

THE MUSICAL IS BACK

OLGA KWACZYŃSKA

THE MUSICAL IS BACK

**How Has the Genre Evolved and Where Is It Now?
Exceptional Movie Musicals of the 21st Century**



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*To Mom
and all of those alive
with the sound of music*

PREFACE

The musical is back, ladies and gentlemen! – those words of Hugh Jackman, the host of 81st Academy Awards as well as an acclaimed musical actor, declared and confirmed the recent revitalization of the movie musical genre in Hollywood and across the globe. The genre renaissance spearheaded by the hit movie musicals from the beginning of the 21st century, like *Moulin Rouge!* (2001) or *Chicago* (2002) was further consolidated by the global popularity of *High School Musical* (2006) and its sequels, the television series *Glee* (2009–2015), or the recent critical and financial success of *La La Land* (2016) or *Beauty and the Beast* (2017). Various reasons have been suggested for the popularization of the movie musical during certain periods of history in the U.S., with its success in the 1930s, indistinguishably connected to that decade's Great Depression or the eruption of musicals during the time of U.S. entering the II World War in order to boost morale. In similar manner, the recent revival of the genre and the return of Hollywood musical may be linked to socio-economic conditions, like the millennial financial crisis, the anxieties of the post 9/11 world or the latest Global Financial Crisis of 2008, consequences of which are felt to this day. Musicals' aim is to provide the kind of escapist balm required by contemporary society, which may be overwhelmed with the brutality of modern world. The idea of the musical as comforting and tonic, as a temporary escape, is a prosaic one, but it applies perfectly to the needs of present-day audiences.

However, the movie musical guided by the achievements of the stage musical and with the rise of the new millennium, started to

touch upon more up-to-date themes and address more controversial yet current social issues, that public and critics alike are interested in. Society is changing, so are their needs and thus movie musicals along with them. The film musical can be seen leading in a more real, more socially aware, and more musically current direction. Certainly, the musical is no longer an entertainment for entertainment's sake and it has proven that the genre can concentrate on more serious issues and appeal to the younger generations as well. Current successful movie musicals make use of technology to appeal to those younger audience (often called the music video generation) with the relatively fast paced editing and extreme close ups.

The purpose of this monograph is to explore how the genre have been developing, since the introduction of sound to the movies in 1927, to define the genre's specialness and to distinguish its current state through interpretation of six exceptional movie musical productions of the 21st century. Nonetheless, I would like to state at the outset that my desire to examine the genre is not motivated purely by sharp objective academic enquiry. The musicals that I have chosen to write about I have enjoyed, studied and anticipated.

Chapter 1

THE FILM MUSICAL

The film musical – a typically American invention and one of the most popular film genres not only in academia among the scholars, but among audiences as well – cannot be discussed without a reference to the original musical genre, the theatrical one. It is hard to speak about musical without its theatrical roots, especially when we take into consideration the fact that half out of ten musical movies that have won the Academy Award for Best Picture had their origins in theater (*West Side Story* from 1961, *My Fair Lady* from 1964, *The Sound of Music* from 1965, *Oliver!* from 1968 and *Chicago* from 2002).¹ Naturally, it is not a determinant of success, but I think it is safe to say that a great amount of, or even most of the admired film musicals had been adapted from the stage. Interestingly, the first historical film musical, or at the time, more of a so-called “talkie,”² which was *The Jazz Singer* from 1927, had its origins on a Broadway stage.³

¹ *The 10 Movie Musicals That Won a Best Picture Oscar*, <http://magazine.foxnews.com/celebrity/10-movie-musicals-won-best-picture-oscar> [accessed: 1.03.2017].

² Term *talkie* is a cinema film with speech and sound made during the period when most films were silent, see: “talkie”, *Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary & Thesaurus*, Cambridge University Press, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/talkie> [accessed: 1.03.2017].

³ A play *The Jazz Singer*, by Samson Raphaelson had debuted in New York in 1925, before being purchased by Warner Brothers, see: M.B. Druxman, *The Musical. From Broadway to Hollywood*, Thomas Yoseloff Ltd, London, 1980, p. 13.

1. DEFINITIONS

In terms of the definitions, the easiest one would be the one given from a common online dictionary:

*musical (noun): a film or theatrical production typically of a sentimental or humorous nature that consist of musical numbers and dialogue based on a unifying plot.*⁴

The term *musical* is often presented as an abridgment of *musical comedy* which highlights the fact that this type of genre is associated with such emotions as humor, pathos, love and anger (especially the first one). The story and the emotional content of the musical are communicated through the words, music, movement and technical aspects of the entertainment as an integrated whole. Although, the musical, in particular musical theater, can bend or overlap with other theatrical genres like opera, vaudeville or burlesque, it can be distinguished by the equal attention being paid to music as compared to other elements like dialogue or dance.

Specific works on film musical exclusively, and the body of literature about it, is grounded in genre studies. In particular works of Rick Altman contributed greatly to the general understanding of musical in film studies. Two of his volumes become the standard works on the genre – *The Film Musical* (1981) and the collection which he edited, *Genre: The Musical* (1987). Those publications and Altman's insights were by many critics called a landmark study and an important addition to film studies.⁵ In writing about musical Altman interweaved theory, history and criticism of the genre. According to him, musical genre is one of the most complicated and

⁴ *Musical*, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/musical> [accessed: 1.03.2017].

⁵ *The American Film Musical*, http://books.google.pl/books/about/The_American_Film_Musical.html?id=yXPN0ZkkJuUC&redir_esc=y [accessed: 1.03.2017].

structured film genres and “a fascinating multi-media celebration constituting the world’s most complex art form.”⁶ He states that American cinema shares a redemptive aura with the American way of life. American art, literature and music – in his view – are energized by the need for redemption, for recovery of lost values. This feeling is rooted in the American religiosity, Christianity and its notion of the Fall. He stresses a need in American society to emphasize the importance of individualism over the modern society. He notices a kind of nostalgic longing for the lost values, which the contemporary society has in fact endangered, but which could be restored by Hollywood genre films like musicals. He also states that each of the musical’s subgenres may have a redemptive function. He gives an example of folk musical’s function to generate a sense of community and access to a shared mythological past of American people.⁷ Altman also stresses the creative role of the individuals in a process of filmmaking and the huge impact the directors have on the style of their work’s final product. He recalls a figure of Vincente Minnelli and calls him an *auteur* to underline his specific manner and unique way of directing and perceptible character of movies made by him.⁸

The Altman’s work is worth mentioning and having a look at, because he is the first author who in detail examined the genre of film musical, showing not only its form and structure, but also its specific correlations and relationship to the American society and its way of living. Altman exposed musical’s recurrent structure and strategies that musical shares with numerous aspects of American life. He did all of this to end the pattern – repeated by reviewers and academic film historians – to call “everything that shows music on

⁶ R. Altman, *The American Film Musical*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1987, p. 2.

⁷ Ibidem, pp. 360–364.

⁸ Ibidem, p. 90.

film a musical."⁹ He acknowledges the musical as standard American genre and connects the deep and true understanding of it with the knowledge of the American culture in the first place. He says: "*to understand the musical is to understand the overall cultural system in which it develops and makes its meaning.*"¹⁰

Clearly, there was and still is some criticism of Altman's work, but it concerns mainly the topics which were not discussed in his publications. Scholars Bill Marshall and Robynn Stilwell edited a book on film musical, in which they suggest that Altman's work (as genre studies) focus primarily on the general and the narrative. In view of the mentioned fact, his insights give only a good understanding of the large-scale workings of the genre, but are lacking important specificities that constitute film musical. According to these scholars, when discussing the film musical it is worth to expand the topic with such threads as the importance of the stars, whose performance in musicals can be more similar from film to film than in other genres. Attention should be also paid to the distinctive stamps, which composers, lyricists, musical arrangers and choreographers leave on film musicals. The creation of the stars need to be articulated as well as the reception of the audience, however due to the collaborative character of filmmaking one should not forget about contribution made by writers, directors, designers, publicity and even make-up artists and hair-stylists. It would seem obvious that music is the most important aspect of a film musical, but still the close studies on this issue are quite rare. In *Musicals. Hollywood and Beyond*. Marshall and Stilwell talk about gaps, both in Film Studies and in Music caused by the simple fact that our hearing sense is far inferior to vision in cultural expression. To fill in those gaps it is necessary to open up to the discussion about popular music and

⁹ Ibidem, p. 13.

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 1.

what is seen as opposite to “absolute,” instrumental music. Additionally, this discussion should be carried on among only those with musical training.¹¹

One of the recent publications on film musical also traces typical aspects that constitute a genre of film musical and underlines the difference between a *musical film* and *the film musical*. Barry Keith Grant in *The Hollywood Musical* (2012) mentions a few characteristics that are essential to a film musical. Firstly, the action of the film, song and dance performances in this genre are presented in an *imaginary space*. Even if this space is a real location on the surface, it is a kind of utopia, a *no-place* with even possible *no-time*, in which occurrences from real life are pushed away in favor of *fantasy*. The relationship between the musical and social location of space and time does not equal authenticity of the real world. The element of magic and fantasy is obtained by sudden expression of one’s emotions, as Grant states: “*the musical depicts its space as charmed by the magic of performance, where anyone and everyone may burst into magnificent, breathtaking song and dance in order to give unhindered expression to their emotions.*”¹² Examples of those *charmed spaces* are visible from the early years of film musicals (enchanted land inhabited by different creatures somewhere over the rainbow in *The Wizard of Oz* from 1939) to the most recent ones (magical forest, into which people go to make their wishes come true, in *Into the Woods* from 2014).

Mentioned above, Rick Altman wrote about the musical’s space as “*a ‘place’ of transcendence where time stand still, where contingent concerns are stripped away to reveal the essence of things.*”¹³

¹¹ B. Marshall, R. Stilwell, *Musicals. Hollywood and Beyond*, Intellect Books, Portland, Oregon, 2000.

