the satisfaction of witnessing the fated meeting of the last remaining couple, a choice that seems rooted in the desire to break with conventionality that the decade embodied for so many institutions.

The Young Girls of Rochefort is the third in Demy's own pseudo-trilogy, preceded by the unofficial Musical *Lola* (1991), and *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* (1964), a significant benchmark in the onward march toward a totally lingual musical film. All dialogue is sung as recitative, but where the operatic mode would usually give way to arias or duets for the acknowledgement of thematic or dramatic events, none emerge besides the occasional "I Will

Wait For You” leitmotifs. The structure denies the concept that musicality represents a higher register of emotion manifested, and renders harmonization (or truly any unison singing at all) defunct by adhering to the normal rules of conversation that would rarely precipitate layered voices. Although the lead role was the one that catapulted Deneuve to stardom, it is not one which establishes the personal talent that her casting in *Dancer* was necessarily meant to recall. No dancing occurs and all singing is actually a dubbed pre-recording that the actors lip-sync to but are not responsible for, deviating drastically from the traditional focus on celebrity that either required or was derived from an impulse toward virtuoso exhibition. With its comparatively subdued nature accounting for the film’s utter distinction from the legacy of big-production ornamentation and loosely framed recital, the plot also boldly ventures away from the supposedly central arrangement of courtship. The young lovers are never united in erotic bliss, but the lack of that achievement does not mean the end of the music, which is liberally applied to the partially negative spectrum of human emotions that the melodrama samples. To musically delve into tragedy outside of the opera would have been remarkable at this time, but instead of retaining a positive quality for the music itself as *Dancer* later would, *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* allows the score (and the characters who recite it) to fully realize the expressive potentials of music.

Having ascended from the studio era and approaching a period of drastically different tastes that would prove to be a major challenge to the viability of the genre, the 1960s produced a swath of Musical films that included ageless triumphs like *My Fair Lady* (1964) as well as other confrontations with convention like Jean-Luc Godard’s take, *A Woman is a Woman* (1961). A degree of credit for the success of the aforementioned adaptation must be given to the coincidentally evolving world of musical theater, but the coexistence between that linear type of

musical and the more experimental works of independent filmmakers projects a growing synthesis of narrative and heightened musicality that should have led exponentially toward a kind of completion. Instead, a decline of quality and then interest in the musical film ostensibly occurred followed this highly productive decade. The struggle to remain a relevant art form drove some filmmakers to retreat to the defunct protocols of the past (as with 1975's disastrous pastiche *At Long Last Love*), while others internalized the notion that musicals were best suited as children's entertainment. The final phases of the 20th century regarded the Musical film almost like a lost treasure that could not survive the surging advances that were affecting music's other venues, leading it to seek out alternative spaces to inhabit. The two filmic vacancies that welcomed musicality and allowed it to stretch and recover itself were the teen dance movie in the 1980s and the sector of animation during the 90s, a mode which will be addressed in the next chapter.

A key factor in that first alternative sphere is the mixing of methods that challenged the static rules of the past in pursuit of a musical fidelity. Although applied to a different conception of such progress, Feuer's respect for the influence of pop culture asserts that "what MTV lends...is a new way of organizing the sound/image relationship that may be adapted to feature-length films which otherwise maintain the narrative/number distinction", postulating that "the vogue for MTV in the 1980s created an acceptance of this new convention" (Feuer [132]). Along with the advent of this 'music television' network in 1981, the rise of music videos (and in no small part the ease with which one could be created) provided a ground for unprecedented experimentation using film to enhance and combine music with visual art, and while certainly many were engaged in more economic concerns (including the basic presentation of live performance), the Musical films to come would benefit greatly from the platform's implicit

emphasis on service to the song. As Feuer observes in the updated edition of her book, the aesthetics of the popular teen dance film were symbiotically linked to the widespread emergence of music videos, exemplified well by 1983's *Flashdance* as the beneficiary of a shrewd promotional relationship with the network (Feuer [132]). In comparing the surprise hit with *Dirty Dancing* (1987), Feuer suggests that where the later film strictly connected the music to the diegesis, *Flashdance*'s qualification as a 'Musical film' at all comes from its apparently conforming narrative pattern, in spite of its "fragmented" musicality structure of performance and non-diegetic montages (Feuer [131-133]). However, I must disagree with Feuer's sweeping characterization of this teen/dance subset as being "reconstructive" of the classical Hollywood Musical, which she partially bases on the cropping up of similarities regarding narrative themes. For Feuer to describe *Flashdance*'s plot as having "narrative incongruities" is to surmise that the story was constructed for conformity to the Musical genre in the first place, something that the source material as well as the obvious lack of singing should indicate is unlikely (not to mention a misguided motivation that limits the versatility of the Musical as a form).

While one could interpret some of the dance numbers as parallels, the only one that could truly be verified is, appropriately, the sequence that corresponds with the title track written for the film. It must be said that Feuer misses the point when she states that the close of the film signifies how "as ever, a show is a metaphor for love, and love is what makes a show happen" (Feuer [133]). While the former would indeed render the film compliant with the classic formula, the climactic audition that houses the final dance is not a 'show' for an audience but instead a test--one that is at heart a trial of the heroine's personal confidence more so than it is for the ballet academy administrators she is auditioning for. The perseverance to overcome one's doubts and thus pursue one's dream is the true conceptual motif of the film, and so the idea

that the triumph of Alex's dance (which is restarted after an early stumble that spells suspenseful trouble to the viewer) is meant as a final provision of entertainment or confirmation of the eminence of erotic love is not only dubious but insulting to the autonomy of the [still rare] female lead. Just technically, the way that the song's source morphs from diegetic record into extra-diegetic soundtrack signifies the music-video sensibility of the film. While the remaining exhibitions do not actually approach credible narrative expressivity, the resulting distinction between the song and the routine allows the dance to identify as a lingual act of symbolism. In this case, the sequence's use of multiple body doubles represents an important shift that recalls the "Dream Ballet" of *Oklahoma!* (1955): the protagonists played by Shirley Jones and Gordon MacRae gesturally replace themselves with professional dancers, and this way the practice of dance itself is duly respected. Then and in *Flashdance*, the concession that an actor cannot totally fulfill a dancer's role signifies the uncompromised importance of the dance as a series of legitimately informative gestures that must be properly carried out for the sake of clarity as well as beauty. The film itself is by no means a pinnacle of musicality or cinema, but it nonetheless constitutes the immensely effective blending of conventions that would be such a boon to Musicals during the period between 1989 and 1999, in which the genre creatively regrouped in preparation for a glorious return.

Chapter 2

Constructing Boundaries and Breaking Them

Having delineated some of the barriers that prevented the musical films of the Golden Age from achieving the artistic synthesis for which the medium creates so much potential, it is time to excavate the elements that helped to make the successful Musicals that came after them *work*. By observing the evolution of these elements over the course of the subsequent eras, it becomes apparent that the impulses from which they are derived are in theory and practice essential for films to harmoniously incorporate musicality and, eventually, become totally integrated with it. Together, the following elements make possible the filmic use of musicality as a *language*, not merely as a dichotomous lens through which musicality appears: *Enclosure*, emancipation from what will be referred to as *Performance Priority*, and the use of *Mixed Methods*. Initially utilized for the musical theater adaptations helmed by Robert Wise in the 1960s and later adopted by Walt Disney Animation for the originals that comprised its ‘Renaissance’ period, these elements not only reconcile some of the difficulties that arise when attempting a natural depiction of musicality, but more faithfully embrace film form as a primary effect (and not simply as the means to an end).

I have formulated these terms as a way to succinctly reference the dialectical issues at hand and the practices for addressing them in film, which evolved during this time. “*Enclosure*” deals with the construction of coherence in a film’s diegesis for the indication of its totally musical nature. With techniques for *Enclosure*, a musical film ensures that its inclusions of musicality appear as an organic condition of the film’s world, setting a standard that removes the uncomfortable disconnect between narrative and numbers. For films that are properly “Emancipated from Performing Priority”, numbers are liberated from the concerns of virtuosic

presentation and so configured instead for dynamic service to the music and the story. *Mixed Methods* refers to the combination of conventions that may together create a specialized Song-Montage, which can provide solutions to the formulaic inconsistencies that often arise in Musicals as well as smoothly endow a song with multiple levels of meaning. The use of Mixed Methods also exhibits an assertion that film should be employed to its fullest potential, tapping into the unique opportunities that are inherent to the form and ascending from mere capturer to an active and essential participant.

The opening sequences of Robert Wise's two musical films are identical, using aircraft to steadily and inclusively survey the environment of the setting before closing in on the central performer(s). But while this technique may seem to simply be producing grand-scale establishing shots, it actually serves the even greater purpose of Enclosure--establishing not only the physical place but also the fact that the world in which the story takes place is a *musical* one. *The Sound of Music* (1964) begins with glorious views of the Salzkammergut Mountains, and though audiences likely understood this opening to be a visualization of the conceit verbalized in the iconic first lyrics that "the hills are alive with the sound of music," the score is not actually always present. The first audial phenomenon that accompanies the sequence is the natural echoing of winds whistling past snowcaps, and only after the montage descends towards the greener slopes and valleys of the mountain range does true music enter the film. Birdsong is added to the ambience before a fluttering orchestration (likely piccolo, flutes, and clarinet) trickles in beneath it, alluding to the idea that musicality is an extrapolation of natural audial entities.

In the stage version, the song "The Sound of Music" is actually placed second behind the "Preludium" choral piece heard during the film's introductory montage of the Abbey, and so it

can be assumed that the liberty taken with the succession of numbers was consciously arranged so that this gradual recognition of the film-world's musicality could be immediately carried out. The new order creates a program of triple establishment with a narrowing scope: after the instrumental prelude "The Sound of Music" encompasses a large sweep of the mountains, countryside and a few clusters of estates, the "Overture" accompanies the opening credits over a series of stationary shots of the city of Salzburg, until finally, the locational zooming in brings us to the Abbey. In accordance with both the *Emancipation* and *Mixed* elements (as will be further defined and exemplified soon), Wise seizes the opportunity presented by the a capella "Preludium" and constructs an elegant introduction to life at the Abbey. Though the sequence eventually includes and is completed with a shot of the nuns in the choral balcony of the chapel diegetically singing the number's Hallelujah outro, the rest of the song is never shown to be coming from any person's lips (Images 9-13). Instead, Wise composes a sort of profile-montage for the Abbey, providing the viewer with a comprehensive pageant of its nodes while the music solidifies the general tone that these images have supplemented (Images 14-17). As such, while church bells eventually break the extra-diegetic mix of the music that has been sounding since the start of the Overture, no dialogue is heard until almost ten minutes into the film. Perhaps as an Enclosing technique, the purpose of this initial inundation with music is to ease viewers into the essential normalization of musicality that is required for visceral acceptance of the Musical format. More conceptually, the sequence fulfills Wise's initiative of exploiting and emphasizing the often overlooked but vital role that music and singing play in real life, which is partially the duty of Musicals in the first place.

But it must be remembered that *The Sound of Music* was Wise's second musical feature, so while one might plausibly assume that the specific conditions of that Rodgers and

Hammerstein show are totally responsible for the adaptation's fittingly metaphorical opening, one need only observe that of the earlier *West Side Story* (1961) to recognize that it actually follows a standard construct that Wise must have deduced to be applicable to any subject. In this film the overture is first, played over an abstract graphic that eventually materializes into the view of Manhattan that serves as the first real shot of the film. An aerial tour of the island's various neighborhoods commences, and this time it is dangerous jungle-like drumming and the trademark gangland whistles that slowly emerge and echo throughout the Musical film's concrete field of play. Once the musicality and demarcation of the story's world is sufficiently set, the gang of Jets are found and zoomed in upon, and the "Prologue" dance sequence proceeds to further detail the premise. This prologue is itself a lengthy process, and while some vocalizations (scoffs, a few single exclamations etc.) are interwoven before the dance devolves into a fighting, true dialogue only surfaces through the commotion after nearly fifteen minutes of running time. Each opening foreshadows the tragic or hopeful endings that are to follow, but while the tones between the two films may be fundamentally different, it is clear that Enclosing the space in which these musicals take place resolves for their remainders the awkwardness of transitioning to musicality that so many others struggle with. From the very beginning it is made apparent that the musicality engendered in the story is a native tool for telling it, not an alien exhibition that hijacks the story for its own display.

Because the plot of *West Side Story* does not include any diegetic performing arts (unlike *The Sound of Music's* Von Trapp Family Singers, as it were) it presents a richer issue to experiment with, and furthermore the involvement of Jerome Robbins as both choreographer and director surely made for a more essentially attuned production. After all, the establishing vignettes presented by the totally instrumental "Prologue" were already present as the device for

setting up the circumstances of the story in the stage version, and so the hands of the directors (and the potential for fuller realization that the film medium provides) is more evident in the execution than in the narrative content. Although the stirringly dynamic number “Cool” later visualizes the more traditional notion of dance embodying or being utilized to express intense emotion, the notion mainly expressed in the instructional “Prologue” (besides the relevant information of the central conflict) is the functional essence of the mundane--the opposing force of such intensity. The importance of exploring this side lies partially in the role of completing a Musical’s world, where the veil between the realms of stimuli and reactive expression is removed in favor of a more immediate synthesis.

For *Wise*, the presentation of this musical unity with life actually begins with a fair amount of restraint, allowing the scene to grow and build upon itself before taking advantage of too much editing assistance. The first display of the Jets’ hierarchy of intimidation, for instance, is constructed through blocking and subtle camera movement, allowing these to combine with the potency of the score to succinctly and affectingly deliver the gist even before the gang taps into their dance vocabulary. After catching the wary eye of a girl seated on the asphalt, the herd of ‘hoodlums’ approach a game of basketball being played by unaffiliated teenagers. A brass flare in the music erupts as one of them quickly decides to lay the ball at the Jets’ feet so that they--along with the first incarnation of their leitmotif--can play. The ball is returned in rhythm with the instrumental accompaniment as the gang departs, cutting from this view to their surveying promenade of the neighborhood. This small interaction illustrates several fundamentals for the film’s treatment of musicality. Firstly, the director has acknowledged the blueprint of possible cutting patterns that is provided by the music, exemplified by the understanding that the undulations of the score can be isolated and exploited for individually

informative scenarios. Perhaps for this section's arrangement, the brass flare illustrates the fear and thus submission that the Jets impose upon--and is *felt by*--others, the leitmotif encapsulates their resulting lifestyle of reckless power, and the falling end which launches the next, further illustrated musical phrase serves as the visceral and succinct indication of their wider reign. Next, the sovereignty of music is confirmed by the subordination of conventional continuity to the sequential patterns of the music. Dance moves such as jumps are completed via cutting to a new facet of the location, acting as segues that stitch together the series of musical phrases that have been excavated.

Additionally, and very importantly, the Jets' and Sharks' athletic performance is framed for the assurance of normalcy and never as an aware showcase. The camera is set at diagonals or moves through spaces that place it behind environmental objects that separate the viewpoint from the subject, adopting an observational sensibility and thus emphasizing the plausibility of witnessing such an apparently regular sight (Images 18-20). Further emphasis of this notion is achieved by the placement of background figures in this space between the camera and the action, either standing still or breaking across in a way that would hardly have been condoned in the era of Performance Priority (Image 21). In the same vein, attention to avoiding performance-framing can be seen when the cluster of Jets moves horizontally, while blocked with the wide berth that might have been used for the imitation of a stage in earlier musical films. This denial of a matching focal point is later reissued for the only diegetic dancing that occurs (the school dance number "Mambo"), where again one similarly notes several shots of teenagers watching from the walls. Next, Wise uses the time/space liberty of film to broaden the purview of the Prologue and all that it is meant to impart, providing an early model for the *Mixed Methods* strategy. First using a wipe to transition between two views of the Jets as they dance through

different areas of the streets, they are placed back onto the basketball court through a match-cut of their hands--reaching up in dance but then retracting as a ball is caught (Images 22-23). The multiple locations touched upon for the scene enforce its purpose of displaying the current action as both a standalone event and the representation of the overarching status quo. By creating an association between the Jet's dancing and basketball, the film reiterates that the musicality depicted is merely a language through which the story is told; the dance is not a performance to be presented and appreciated in its entirety, but instead a musical representation of action on the same level as a pickup game.

A brief collection of other ways that the film's treatment of musicality suggests the parallelism of it with real life would include the diegetic tolling of the bells that ring over the casualties of "The Rumble", providing an organic transition to the next scene, and the casual acknowledgement of the act of singing that follows the conclusion of the "I Feel Pretty" number, confirming that this musical act has taken place in the diegetic present and not in any alternate plane of fantasy or refraction. Interestingly, a shot of the Sharks traveling during the "Prologue" was mentioned in an interview by dubious action movie director Michael Bay, who claimed the film to be a great inspiration for its dynamic camerawork but had difficulty pinpointing *why* the moment was so striking (Lyman). While I must agree that some instances of skillful cinematography seem so irreplaceable that they defy interpretation, the upward panning used to widely capture the street that the trio of Sharks shuffle-and-pirouette down is actually more *functional*. Derived from the same symbolic impulses as the aerial tour, the depiction of the Sharks as small humans forging their way through towering buildings and endless streets reiterates their relative unimportance: they are not deified artists from/of reality whose prioritized skills might force the film's world to noticeably bend to the facilitation of display, but are instead

merely residents of a musical Manhattan who are endowed with the agency that enables actual suspense in the development of the film's drama. Wise carried over this use of scale to *The Sound of Music*, where actors perform their musicality within large frames that are resistant to being used as signals of a sudden sabbatical from the film's reality (Images 24-25). Apparently, it is a combination of *Enclosing* and *Emancipatory* assertions that make for a believable and engrossing Musical film, as this allows the exertions of performance to be viewed and understood for their own meaningful merits. The viewer is then to experience the rapture that affords them access to the heightened consciousness of musical expression.

These viewer benefits are also among those that are automatically ensured through the medium of animation, particularly those from The Walt Disney Studios. While Disney's endeavors were heavily focused on music from the studio's inception, the string of feature musicals comprising the Disney Renaissance era appear to have adapted their surefire formula from Wise's example. This highly productive period is significant for much more than the films' resemblance to the two Wise adaptations and the new standard they had set for Musical films. Indeed, beginning in 1989 with *The Little Mermaid* and concluding with the more alternatively conceived *Tarzan* in 1999, the Disney Renaissance clearly reissued serious attention to and popularity of the genre, eventually ushering in a mainstream effort that was more equipped to adapt musicality for live action. Indeed, the variety of perspectives, themes and time periods that these films explore while adhering to a conceptual standard and narrative formula speaks to the versatility of that formula, and one can infer from their prominence and bankability that something was achieved filmically which had been missing even from the supposed source of musical theater. Having welcomed the advent of sound for his early cartoons, Walt Disney's belief in the affective power of music was integral to the Studio's mission even before its

revolutionary undertaking of the world's first feature animated film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, (1939). Honed while producing their trademark *Silly Symphonies* shorts and exhaustively tested for the ambitious *Fantasia* (1940) project, the artists of Disney pioneered the art of modern, entirely-musical storytelling by drawing from Vaudeville and antiquity alike. But even the enormous success of the films produced during Disney's lifetime would not prevent the musical genre from waning as the century progressed, and eventual disappointments like *Oliver and Company* (1988) would prove that just the integration of music (without a thoroughly integrating concept or holistic approach to the creation of songs) was not enough to carry a musical feature into the future.

Music was undoubtedly integral to Walt's creative process, and legitimate connections have been drawn between him and composer/dramaturge Richard Wagner, as both actively sought to reconvene the arts with one another in affecting wholeness. Disney is a featured part of Matthew Wilson Smith's thorough study of *The Total Work of Art: From Bayreuth to Cyberspace*, in which Walt's ambitions for a perpetual, immersive *Fantasia* event foretell the construction of a "total world" in Disneyland (Smith [113-120]). The links between the two prolific artists are indeed numerous, with the influence of German Expressionism and Romanticism frequently apparent in the styles and fairytale subjects favored by Walt in his work. And yet, the idea that Disney truly could have shared in Wagner's unnervingly discriminatory views is unconscionable, as countless testimonies of his character and philosophy show such accusations to be falsely interpretive. Describing the appeal of his central creation, Mickey Mouse, Disney stated that "The Mickey audience is not made up of people; it has no racial, national, political, religious or social differences or affiliations; the Mickey audience is made up of parts of people, of that deathless, precious, ageless, absolutely primitive remnant of

something in every world-wracked human being which makes us play with children's toys and laugh without self-consciousness at silly things, and sing in bathtubs, and dream and believe that our babies are uniquely beautiful" (Korkis). The inclusive humanist in Walt Disney is clear in these words, and in addition to invoking an interesting thematic parallel with Wagner's conception of the *Folk* (Wagner [15]), they speak to the universality that is so intrinsic to the art of animation. It should come as no surprise that Disney animation's early distinction in the entertainment industry was secured by its founder's shrewd embrace of new sound and color techniques, and the later invention of the innovative multiplane camera nicely exemplifies the studio's commitment to the kind of immersion aimed for with *Enclosure*.

Given the sheer technical wonderment that launched it as a serious form of entertainment, and because of the limitless possibilities that it affords, the medium of animation is uniquely apt for the adaptation of a Musical narrative. As prone to intensive artistry as it is simplified design, the essence of cartoon-style animation is not always a flight from reality into fantasy, but, as with musicals, the *amplification* of reality. Barry Keith Grant notes in his essay *Jazz, Ideology and The Animated Cartoon* how "in their dependence on exaggeration and simplification in both imagery and narrative, they create a clear and fundamental language. Roadrunner cartoons, for instance, present a pared down essence of 'the chase', not unlike the surreal kinetics of Buster Keaton or Mack Sennett's Keystone comedies" (Grant [21]). A comparison between classical animation and physical comedy is appropriate, and indeed the identification of early cartoons as belonging to the same species as Silent film would account for the similar styles of entertainment the genres once shared. But most intriguingly, the observation touches upon how the inherent potential for universalism shared by cartoons and music is itself epitomized by the Silent era,

when musical accompaniment was similarly combined with individually potent (readable) imagery.

The power of this fundamental relationship between the aural and visual is of course acknowledged by the use of film scores, but it is puzzling that animation--so often dedicated to exploring that correlation even after soundtrack dialogue became available--would be relegated to a different, perhaps less strict standard of criticism. Grant posits later that “perhaps jazz was featured in so many cartoons because the two forms are similar in certain ways. Just as jazz escapes the constraints of melody and notation, so the cartoon is the one type of mainstream cinema that has frequently been able to break away from the tyranny of narrative” (Grant [22]). Grant’s hypothesis predicts how the Disney Renaissance musicals would benefit from this unique exemption, and is a fair explanation for why the animated Musical could escape the idiosyncratic regulations applied to live-action features. Indeed, if the initial standard of a functional Musical film is the suggestion and reinforcement that the story is taking place in a [musically] altered reality, then what better indication of that is there than a totally different (animated) representation of the content? Of course, this psychological phenomenon I’ve proposed would be mostly subliminal in practice, but it would nonetheless explain the one that occurs when rifts in the classical conventions of cinematography are overlooked in animated films because they espouse an alternative (but discernible) vocabulary and style. As Mervyn Cooke articulates in the exhaustive *A History of Film Music*, “the animated cartoon demonstrated a significant debt to musical techniques popularized in ballet...[and was] distinguished by a satisfying symbiosis of music and image as mutually dynamic entities, each contributing equally to a compelling choreography of sound and movement” (Cooke [287]). This alternative sensibility--descended from the pioneering efforts of Walt’s early shorts and containing a

specialized rhythmic instinct instilled by a fundamental connection to movement and the nuances of gestural comedy--primed the teams behind the Disney Renaissance to take on the mantle in the genre's time of need. By endeavoring to innovate the way that musical films worked, these artists paved the way for interested filmmakers to make the leap from traditional continuity and narrative patterns in favor of a more musically synchronized cinematography.

By the 1970s, the prescribed formula for an animated musical of the classical Disney period was understandably outdated, and this can be most immediately recognized when comparing their first moments to those of the Enclosure-conscious Disney Renaissance. The literal storybook opening initially utilized for *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* was repeated for several of Disney's pre-1980 animated features (although not exclusively for those whose plots were drawn from literature). Though a musical number sometimes followed these prologues, others, like those of *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) and *The Sword in the Stone* (1963), incorporated singing themselves. The device made its final (non-parody) appearance in *Robin Hood* (1973), and coinciding with the decline of the customary Musical that was taking place in the realm of live-action, the productions that followed continued the incremental removal of song (1985's *The Black Cauldron* would be the studio's first animated feature totally devoid of it). In truth, it is really just *singing* that began to disappear, replaced frequently by a version of montage that was more reminiscent of the "Illustrated Song" exhibits that were popular in the nickelodeons of the Silent era. Exemplary of this is *Robin Hood*'s meager soundtrack, which hosts only one diegetic (but non-narrative) song and dance number in the form of a fireside gathering. Otherwise, the only vocal music beyond that which accompanies the introductory credits is "Oo De Lally"--a folksy establishment of the characters Robin Hood and Little John that also articulates some of

the depicted action--and “Love,” a nonspecific ballad that facilitates an unremarkable montage of evening tenderness.

In this vein, the inclusion of songs--once a Disney hallmark-- was increasingly demoted, relegating the once integral music and lyrics uncomfortably into formats that spirited them away from their inherent expressive functionality. For instance, in *The Fox and the Hound* (1981), an owl character launches a song with a diegetic comment, but it soon is revealed to merely be an efficient storytelling device for the passage of time and the development of a relationship; another evolves from reflective dialogue that never breaks into the film’s reality but is instead presented totally as voice-over. The preceding *The Rescuers* (1977), made no such attempts to link its non-specific, thematic songs to any characters within the diegesis at all. Clearly possessing the desire but not the ability to realize the musical magic that Walt had endowed to the pictures during his lifetime, each of these instances of pseudo-musicality exposes a lack of confidence in the feasibility of creating a work that could properly walk the line between diegetic music and the non-diegetic applications of it that are so customary for the remaining genres of film (and thus are likely employed simultaneously within musical films). Again, it is plausible that the discrepancy of form created by the odd combination of musical conventions present in these transitory movies was excused from more intense condemnation because of the lawlessness characteristic of (and allotted to) animation, but this exemption may also be responsible for the sense of security later needed to risk producing a Musical during the drought of live-action projects.