¹² B.K. Grant, *The Hollywood Musical*, Wiley-Blackwell, West Sussex, UK, 2012, pp. 1–2.

¹³ R. Altman, op. cit., pp. 66–67.

The characters of the musical enter the charmed space in which they can get in touch with and finally let go of their true feelings. Those are manifestations of the musical's transcendent visions; characters transcend their own physical limitations and fears through music and performance. In musicals characters do not simply talk about their emotions (which might be considered to be boring), emotions are articulated as voice and motion, song and dance. Gestures and motion with connection to voice are mirroring their true emotions. Two basic elements of the film medium – movement and sound – are given the priority in musicals, which is why Jean-Luc Godard calls musical “*the idealization of cinema*.”¹⁴

Grant also states that an unusual feature for film musical is actors' performance for the audience outside of the movie, beyond the narrative. This is a result from the emotional saturation of that genre, the only one in which emotions outbalance rigid logic of classical narrative cinema. This behavior can be noticed when characters sing and dance to and for the camera, as if they were aware that they are starring in a movie. This procedure is used solely to please the viewers of the film. Another aspect that contradicts the rules of realism, which prevail in most other genres, is the music that comes out of nowhere. In most of the cases there is no visible source of music, it appears as spontaneously as the characters begin to sing. Those features underline the conventions artificiality that characterizes musical's performance. In sum, film musical is a generic construct, which demands from its viewers a suspension of disbelief. Sudden outbursts into singing or dancing (or both) are most common convention of the genre and its specific contrivance.

Film musical was a fairly new form of film and it developed along with Hollywood itself. The phenomenon of American musical is incomparable to any other film-producing country of the western world.

¹⁴ Quoted in: B.K. Grant, op. cit., p. 2.

Jerry Herman, the composer of the music and lyrics to the hit Broadway musicals, like *Hello Dolly!* once said about the American Musical: “*this is America’s own art form, this is not what we have copied from anybody else, this is ours.*”¹⁵ The only country, which can be juxtaposed with the United States, in terms of musical tradition, is India. In the so-called Bollywood the idea of film musical is rather different than in Hollywood, but the genre’s cultural impact on the society has been even greater.

The development and popularity of American film musical is often associated with the ideological function. The musical’s optimistic message and attitude full of hope for the future is similar to the notion of the American Dream and the conviction that if you really want to do something or become someone, with a lot of work and willingness – dreams do come true. The importance of the film musical in the American society becomes visible also when we take into consideration how many stars were born and discovered after starring in a film musical. There is a great deal of examples, from actors like Judy Garland, Shirley Temple, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers to many singers who crossed over from music stages to movies, like Frank Sinatra, Elvis, to Madonna and David Bowie.

All of the abovementioned components that constitute the film musical may seem hard to get in a single film piece. From a perspective of an ideal musical, encompassing all of these features, this organizational complexity and the amount of the professionals who create it, hardly makes things easier. As John Russell Taylor and Arthur Jackson wrote – the ideal musical may not exist and we may never discover a true formula for it. Like the Philosopher’s Stone, a perfect musical

¹⁵ Quoted in: M. Bauch, *The American Musical. A Literary Study within a Context of American Drama and American Theater with References to Selected American Musicals* by Richard Rogers, Oscar Hammerstein II, Arthur Laurents, Leonard Bernstein, Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine, Tectum Verlag, Marburg, 2003.

will hopefully be looked for and never found. The authors claim that this complexity of film musical makes the viewer find a whole new range of unexpected enjoyable features, diverse in distinct productions. For me, as a musical enthusiast, I find this argument very convincing – that this variety and multiplicity of elements in film musical makes it “*the most continually satisfying of all film genres*.”¹⁶ Along with those scholars I think that no other film genre than musical can be seen and re-seen more frequently without having enough of it. I simply think that it is impossible to catch all of the nuances of songs, lyrics, choreography, scenography and costumes while watching the movie for the first or second time. Musicals’ unpredictability and often indefinable effect obtained by the mixture of so many techniques is its greatest beauty.

2. HISTORY AND ORIGINS

The history of American film musicals is closely related to the history of music. From the beginning those two extremely important mass media of American culture owe their developments to one another. When the movie musicals were born in the late 1920s, it was one of the most chaotic eras in the history of American entertainment and maybe even in some ways the least understood. The film industry was changing and along with it the whole idea of spectacle and performance, as one of the scholars dealing with film musical wrote: “*the film industry [...] was irretrievably altered, turned completely around in reaction to one word: Sound*.”¹⁷ On the other hand, other scholars of this genre claim that the history of cinema coincides with

¹⁶ J.R. Taylor, A. Jackson, *The Hollywood Musical*, McGraw-Hill Book, Great Britain, 1971.

¹⁷ R. Barrios, *The Birth of the Film Musical*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1995, p. 4.

the development of the twentieth-century dance. Peter Wollen in his monograph of *Singin' in the Rain* begins with a quote: "*As film itself developed as an art form, it intersected with dance to create a new phenomenon – film dance, dance created expressly for film, with camera, framing and editing in mind.*"¹⁸ In my view the American film musical was born in an accumulation of some many important aspects constituting it, like film dance and sound in movies. Therefore an equal weight should be attached to all of these cases as well as to the earlier diverse cultural forms, which influenced the genre (as minstrelsy, vaudeville or Tin Pan Alley).

Minstrel shows were the most popular form of musical and comedy entertainment in the nineteenth century, featuring white performers in blackface (also Black people in blackface, especially after the U.S. Civil War) doing comic skits, variety acts, dancing and music performances. The influence of minstrelsy on popular music was enormous: many blues singers began their careers in blackface, like Bessie Smith or Gertrude "Ma" Rainey. Some important songwriters, like Dan Emmett and Stephen Foster, also emerged from that tradition. This first and purely American form of entertainment became the influence and origin of all subsequent stage entertainment, like revue, vaudeville, burlesque and musical comedy.¹⁹ Tin Pan Alley was a phrase describing a place in Manhattan, where all of the composers and music publishers created their music, but later that phrase became a synonym for the institution of popular music itself. Leading Tin Pan Alley composers included Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern and George Gershwin, whose music later dominated the musical world. Another cultural form before the birth of a film musical which influenced it greatly was vaudeville. Its popularity reaches back to the 1870s when it became the most popular as a leisure activity

¹⁸ P. Wollen 1992, quoted in: B.K. Grant, op. cit., p. 7.

¹⁹ D. Parkinson, *The Rough Guide to Film Musicals*, Rough Guides Ltd. William S. Pechter, London and New York, 1982, p. 4.

especially among working-class and immigrant audiences. American composers, such as George M. Cohan began to bond musical number to its narrative, thus making a foundation for film musicals. Broadway impresario, Florenz Ziegfeld, created a revue *Ziegfeld Follies*, which was a hit from the late 1900s to late 1920s. With the arrival of sound in 1927 many of his productions were adapted for the big screen, and some of his *Ziegfeld Girls* retrained for the film industry. Actually, many film musicals were adaptations of the theatrical plays or many of them used the songs originally made for theater. In that order of things, not only *Ziegfeld Girls*, but also many performers, choreographers, lyricists, composers and directors moved from Broadway to Hollywood after the arrival of sound.

Everything changed when in 1926, Warner Brothers Studio, then a mediocre studio, struggling with financial problems, introduced Vitaphone – a sound film system which coordinated filmed images with sound recorded on large phonograph disks, used for feature films.²⁰ From the beginning the executives were more interested in recording the music than the dialogues. For them, at that time when silent films were in the spotlight nearly as long as the film itself, it was incomprehensible that someone would be interested in hearing the actors' dialogues. That is why the rest of the studios in Hollywood decided not to incorporate sound into their movies, thinking it is only a temporary fad. All of the industry's objections and criticism was sharply cut off by audience's enthusiastic reaction to a singing Broadway legend in blackface, seen on screen. In October 1927, Warner's *The Jazz Singer* had its premiere. It is cited as the first feature-length sound film and the first film musical.²¹ That is why viewers today are often surprised to find this milestone movie mostly a silent one, with intertitles, but with seven musical

²⁰ J. Kenrick, *History of Musical Film, 1927–30: Hollywood Learns To Sing*, <http://www.musicals101.com/1927-30film.htm> [accessed: 10.03.2017].

²¹ B.K. Grant, op. cit., p. 11.

sequences added. Warner Brothers decided to cast – as the main character – an already noted singer and actor, Al Jolson. No dialogues had been planned in this production, until Jolson started to improvise some lines in his musical sequences. In one extra scene, in responding to the applauding audience, Jolson ad-libbed “*Wait a minute, you ain’t heard nothin’ yet,*” which became most famous sentence of the movie and a lot more... Jolson not only signaled the arrival of *The Jazz Singer* and the end of the silent film era, but also gave the audience a first taste of a new genre – a film musical, possible only through this new, revolutionary technological process. *The Jazz Singer* was played to packed houses in a city after city and was a huge box office success, followed by another Warner Brothers’ movie released in 1928, *The Lights of New York*, which became the first all-talking full length feature film and helped to finally establish Warner Brothers Studio as a major player.

The year of 1928 was a chaotic one in Hollywood. None of the major studios, besides Warner Brothers, were prepared for such a great amount of demands for talking pictures. The audience fell in love at a first sight (or more *at first sound*) with the talking pictures and “*in a stunningly brief period of time, the established art of silent film become extinct, thrown over in favor of the virtually untested medium of talking pictures.*”²² This novelty caused a chain reaction in all aspects of the entertainment business. Timing, exposition, styles of acting and directing – all of them had to be transformed to favor this new, particular medium. The plot of 1952 musical *Singin’ in The Rain*, (dubbed as the greatest movie musical of all time²³) humorously depicts the struggles of the whole film crew to convert to sound film and to create a musical with the silent film star Lina Lamont (Jean Hagan), whose heavy Brooklyn accent makes it

²² R. Barrios, op. cit., p. 4.

²³ *AFI’s 25 Greatest Movie Musicals of All Time*, <http://www.afi.com/100years/musicals.aspx> [accessed: 10.03.2017].

dangerously prone to becoming a spectacular failure. With all of this changes, there was only one new type of film, not possible with earlier developments – the film musical. Its development and popularity could be seen from the day one and for nearly three years, by the end of the decade, its reputation exploded and musicals became Hollywood's hallmark. By the middle of 1929, 25 percent of movies in production were musicals.²⁴ Anticipating the musical potential, the studios moved their shares also to the medium of radio, Warner Brothers for example established radio stations across the country and Paramount bought 50 percent of the stock of the new to the market Columbia Broadcasting System.²⁵

Despite the fact that Metro Goldwyn Mayer was the last major studio to switch to sound production, it did not stop it from producing (in only 28 days) the first sound film to win the Academy Award for Best Picture. *The Broadway Melody* of the year 1929, advertised as the first *All-Talking, All-Singing, All Dancing* feature produced a clear profit of more than \$ 1.6 million²⁶ with the score by Nacio Herb Brown and Arthur Freed.

Even with MGM's success of *The Broadway Melody*, it was a Paramount director who as the first one distinguished himself in the genre of the film musical. Most early sound films were melodramas, with the emphasis mainly on the fact that the audience could actually hear the dialogues and songs, but Ernst Lubitsch created a new form of specifically screen musical. His musicals combined sophistication and sex. His style was light and fast, using to the fullest the cinema ability to focus on and reduce everything to the essentials. Lubitsch was a Jewish-German director, who came to Hollywood in 1923, and his films were seen as representing a continental "touch" and also

²⁴ J. Hoberman, quoted in: B.K. Grant, op. cit., p. 12.

²⁵ S. Hall and S. Neale, quoted in: B.K. Grant, op. cit., p. 13.

²⁶ J. Kenrick, *History of Musical Film, 1927–30: Part II*, <http://www.musicals-101.com/1927-30film2.htm> [accessed: 10.03.2017].

as in some measure standing in opposition to the American direct cheerfulness of romantic comedies and musicals. As the result the famous *Lubitsch Touch* is evident in his first musical *The Love Parade* (1929) which takes place in some European kingdom. Lubitsch was appointed the Paramount production manager, but created musical hits also for other studios like MGM (*The Merry Widow* from 1934 or *Ninotchka* with Greta Garbo from 1939).

Finally, animated cartoons also took the advantage of the arrival of sound. During the so-called studio era, movie theaters depended massively on popular music. The musical scores of cartoons like Disney's *Silly Symphonies* or Warner Bros' *Looney Tunes* and *Merrie Melodies* were often pastiches of popular and folk music. Their function was mainly to evoke the atmosphere of the animated action and create the sound effects. As Broadway was far in decline in 1930s, a lot of Broadway composers, including Irving Berlin, Cole Porter, George and Ira Gershwin came to work in Hollywood.²⁷

During the Depression-Era a few new subgenres of musicals have developed. Revue musicals, popular at the time, did not present a specific tendency in filming or expanded plot, but rather concentrated on dances, songs and comedy sketches themselves. The performances creating the show had no relation to one another; instead the stress was on the famed lineup of the shows, like in MGM's *The Hollywood Revue of 1929*, in which actors like Joan Crawford or Buster Keaton starred. Operettas were also quite favored at the time: the most popular ones were the series of eight films starring the duo Nelson Eddy and Janette MacDonald. However already in the middle of the 1930s operetta become a target of parody, there was an assumption that this genre is outdated and old-fashioned.²⁸

²⁷ J. Hoberman, quoted in: B.K. Grant, op. cit., p. 13.

²⁸ B.K. Grant, op. cit., p. 14.

However, the most important and significant for later advancement of film musical genre was the so-called *backstage musical*. Also called show-within-a-film formula, it dealt with the life of people creating theatrical musicals or those designed for the big screen. That kind of show provided the longest lasting narrative framework, because of the possibility and the evidence of presence of musical numbers. The already mentioned MGM's first musical winner of the Academy Award for Best Picture *Broadway Melody* was also a backstage musical about two sisters wanting to shine on the theater stage. This subgenre remained a leading one in the subsequent years and through the war years, but later slowly started to give in to *integrated musical*, in which musical numbers were a logical and natural consequence of the plot.

The most recognized director and choreographer of backstage musicals, who created his own, unique style of filming, was Busby Berkeley. He was the first director who understood and took into account the movement of the camera while shooting. In contrast to previous directors he did not shoot from one viewpoint, but moved the camera along with the dancers. Despite his lack of knowledge and education about the medium of cinema, his 1930s screen musicals remained cultural landmarks.²⁹ He is known for his typical bird's-eye-view shots of the dancers creating geometrical patterns that reshaped smoothly. Berkeley was also the first to use close-ups of an individual dancers and a precursor of a frequent change of a spectator's viewpoint – as an opposition to the theatrical spectator. He was producing an outstanding cycle of backstage musicals for Warner Brothers, along with the music written by Al Dubin and Harry Warren, who used to work in Tin Pan Alley. Together they created an optimistic atmosphere with promising messages of group effort and success.

²⁹ J. Kenrick, *History of Musical Film, 1930s Part II: Warner Brothers & Berkeley*, <http://www.musicals101.com/1930film2.htm> [accessed: 12.03.2017].

In combination with the visual extravagance, sometimes vulgar or erotic images, Berkeley's musicals served as a cinematic distraction from the realities of economic hardships of Great Depression. Most popular titles for Warner Brothers' include *42nd Street* (1933), *Gold Diggers of 1933* (1933) or *Footlight Parade* (1933). In 1933 Busby Berkeley moved to MGM, where he choreographed or directed next nineteen musicals, some of them among the most popular of the decade, but he was short of the creative independence, like the one provided by the Warner Brothers.

Another film musical subgenre and the only one which could compete with Berkeley's backstage musicals in 1930s were *The Astaire-Rogers* musicals. Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers were coupled by RKO Pictures first in *Flying Down to Rio* (1933), where they made occasional appearances, but the duo's chemistry and charm resulted in the legendary collaboration. They made another eight movies for the studio, including such hits as *Top Hat* (1935). Most of these nine pictures were directed by Mark Sandrich and every one of them included a song that became a standard, mainly because of the noted composers like Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern or Ira and George Gershwin. The most acclaimed and well-known songs from Astaire-Rogers musicals were *Cheek to Cheek* by Irving Berlin for *Top Hat* (1935), *Let's Call The Whole Thing Off* by Ira and George Gershwin from *Shall We Dance* (1937) or Jerome Kern's *The Way You Look Tonight* composed for *Swing Time* (1936). Astaire himself choreographed (often with the help of Hermes Pan) the numbers and preferred to shoot them and show them on screen in one long take, with as little editing as possible, unlike Berkeley's musical numbers which were built on editing. The plot of these musicals were constantly duplicated – with two characters from different environments, attracted to each other in a kind of love-hate relationship, who by dancing together resolve their misunderstandings and live happily ever after. Astaire-Rogers musicals also offered a fantastic escape for the Depression-era audiences, because

of the unrivaled songs, shimmering environment and magic and electricity between the dancing duo.³⁰

On one hand, the 1930s was the decade of fast-growing popularity of film musicals, but also of increasing knowledge and the emerging system of how to produce and create them. On the other hand, producers had to face some restrictions imposed by Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA), a trade organization created by Republican politician Will Hays to “*restore the industry’s reputation by censoring film content.*”³¹ Hays established the *Production Code* in 1930, which among other things forbade on-screen nudity and profanity, but also such engagements as open-mouth kisses or kisses (closed-mouth) that lasted more than six seconds. Until 1934 most of the filmmakers turned down the code, but later everyone was made to adapt to it. In result the American film industry was sexually neutralized and the naughty “Lubitsch touch” was replaced by dancing *cheek to cheek*.

By the end of the decade, film musicals were in a state of stagnation, but everything changed with the United States entering the World War II in 1941. During the war time, film musicals became again a number one genre, in 1943, 40 percent of the films produced in Hollywood were musicals.³² In terms of what was perceptible, like scenography or costumes they were more imperfect, because of the need to cut material expenditure as a part of the war effort. Nevertheless, on the level of embodying ideas and conceptions, film musicals of the war period had a crucial function to boost morale before, during, and after the war. Warner Brothers’ *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (1942) about composer

³⁰ “*There was a certain magic between Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers... there’s never been the same electricity that has happened as when Fred and Ginger danced together.*” – Choreographer H. Pan, quoted in: G. Ihnat, *Elegance Meets Feistiness in the Astaire-Rogers Musicals*, <http://www.avclub.com/article/elegance-meets-feistiness-astaire-rogers-musicals-202382> [accessed: 12.03.2017].

³¹ J. Kenrick, *History of Musical Film, 1930s Part II...*, op. cit.

³² B.K. Grant, op. cit., p. 18.

George M. Cohan was one of the most propagandistic during this period, presenting long-lasting patriotic songs like *You're a Grand Old Flag*. Some of the musical composers converted and became patriotic songwriters, like great Irving Berlin, who wrote *Oh, How I Hate To Get Up In The Morning*, *How About a Cheer For The Navy* and *God Bless America* for a musical *This Is The Army* (1943), whose cast constituted mostly of U.S. Army soldiers.