As a strategy for revamping, it is apparent that Disney’s musicality had to be redefined from such muddying practical uses, and perhaps the explicitly Broadway approach which kick started the Disney Renaissance was undertaken for the bonus challenge of adhering to the stage’s

preexisting conventions. However, while the musical theater sensibility brings stronger and more personal songs to the films, instances of the kind of hybrid montage discussed above are present as well, and their development (into what I will label “Song-Montage”) and application not only yields powerful numbers, but also fortifies the normalization of musicality. Evidently emulating the success of Wise’s adaptations, the Musicals of the Disney Renaissance are quick to introduce the insular but grand worlds in which their stories take place. Although the opening of the first installment, *The Little Mermaid*, is too vague to signal true commitment (while 1998’s *Mulan* is the only real exception), the remaining members of Disney’s musical resurgence each share a rather standard type of introduction that aims for Enclosure. Following a conventional prologue narrated over a series of inanimate stained glass tableau, the diegesis of *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) is enacted with an opening song (“Belle”) that provides a tour through the protagonist’s environment. The first instances of dialogue are intermittently woven through the number, with clever verses provided by Howard Ashman allowing for succinct character profiling that had proven difficult to satisfyingly deliver in early storyboards (“Beyond Beauty – The Untold”). Although extremely conventional by the standards of musical theater, if one is to consider “Belle” as a number whose inclusions of speech are technically part of the song (each are timed with instrumental interludes and are not omitted in soundtrack records), then it represents the Renaissance’s first incarnation of the Enclosure principle that initially postpones dialogue behind the music in a Musical film’s *mise en scene*.

When applying the principle to the other films of the Disney Renaissance, the iconic “Circle of Life” song that opens *The Lion King* (1994) may come to mind, and the fact that this number is presented entirely as montage with only extra-diegetic music ensures that dialogue is indeed delayed. And yet, the song’s use of African chanting before the English lyrics commence

is acknowledged by the filmmakers, who seem to have cast this node of the number differently. The first animals depicted are shown to be hearing something themselves--their ears perking up and their heads turning with the same instinct to find the source of singing that might have led viewers to momentarily believe that the sun itself was being personified in those stirring first moments. For the establishment of a musical world that adherence to Enclosing techniques is meant to impart, these implicit images of diegetic music are crucial, as the subsequent lyrical majority of the song espouses the impersonal sensibilities of observational montage (which otherwise are hardly exclusive to musical films and would thus achieve nothing). More naturally permitted in animated films, such liberal malleability of elements and conventions is what sets Disney's musicals apart, this freedom to experiment with the presentation of musicality resulting in the dynamism that only comes from true service to the music.

Considering again the functions of Enclosure, the Renaissance installment that most resembles the narrowing-in approach of Wise's musical introductions is *Aladdin* (1992). The environment is constructed using a thematic song ("Arabian Nights") that plays over the entrance of an obscured traveler from the desert into the fictional kingdom of Agrabah, these areas swept through as if captured by aircraft and depicted with intentional grandeur. By the final phrases of the song, it is revealed that the traveler is (and ostensibly has been) the diegetic singer, illustrating the unconfined nature of music in animation that allows for the inclusion of such montage/performance hybrids. The next appearing song "One Jump Ahead," introduces the title character's circumstances as he navigates (and thus displays for the viewer) a more detailed city. Narratively, the song might have been able to stand alone and indeed resembles the kind of establishing chorus number found frequently in musical theater. The necessity, then, of the

“Arabian Nights” sequence must not lie totally in familiarizing the viewer with the geographical or socioeconomic setting, but mostly in confirming the musical nature of it.

Similarly, after the filmmakers decided to begin the narrative of *Pocahontas* (1995) with the nautical departure of the English settlers instead of with the “Steady As the Beating Drum” number that establishes the title character’s world (“Audio Commentary”), a brief song was inserted, pointing to a determination to adhere to the formula of always beginning with some kind of music. Interlaced with introductory dialogue in the same manner as “Belle” was in *Beauty and the Beast*, the lyrics of “The Virginia Company” deal with the approximate motivation for the sailors’ mission but does not match with any of the action depicted, and the simple song (which, considering the change of plans was probably hastily-written) conveys very little besides the general tone of the scene. In fact, once the scene is underway and a few of the dialogue interludes have commenced, diegetic sounds such as seagull cries and crowd noise are layered indiscriminately upon and relatively obscure the singing (which is never shown to be coming from anyone’s mouths). As such, the song serves mainly as accompaniment, mirrored (except for the dialogue breaks) by the format of the “Steady As the Beating Drum” sequence, as the subjects are meant to be the ostensible source of an otherwise disembodied chorus.

Recognizably the intended opening number (the intro contains the title and credit texts) montage is employed to tour the Powhatan tribal village and lifestyle, and while the lyrics are discernibly general/thematic, the diegetic sounding of a villager’s horn is integrated. The horn is soon specified as the announcement that the tribe’s war party has returned home, and the visual tour is given narrative legitimacy as the various facets of the culture depicted each react to the news--itself instrumentally rendered and thus evocative of the universal power of music as communication. As in “The Virginia Company”, the fidelity of action and its sounds is intact

(visible crows squawk, fishermen's spears splash, women excitedly exclaim), and the framing of these connected vignettes favors high vantage points and wide angles that display the landscape's majestic design. This pair of similarly themed but stylistically distinct songs is the first representation of the dichotomy that is so central to the story's theme of prejudice, and beyond their individual flavor the songs embody the winning combination of Wise-style Enclosure (immense views, immediate and commonplace music) and the exemption of cartoons from conventions, which makes the unusual relationship between song and source acceptable. With the liberty to construct a kind of musical Frankenstein's monster, the filmmakers potentially deliver to the viewer not only the assimilative and tonal understanding that is aimed for with establishing shots, but the awareness of the film's baseline depiction of a Musical world.

While adhering to such a specific formula may seem constricting, the openings of the remaining films of this period are appropriately unique in accordance with their individual stories: in tandem with the film's bold theme melody, the title setting of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996) is the first image presented, towering above a layer of clouds before zooming in and delving into the streets of Paris, while a prologue is sung diegetically for a group of children but is nonetheless displayed as action, intermittently cutting back to the gypsy orator; the sassy Muses that serve as singing narrators for the intentionally anachronistic telling of the legend of *Hercules* (1997) emerge from ancient Greek pottery on display in a magnificent natural history museum; intense drumming emerges out of natural jungle noises for the graphic title sequence of *Tarzan* (1999), and the brief instrumental intro to the first illustrative song (which accompanies an escape from a massive shipwreck) is similarly blended with ambient noises.

The conceit of *Tarzan* is especially reliant upon montage sequences, set to illustrative songs by pop musician Phil Collins, and while his vocals are eventually shifted in character from narrator to the inner voice of the non-verbal Tarzan, the film only contains one instance of diegetic music-making (and never any articulate singing beyond empty scattling). Thus while *Tarzan* represents another instance of Disney's ability to get away with mixed musicality mediums, the preceding Renaissance films that set out to grapple with the display of sung performance more richly demonstrate the benefits of abandoning realism in deference to rhythm. Looking again at *Pocahontas*, the "Colors of the Wind" number is constructed with a unique blend of diegetic performance, graphic fantasy, and a sort of metric Song-Montage that illustrates the lingual quality one aims for in a symbiotic musical film. The scene begins in a valley beneath a large oak tree, and while the instrumentation creeps in as Pocahontas recites a transitory line ("what you mean is 'not like you'..."), the following close-up as she begins to sing discernibly marks the true beginning of the song. Attuned to how, like shots in film, individual phrases of music may each contain meaning, the continuity of physicality is forgone in the next cut so that Pocahontas may (abruptly) grab John Smith's musket from where it has been resting several paces away and hand it to him. A nuanced gesture, the poignancy of the corresponding lyric "but still I cannot see if the savage one is me" resides more apparently in this action than in her voice. Next, the *mise en scene* works to effectively visualize the invitation to follow and learn that is implied by her sung assertion "you don't know...": Smith watches Pocahontas walk slowly to the right and out of the now distanced frame, but after deciding to join her and thus moving toward the edge of his own, a cut suddenly situates the pair at a different location. And yet the moment of this teleporting cut occurs as the song itself transitions from the intro and enters its main phase, and it is soon apparent that the number operates in an extremely illustrative

fashion as each section of music is matched to a new location and/or symbolic vignette. The contextual motivation for and point of this song is to reeducate John Smith about the values of nature, the bricolage of exemplary vignettes thus traversing the variety of wildlife and habitats that this constitutes. In a matter of seconds the pair is seen coming across and interacting with a family of bears and then marveling at the patterns that they find in the environment. By the time the song reaches its title lyrics, their figures are temporarily transformed into a stylized form of stripped down pastels. From here, the same technique is used to animate an ethereal herd of prancing quadrupeds that thunder alongside the couple as they magically (and completely beyond the realm of physical laws) float down a mountainside and waterfall.

Yet even while these more unabashedly fantastic renditions of otherwise plausible activity play out, physical sound effects are still prominently present, grounding the sequences in a sense of unbroken reality. In comparison to the fantasy asides used for intensely stylized dance numbers in the Studio era, the inclusion of this ambience (indeed any sound beyond the score and the performance) is rather novel. But the naturalizing sounds are not actually the primary indication that what is presented on the screen is meant to be considered real. Although such a device is commonplace in Musical films that do divert to a plane of fantasy or dreamscape to facilitate their musical numbers, the fact that “Colors of the Wind” begins and ends in the same location does not necessarily identify the action as an illusion. The intent of the song’s enaction is to convince by example, and so if the exploration of those examples as seen by the viewer was merely within the characters’ imaginations, Smith would not have undergone his metamorphosis (signified by the final notes of the song being used to show that the musket has been abandoned in the foreground). Although it is plausible that the highlights depicted could be accomplished in their own realistic time, this scene illustrates one of the beneficial functions of a

musical sequence: the various mental and physical states that are tied together by the song are also intrinsically informed by it, and are culminated into a synthesis that is manageably succinct and viscerally impactful.

For *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, decidedly more serious and darker than most Disney fare, fantastic imagery is still utilized, but is depicted almost entirely as mental manifestations derived from the diegesis. The binary system described by Rick Altman as the driving force of musical narratives was adopted for the story and musical structure, only this time the romantic plot plays second fiddle to the main opposing pair of protagonist Quasimodo and villain Judge Frolo. “What makes a monster and what makes a man?” the troubadour Clopin sings as the primer for the tale, and indeed it is within the awareness of these two characters only that the richly symbolic elements of fantasy appear, taken from either the ambiguously sentient gargoyles that counsel the lonely and extremely imaginative Quasimodo, or the deliciously sick psychology of Claude Frolo. Reminiscent of the ways that older films might indicate to the viewer that a musical number had taken place only on a cerebral plane, Quasi’s encouragement fantasy (“A Guy Like You”) and Frolo’s internal communion with infernal spirits of judgment (“Hellfire”) are each interrupted and explicitly revealed as such (Images 26-30). But the distinction is not that *musicality* belongs to an imaginary realm, as the varied inhabitants of the film’s world appropriately espouse it at one time or another. For “God Help the Outcasts,” Esmeralda’s prayers are extractingly sung as she circles the cathedral, and those of the worshippers she passes are transfigured by the song into an audible pageant of profane requests; Gypsy leader and apparent community representative Clopin leads a macabre introductory theme song for “The Court of Miracles” that is dually directed at his prisoners and the viewer--in addition to his duties as the master of ceremonies for the (already musical) Festival of Fools. This stipulation that

visually incredible incarnations of emotion be specially confined to inner mindscapes makes credible the musical lens through which the rest of life is projected.

Beyond these conceptual fixes, *Hunchback* incorporates the editing exception that allowed the numbers of *Pocahontas* to resonate so integrally with their musical sources. But unlike “Colors of the Wind,” which was additionally utilized to facilitate a complex montage, Quasimodo’s signature song “Out There” never enters into any parabolic states and is only meant to take place in one location. Comparing these numbers reveals how a sequence that dares to overhaul the realistic continuity that is usually assumed when the act of singing is depicted does so for the sake of rhythmic/thematic fidelity. Like Pocahontas’ grabbing of the gun, the first few phrases of the song incorporate cuts that subtly skip over the physical movement that the new position displayed would have required of a corporeal human. One is even detached from Quasi’s perspective/depiction in favor of a removed, bird’s eye view of the Cathedral square, seemingly as a comparison to his carved model but nonetheless signaling the almost Brechtian phenomenon that occurs when songs (whose value, a viewer understands, lies in providing unparalleled insight) are launched into. The choreography of the number is characteristically thoughtful of displaying the animator’s sumptuously created environment, and this is accomplished by using the editing form (including techniques like contrived lens flares) to transport the *continually singing* Quasimodo to various points around the Cathedral. The different emotions found in the song’s various sections are endowed within these corresponding tableaux, and this artistic relationship is prioritized above any aims toward realism that would confine a singer to the area at which he or she begins. In relation to the former frontier of Musical films in which they were focused on recreating or imitating the aura of the live performer, one is able to better understand the meaning and effect of what is being

performed. More subtle than the overt matching that is not insignificantly (but often disparagingly) termed ‘Mickey Mousing’, shots are composed with the feeling of the accompanying music in mind, such as when distance and angle are made responsible for its delivery in place of or in addition to the physicality of the figure (Image 31). In the same way that one may characterize the aforementioned sampling of setups as a mere externality of the animator’s prerogative to presenting multiple facets of their craft, it must be acknowledged that the medium of animation--so dependent upon the careful planning that is epitomized by the fundamental practice of storyboarding--is especially predisposed for the compilation of individually thoughtful and meaningful images that can correspond with musical phrasing.