The next period in American history of film musical is called *The Golden Age* and it encompasses the period from the end of the World War II to the late 1950s and is closely related to the figure of Arthur Freed. His main contribution to the film industry was the big-budget integrated musicals. Freed's integrated musicals, unlike earlier backstage musicals, incorporated songs and musical numbers into the narrative. This type of performance differed a lot from previous type of shows and brought something entirely new and sophisticated to the genre. In contrast to backstage musicals, where musical numbers were performed on the stage, here characters could burst into singing or dancing at any time, because it was a consequence of a storyline. The act of performing, or singing, dancing, or both was now an integrated part of the plot and could serve as embodiment of feelings or narrating an event. The potential of musical number could now be found in any type of situation, like in *Singin' In The Rain*, two of the main male characters find rhythm in a tongue twister read to them by a colleague and turn the scene into a musical number based on the words of the tongue twister. Producer Arthur Freed was said to be lacking of talents like singing, dancing, acting, directing or composing, but his greatest skill was the keen awareness of talent.³³ While working for MGM, he formed the legendary "Freed Unit" – a production unit

³³ *Arthur Freed*, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/707676/Arthur-Freed> [accessed: 3.03.2017].

of trusted and talented cast and crew members, who all together were responsible for creating the longest string of movie musical blockbusters in history.³⁴ *Freed Unit* consisted of 20th century most notable creative talents in film industry, like Vincente Minnelli, Stanley Donen, Gene Kelly, Fred Astaire and Judy Garland among others. According to many scholars, Freed's work represented the height of the genre's Golden Age. Over the twenty years of his work he supervised around forty musicals, starting with his first *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), *Cabin in The Sky* (1943), *Meet Me in St Louis* (1944), *On the Town* (1949), *An American in Paris* (1951), *Singin' In The Rain*, *The Band Wagon* (both 1953) and *Gigi* (1958), among others.³⁵

From the *Freed Unit*, one person especially deserves extra attention – dancer, actor, singer, film producer, director, and choreographer – Gene Kelly. He emerged as MGM's leading star of musicals and the genre's dominant force, until they fell out of fashion in the late 1950s. He is best known for his performances in *Anchors Aweigh* (1945), where he himself choreographed the famous dancing routines with animated mouse character – Jerry; *Singin' In The Rain* (1954), voted single most popular movie musical of all time, where he was a co-director, lead actor and choreographer; finally *American in Paris* (1951), for which The Academy awarded him a special Oscar for “his extreme versatility as an actor, singer, director and dancer, but specifically for his brilliant achievement in the art of choreography.”³⁶ Indeed, his greatest talent was dancing and he brought some change to it. Compared to Fred Astaire's style of dancing, Kelly's was more masculine and informal. Due to his background in athletics, he incorporated a more muscular type

³⁴ *The Arthur Freed Unit. The Freed Unit and The Golden Age of The MGM Musical*, <http://www.tcm.com/this-month/movie-news.html?id=31641> [accessed: 13.03.2017].

³⁵ *Arthur Freed's Filmography (as Producer)*, http://www.hollywoodsgoldenage.com/moguls/arthur_freed.html [accessed: 13.03.2017].

³⁶ *Gene Kelly (1912–1996)*, <http://www.hollywoodsgoldenage.com/actors/gene.html> [accessed: 13.03.2017].

of dancing, popularizing such styles as ballet or modern dance. Kelly also brought change to shooting techniques. Unlike Astaire or Berkeley, in shooting he focused on the bodies of the individual performers, rather than on the entire ensemble.³⁷

Towards the end of the 1950s decade and the beginning of the 1960s, film musical was in unpredictable decline. In comparison to sixty-five musicals produced in 1943, only four were made in 1963.³⁸ Hollywood did not produce many shining stars and talents like decades before, but they had one particular gift – Julie Andrews. She was the musical star of the 1960s. Her first role in a film musical *Mary Poppins* (1964), produced by Walt Disney Company, brought her excellent reviews and The Academy Award for Best Actress. Another year and another musical hit – *The Sound Of Music*, produced by 20th Century Fox, turned out to be one of the most popular films of all time, and one of the highest grossing of all time,³⁹ winning The Academy Award for Best Picture and Best Director in 1965. What singled out Julie Andrews from other performers, besides her genuine screen presence, was her exquisite vocal technique, her extensive vocal range that spanned four octaves, and her lyrics interpretations.

One of the causes of the decline in popularity of film musicals was television. Introduced in 1947, TV became a serious competition for Hollywood and a medium which pulled away audiences from the big screen at the turn of 1950s and 60s. That was the reason why many musical performers changed their environments to popular variety shows. Additional cause was the reaction to the tensions of the Cold War, which did not stimulate to *sing in the rain* or *dance cheek to cheek*. The shift in popular music was also the case. The music that people, especially teenagers, were listening to in the 1950s and 60s,

³⁷ B.K. Grant, op. cit., p. 24.

³⁸ A. Dowdy, quoted in: B.K. Grant, op. cit., p. 24.

³⁹ *Domestic Grosses Adjusted for Ticket Price Inflation*, <http://www.boxoffice-mojo.com/alltime/adjusted.htm> [accessed: 13.03.2017].

was a new phenomenon – rock’n’roll, which had little in common with music used for musical numbers. First big-budget musical with rock’n’roll music was *The Girl Can’t Help It* (1956), which displayed a couple of great rock performances by Little Richard, Gene Vincent, Eddie Cochran, and Fats Domino.⁴⁰ Subsequent film musicals with rock’n’roll tunes functioned as a transition and connection of the old music with the new one.

One of the exceptions, when musicals were fading from the screen, was the popularity of movies with Elvis Presley. Between 1956 and 1970 he starred in almost thirty musical movies, *Jailhouse Rock* (1956) and *Viva Las Vegas* (1964) being the most famous ones. Despite the fact that there was no integration of the story and the songs that appeared in those movies, Presley films attracted many viewers and popularized songs like *Love Me Tender* or *Can’t Help Falling In Love*. With the developments of new techniques and equipment, like portable cameras, a new type of musical movies could be made, namely the *rockumentary*. Their plot centered on one musician, a band or several music groups shoot on location during concerts and performances. Directors’ aim was to show the backstage life of celebrated musicians and discover the real person, often hidden behind the stage persona.

Hollywood during the 1960s was missing the visionary production teams that came up with whole new plots for film musicals, which is why movie producers turned to Broadway for musical projects to adapt. Some of those adaptations – though sometimes costing a fortune to acquire the rights – hit the jackpot. Four of the Broadway musical adaptations in the 1960s won Academy Awards for Best Picture. United Artist-produced *West Side Story* (1961), which allowed Jerome Robbins to adapt his unforgettable stage choreography for the screen. Rita Moreno received the Oscar for Best Supporting Actress and the movie turned out to be a triumph during

⁴⁰ B.K. Grant, op. cit., p. 25.

the 34th Academy Awards. Warner Brothers' 1964 adaptation of *My Fair Lady* with the delightful Audrey Hepburn won eight Academy Awards, including Best Picture. Recipient of the Academy Award for Best Picture in 1965 was the already mentioned *The Sound of Music*. Finally, the fourth Oscar for Best Picture for a musical in the single decade went to the British retelling of Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, enthusiastically titled *Oliver!*⁴¹ Another film adaptation of Broadway musical that did not win an Oscar for Best Picture but is worth mentioning is Columbia's *Funny Girl* (1968) with Barbra Streisand's screen debut as Fanny Brice, which won her the statuette for Best Actress.

The next decade brought sizable changes to the industry. The studio system⁴² collapsed and the *Production Code* ceased to influence films, and gave way to the ratings system. Adaptations of Broadway hits continued to be a big part of the musical film industry, but only two of them became screen classics. *Fiddler on the Roof* (1971) won three Academy Awards in 1972, including one for unforgettable music arranged by John Williams and two Golden Globes in previous year, including the award for Best Motion Picture – Musical or Comedy. Second musical of the 1970s which earned a great deal of popularity and become a standard, is one of the most known and popular movie musicals of all time – *Cabaret* (1972) directed by Bob Fosse. Awarded eight Oscars, including Best Actress for Liza Minnelli and Best Supporting Actor for Joel Grey, the movie's adoration was created by the memorable performances from the two of them.

⁴¹ *The 10 Movie Musicals That Won a Best Picture Oscar*, op. cit.

⁴² The studio system was a big part of the success of Classic Hollywood. It was a system that made sure that the biggest studios in Hollywood were in total control of the movies they made and that the movies would be distributed. The biggest studios at that time were divided in two groups. 'The Big Five': MGM, Paramount, Warner Bros., RKO and Fox and 'The Little Three': Universal, Columbia and United Artists: Classic Hollywood Central, *The Studio System*, <http://classichollywoodcentral.com/?p=48> [accessed: 13.03.2017].

Bob Fosse was the director of another important musical of 1970s, *All That Jazz* (1979), which was a representative of a new postmodern musical. It is filled with pastiches of pop music and uses earlier musical numbers and modifies them in a darker, postmodern way. Inspired by a biopic about the creator of famous 1975 Broadway musical *Chicago*, it stands in contrast to a traditional notion of a musical. Its characters are gloomy and miserable. *All That Jazz* symbolizes impermanence and morality and is far from the concept of a happy ending like in earlier forms of film musical. Although *All That Jazz* have not been the one musical to take the darker turn, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975) developed a unique cult following and became a camp classic. Other film musicals like *Saturday Night Fever* or *Hair* (both from 1979) undermined the genre's stylistic conventions in a lot of distinct ways. When by the end of the decade a tradition film musical seemed to be out-of-date, *Grease* (1978), with John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John, turned out to be a huge hit worldwide, becoming the highest grossing musical movie up to 2017, when it got surpassed by *Beauty and the Beast*.⁴³

By the end of the 1970s decade, there was a general agreement that musical was a thing of the past. This time it was the singing Muppets who came to the rescue of the film musical genre. *The Muppets* had been entertaining American audience since 1950s on TV, and by 1980s they were a huge hit worldwide. That is the reason why the director Jim Henson, decided to take this phenomenon to the big screen, beginning in 1979 with *The Muppet Movie*. New musical screen couple – Kermit the frog and Miss Piggy were entertaining the audiences during the 1980s also in next movies *The Great Muppet Caper* (1981) and *The Muppets Take Manhattan* (1984).