By the time these have been duly paraded and “Out There” is complete, the song has accomplished its overarching goal of presenting to the viewer a potent profile of Quasimodo and his life as they are at the beginning of the story, familiarizing us to his condition with a fullness that would otherwise take either cumbersome time or inelegant exposition. This iconographic aspect of the sequence would be lost in a stage production of the song, because while a performer’s interpretation of the lyrics might very well attest to the longing for normalcy that Quasi daily experiences, the procession of poses that were devised to indicate that daily routine are only so effective when the serial nature of the filmic form endows them with the dual identity of present action and indicative imagery. In other words, the additional duty of sustaining an emblematic montage that is so often applied to Disney musical numbers allows them to relay the sort of information that defies time and space. Regardless of the physical impossibility that Quasimodo would reach all of the perches that he sings from over the course of the song’s duration, each representation of Quasimodo looking out from his protective prison together communicates to the viewer that this activity has been going on long before they were privy to it.

These accomplishments are not only totally indebted to but entirely dependent upon the editorial aspect of filmmaking, and so the idea that successful musical numbers which exist within films cannot be replicated to their full effect on any other platform is inexorably linked to the sheer trickery that has always distinguished the film medium (and further characterizes the boundless potential of animation). But the handling of that potential is of course the true test of quality, and so it is pertinent to compare the new generation of Disney musicals to *Anastasia* (1997), Don Bluth's answer to them via an attempted imitation. Though oblivious to the rites of Enclosure (and thus analogously lacking any numbers until seven minutes in), *Anastasia* is understandably often mistaken for a Disney feature. In fact, Disney has recently acquired the film's rights and plans to produce a live-action version (along with several of the other now-classic musicals of the Renaissance, which might have provided a great opportunity for comparative study here). However, while Bluth's version of the Disney Renaissance formula is adequate, it did not tap into the musical/film relationship in as thoughtful a manner. The filmmakers have voiced their appreciation for the ability of animation to achieve special effects like the unique apparition of ghosts that erupt from portraits in the "Once Upon a December" sequence, but while the scene takes advantage of this kind of technical sorcery, the film otherwise seems to ignore the advantages of filmic maneuvering. *Anastasia's* musical numbers are extremely naturalistic, with only two of them actually incorporating the manipulation of time or space that so heightened Disney's. The first, "Learn To Do It" begins as a regular instance of diegetic singing and only transitions into a series of vignettes after the characters are shown (via a spinning newspaper-esque transition) to be embarking on a journey. Because the theme of the song is appropriate for it, one cannot be too disappointed that the number functions tritely like a training montage, but the ineptitude of the filmmakers to take advantage of their own medium is

illuminated in the number's final moments. Instead of allowing the scene to fully morph into and represent the ongoing process of Anastasia's education, it professes to merely be an efficient sweep for the characters' traveling, culminating not in any artistic indication of intellectual progress but instead simply with the trio's boarding of yet another method (a boat). The three singing characters abruptly fade to black as they hold a final pose for the camera, one of many throughout the film that results from the slow raising of one's outstretched arms, a gesture so evocative of and native to musical theater. The organization/filming of the number has failed to accurately respond to the song's themes, but the real misstep is how the animators do not commit to the thematic combination of song with montage, apparently hesitant to utilize it without affirming a return to the performer's reality.

The second attempt in *Anastasia* to approach the power that Disney's numbers had been demonstrating, "Paris Holds the Key to Your Heart" dives totally into fantastic stylization and thus misses the delicate middle ground that links a number's inspired elements with their roots in reality. The extreme choice between realism and fantasy made for these numbers indicates a traditional (and thus outdated) conformity with the rules of yore that confined musical numbers to the materiality of their performers and more strictly demarcated the lines between a song, a fantasy, and touring montage. An ancestor of the synthesis between these elements is the "New York New York" sequence of *On the Town* (1949), which intersperses sung refrains with a classical montage of sightseeing. The most obvious innovation that *Anastasia*'s similar love letter to Paris exemplifies is the continuous presence of singing, as the song is not put on hold for montage sections the way that it is when performance space is reserved for the sailors' vocalizations. While both songs are specifically meant as odes to a cosmopolitan city, their shared aim of encompassing not only multiple aspects but also the *soul* of the place is a

fundamental purpose of musical numbers that can be applied to any subject. Very rarely does musicality remain insular once it begins, and so too it is the task of the filmmaker to not only capture the events or emotions that pertain to the catalyst for a song, but also to effectively report upon the resulting atmosphere. This might manifest as illustrative fantasy, direct response from surrounding characters, or as a descriptive reel of an event in which the soloist is merely sharing. It is this last option that Disney's uncompromising montages best reflect, for in the same way that one understands the act of bursting into song as a magically in-depth revelation of feeling, the privileges of film make it possible to extract the essence of the time and place as well.

Although the intent is on the right track, "Paris Holds the Key to Your Heart" goes about constructing its version of Paris using an anachronistic string of clichés (including cameos by Maurice Chevalier and Claude Monet), and one accepts its rather shallow excess in light of how the film has been constructed more like an animated stage musical than an intrinsically filmic one. The best proof of this distinction is the depiction of actual dance numbers, something not truly attempted anywhere in the Disney Renaissance. It is both an aptitude for capturing dance and an affinity for collective embodiment that endowed Baz Luhrmann with the potential to realize the musical film to its fullest, a feat informed by the innovations made in the creative crux of animated features and which could only flourish when approached with the same sense of limitless possibility.

Chapter 3

Total Artwork for the Twenty-First Century

Although he did not live to see its invention, Richard Wagner would surely have had to revise his treatise “The Artwork of the Future” to include filmmaking in the sublime culmination of the ideal *Gesamtkunstwerk*. The three elements he describes as sisters who have been torn apart and seek divine reunification--tone (music), dance, and poetry (drama)--are the pillars of opera from which musicals are descended, and one can reasonably speculate that the collective capacity inherent to the film medium would have identified it to Wagner as the potential conduit. A miracle of technology that in turn creates miracles through illusion and manipulation, film defies the limits of time and space with a uniquely boundless capacity. As such, the scope of film musicals is exponential in comparison to an original counterpart on the stage, and while some may expressly aim to imitate the aura of live performance, it seems a great waste to ignore or underutilize the medium’s more supernatural advantages.

Baz Luhrmann is never guilty of such neglect, and his appreciation for the magic of cinema is fused with an equal appreciation for music, which is prominently featured (and functional) in them all. Luhrmann has only made five films in his 20+ year career as director, garnering such fascination and notoriety with each that he has been rightly established as an auteur. While fans of his films may wish for more to feast upon, his sparse resume is a testament to the intense nurturing and planning put into his work, making it so that there is little room for doubt that any one moment of his first true musical, *Moulin Rouge!* (2001), is without strict purpose and care. It would be virtually impossible to adapt it for the stage, where the incredibly charged effects and meanings created by Luhrmann’s inclusive montage would be lost. As Luhrmann is an active and accomplished theatermaker in his own right, the lack of performance-imitating techniques in his quest to “reinvent the movie musical” does not imply a bias toward

either art, but instead an understanding that filmmakers must forgo attempts at translation and focus on using the medium to its full potential in the communication of musical storytelling.

Still, it is apparent that Luhrmann's personal connection to theater is the driving heart of his filmic endeavors, which are in no small part undertaken as a kind of advocacy. Before attempting to resurrect the movie Musical with what would become *Moulin Rouge!*, Luhrmann's first film was similarly fueled by the attraction to risk and challenge, a tellingly recurring theme in Pam Cook's paramount study of his career. *Strictly Ballroom* (1992) may have emerged from a collaborative academic project that expressed the notion of artistic freedom (Cook [36-38]), but Luhrmann's familial connection and personal history with the world of ballroom dancing adds a dimension of defensive promotion of its expressive abilities. The director retroactively deems his first three films to belong to a *Red Curtain* trilogy, each being told primarily through a featured theatrical element: dance in *Strictly Ballroom*, poetry in *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996), and music in *Moulin Rouge!* ("A Creative Journey"). In this context, the stipulation that the story be expressed through dance presents a translational challenge, in addition to the risk of basing the work around such a niche sport and lifestyle. Indeed, how might one level the playing field between the native show folk producers and a totally foreign audience into a common ground? As Leslie Caron attested, dance as an art form is one of the few that can transcend the dividing constraints of cultures, making it more than apt for the task. And, as the world of competitive ballroom dancing is indeed its own miniature culture, the inclusive idea of innate potential pioneered by Gene Kelly is a potent notion in the film. The leading conflict between protagonist Scott Hastings and the sport's tradition-clinging establishment class reflects the preference/celebration of amateurism that was so prevalent in the Golden Age of musical films, but the underlying condition for proficiency (that which a realized

dance is derived from and expresses) is, as in *Flashdance*, a fearless trust in the legitimacy of one's unique talent.

Scott is made aware of this key to success when he departs from the regulated competition circuit and expectation-laden studio that his parents run where he is instructed instead by Fran's Spanish relatives, whose connection to dance is characterized as a matter of culture and ancestry. In the oasis of the Toledo Milk Bar where they live, the contrast between the more perverse motivations of professionalism and the musical attunement that yields transcendence is defined, but more radically, the scene aims to blur the line between the physically exertive aspect of dance and its intellectual/emotional motor. The necessity of passion in dance is a timeless theme, but rather than hope that the viewer can discern the superiority of the steps that are supposedly more grounded in it, Luhrmann relies on close-ups to both relay their mesmerizing effects and proclaim the unity between soul and body. The *pasa doble* duel that Scott and Fran enter into with her father (and grandmother) is from the start an explicit test of Scott's character, and the younger couple's demonstration is framed in a traditional way that prioritizes wide coverage of the movement. These angles also leave little room for the concealment of mistakes or the awkward positions that sometimes occur between steps, leaving the students' shortcomings utterly exposed (Image 31). The father's ambassadorial response is also begun within this view, but the cinematographic transition to specified focus occurs when he requests "*las compas*"--the compass--from his observing guests, who oblige by clapping together in time. With this fuel the dance transforms from a bodily exercise into a spiritually stylistic one, the intensity of the father's countenance and upper body taking visual precedence over a complete display of the routine. The crescendo of the pounding footwork is matched in the increasing zoom of the camera, which cuts between the father's fierce

face and powerful feet in order to distill the act down to their direct oneness (Images 32-34). Scott's enraptured gaze is also spliced into the sequence, and the silent expressions of a few guests that follow impart the obviousness of who has won this contest.

Meant to represent the essential added ingredient of "the rhythm" (a lesson which the grandmother subsequently bestows upon Scott), the act of clapping is furthermore appropriated as a motif of universal access to the underlying musicality of life. As Scott begins to channel the rhythm that the grandmother pats into his chest, the clapping erupts again in a collaborative encouragement; Scott's vanity produced a laughable performance, but he benefits from the newfound awareness he shares with the crowd, casting the act of dancing as a communal event. The culminating finale of crowd participation at the Pan Pacific Grand Prix Championship underscores this symbiosis of dance performance, as the music (cut off by the threatened officials) is replaced by a supportive clapping so that Scott and Fran's defiant routine may continue. The climactic exhibition event duly displays this dance, but its aura of triumph is confirmed by the reactions of those watching it. Luhrmann's regular supplementation of quickly cut expression-portraits is in full bloom here, in this case proclaiming dance to be as much about the feelings it elicits in others as those of the dancers themselves. It is the crowd and not the judges that must be won over in order for the protagonists' progressive force to be vindicated, and the agency of the film-audience is acknowledged in these snapshots as they more thoroughly depict the incremental way in which the crowd's eventually adopted sentiment gains momentum. It is the infectiousness of musicality that Luhrmann presents in the final scene, where even the defeated villain is offered consolation in the joyous new era that Scott and Fran's conviction has brought forth.

The dramatic tones of the film's third act are characteristically intense in relation to the trilogy's remaining films, and so it is easy to forget the slapstick sensibility that *Strictly Ballroom* earlier possessed. Indeed, the humorous documentary-esque arrangement of the opening sequence is presently abandoned, and this is simply because it has fulfilled its purpose--the first of which is to provide a way for expository/establishing dialogue and characterization to be combined with the sovereign dance-competition scene. The device blends the interviewee's comments with the depiction of the subject, and Cook notes that "the strategy of cutting the two scenes against one another, combined with the histrionic, non-naturalistic performance...produces an impression that both are taking place simultaneously" (Cook [47]). The device's advantage of efficiency is akin to the motivation behind the Song-Montages of the Disney Renaissance musicals, and it is likely that the exaggeration and travesty so prevalent in the film pacifies the breaches of cinematic convention the same way the cartoon medium did.

Brashly utilizing selections of generic qualities is by now a recognizable practice in Luhrmann's work, both in aesthetic and form of presentation. Cook affirms that "the film is not set in a particular era; rather, a mix of period styles in sets, costumes and music creates a sense of collapsed time in which different decades merge together" (Cook [46]), each of which are mined for their boons (including purposefully *negative* indications/associations) and applied to the service of the story's visceral impact. His no-holds-barred wielding of styles indicates either that Luhrmann is masterful at distracting viewers from his films' overall anachronism, or that each instance of it is handled appropriately--constructed to exist only within the effects for which they were chosen. The ease with which one accepts the collage aspect of the film is a testament to the filmmakers' artistic process, in which the story and the most effective ways of telling it are

prioritized over any fidelity to a categorical genre. The film may at first appear to qualify as a romantic comedy or even a diminutive sports drama, but the result is entirely original.

To praise a contemporary director for their ‘originality’ is a dubious task nowadays, because while such a quality does still exist, the new millennium is at heart the era of remixing. An Internet age in which media and art are in unprecedented supply and availability, creative industries are both lucratively benefitted by the wealth of inspiration and anxiously beholden to it. Especially in regard to film--the form in which the elusively ephemeral became verifiably preserved--the burden of modernity is a conundrum of credit: claims of ignorance in cases of similarity are disenfranchised in a time when the intellectual property of the last century is publicized, and directors are expected to not only produce unique additions to this collection, but also take into account their audience’s broadly informed sensibilities. For Luhrmann, the pool of resources at his disposal is curated with a liberal inclusivity that seeks to update and upgrade through reconfiguration that which is steadfastly fundamental to humanity. A formidable force of innovative impulses, Luhrmann’s vision is more rooted in appreciation than in dissatisfaction, and thus the alternative approach his work applies to pre-existing bodies constitutes a frame of reference that favors respect above parody on the spectrum of pastiche. “There are certainly elements of nostalgia in Luhrmann’s homage to his beloved Hollywood musicals”, Cook explains in reference to *Strictly Ballroom*, but one can clearly see in his following works how an “underlying principle is one of appropriation rather than reverence; the source material is plundered, reworked and added to a heterogeneous mix to create a new, hybrid concoction” (Cook [47]). The *Red Curtain* films abound with referential materials, and yet these are repurposed not so that the viewer will remember the contextual specifics of their

origins, but as an appeal to thematic recall; genres intersect so that their individual merits can be excavated and utilized, all glued together by the audience's shared experience.

Luhrmann employs this multiplicity of perspectives not necessarily for the challenge of fitting them all within a coherent picture, but simply as compounding clues that can succinctly and effectively describe the emotional/experiential *spirit* of the action in focus. Such is a fundamental goal of Musical films, and it is perhaps because of this unusual priority that he is frequently accused of pandering to a contemporary taste that prefers style over substance. While it is true that the sheer amount of ideas that are compressed into the films makes it difficult to delve into each of them with full consideration, these are more often designed to be *felt* rather than discussed. Much of Luhrmann's directorial ethos is laid out in *Romeo + Juliet* where this concept was addressed within the basic challenge (or indeed quest) of translation. Film adaptations of Shakespeare were by then nothing new, but the desire to impress upon modern viewers the meaning behind the Bard's reportedly timeless verse unites traditional versions with Luhrmann's less customarily serious take. Yet the drastic overhaul of setting is not merely a flashy excuse for the use of popular (i.e. fiscally reliable) aesthetics, as Luhrmann's intent was to capture both the interpersonal truth in the outdated words and the wider context in which they were used--including the bawdy side of Shakespeare's work (and audience) that is forgotten as his legacy continues to accrue a legendary loftiness.

Aside from the great expectations that accompany the material (this specific play is also tied of course to the memory of Franco Zeffirelli's 1968 film), the task of adapting Shakespeare for the screen is partly an exercise of adapting a set of previously defined and nearly archetypal characters, and the reinforcement of those roles is an important part of Luhrmann's attempt to propagate the atmosphere in which they interact. When Tybalt's persona and the scene in

general are possessed by the spirit of spaghetti Westerns in the film's opening confrontation, the urgency and bravado of the foolhardy youths is materialized; Juliet is not so much introduced as she is set in relief to be a foil of purity against the shrill garishness of the household her caricatured mother (a previously negligible figure) runs; Romeo is immediately characterized as the sensitive heartthrob by being presented in tandem with the beachfront "Sycamore Grove" complex, the refuge in which he broodingly observes the vices of Verona Beach's less privileged. A key ingredient in these profiles is the accompanying soundtrack, selected for establishment in these instances but a nearly constant and prominent presence throughout the film, speaking to Luhrmann's interest in applying and experimenting with the power of music more centrally.

The underlying desire for Luhrmann was to "reinvent the movie musical", a daunting feat that made even the radical nature of *Romeo + Juliet* seem like a more plausible endeavor at the time (Baz Luhrmann). But with the success of that film came the opportunity to tackle the challenge, with 20th Century Fox so convinced by the viability of his vision that the next film would be secure in both financial need and creative freedom (Cook [83]). The total control that this allotted Luhrmann and his collaborative team is incredible, and the fact that the production took place entirely in studio and without any location filming indicates an exceptional understanding of the delicate nature of Musicals that requires absolute precision. What the physical isolation of the film's contents also theorizes is an explicit adherence to the principle of Enclosure, an effect that is utilized in the mise en scene as well. The film's opening is rendered like an opulent and old-fashioned silent cinema, complete with a conductor and orchestra that supposedly provide the overture of the opening credits. The titles are projected behind the conductor, and while it is unclear whether the viewer is meant to assume that this orchestra is the

source of the film's proceeding score, this setup alludes to an objective of perpetual accompaniment that would unequivocally identify the piece as a '*musical* film'. Indeed, if it were truly meant to be seen in a theater and/or with a pit, then the age-old issue of phantom sound in musicals would be resolved as the supposedly ever-present orchestra could be held accountable for all non-vocal music that has no diegetic source. The typical complaint of the genre may be how unrealistic it is for people to suddenly "burst into song", but since such an action is *possible* (just *improbable*), the real challenge lies in explaining how one's singing is suddenly joined by the remaining body of the song. But in the same way that such questions are usually (or willfully) overlooked, the assumption of the orchestra's physical presence is not truly necessary for grasping the procedures of presenting musicality that the film experiments with. A benefit, though, is the understanding that in a world so permeated with musicality that even gestures and vocalizations possess tonal counterparts, the transition into song becomes totally reliant on the will of the singer. In other words, the disorientation that would be incurred by the sudden intrusion of both singing and instrumentation is partially avoided by the fact that the music already is and has always been present.

Once the audience has passed through the membrane of the contrived cinema, the first song, a melancholic "Nature Boy", is used for a multi-level establishment that, like the Wise musicals Luhrmann undoubtedly admired, began by solidifying the musical nature of the larger world in which the story takes place. As the branded frame of the faux-silent show dissolves we see the isolated slice of Paris containing the suitably rearranged village of Montmartre, which houses the Moulin Rouge complex. The windmill itself is not immediately visible, and instead the village is graphically represented by grizzled streetwalkers and a sickly troubadour before the camera finds Christian in his desolate garrott. As with some of the opening songs of the Disney

Renaissance, dialogue is intermittently present in the sequence, such as when a guarding vicar directly addresses the camera to warn the viewer to “stay away from this village of sin”, and although Christian’s literary narration of the memoir-story within/of the film is quickly begun, the song’s remaining orchestration is prominently continued in a manner that blurs the boundaries between performed numbers and technical scoring. The first moment of silence is, fittingly, reserved for the statement that Satine--like the desolate and deserted facade of her nightclub kingdom--is dead. It is through Christian’s telling of their story that Satine is temporarily resurrected, and just as “Nature Boy” established the open ownership of songs (they may discernibly issue from diegetic singers but can be variously integrated and take on several responsibilities) the village too transforms back into its brighter, former self through the combination of Christian’s logos and another song chosen to set that tone (a rendition of “Complainte De La Butte”, originally written for Jean Renoir’s 1954 *French Cancan*).

The foreknowledge of the consumptive courtesan’s death should hardly come as a shock if one is aware of the film’s relationship to Giuseppe Verdi’s classic opera *La Traviata*. An accomplished opera director in Australia, Luhrmann most frequently proclaims the legend of Orpheus and Eurydice to be the driving root of the coming-of-age story that *Moulin Rouge!* was meant to be. But while the mythic musician served as the subject for works by Monteverdi and Gluck, the final arc of the film more closely mirrors that of Alexander Dumas, fils’ popular 1852 play *La Dame aux Camélias*, the source material for Verdi’s opera. These operatic staples obviously had a major influence on Luhrmann and his taste for melodramatic spectacle, and the further mythification accrued by their subjects renders them acceptably familiar candidates for the Bazmark treatment. The parameters of the Red Curtain aesthetic were only fully realized with *Moulin Rouge!*, and as key features include “a theatricalized cinema set in heightened

created worlds, relying on primary mythology and demanding audience participation” (Cook [31]), it is necessary for the source to be ‘mythic’ in the sense that it is universally recognized and known; the audience participation sought is only achievable when everyone is on the same page, as otherwise the elemental exercise of reinvention and subversion cannot be appreciated. Thus while more contemporary and specific than the cosmic histories of ancient Greece, the premise of a naive young man who tragically fell for a dying woman of pure heart but ill repute qualifies as such a modern myth.

The overarching goal of the treatment is not to maliciously overthrow the familiar, but to elevate it beyond previously necessary hindrances that may suppress the total realization of an underlying essence. It expresses a radical form of homage that isolates and nurtures the purely thematic in a way that is only possible within an equally radical film, whose sensibility is untethered to conventions or contextual limits. Characterizing Luhrmann as an intensely international artist, Cook points out that “the link between transnationalism and cosmopolitanism, understood as a belief in the underlying connections between people or citizens of the world, informs these practices, which have an ethical dimension, in that they presuppose mutual respect or trust between like-minded people or groups” (Cook [11]). True to form, Christian claims kin with the Bohemians he suddenly encounters by reciting the mantra of belief in “Truth, Beauty, Freedom and Love”. The assumption of the viewer’s agreement with these principles is confirmed by the fact that The Duke--the dastardly villain whose only other characteristic is an inability to contribute to the artistry he otherwise admires--is the only character not completely on board with this dogma. Indeed, the Duke is to *Moulin Rouge!* what the adult world was to teen dance movies--a square whose practical orientation, normality, and intrusive authority threatens the artist community that comprises the film’s baseline

perspective. But since musicality is a mode of expression independent from actual (diegetic) showmanship, the untalented Duke still contributes a verse--the hyper-theatrical rendition of 1980s pop star Madonna's "Like a Virgin".

Containing direct address towards the camera and a primarily symmetrical viewpoint, the Duke's number is a travesty of the classical Hollywood musical film. The aversion to tradition that was so central to the production of *Strictly Ballroom* is evident here, as the number's explicit quotations from the past are denied the refreshing assimilation into contemporary style that is applied to the others. Cook proposes that the narrative purpose of this number is to "sabotage the song's message of innocence regained through love, throwing into relief the romance between Christian and Satine" (Cook [98]), but it is more important for our purposes to analyze the number's style and the *reasons* for it that go beyond sheer oppositional contrast. The Duke's artistic ineptitude is displayed in other scenes, and one must note that while his performance and the choreography of his footmen is intentionally silly, his evil or inferiority is not expressed through an inability to complete these; the prescribed number is executed well and without any falls or falters. Instead, the choice of imitation basis is marked as the unfitting element, and though Luhrmann constructs a fine impersonation of the "Waiters' Gallop" from *Hello Dolly* (1969), the number makes a rather negative statement about the Golden Age formula. After its conclusion Christian's voice-over narration references the event as "Harold Zidler's brilliant lies...", alluding to the theme of intoxicating artificiality that is so prevalent in the film. The song belongs mostly to Zidler, who launches it as a desperate ploy to placate the Duke when Satine does not keep her engagement with him. Thus the number operates as distraction via entertainment, the impulse behind so many of the popular but shallow musical numbers of yore. Luhrmann recalls in turn the style in which those were captured, composing the sequence

with arrangements of Berkeley-esque symmetry (including specialized birds-eye shots) and by capitalizing on the Gothic Tower set's potential for contrived prosceniums (Images 35-38).

But this referentiality is the exception to the film's musicality rules, which aim for sincerity and potency in the oft-overlapping instances of show-performance and expressive "spontaneous" musicality. The foremost method of ensuring this occurred in the film's initial planning stages, when the songs themselves were assessed and chosen based on use value. Though often categorized as a Jukebox Musical (the once extremely prominent form that drew popular songs from closed sources), the eclectic soundtrack of *Moulin Rouge!* was compiled as part of the scriptwriting process (Cook [95]) and was thus appropriately malleable in response to changes, making certain that none would appear forced or inorganic. Such was frequently the case in films that prioritized an initial repertoire over story, imposing a causal relationship that would logically put the integrity of the foreign song before that of the plot (and indeed yielding the weak transitional 'excuses' for musicality that inform the genre's problematic reputation). The effectiveness of *Moulin Rouge!*'s musical core comes from the inversion of this: songs featured were selected to enhance the expression of the characters who sing them (Cook [95]), chosen as allies to the story instead of having the story be forcibly built around them, proving that musicality, if handled with thematic fidelity, was a viable vehicle for the lifeblood of a film's narrative. Evoking Wagner and his hopes for a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, leitmotifs are subtly woven beneath dialogue at times, which is almost always accompanied by custom underscoring and thus potentially qualifies the film as a kind of through-composed work.