One of the highlights in history of film musical of 1980s was *Victor/Victoria* (1982), both title roles played by the great Julie Andrews.

⁴³ *Musical 1974-Present*, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/genres/chart/?id=musical.htm> [accessed: 15.03.2017].

The movie is said to be the best original screen musical since *Gigi* (1958),⁴⁴ distributed by the former home of film musicals – MGM. Directed by Blake Edwards it tells a story of “*a woman pretending to be a man pretending to be a woman*.”⁴⁵ Besides the great performances by Andrews and the Oscar-winning music score by Henry Mancini, the movie’s value is also in the display of issues of sexual identity and tolerance. However it was not a typical integrated musical. The musical numbers were performed as a part of stage performances and stylistically the movie referred more to the backstage musical. *Victor/Victoria* was the last film musical which starred Julie Andrews and also the last great live-action musical film of the 20th century.⁴⁶

The period of the 1980s marks also the beginning of infantilization and juvenilizing of the genre. Since *The Little Mermaid* (1989), The Walt Disney Company has dominated the field of animated musicals for children. This animated musical was an adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale about a courageous mermaid Ariel, featuring a lush Tin Pan Alley score by Howard Ashman and Alan Menken, which grossed over 100 million dollars and a few more in the subsequent home video release. The movie won an Oscar for Best Song (*Under The Sea*) and Best Original Score, was awarded a Grammy for best soundtrack and influenced a hit TV animation. This effort inaugurated Disney’s New Golden Age, making animated musicals one of the most profitable genres in the decade ahead.

Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) was one of the greatest animated film musicals ever made. The story of a prince who is magically transformed into a monster as a punishment for his arrogance,

⁴⁴ J. Kenrick, *History of Musical Film, The 1980s*, <http://www.musicals101.com/1980film.htm> [accessed: 16.03.2017].

⁴⁵ *Victor/Victoria Script – Dialogue Transcript*, http://www.script-o-rama.com/movie_scripts/v/victor-victoria-script-transcript-edwards.html [accessed: 17.03.2017].

⁴⁶ J. Kenrick, *History of Musical Film, The 1980s*, op. cit.

and Belle, a young woman who he imprisons in his castle, became the first animated movie to ever be nominated for Best Picture at the Academy Awards (and with only other four nominees, not like today where there are up to ten nominees). It was also the first case where in the Best Song category three out of five songs nominated came from one movie. The Oscar for Best Song and for Best Music, Original Score went to Alan Menken and Howard Ashman. Unfortunately it also marked a sad note for the studio – Howard Ashman, responsible for the great Disney's lyrics, died of AIDS before the movie's release and was awarded the Oscar posthumously. Some say that he could have been the only one to guarantee that the movie musicals would thrive in the 21st century.⁴⁷

Disney's series of successes is also called *The Disney Renaissance*,⁴⁸ and it encompasses the years from 1989 to 1999, with ten memorable animated films, like *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Aladdin* (1992), *The Lion King* (1994), *Pocahontas* (1995), *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996), *Hercules* (1997), *Mulan* (1998) and *Tarzan* (1999). However, the later productions referenced the traditional Broadway musical to much lesser degree in animations and resulted in minor successes. In 1993 The Academy decided to award *Aladdin's A Whole New World* with the Oscar for the Best Song, created by Menken with the help of Tim Rice. *The Lion King* won the next two Oscars for Disney – for Best Song *Can You Feel The Love Tonight*, with lyrics by Tim Rice and music by Elton John and for the Best Original Score awarded to Hans Zimmer. This animated movie turned out to be the highest grossing animation of the 20th century⁴⁹ and inspired the 1997 Broadway

⁴⁷ Idem, *History of Musical Film, The 1990s*, <http://www.musicals101.com/1990film.htm> [accessed: 17.03.2017].

⁴⁸ D. Crow, *The Little Mermaid and The Disney Renaissance: 25 Years Later*, <http://www.denofgeek.us/movies/disney/51171/the-little-mermaid-and-the-disney-renaissance-25-years-later> [accessed: 17.03.2017].

⁴⁹ *Animation*, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/genres/chart/?id=animation>.htm [accessed: 17.03.2017].

adaptation, which become one of the biggest stage hits of all time. *Pocahontas* also won two Oscars, for the Best Score and the Best Song, but it did not repeat the success of *The Lion King*. *Hunchback of Notre Dame* was more appreciated in Europe than in United States, proving that America is not always the most perceptive audience for animated musicals. Subsequent animated musicals produced by Disney accented action and animation rather than music, in such a way ending the Disney Renaissance era in the late 1990s.

Chapter 2

FILM MUSICAL'S SECOND CENTURY

While the Broadway musical comedy in the beginning of the 21st century was experiencing its revival, the film musical was in the state of deep eradication. The boom of the animated musicals of the previous decade came to an end and musical movies were quite rare. Those movies that went into production were rather distinct from those that came before.

1. FIRST DECADE OF 21ST CENTURY

One of the first movie musicals to hit the silver screen was a box-office and critical disappointment. The 2000 adaptation of the comic play by William Shakespeare *Love's Labour's Lost*, directed by Kenneth Branagh mingled Shakespearian dialogues with songs by Cole Porter, Irving Berlin and the Gershwins along with set and costume details designed in style of 1930s, which did not turn out well.

The same year had also seen one of the most unique and distinctive movie musicals ever made. *Dancer In The Dark* (2000) was Lars von Trier's experimental musical, the third and last part of his *Golden Heart Trilogy*.⁵⁰ This musical was anything like the traditional joyous ones, exceeding the genre; this one was dark, muddy and emotionally

⁵⁰ In *Golden Heart Trilogy* each film centers on a heroine with a heart of gold; in von Trier's own words, they're about "good women overwhelmed by a bad world," movies contain emotional brutality. See: *Lars von Trier's Golden Heart Trilogy*, <http://bitchinfilmmreviews.com/lars-von-triers-golden-heart-trilogy/> [accessed: 20.03.2017].

draining. Singer Björk portrayed one of the main characters, which was her first and last movie role. She was also responsible for writing the music score and performing most of the songs as well. The type of voice that Björk possesses, a kind of sad and haunting timbre, was most adequate to the movie's style. What also set *Dancer In The Dark* apart from other musicals and movies in general, were the visuals and shooting practices. Von Trier along with other Danish filmmaker Thomas Vinterberg created a *Dogme 95*, which was a specific shooting convention, focusing on actors' emotions and narrative, rather than on visual effects. The movie was shot with unprofessional hand-held and small digital cameras which created a home movie feel, in contrast to the acknowledged classical musical characterized by glitz and glamour. *Dancer in The Dark* had its premiere at Cannes Film Festival to standing ovations and a lot of controversy at the same time, even so it was awarded the Palme d'Or and one of the songs was nominated for the Academy Award in 2001.

One of the first successful productions of the century came with the adaptation of an eccentric, Off-Broadway hit *Hedwig and The Angry Inch* (2001). John Cameron Mitchell, who first wrote, than adapted and directed the play, also starred in the movie as the main character (as well as in the stage version). The story revolves around a life of a front man of a rock band, a gay male singer who went through a sex change operation to marry an American man, and his subsequent struggles as a transgender person. This production has gained a devoted cult following,⁵¹ and a lot of critical acclaim and prizes across film festivals worldwide. *Hedwig* was one of the first musicals in 21st century to start a trend of relating to recent, often controversial problems, exploring more emotional issues of the characters. After the movie version, this musical strengthened its position and was performed on different stages in various countries. However, only in 2014

⁵¹ S. Tobias, *The New Cult Canon. Hedwig and The Angry Inch*, <http://www.av-club.com/article/emhedwig-and-the-angry-inchem-35004> [accessed: 20.03.2017].

Hedwig had its first Broadway premiere, winning the Tony Award for the Best Revival of a Musical.⁵²

Despite a few musicals produced already in the 21st century, it was *Moulin Rouge!* that by many critics and cinemagoers was called the first real musical screen hit of the new century.⁵³ Baz Luhrman's musical spectacle was also the first musical movie in the century nominated for the Academy Award for Best Picture, last musical nominated was *Beauty and the Beast* an entire decade before. *Moulin Rouge!* was nominated in eight categories at the 74th Academy Awards in general and is classified as a pastiche – jukebox musical, exploiting and adapting previously released popular songs as its musical score. What makes it stand out among quite boring (especially in the juxtaposition with dazzling Luhrmann's production) movie musicals of the previous decade and what makes it a completely modern (or actually postmodern) musical will be discussed in detail in the chapter 3.

Next year musical film took another turn into thoroughly new environment, namely hip-hop. *8 Mile* (2002) was the first movie to feature a hip-hop score that resulted from and played an important part in the plot. There is some controversy regarding *8 Mile*, some scholars determine it as film musical, others as musical (meaning hip-hop) biopic film. One thing is clear, that the music's role in the film is not just running in the background and expressing the atmosphere of the movie, but an equal attention is being paid to it as to dialogues. Dark and angry, supposedly semi-autobiographical film starring Eminem spoke to the younger generation, which could have avoided the traditional musical and was called the 2nd Best Hip-Hop Movie Ever

⁵² P. Frank, '*Hedwig and The Angry Inch*' Wins The Tony Award For Best Revival of a Musical, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/06/08/hedwig-and-the-angry-inch_-n_5470785.html [accessed: 20.03.2017].

⁵³ J. Kenrick, *History of Musical Film, 2000–2009: A New Century*, <http://www.musicals101.com/2000film.htm> [accessed: 20.03.2017].

by Billboard,⁵⁴ and the rapper himself was awarded an Oscar for Best Original Song for *Lose Yourself*.