Once the songs are decided upon the characterization of those who sing them requires careful consideration. The concept that Christian is an incarnation of Orpheus lends a conscious

reason for the film's use of contemporary pop songs. Luhrmann confirms that the Moulin Rouge represents a "great metaphorical underworld for [his] Christian character to journey into", and indeed Offenbach's famous melody (popularly associated with the cancan) is utilized early on, transformed into the original "The Pitch" song. Once that analogy was solidified, the writers needed to establish what kind of audible phenomena could be used to emulate the preeminent tones of Orpheus and his legendary lyre. Humbly aware that original compositions would likely fall short of representing music so beautiful that it possessed magical powers, Luhrmann and writing partner Craig Pearce decided that the pop songs Luhrmann was so interested in working with could legitimately suffice.

This concept works on multiple levels. First, Christian's "poetry" is portrayed as the impromptu manifestation of sheer talent, his first two singing parts begun by truly *bursting into song* in a way that is much more literal than the unfitting randomness this phrase normally implies. As will be more fully addressed later, the power of Christian's music is depicted as having the ability to cut through the chaos that surrounds him, built up visually by Luhrmann's rapid camerawork and then suddenly commanding stilled, reverent attention. Most fully realized in the moment where Christian's talent is first discovered ("The Sound of Music"), the surrounding characters' instantaneous and awed impression is of course a result of the song's 1960s Broadway style being totally foreign to 1900s France. Additionally, by using the aura that Christian's songs accrue by being conspicuously before their time, the brash device creates a unique relationship between the film and its viewers, whose foreknowledge of the tunes acts as a vital part of the sense of greatness that the filmmakers bestow upon Christian's poetry/songs. The reaction shots of the other characters may be the kingmakers of Christian's Orphean status, but the filmmakers are also banking on the viewer's recognition of the songs'

true places in history to understand how “modern” and appealing the Bohemians find Christian’s poetic voice. After all, these hits are part of what’s to come with the turn of the century that the Children of the Revolution have so eagerly awaited.

But Christian does not have sole access to the songbook of the future, as is evident in his first duet with Satine. The “Elephant Love Medley” number is a beautifully composed merging of several popular love songs from the twentieth century, and it is imperative that its creation is understood as another testament of *Moulin Rouge!*’s exceptional philosophy regarding the role of musicality. Christian sings only a sample of the songs included--predominantly their most identifying hook, melody or lyrics. The narrative motivation for the song is Christian’s aim to woo Satine, and again the modernity and renown of these songs construes his Orphean power. But more fundamentally, the number fulfills the true venture of musicals--the treatment of musicality as not only the result of intense emotion, but as a special language. As such, the number is not an *aria* in the traditional sense where one might sing to extrapolate upon their feelings, but a conversation in real time between people who are indeed experiencing heightened tension but retain their situational bearings. Described by Luhrmann and Pearce as an argument (“Elephant Love Theme”), the patchwork nature of the medley is born from the fact that Satine is continually rejecting Christian’s [borrowed] professions of love, thus forcing him to try multiple versions of the declaration. Of course he is successful, and one might interpret from Satine’s eventual joining of him in duet the lovely idea that, while each of the songs were originally written for a single vocalist to express their adoration of another, such testaments of love always hope to be answered in kind.

Before the lovers engage in this bliss though, Satine must be duly introduced, and her shared presentation with the Moulin Rouge itself (“Lady Marmalade/Because We Can” and

“Sparkling Diamonds (Diamonds Are a Girl’s Best Friend)” displays Luhrmann’s proficiency with the Mixed/Song-Montage concept of musical profiling. The regular ubiquity of musicality in the film’s world is reinforced during this sequence, which is constructed like a music video in the sense that while singing is presented as occurring in real time, it is untethered to any one perspective and instead freely provides a comprehensive tour of the complex’s many facets--including the main dance hall, outdoor Elephant Garden, private rooms, and the iconic front doors. The human inhabitants--the Diamond Dogs dancers, various exhibitionists and performers--each share the “singing” of the song in randomized turn, which is mixed so that beyond Zidler’s solo, the vocals are heavily layered with ambient noise to simulate the chaos of the crowd. The mostly male patrons also contribute to the number, because while they are not performers, they are an essential part of the Moulin Rouge ecosystem and thus are allotted a section of the medley (appropriate lyrics extracted from grunge-rock band Nirvana’s “Smells Like Teen Spirit”) to proclaim their identity. Though Christian’s experience is technically the driving force of the scene, the sections of Zidler’s solo that are directed at the camera or take place before an unabashed green-screen rendering of the club specify to the viewer that this highlight-reel of attractions is intended primarily for them and to further their understanding of the central setting. Another telltale indicator of the scene’s manipulation are the shots that place single characters such as the distinct Nini Legs In The Air in multiple situational locations and wardrobe, depicting some of the duties she might regularly undertake as a Diamond Dog. Prioritizing *impression* over physics and continuity, the song succinctly outlines the Moulin Rouge’s many typical (i.e. existing before and beyond this individual evening) functions.

As soon as the bacchanalia of the club is established its star makes her entrance, continuing to delineate the status quo. Satine’s rendition of “Diamonds Are a Girl’s Best Friend”

references Marilyn Monroe's iconic *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953) version (Images 39-40), but the song acts more functionally than the original, fun but frivolous number, taking on multiple responsibilities. In *Gentlemen*, the song is performed long after Lorelei's penchant for riches has been established, and so instead of providing any new insights, the number merely reinforces it. Without narrative necessity the scene is candidly an indulgence, and since the song is uncanny in its association with Lorelei's character, viewers naturally hold no delusions that the number is anything short of a self-aware exhibition aimed almost entirely at themselves. The awareness is further supported by the camerawork, as the contrived physical space of the stage is all but abandoned so that the cinematography can weave intimately through an ever-expanding set. Different from simply employing filmic techniques to efficiently capture a performance that could plausibly be performed live, it is apparent that the number was designed and choreographed with a freely-moving camera in mind. This kind of distinguishable planning further implies (although perhaps not consciously) the number's true role as spectacle that is separate from the narrative universe. Luhrmann avoids entering such a privileged space by allotting ample shots of the club's outer spectators and their ostensible (i.e. realistic) points of view, only occasionally depicting Satine with the centered performance framing that highlighted the exteriority of the *Gentlemen* version (Images 41-42).

Although endowed with significantly more purpose than the original, the film did not try to cleverly revamp the context of the song's lyrics. Like many pop songs that thrive because of the neutral broadness and applicability of their subject matter, the lyrics of "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend" read like a series of modern proverbs, and so attempting to mold them into a natural expression of Satine's true feelings would likely be in vain. Instead, Luhrmann allows the song to remain an exhibitionist facade so that it can act primarily as the base around which

vital visual clues are built. Just as Hawk's number is preoccupied with the physical spectacles the song facilitates, Satine's sung words are secondary to the implicit actions taking place around her. A series of momentary vignettes are excavated from the pandemonium of the crowd and shown as part of Satine's act, in order to exemplify in caricature the modes of Satine's especially obscure position. Encompassing the various relationships that she usually navigates, the diegetic number behaves more like a ritual than a mere routine by representing the types of customers she may encounter both on and off the show floor--from the old aristocrats jubilantly enjoying their night of hedonistic freedom to a baby-faced young man nervously clutching virginal roses. Aside from their uniform black tuxedos and top hats, the men are unified by their wealth, and their collective offering of different gifts to Satine presents an opportunity for the filmmakers to swiftly and wordlessly communicate her essential preference for diamonds and money over offerings of juvenile, insubstantial sentimentality. As in the operatic and literary inspirations for the story, Christian's distinguishing mystique as the courtesan's only true love is derived from his revelatory ability to overcome her preoccupation with security, and thus this song is responsible for quickly but effectively constructing that aspect of her persona. Satine's character presents another opportunity for Luhrmann to concentrate several ideas into a single conduit, but this too has an effective purpose. The character's acting ability allows her to shift like a chameleon between the classic aspects of the male fantasy that she projects, but her offstage persona is similarly designed as a composite of "screen goddesses such as Marlene Dietrich, Rita Hayworth and Marilyn Monroe" (Cook [87]).

The fusion of multiple personae that Nicole Kidman is charged with embodying in her character hints at Luhrmann's penchant for excess, and his continued use of the multi-portrait series technique first seen in *Strictly Ballroom* facilitates his desire for mass inclusion as well as

amplifies the material. Many shots throughout the film seem purposefully designed like still, emblematic photographs, and this style not only emulates the way memory is experienced, but allows Luhrmann to record as much descriptive information as possible into each scene. The editorial device approaches the accomplishment of this by gathering reactions from several players within a given scene--compiling the faces of everyone present or, in order to work on a larger scale, selecting individual ambassadors to represent each group. This way, Luhrmann is able to more fully detail the scene's atmosphere to the viewer, a descriptive maneuver that would otherwise be impossible to attain without elongated observation. This collecting of images is most significantly exercised during the film's individual musical numbers, and the scene which contains the extraordinary "El Tango de Roxanne" stands as an electrifying testament to Luhrmann's transcendent ability to capture music and dance on film. The movement of his multifaceted montage is in superb sync with the dancer's choreography and the feelings of the music behind it, the language of dance filmically depicted with isolated expressions and gestures that together perfectly project the sexual energy from which the Tango style was born. The sequence is shared between two sets: the half-lit dance hall of the Moulin Rouge and The Duke's domain in the Gothic Tower. The number is a mirror for the grave and precarious confrontation between Satine and the Duke, which, like the increasingly violent tango, devolves into a vicious attack.

While the Narcoleptic Argentinean may present the "Tango" as a (retroactive) cautionary tale for Christian, the filmmakers make it all too clear that the relationship being explored through this dance is the false one between Satine and The Duke. She enters the Tower fully clothed in her femme-fatale alter ego and proceeds to reassure The Duke of her fidelity, peeling one long glove from her arm and turning into a pose as she begins on the other (with her

character being built upon the of icons of male fantasy, it is safe to infer a nod to Gypsy Rose Lee). Before she can complete this classic act of seduction, the tableau is cut away from--putting the moment on hold until the dance's main conduits (Nini, a double of Satine only in the sense of their profession, and the Argentinean) are in place. As the melodic theme of the "Tango" rips across diegetic violin strings, the twin confrontation begins: the glove, just like the pretenses, is off, and the courtesan goes to work. The dancing couple begin their routine facing each other like opponents ready for battle, and as the Argentinian's handling of his partner crosses into infliction, Luhrmann strings together a line of portraits of the Bohemians who are watching. Ending on a stylized close-up of Christian, the featured spectators each look on with a kind of wounded horror and concern, their ideals being warped by this distortion of lovers' embrace. Nini and Satine are both literally going through the motions of intimacy, but, being devoid of truth, the results are a dark pantomime of deceit and control.

Christian eventually leaves the hall and wanders into the garden, and the sight of him compels Satine to drop the charade. Her rejection of the Duke spurs him to take her by force, and as the handling of such a gruesome subject requires a delicate balance of restraint and respect, it is commendable that Luhrmann's depiction is neither exploitative nor hidden. Rape, especially in this case, is about power and dominance, and Luhrmann is sure to represent this in the shots of the male dancers, who in these frames assume poses of clenched fists and flexed muscles, their jaws open in wolf-like rage. Soon the rest of the Diamond Dogs join the exercise, dressed only in pale underclothes (a contextual sign of leisure but also a traditional emblem of prostitution). The artifice of their individually characterized costumes has been shed, laying bare their femaleness beside the archetypal masculinity of their similarly-clad partners. Indeed, Luhrmann's treatment of the dancers in this sequence renders them as pieces of a

representational body that, like a folk dance, casts them in the archetypal and oppositional roles of the patriarchal binary. After the Argentinian has let go of Nini and assumed a primarily vocal role, the male dancers approach to take their turns as her partner in an obvious allusion to promiscuity, but the commentary on this specific relationship is broadened and transformed when they disperse and pair up with the women to form the company tango; the allegorical exercise that had been inspired by the hero's specific predicament (love threatened by specific sexual commerce) expands to embody the darker intricacies of heterosexual coupling. Tapping into this assumption of allegorical status, every pair (or truly each person shown on screen) is prone to be highlighted at any time so that their images can be used as a piece of Luhrmann's collage. Both during the dance and in the spaces between the plot-driving break, Luhrmann's eye is drawn to individual couples, each offering their own images of the painful passion that the empathetic atmosphere has manifest into dance. The technique takes advantage of cinema to represent multiple nodes of emotion that together express the scene's overall tension, and while such a conceit is possible in other genres, large dance numbers such as these provide an exceptional bank of material to work with. After all, the sequence utilizes a multitude of emotive performers (the dancers, diegetic musicians, observing characters etc.) who furnish the scene and present an exponential opportunity for applicable iconography.