Even after the success of *Moulin Rouge!* in 2001, in 2002 in Hollywood, there was an assumption that the traditional film musical was doomed; to the rescue came a screen version of a long – running Broadway hit from 1975 created by John Kander and Fred Ebb, and directed by Bob Fosse – *Chicago*. The film version was taken over by a Broadway director-choreographer Bob Marshall and was his first feature film. Silver screen's *Chicago* combined theatrical fashion of performance with a cinematic approach and as a consequence most of the musical numbers were performed in the main character's imagination. The story of the notorious murderesses Roxy Hart and Velma Kelly and their struggle for freedom behind the bars topped with excellent music score and choreography was awarded the Academy Award for Best Picture, first one for film musical in 34 years since the win of *Oliver!* in 1969. In total the movie was nominated in thirteen categories and won six statuettes. A short description of the storyline reveals significant differences between *Chicago* and the traditional golden age film musicals. Hollywood musicals always had some anti-heroes, but never as their leads, in contrast to theater musical. Traditional, golden age musical approach was to root for a heroic character struggling with his problems, but that was not the case in *Chicago*. The case of the change in the portrayal of the protagonist and many more original procedures is discussed and described in chapter 4.

Besides big Broadway adaptations like *Chicago*, in the subsequent years a couple of small, independent productions tried to prove that the original film musicals were still possible to be made and enjoyed by the audiences. Representing those movies was *Camp* (2003), written, directed by, and based on Todd Graff's personal experiences. The movie

⁵⁴ E. Ramirez, *Top 10 Best Hip-Hop Movies Ever*, <http://www.billboard.com/articles/list/474260/top-10-best-hip-hop-movies-ever> [accessed: 20.03.2017].

was a compassionate yet witty look at teenage problems clashing at a performing arts camp. The music was partially original, partially based on old stage hits like *I'm Still Here* by Stephen Sondheim. However, the story was one hundred percent original. *Camp* was also a debut for Anna Kendrick, an actress often associated with film musicals, especially in recent years, while her musical performances – *Pitch Perfect* (2012), *Into the Woods* (2014), *The Last Five Years* (2015) – urged some movie critics to call for reviving screen musical and building it around Kendrick, due to her unusual talents.⁵⁵ In this manner a film musical in the first years of the new decade was brought back to life.

However, the Hollywood decision makers seemed not to have learned the lesson of the success of *Moulin Rouge!* and *Chicago* and following productions seemed to tear down the newly build and revived reputation of the genre. Instead of the boom and rise of film musicals, the subsequent productions felt like a decline from the achieved progress. In 2004 MGM distributed *De-Lovely*, a musical biopic about Cole Porter, Kevin Klein portraying the main character. The life of the famous songwriter and composer surely had a lot of potential for a film musical, but the heavy story, mismatched casting (aside from Kline) and lousy pop performances of classic songs made it *not delightful, not delicious, just disappointing*.⁵⁶ The British extravagant adaptation of Andrew Lloyd Webber *Phantom of the Opera* (2005) only made the situation worse. What had been exciting on stage seemed exaggerated on screen and despite the fact that the admirers of the theatrical version and audience generally liked the film; most of the critics dismissed it as a disappointment.⁵⁷ In 2005 two of the Broadway adaptations made

⁵⁵ S. Tobias, *The Last Five Years*, <https://thedissolve.com/reviews/1374-the-last-five-years/> [accessed: 21.03.2017].

⁵⁶ S. Persall, "*De-Lovely*" isn't pretty, http://www.sptimes.com/2004/07/15/Weekend/_De_Lovely__isn_t_pre.shtml [accessed: 21.03.2017].

⁵⁷ *Phantom of the Opera* (2005), http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/phantom_of_the_opera/ [accessed: 21.03.2017].

their way to silver screen – *Rent* and *The Producers*, with most of the original casts. Even so, those film musicals have not been as successful as their stage versions. Most negative reviews suggested that the performances were created originally for the stage and had not been properly adjusted for the screen.⁵⁸

While film industry's attempts to release another outstanding musical came to nothing, television, namely Disney Channel, released a teen romantic comedy musical television film *High School Musical* (2006), which became an enormous hit. The scale of its success was so vast that there were another two sequels to the story – *High School Musical 2* (2007) and *High School Musical 3: Senior Year* (2008). A huge fan base was built up around this production and the movie's soundtrack was best-selling album in United States in 2006.⁵⁹ The story, as the author described it, was a modern adaptation of Romeo and Juliet in high school packaging. Popular interest in this specific production resulted in adapting television version into a stage version, ice tour, book series, and creating video games and even a reality series based on the franchise. *High School Musical* initiated the popularity and opened doors for television musical productions like *Glee*, which ran from 2009 to 2015 and gained crowds of fans around the world. This American musical comedy-drama television series focused on the fictional high school glee club – *New Directions* and on problems concerning social issues like race, sexuality, relationships and learning how to become an effective team. Those two modern television musical productions appealed to the younger audiences and played a huge role in popularizing musical genre in the 21st century, especially among teenagers and young adults.

⁵⁸ S. Zacharek, "*The Producers*", <http://www.salon.com/2005/12/16/producers/> [accessed: 21.03.2017].

⁵⁹ *Top 10 Selling Albums, 2006*, <http://www.infoplease.com/entertainment/music/top-selling-albums-2006.html> [accessed: 21.03.2017].

After numerous setbacks for Hollywood's film musicals, by the end of 2006, one adaptation of the 1981 Broadway musical presented itself with the same manner as previous big Hollywood musicals – *The Sound of Music* or *West Side Story*. *Dreamgirls* (2006) debuted with three special, old-fashioned, ten-day road show engagements, beginning at the Ziegfeld Theater in New York, via Cinerama Dome in Los Angeles and the AMC Metreon 15 in San Francisco.⁶⁰ In the previous film era, road shows were frequently organized to build up buzz around the upcoming productions; this one seemed to have worked also in the 21st century, because *Dreamgirls* turned out to be a great commercial success. The movie was directed by Bill Condon (responsible also for the Broadway version) and jointly produced and released by DreamWorks and Paramount Pictures. The production of the movie itself was strongly influenced by the success at the box office, as well as at the Academy Awards for *Chicago*, whose screenplay was also written by Condon. The idea of adapting the famous Broadway show was circulating in the air since the 1980s. The movie recreates the story of a famous Motown group of the 1960s – *The Supremes*, showing the development of R&B music during the 1960s and 70s through the eyes of the so-called *Dreams* and their scheming manager. The songs from original Broadway version by composer Henry Krieger and lyricist Tom Eyen were used, with new additional four songs composed by Krieger as well. *Dreamgirls* brought a breath of good, old, classical Hollywood musical, but also delivered some novelties. The production, costing \$ 80 million was and still remains the most expensive film to feature an all African American cast in American history.⁶¹ However, at the time it was released some critics emphasized with regret the fact,

⁶⁰ P. McClintok, *D'works Takes "Girls" on road*, <http://variety.com/2006/film/markets-festivals/d-works-takes-girls-on-road-1117953449/> [accessed: 21.03.2017].

⁶¹ M. Gottfield, *Dreamgirls: The Movie Musical*, Newmarket Press, New York, 2007, p. 15.

that the audiences would not encounter anything vital or new, but they will be going to the cinema *for old time's sake*.⁶² Nonetheless, as other critics claimed, it was one of the recent film musicals to get the transfer from stage to screen right, and which featured exciting musical sequences.⁶³ *Dreamgirls* received a lot of accolades, including the Golden Globe for Best Motion Picture – Musical or Comedy and two Oscars in 2007, one of them for Jennifer Hudson's magnificent screen debut in the category of Best Supporting Actress.

The triumph of *Chicago* seemed to have its repercussions only few years after its premiere... The year of 2007 was filled with well-known and well received musical productions, those adapted as well as original ones. *Hairspray* (2007), a musical romantic comedy film was based on the 2002 Broadway musical of the same name, which was adapted from an original comedy movie from 1988. Having an already acclaimed film musical cast like Queen Latifah, John Travolta and Zac Efron, the movie introduced the actress, singer, and dancer Nikki Blonsky portraying the main character Tracy Turnbald, an optimistic, overweight teenage girl who loves dancing and is a vital activist against racial segregation during the 1960s. The movie was directed and choreographed by Adam Shankman, who smuggled a couple of his musical inspirations into the narrative. The examples are evident in the movie opening shot – when, while showing Baltimore, the camera descends from the bird's eye view to the ground level – it is a combination of opening shots of *The Sound of Music* and *West Side Story*.⁶⁴ Another homage visible in the movie is the one to Barbara Streisand in *Funny Girl*, when Tracy rides the garbage

⁶² A.O. Scott, *Three-Part Heartbreak in Motown*, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/15/movies/15drea.html?_r=0 [accessed: 21.03.2017].

⁶³ D. Rooney, *Review: "Dreamgirls"*, <http://variety.com/2006/film/awards/dreamgirls-7-1200511727/> [accessed: 21.03.2017].

⁶⁴ C. Zadan (producer), *Hairspray: Commentary with producers Craig Zadan and Neil Meron*, DVD, 20.11.2007.

truck during the *Good Morning Baltimore* it resembles the famous scene on the tugboat when Streisand is singing *Don't Rain On My Parade*.⁶⁵ At the time of its release *Hairspray* broke the record for the biggest sales at the opening weekend for a movie musical and become a great financial success.⁶⁶ It held its position of the 4th highest grossing movie musical until July 2008, when it was outperformed by *Mamma Mia!* and at present it holds position number 9⁶⁷ in the same ranking and remains one of the most critically and commercially successful movie musicals of the last decade.

The next movie musical of 2007 was a pastiche of the 1960s counter-culture; it viewed popular music, especially music of The Beatles as appropriately expressing personal and social history. *Across The Universe* (2007) uses thirty-two songs by The Beatles created between 1962 and 1969 to provide a cultural overview of that decade through the music of this one influential band.⁶⁸ For the director Julie Taymor, The Beatles, their music, and influence, represent a certain myth of cultural values of that time. The movie's overall message comes back to the romantic and utopian emphasis of the early musicals at the heart of the genre, despite many changes and differences in popular music and listeners' demands. The movie achieved mixed reviews, but was recognized among Hollywood Foreign Press Association and The Academy in 2008.

Another production of the same year was a confirmation of the assumption, proved also by recent projects, that Hollywood was not bringing many novelties to the genre of movie musicals, but was relying on the old and effective formulas. It is understandable that film

⁶⁵ A. Shankman, *The Director's Chair: Adam Shankman's Hairspray Diary #15*, <http://www.broadwayworld.com/article/The-Directors-Chair-Adam-Shankmans-Hairspray-Diary-15-20070725#> [accessed: 22.03.2017].

⁶⁶ B. Gray, "Chuck & Larry" Can't Stop "Hairspray" Sheen, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/news/?id=2355&p=.htm> [accessed: 22.03.2017].

⁶⁷ *Musical 1974-Present*, op. cit.

⁶⁸ B.K. Grant, op. cit., p. 153.

producers would rely on old stories, employ recognized composers, and show something that people were already familiar with and related to, but *Enchanted* (2007) was a truly uncanny production. Disney's live-action/animated fantasy/romantic comedy was at the same time an homage to and a self-parody of the typical Walt Disney animated classics. Director Kevin Lima took care to make numerous references to Disney's previous and future works through the sequences of traditional animation, live-action film-making and computer-generated images. Alan Menken and Stephen Schwartz, who created music for previous Disney productions, produced the songs for *Enchanted* and received three nominations for the Academy Awards in the Best Original Song Category. Traditional solutions like elaborate choreography, great musical score, and – the hallmark of fairy tales and traditional film musicals – the happy ending, again proved their value. *Enchanted* remains the 8th highest grossing movie musical in the history.⁶⁹

The end of the quite musical year of 2007 saw the premiere of *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (2007) directed by Tim Burton. It was a musical thriller film and an adaptation of Stephen Sondheim and Hugh Wheeler's Tony Award-winning musical of 1979. It has nothing to do with the cheerful and happy Golden Era musicals – it tells a story of a serial killer who happens to also be an English barber, and who kills his customers with a straight razor and with help of his partner Mrs. Lovett, who processes their corpses into meat pies. Some critics even claimed that the movie was more of a horror film than a musical, expressing brutal and pessimistic view of human nature.⁷⁰ The main character Benjamin Barker/Sweeney Todd was portrayed by Burton's long-time associate, Johnny Depp, who seems to have an ideal ability to present Burton's gothic and grotesque universe on screen. Mrs. Lovett was

⁶⁹ *Musical 1974-Present*, op. cit.

⁷⁰ A.O. Scott, *Murder Most Musical*, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/21/movies/21swee.html?_r=0 [accessed: 24.03.2017].

played by another of the director's cinematic companions, Helena Bonham Carter. This combination of co-workers has been dubbed the *Tim Burton Trio*⁷¹ and casting of the those actors became the director's hallmark. Unlike most of the musicals adapted from the stage, *Sweeney Todd* was called by Sondheim himself a *movie based on a musical and not a film of the stage musical*. Confirmation of this fact is that the amount of time spent on the stage numbers did not equal the amount of time spent on them on screen. A lot of numbers have been reshaped or cut down to adjust the musical to the cinematic medium, which is not a frequent occurrence while adapting a stage musical. It does not mean that the music was less important in the film version; it was modified but approved by Stephen Sondheim. His main musical inspiration to the musical score of *Sweeney Todd* was the music created by Bernard Herman who composed most of the music for Hitchcock's movies like *Psycho* (1960). Sondheim music's role was to synchronize with the frightful scenes of the movie and to scare the audiences, build up the tension, and set their nerves on edge.⁷² The outcome was successful and the movie soundtrack ranked high in *The Billboard 200* chart in 2008.⁷³ The whole production was appreciated during the 2008 Golden Globes where it won the Best Motion Picture – Musical or Comedy, and during that year's Oscars, where it received three Academy Award nominations.

The next year in the history of film musical was not as rich in musical productions as 2007, but it had one prominent film musical. *Mamma Mia!* (2008) turned out to be the highest grossing film musical during the opening weekend, adapted from Broadway stage; it topped

⁷¹ See: *Tim Burton Trio*, *Tim Burton Trio*, <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Tim+Burton+Trio> [accessed: 24.03.2017].

⁷² See: *Sweeney Todd: Interview with Stephen Sondheim*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=naHgXkV-JII> [accessed: 22.03.2017].

⁷³ E. Hernandez, "*Sweeney Todd*" Soundtrack Climbs Higher on "The Billboard 200" Chart, <http://www.playbill.com/news/article/sweeney-todd-soundtrack-climbs-higher-on-the-billboard-200-chart-146957> [accessed: 22.03.2017].

Hairspray record from 2007, but eventually was surpassed by *Into The Woods* in 2014 and *Beauty and the Beast* in 2017.⁷⁴ The range and scale of the success of *Mamma Mia!* (discussed in Chapter 5) resulted in spectacular proclamation made by Hugh Jackman, the host of the 81st Academy Awards... Jackman started his speech:

*You probably wondering why I'm wearing this suit. Well, something truly remarkable happened this year, something we thought will never happen in our lifetime. Yes. Change has finally come. Mamma Mia! has sold more tickets than Titanic in the UK. **The musical is back**, ladies and gentlemen.*⁷⁵

Despite the fact that the announcement was made with a slight dose of humor, the evidence that a movie musical achieved such acclaim among audiences worldwide was a positive surprise for Hollywood. On top of that, right after this declaration, Jackman – exactly in a traditional musical manner – burst into song and dance to fully express his thesis. The musical number that he performed, with the help of musical stars like Zac Efron and Vanessa Hudgens from *High School Musical* and Amanda Seyfried and Dominic Cooper from *Mamma Mia!* along with Beyonce, was directed by no one else than Baz Luhrmann. It was one of the biggest showstoppers of the Academy Awards and apart from celebrating *Mamma Mia!* there were plenty of references made to previous movie musicals like *Top Hat* (1935), *Singin' in The Rain* (1952), *West Side Story* (1957), *The Sound of Music* (1965), *Grease* (1978), *Evita* (1996), to more recent *Moulin Rouge!* (2001), *Chicago* (2002), *Dreamgirls* (2006), *High School Musical* (2006) or *Hairspray* (2007) and more. The message at the 81st Annual Academy

⁷⁴ P. Wontorek, *After Record-Breaking Opening Weekend*, *Beauty and the Beast to Become Most Successful Movie Musical Ever*, <http://www.broadway.com/buzz/187967/after-record-breaking-opening-weekend-beauty-and-the-beast-to-become-most-successful-movie-musical-ever/> [accessed: 19.03.2017].

⁷⁵ See: H. Jackman (host), *Beyonce & Hugh Jackman – 2009 Academy Awards – The Musical is Back*, http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xm1fg1_beyonce-hugh-jackman-2009-academy-awards-the-musical-is-back_music [accessed: 21.04.2017].

Awards was pretty strong and there was nothing left for audiences but to wait for the next outstanding musical productions.

Next year's long awaited musical *Nine* (2009) was created by the same producers and director responsible for the sensationally successful adaptation of Broadway *Chicago*. They met again to produce the musical drama metafilm, filled with big names, but unfortunately poor in critics' and audience's view. The movie turned out to be a musical flop, costing \$ 80 million to produce, but grossing only \$ 54 million worldwide.⁷⁶ The film, as well as the Broadway version of the musical, is strongly influenced by movies made by Federico Fellini, especially *8½* (1963) and Fellini himself. Main character – Guido Contini (portrayed by Daniel Day Lewis), a filmmaker struggling with professional and personal decline (supposedly based on Fellini's) is surrounded by many women in his life. Those women are important to him, but at the same time, they are the cause of his pain – his friend and confidante, a costume designer (Judi Dench), his mistress Carla (Penélope Cruz), his wife Louisa (Marion Cotillard), his muse (Nicole Kidman), his mother (Sofia Loren), as well as the Vogue reporter, who flings herself in his direction (Kate Hudson) and the memory of his village's prostitute, Saraghina (Fergie), who provided him with a glimpse of forbidden pleasures when he was a little boy. Despite the magnificent cast, the movie was said to lack memorable characters, and also that it indeed "adapt" the *8½* movie, but does not "feel" like it,⁷⁷ making it an incomprehensible mess.⁷⁸ However, the individual efforts of actors and creators have been noticed and the movie was nominated for four Academy Awards in 2010, including Penélope Cruz for Best Supporting Actress. Likewise, the movie soundtrack was appreciated, with three original movie songs like *Cinema Italiano* or Oscar nominated *Take it All*.

⁷⁶ J. Kenrick, *History of Musical Film, 2000–2009: A New Century*, op. cit.

⁷⁷ R. Eber, *Nine*, <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/nine-2009> [accessed: 23.03.2017].

⁷⁸ J. Kenrick, *History of Musical Film, 2000–2009: A New Century*, op. cit.

2009 marks also the Disney's return to the traditional animation with musical romantic fantasy comedy film, *The Princess and the Frog*. The studio yet again came back to a Broadway musical format used frequently in their productions during the 1980s and 1990s, as well as to working with creators of Disney's masterpieces like *Little Mermaid* (1989). The format proved to be irreplaceable and *Princess and the Frog* is said to initiate the "second Disney Renaissance,"⁷⁹ additionally being a central key in the development of subsequent animated musical features like *Tangled* (2010) and *Frozen* (2013).