This multi-nodal technique, however, is not welcome for all scenarios, and the deliberate omission of it illuminates what I believe to be the driving notion of the film. One may be inclined to regard the prevalence of dynamic chaos as simply par for the course in a Baz Luhrmann film, but closer examination reveals that it is actually calmness and simplicity that he considers to be the hallmarks of his primary artistic concern--Romantic Love. Having stated that a unifying paradigm of his Red Curtain Trilogy is "young love in conflict with society" ("A

Creative Journey”), one need only look back on those filmic exercises to decipher Luhrmann’s personal philosophy on the subject. Explored using water as a recurring motif in *Romeo + Juliet*, Luhrmann portrays the romantic relationship as a relief from the entropy of society. The star-crossed lovers are each seen submerging themselves in water to escape the tacky whirlwind of their lives, and not only does their first fatal sighting of one another occur betwixt a fish tank, but even the iconic balcony scene is revamped to instead take place in a swimming pool. Luhrmann’s notion of love as respite is carried over to *Moulin Rouge!*, but instead of simply employing a motif to signify this as before, the very film itself is employed in the endeavor. Firstly, the idea can be seen in the dramatically contrasting designs of the scenes that celebrate the protagonists’ love against the rest of the film’s preoccupation with the underworld of the hedonistic nightclub. This is most aesthetically apparent in the “Come What May” sequence, when the lovers and their surroundings are dressed with conspicuously minimal adornment and muted color palettes that match unembellished views of bare skin and sheets. The song enacts a montage for both the affair and the rehearsal process of “*Spectacular Spectacular*”, and even the Moulin Rouge’s gilded theater is now covered with white sheeting and beige tarps. The show-personnel depicted have traded their customarily bright and detailed garb for softer, pale practice clothes as well. The legato tempo of this song allows for an unusually long (uninterrupted) shot that zooms out from Christian’s garrott and across Paris, landing on a rare view of pastoral nature that is also softened by a sepia-toned gel effect.

Beyond the set-dressing and costumes, Luhrmann integrates the concept of love’s wonderment and release into the very editing and orchestration of such scenes. Both the “Your Song” number and the “Elephant Love Medley” illustrate the burgeoning love between Christian and Satine, and while the latter is primarily an attempt to convince Satine to concede to her

feelings, the former is an interpretive depiction of those feelings' unexpected, dazzling premier. Desperate to overcome Satine's obnoxious roleplaying, Christian's opening lyric erupts like the saving breath of a diver breaking the surface. Effectively illustrative of the sudden but major shift that is occurring, Satine (along with the city, which literally becomes alight) is mutely transfixed by this unprecedented magic. While viewers are sure to overlook the mechanics of this sequence's success, it is partially owed to the editorial restraint that is employed for the sake of the love-as-rest theme's illustration. Before Christian opens his mouth to sing, the establishing, three-minute scene contained over 132 cuts. The four-minute scene that follows the song's conclusion resumes the hectic splicing with 165 cuts. But the song itself, although occupied with dancing, special effects, and an entire change of setting, only contains 51 cuts within its three-minute duration. Much of the sequence focuses on Satine's stunned and delighted listening, one shot even lingering beyond what would traditionally constitute a cut to keep the singer/speaker's mouth visible. Christian's serenade transports the couple to a fantastical version of Montmartre, and their return to reality is simultaneous with the final note that he sings. The lyrics of the Elton John ballad do not possess the potential for expository application and so are only ripe for an expressive aria, but by ending the sequence with the filmic indication that their trip was imagined, the song is revealed to be a device used to *visualize* the process of falling in love, not merely a diegetic reflection on it.

Following the flight into fantasy (and once the interruption of "The Pitch" and a brief scene change have passed), that process is continued until its true completion. Christian sets off another unusually legato section by gently singing "how wonderful life is now you're in the world", a lyric repeated from "Your Song" that is here used to bookend the final stages of the couple's uniting. Prefaced by the audial memory of his words, Satine's rendition of "One Day

"I'll Fly Away" is depicted as being extremely communicative with Christian, and his sung interjection from across the way renders it a kind of duet. Yet still predominantly a personal solo, the number equalizes the couple's musical explorations of their pairing: almost like profile-songs, "Your Song" and "One Day I'll Fly Away" each detail the respective singer's perspective on the prospect of romantic entanglement with the other, allowing for a proper duet ("Elephant Love Medley") to analogously reconcile them. The songs occur sequentially and are the final two stages of Christian and Satine's establishment as lovers. As such, the ten minutes that are devoted to them contain more fully sustained tracking shots and lingering frames than anywhere else in the film.

This minutely expressed dedication to the depiction and illustration of emotional concepts is what sets *Moulin Rouge!* apart, fulfilling the destiny of the Musical film by employing techniques developed for the faithful display of musicality and utilizing the medium itself as an expressive instrument. The film might also be said to qualify as a total work of art in regard to its deft assemblage of widely eclectic genres of music, fashion, and narrative styles, all of which remain grounded in the story and are connected by their origin of pastiche. If the laurels Luhrmann earns as the director responsible for making Musicals a viable genre once more are based upon that skill of culmination, then it may be unfair to analyze the film in comparison to those that came before it (as these did not have as rich a canon of culture to draw from). But while *Moulin Rouge!* represents a turning point in the genre's socioeconomic standing, perhaps its true success lies in being totally *of its time*--fortified by the undulating tastes of the past but adaptable to and a product of the morphology of the 21st century.

Outro

Innovations in Adaptations

While *Moulin Rouge!* might represent a uniquely modern moment of resurrection for film musicals, the content of the musical resurgence which followed is decidedly more retrospective, consisting mainly of adaptations from stage musicals that premiered long prior. The first of these--*Chicago*, released in 2002--is commonly confused with *Moulin Rouge!* as the gatekeeper of the genre's millennium era, but it might be fair to acknowledge it as the first mainstream film to successfully marry contemporary aesthetic style with vintage and established (i.e. static) source materials. In agreement with my assessment that Luhrmann's filmic instincts for musicality were a long-awaited revelation, producer Martin Richards recounts as part of the musical's long journey to filmic realization that "once Bob Fosse was dead, there was no one that could make a movie musical...But then I saw *Strictly Ballroom* and I said, 'get me in touch with Baz Luhrmann'" ("From Stage To Screen").

Yet even without that visionary at the helm, Rob Marshall's direction was rich enough in concept to accommodate the show's Vaudevillian numbers but fluid enough in execution to integrate them as part of a dramatic whole. The key to such tricky success is attributed to Marshall's conception that the numbers exist within the psyche of the main character Roxy, whose admiration of and ambition for showbiz determines the (musical) form of her perception. A literal and insular version of Enclosure, the film's first frames contain only Roxy's eyes and zoom methodically closer into one iris as the overture's opening brass solo lazily wails atop anticipatory stillness. Once the screen is enveloped in the darkness of her pupil the film's title appears, conveying the totality of the filter principle under which *Chicago* operates. Next, like

the catalytic voice of God that verbally constructs the world in Genesis, the action is begun when the isolated lips of Taye Diggs as The Bandleader (a functionally omniscient narrator/device throughout) articulates the traditional “five, six, seven, eight!” to strike up the band--blurring the distinction between the diegetic ensemble that plays at the Onyx Club where the narrative begins and the source of the film’s accompanying score. After these two indications of specified otherworldliness (and an early reinforcement that flashes the initial shot of Roxy’s eyes to patch a moment of fantasy-performance into a diegetic number), the cerebral concept is exercised by thoughtfully intercutting the diegesis with its musical version. Although the two realms are kept stringently separate for the remainder of the film, they are made to dance with one another in unifying harmony, edited so that the chasm between the realistic content and its musical counterparts is closed. This allows one to appreciate the art of the translation more immediately and avoid the loss of energy that might usually occur in the interim between them.

The respective realms, however, are spatially and chronologically unbound: no angle or perspective is off limits for the depiction of real life, nor the performances which each involve a conventional stage or studio in some capacity, adopting the multitasking conventions of the music video aesthetic. A core benefit of that mode is the distillation of broader ideas or events into a concise and effective representation, and the efficiency of the method is visible in several numbers as they are used to traverse periods of time. One example is found within the “Cell Block Tango”, which is heralded by editorially arranging the ambient noise of Roxy’s jail cell into the proceeding song’s beat and then stylistically setting up an apparatus that has her viewing the performance from a designated table. Though the conceit of the song-inspiring noises echoes the transitional method employed by von Trier in *Dancer in the Dark*, it is important to note that Roxy’s role as the viewer’s musical filter is simply that; she is not a creator but merely a conduit.

While Selma's musical vision was intrinsically linked to her own emotional state, *Chicago's* functions as an entirely objective lens that holds no biased sway over the expressions that are exposed through the Roxy/Vaudeville prism. As such, the inner truth that musicality is traditionally meant to reveal is kept intact, and Roxy's position as an observer is often appropriate.

The lyrical content of "Cell Block Tango" does not reveal as much as inform, and actually is orchestrated with a great amount of dialogue as each of Roxy's fellow inmates describe the murders that resulted in their respective sentences via monologues embedded into the song. Recognizing the conversational (though certainly not *confessional*) nature of the song, Marshall constructs the song's counterparts in reality around prison-life vignettes: as soloists complete the dance in the stage-realm, portions of their monologues are shared with that of reality, where the inmates relay their story in the complex's bathrooms, mess hall, during a game of cards, or while being interviewed by reporters (Images 47-50). The number is a profile song and so combines the duty of entertainment with that of establishing and conveying the conditions of being in jail. While the end of the sequence--a shot of Roxy in the same position as when the 'fantasy' began--may resemble a return to/ending of an isolated moment, it instead represents consistency and is functionally emblematic.

The liberty of *Chicago's* format also allows it to subvert formulaic expectations and generate specialized relationships between images and lyrics with a unique humor and irony. Embodied in "All I Care About"--a profile song for attorney Billy Flynn--the realm of reality is for once made to signify the truth while the performance routine is totally devoted to a spectacle of transparent artifice. The song delineates Flynn's character by wryly contrasting the lyrics, which protest a disregard for material luxury, with a montage of his lavish lifestyle. This

discrepancy represents more than personal hypocrisy though, as Flynn's success as a lawyer is largely dependent on his skills as a manipulative public showman. The nuance of the sequence comes from its ability to impart both of these notions, humorously outlining Flynn's motivation (illustrated by reality and made charmingly funny with pointed oppositions) while also depicting the innate and smoothly dazzling deception that is so fundamental to his persona.

Perhaps it is this close intertwining of the two realms which ensures the quality of reality's plane, which is usually prone to being neglected in relation to the careful construction of numbers and/or too noticeably defined from them, ruining their intrinsic relationship. The narrative is addressed with the same attention to rhythm and dynamism as the musical numbers it is meant to inspire, and this coherent pacing of the film is one of its most important accomplishments. This inherent understanding of rhythm shines through when a musical film's director also works as a choreographer, as attunement to the underlying musicality of nature allows one to represent it (though at a less overt level) for non-musicality scenes. But--especially in the case of adaptations--I contend that in the same sense that one must surely hold their primary craft above all others if they are to bring out its full potential, it is extremely important for filmmakers to structure the endeavor as an exercise in utilizing the medium's advantages, not as a service for transplanting the ephemeral features of live theater.

This order of priority is automatic for Tim Burton, whose ample experience with cinema and affinity for horror rendered him perfectly adept to tackling a filmic conversion of a most subversive and complex musical. Suppression of theatrical impulses was key to Burton's adaptation of *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (2007), with cast and crew attesting to the director's rejection of Broadway sensibilities like fervent physicality and celebratory spectacle (Making of "Sweeney Todd"). Of course, the macabre plot of this specific

show places it already along the margins of that aesthetic culture, but testimonies further emphasize the production's dedication to creating a totally filmic version that would be redefined from its roots on the stage (Making of "Sweeney Todd"). Burton's conventional taste for darkness is inescapably present as the film was made to be filtered through a desaturation process that applies a standard dreariness, contributing to the Enclosure of the film; the effect visually demarcates it as taking place in a specialized, impressionistic version of London in the same way that musicals represent such a version of life. Stylistic coherence is desirable in any theatrical endeavor, but obviously only filmmaking can provide such a wholly encompassing effect upon the atmosphere (a form of Enclosure). Burton does not possess a background in musical theater, but he is nonetheless attuned to the curatorial patterns provided by music. As Stephen Sondheim himself noted in regard to the director, "he's very musical. And you can see it in the rhythm--not just the cutting, but the way the camera glides, the way it moves, the choice of angles: he's responding to the music" (Making of "Sweeney Todd").

One must be so attuned when tasked with approaching such a unique and appreciable work. The screenplay's removal of the "Ballad of Sweeney Todd" and its many reprises--a narrative device interwoven throughout the entire show--was the most significant alteration of the score. While the decision is appropriate given the song's purpose is to segue and establish in a way that cinema automatically facilitates, its absence from the film marks the utter separation between the central characters and any concerns about community that are otherwise so commonplace in the genre. The show's grim nature and themes nullify the utopian sentiments that are usually associated with a musical's populace, and indeed the cynical views of humanity it espouses are poignantly manifested in the film's impersonal treatment of crowds (and truly anyone besides the core ensemble). Tapping into the outsider mentality so key to his modus

operandi, Burton employs a motif of isolation so that, like true psychopaths, his leading characters can only focus on their own desires and comprehend their own consciousness. Their subsequent beholding of the world as a damnable zoo of dumb (as in both stupid and mute) beasts is elegantly presented through cumulatively grotesque views of bustling, homologous society. This formulation operates most explicitly within the “A Little Priest” scene, in which the duo begin to plot their gruesome business model by assessing the potential human livestock of the neighborhood from behind the separating windows of their shop (Figure). For the murderous “Epiphany”, a number employing the mixed methods of a pseudo-fantasy Song-Montage, Todd artfully stalks through and sings to throngs of eerily sedate and silent passersby (Figure). In these heightened sequences Todd and Mrs. Lovett are blatantly ignored by the surrounding masses, even though their postures should be visibly predatory (or at least unusual) to diegetic onlookers during the former song, and regardless of Todd’s more immediate proximity in the latter. With a signal for heightened perspective lying within the directional focus of figures and as voluble singing is the film’s most significant expressive content, the camera is predominantly positioned with an insular intimacy. The songbook/libretto of *Sweeney Todd* is quintessential of composer/lyricist Sondheim in that it favors staccato, dialogue-esque phrasing over a more extravagant ballad style, and the film’s philosophy that the act of singing should represent a breach of deep introversion accounts for the cinematographic focus on facial performance and closer framing. After all, the film’s preclusions of other forms of musicality augments the songs and charges them as the exclusive bearers of enhanced expression, warranting the frequent use of such a Performance Priority technique.

It is possible to take this focus much too far, however, as in the case of the latest adaptation of *Les Misérables* (2012). Although the production marketed itself as possessing an

earnest, revolutionary approach to musical theater on film by recording all vocal performance during live takes, the egregious subjugation of nearly all other cinematic devices used in the film heavily contributed to its downfall. The ambitious idea of the live recording was admirably conceived as a provision for exploiting the psychological truth that actors supposedly reap from organic interpretations of their songs, but the resulting execution of the film deeply suffers from its singular dedication to this notion. In a review for *The New York Times*, Anthony Lane synoptically articulates the more resounding conditions of the issue, reporting that “the director is Tom Hooper, fresh from ‘The King’s Speech,’ and you can’t help wondering if this shift into grandeur has confused his sense of scale. The camera soars on high, the orchestra bellows, and then, whenever somebody feels a song coming on, we are hustled in close, forsaking our bird’s-eye view for that of a consultant rhinologist” (Lane). Indeed, it is clear that all interest for Hooper lies in observing from his singers’ faces the same expressive projection that theoretically emits from one’s mouth in song. The computer-generated crane shots that comprise so much of the remainder of the film seem to be employed merely for variety (a spatial foil to the endless close-ups), but it is also likely that Hooper’s instinct was informed by the frequency of massive scale that is precipitated by Enclosing measures in more sensible musical films. An understanding of Enclosure is evident in the opening moments, which begin with an introductory text projected upon a steady underwater shot that is scored only with muffled aquatic ambience before the camera rises out into the open air. As that surface is broken the first orchestral notes emerge, and this physical mechanism identifies the film-world’s musical nature.

As the plot progresses it becomes apparent that the project of faithfully recording sung performance takes such precedence that opportunities are missed for songs to be comfortably situated within a reasonably filmic structure. In turn, the slightly inane flavor of some of musical

theater's protocols becomes regrettably accentuated; traditional airs of theatricality are already doomed to appear unfitting on film, and the viewer's cognition of more germane options for combining song with cinema further emphasizes the awkwardness of this adaptation that might have been avoided. For example, the newly freed and wandering Valjean pauses at a makeshift crucifix and sings a small section of recitative, commenting on his circumstances and concluding with the lyrics "...the day begins, and now let's see what this new world will do for me!". Pared down from the original version, the miniature solo was written as a theatrically descriptive transition between the initial prison-galley setting and the following sequence of vignettes which portrays Valjean's struggle to find work as a parolee. As such, the closing, expository lyrics--clearly intended for a stage piece, where the audience cannot see and so must be *told* basic logistical information--appear redundant against the filmed hour/location while taking on the hokey tone that often discredits musical theater. The director unfortunately ignored the inherent opportunity filmic revamping provides for nullifying the limitations of the stage.

Though this may seem a minute issue, the scene embodies several of the hindrances caused by the live-capture insistence. The essence of the entire soliloquy is plainly internal, and so an obvious solution to the sequence's rhythmic oddity would be to have at least partially transferred the singing to voice-over. It is virtually impossible to sing adequately under conditions like trudging across mountainous terrain, and so the opportunity for Jackman to viably recite his musicality is designated to a contrived respite from the action. This self-inflicted limitation could be overcome had the idea of embarking that the lyrics originally constituted efficiently taken the form of a montage that still incorporates some corporeal singing (as displayed in the Disney Renaissance). Instead, a conventional travel montage is hastily cut to once Jackman completes the final phrase, as if Hooper recognized the felicitousness of such a

device. But, confined to his concept, he is forced to clumsily construct that depiction of Valjean's journeying around the discordant performance beside the crucifix.

Hooper is simply not attuned musically, and he constantly reveals his ineptitude for understanding the material. Although several of the show's numbers practically solicit representation through emblematic or time-traveling Song-Montages, only one is ever constructed, inappropriately applied inappropriately to the Thenardiers' profile song "Master of the House". Here again the lack of cinematographic acuity is woefully apparent as rhythmic cutting cues are ignored, leaving the already clownish performances conspicuously bare and awkward without due visual embellishment. Intended as a respite of comic relief but failing to extract any genuine humor or energy, the sequence is compositionally muddled as it struggles to adjust to the whims of the performers and tastelessly illustrates farcical lyrics that were never intended to be taken literally.

Indeed, lyrical statements are frequently misinterpreted, undervalued, or blatantly disregarded, most glaringly during two of Eponine's songs. In "On My Own", she explicitly refers to "trees" and "the river," which are incongruously and conspicuously absent from her surroundings. "A Little Fall of Rain", a duet with her beloved Marius as she lays dying, is executed with such apathetic ignorance that no effort is made to enact the situation that catalyzes the song and provides its very title: the initial lyrics are "Don't you fret, monsieur Marius. I don't feel any pain. A little fall of rain can hardly hurt me now", and yet he is never shown attempting to shield her from it, robbing the song of its basic logic as well as the poignancy derived from the triviality of that concern in light of her fatal wounds. Clearly, *Les Misérables* epitomizes the hopeless clash of misguided ideals and misplaced priorities that, when combined

with direction that is not musically inclined, guarantee a noticeably graceless and underdeveloped Musical film.

In the end it is that enigmatic condition which, though difficult to discern outside of creative practice, acts as the secret ingredient that amalgamates the rules and methods needed to serve a particular musical story. After all, one may take advantage of Enclosure or design a useful song-montage by mimicking such technical forms. But without an appropriately attuned director, the results will be either endowed with an uncomfortable tension or restrained from realizing their transcendent potential. As a final illustration, consider the sequence conceived for the title number in the 2005 adaptation of *The Phantom of The Opera*. The duet between the Phantom and Christine is carried out as they travel from her dressing room to his impressive lair beneath the opera house, and thus a song-montage is all but prescribed for the film version. Joel Schumacher's direction throughout the film is less than inspired, but the song--adroitly arranged to begin when Christine consents to taking the Phantom's hand--is adequately adapted, shrewdly oscillating between diegetic singing and voice-over while inviting the viewer to experience the intrigue and wonderment of the descent. Yet the treatment of the final, iconic notes of the song is unforgivably remiss, illuminating the necessity of meticulous consideration for the meaning in music in order to decipher a rich visual representation.

Culturally, the concluding section of the song's profoundly demanding soprano part represents a kind of vocal challenge--a test of virtuosity, and indeed the narrative context of the relationship between the Phantom and Christine supplies the motivation for its climactic composition. As Christine's voice climbs higher and higher, the Phantom commandingly encourages her on, in accordance with their current dynamic of student and mysterious but trusted teacher. When that last, shattering note is reached, it constitutes a hugely significant

moment for the characters: uniquely able to bring out Christine's potential as a singer, the Phantom coaxes the impressive note out of her, and in addition to a perceived connection to her late father, the accomplishment further indebts her to him in a way that strengthens his sway over her. And yet while Schumacher worked closely with composer Andrew Lloyd Webber for several years, the *mise en scene* that accompanies this vocal exchange is almost totally devoted to the continued presentation of the fortress and virtually ignores Christine, who incongruously remains seated low in a gondola throughout the vocal trial. While I have earlier concluded that physiological realism should not overtake one's reception and understanding of musicality, the operatic context of the show constitutes a more literal intimation between singing athletically and expression through musicality. Even if one could separate that phase of the song from its narrative origin, the overt power of the music would still demand recognition and service, verifying the abject weakness of the scene's final shot (Image 53).

It is perhaps this last example that best denotes the motivation for this study, as it is my belief that such an issue--with its regard to visceral perception and the affirmation that music possesses a discoverable code that can be accordingly served through the unencumbered freedom of film--would be in some way discernible to all. Such a baseline capacity is possible because people share a level of musical attunement, and while individual endowment may determine the kind of engagement one may be prone to (be it composition, performance, or derivatives like dance), our connection to that domain is indiscriminately human. Thus this notion of communion with and through music is surely what makes the Musical film so especially appealing to so many, as the celebratory pleasure one experiences from a robust marriage of music and cinema may in truth issue from some spiritual acknowledgement that these arts have been granted their prerequisite union. The pursuit of such work surely consists of more than the

motivation to merely entertain, although there will likely always be a time and place for that breed of film. But while the form will doubtlessly evolve in accordance with another law of nature—unstoppable change--earnest Musical films have every opportunity to endure.

Appendix



Image 1

Dancer in the Dark, Lars Von Trier, 2000



Image 2



Image 3 *Anchors Aweigh*, George Sidney, 1945



Image 4 *An American in Paris*, Vincent Minnelli, 1951



Image 5 *Dancer in the Dark*, Lars Von Trier, 2000

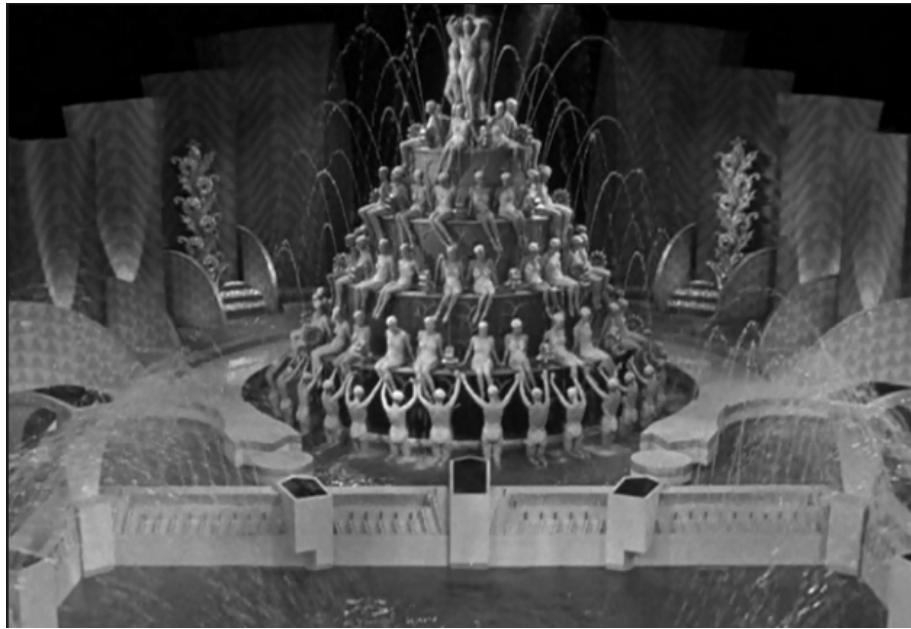


Image 6 Lloyd Bacon and Busby Berkeley, 1933



Image 7 *Brigadoon*, Vincent Minnelli, 1954



Image 8 *The Young Girls of Rochefort*, Jacques Demy, 1967



Images 9 - 13

The Sound of Music, Robert Wise, 1965



Images 14 – 17

The Sound of Music,
Robert Wise, 1965





Images 18, 19, 20

West Side Story, Robert Wise, 1961



Image 21 *West Side Story*, Robert Wise, 1961



Images 22 – 23





Image 24 *West Side Story*, Robert Wise, 1961



Image 25 *The Sound of Music*, Robert Wise, 1965



Images 26, 27, 28

The Hunchback of Notre Dame, Gary Trousdale & Kirk Wise, 1996



Images 29, 30 *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, Gary Trousdale & Kirk Wise, 1996



Image 31 *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, Gary Trousdale & Kirk Wise, 1996



Image 31 Strictly Ballroom, Baz Luhrmann, 1992



Image 32



Images 33, 34

Strictly Ballroom, Baz Luhrmann, 1992



Images 35, 36

Moulin Rouge!, Baz Luhrmann, 2001



Images 37, 38

Moulin Rouge!, Baz Luhrmann, 2001



Image 39 *Moulin Rouge!*, Baz Luhrmann, 2001



Image 40 *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, Howard Hawks, 1953



Images 41,
42, 43, 44,
Moulin Rouge!, Baz
Luhrmann, 2001





Images 45, 46, 47, 48

Chicago, Rob Marshall, 2002



Images 49, 50

Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street, Tim Burton, 2007



Image 51 *The Phantom of the Opera*, Joel Schumacher, 2005

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