2. SECOND DECADE OF 21ST CENTURY

The beginning of the second decade of the 21st century was not a special time for movie musicals. A typical backstage musical *Burlesque* (2010) starring Cher and debuting actress Christina Aguilera, despite undisputed musical talent of the two, in the critics' outlook came out as campy and clichéd.⁸⁰ Some compared it to *Cabaret* (1972), but not bringing anything new to the table and the storyline itself seemed to be far outdated. According to New York Times, this kind of plot was used too many times even back in 1933, while 42nd Street musical was being produced.⁸¹ Subsequent musical productions were not gaining a lot of critical attention and an enthusiastic proclamation made by Hugh Jackman during the 2009 Oscars seemed not to have a true basis in reality. Hollywood could not come up with anything new and groundbreaking. Following produc-

⁷⁹ M. Malach, *Disney Renaissance: Why "Frozen" Is Reviving Company's Golden Era of Animated Films*, <http://popcrush.com/disney-renaissance-frozen-animated-films/> [accessed: 23.03.2017].

⁸⁰ *Burlesque* (2010), <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/burlesque/> [accessed: 23.03.2017].

⁸¹ M. Dargis, *Small-Town Girl Trades Her Naïveté for Lingerie*, <http://www.ny-times.com/2010/11/24/movies/24burlesque.html> [accessed: 23.03.2017].

tions seemed to go over the same, familiar patterns. *The Muppets* (2011), a musical comedy film was a box-office triumph, grossing \$ 41.5 million in first five days, at the same time out-grossing every previous *Muppet* production.⁸² Still, it was a wonderful and profitable idea and it is easily understandable why Hollywood made another *Muppet* movie, but they were not making anything original.

The anticipated change came from the British in 2012, when *Les Misérables* became the first film musical to be nominated for Academy Award in Best Picture Category since *Chicago* a decade earlier. Based on the West End/Broadway version of the musical of the same title, and earlier adapted from the 1862 French novel by Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables* brought a breath of fresh air into the genre and quite a lot of novelties. One of the main innovations – a total oddity until then – was the fact that the film musical was recorded and filmed entirely live. Whole movie production and its outcomes will be examined and analysed in Chapter 6.

Year of 2012 saw a few of musical films, both flops and hits. The former, like *Rock of Ages* was a romantic musical comedy film adapted from the 2006 rock jukebox Broadway musical hit of the same name, filled with musical and movie stars like country singer Julianne Hough and Diego Boneta along with Mary J. Blige, Catherine Zeta-Jones and Tom Cruise, among others. The music of the film was based on the 1980s rock artists like Guns N' Roses, Journey, Jon Bon Jovi, Def Leppard, Scorpions or Foreigner. Sadly, the movie turned out to be a fiasco and did not bring back its \$ 75 million budget, grossing a only \$ 59 worldwide; however, the movie was on the 3rd position regarding gross profits in the opening weekend.⁸³ *Pitch*

⁸² G. Smith, *Box Office Report: 'Twilight: Breaking Dawn' and 'The Muppets' Lead Thanksgiving Holiday Weekend*, <http://www.ew.com/article/2011/11/27/box-office-report-twilight-breaking-dawn-the-muppets> [accessed: 23.03.2017].

⁸³ *June 15-17, 2012, Weekend*, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/weekend/chart/?yr=2012&wknd=24&p=.htm> [accessed: 23.03.2017].

Perfect, a musical comedy of the same year on the other hand became a sleeper hit, first having a limited release in United States and Canada, but in conclusion earning more than \$ 115 million worldwide.⁸⁴ A story loosely adapted from a book by Mickey Rapkin about a women's a capella group competing with another college group to win the Nationals, appealed mainly to young group of women,⁸⁵ and achieved such a success that a 2015 sequel *Pitch Perfect 2* surpassed the original film and grossed over \$ 184.⁸⁶ The creators of the film did not wait long, only after of *Pitch Perfect 2* premiere it was announced that the series is going to be a trilogy and *Pitch Perfect 3* was announced to have its premiere on 22nd of December 2017.⁸⁷

Even though *Les Misérables* did not win an Oscar for Best Picture in 2013, still the ceremony of the 85th Annual Academy Awards was revolving around musicals. Seth MacFarlane, the host, carried himself like Fred Astaire and singed *The Way You Look Tonight* from *Swing Time* (1936), later John Travolta presented a tribute to the movie musicals of the last decade. Three musical films were recalled – *Chicago* (2002), *Dreamgirls* (2006) and *Les Misérables* (2012) – by performances of their original casts; Catherina Zeta Jones performed *All That Jazz*, Jennifer Hudson *And I Am Telling You I'm Not Going* along with the performance of the entire cast of *Les Misérables* singing a mashup of songs from the movie. As if it was not enough, a musical star Barbara Streisand sang solo a theme from *The Way We Were* (1973) in a tribute to Marvin Hamlisch. As producers of the ceremony and of the musical numbers said “*the musical as a motion*

⁸⁴ *Pitch Perfect*, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=pitchperfect.htm> [accessed: 22.03.2017].

⁸⁵ *Weekend Report: “Taken 2” Kills, “Frankenweenie” Fails*, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/news/?id=3541&p=.htm> [accessed: 22.03.2017].

⁸⁶ *Pitch Perfect 2*, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=pitchperfect2.htm> [accessed: 22.03.2017].

⁸⁷ *Pitch Perfect 3*, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt4765284/> [accessed: 22.03.2017].

picture genre has had a remarkable renaissance in the last decade"⁸⁸ and that renaissance was being highlighted and seemed just to be expanding.

Along with the renaissance of musical movies, the already mentioned *second Disney Renaissance* was underway, and *Frozen* (2013) was the cherry on top of it all. This animated musical is the first one in the 21st century that can stand next to Walt Disney's animated classics like *Little Mermaid* (1989) or *The Beauty and the Beast* (1991) and remains the highest grossing animated film of all time with worldwide grosses circulating around \$ 1.280 billion.⁸⁹ There are several reasons why this production was such a triumph. Among those reasons, some indicate the fact that it has *the soul of a Broadway musical*,⁹⁰ because of the employment of a Broadway musical duo Kristen Andersen-Lopez and Robert Lopez, responsible for such musical stage hits like *Avenue Q* (2003) and *The Book of Mormon* (2011), not mentioning Indina Menzel (Tony Award-winning singer) voicing one of the main characters – Elsa. This musical soul is often being highlighted in predictions made by many critics that soon *Frozen*, like other great animated musicals, will be adapted for the Broadway stage. Naturally *Frozen's* success is grounded in traditional Disney's ventures, but it also has a lot of "firsts" – namely, the first woman in one of the director chairs, and it is also the first Disney movie to be focused more on the bond between sisters and their relationship, than on a romantic relationship of one of them. On the 2nd of March 2015, the studio announced a feature-length

⁸⁸ C. Zadan, N. Meron (producers), see: *Oscars to Feature Tribute to Movie Musicals of The Last Decade*, <http://oscar.go.com/blogs/oscar-news/oscar-tribute-movie-musicals> [accessed: 23.03.2017].

⁸⁹ *Frozen*, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=frozen2013.htm> [accessed: 22.03.2017].

⁹⁰ E. Zuckerman, *Is "Frozen" a New, Bona Fide Disney Classic?*, <http://www.thewire.com/entertainment/2013/11/frozen-new-bona-fide-disney-classic/71243/> [accessed: 22.03.2017].

sequel *Frozen 2* to have its premiere in 2019, an exact release date and production details are yet to be announced.⁹¹

After a long hiatus for much of the 1970s, 80s and 90s movie musicals became again a regular component in the movie calendar. 2014 was another year filled with musicals. Two big productions premiered during the winter holiday season – *Annie* and *Into the Woods*, both adapted from Broadway musicals. While *Into the Woods*, a Disney adaptation of Stephen Sondheim's Tony Award-winning musical, received positive reviews from critics and became a huge hit, becoming the 7th highest grossing movie musical in history,⁹² *Annie* appealed to a vast audience but did poorly in the critics' reviews. *Annie* updates the 1977 Broadway rendition of a story about an orphan girl who luckily ends up with a rich guardian. The movie is a typical modern musical, updating *Annie's* story to the 21st century and casting the main character as an Afro-American girl, at the same time criticizing modern income inequality, the foster care system, and omnipresent cell phone companies. The soundtrack was also reshaped into a modern way by singer Sia and producer Greg Kurstin, but they received polarizing response from the critics, especially in regard to the heavy use of auto-tune. There unfortunately are a lot more elements that determine the future of a movie musical, than the on-screen effort of main actors (Quvenzhané Wallis at the age of nine was already nominated for an Oscar in 2013), elements like the integration of the song and dance numbers and they were not fulfilled this time. On the other hand *Annie's* holiday competition, Disney's musical inspired by fairy tales of Grim Brothers', *Into The Woods*, was much more successful. This famed production directed by Rob Marshall, responsible for an Oscar winning *Chicago* (2002), and filled with ensemble star cast – like Meryl Streep, Emily Blunt, Anna

⁹¹ M. Graser, *Disney Announces "Frozen 2"*, <http://variety.com/2015/film/news/disney-announces-frozen-2-1201451480/> [accessed: 23.03.2017].

⁹² *Musical 1974-Present*, op. cit.

Kendrick and Johnny Depp among others – will be examined and discussed in Chapter 7.

The next film musical productions had seen also traditional topics, like musicals about people who make music. This idea seems to be an easy one, since no one is surprised when characters burst into singing. However, despite seemingly easy business, the genre needs its aesthetic to work properly and sometimes even the legend of the cinema like Clint Eastwood can not handle it well. *Jersey boys* (2014), directed and produced by Eastwood, was an adaptation of the Tony Award-winning jukebox musical of the same name, but it lacked the hasty theatrical pattern that the story required, and the most important detail – a prominent musical performance. Generally, the movie got mixed reviews, the critique concerned mainly the lack of focus on and wavering between genres, consequently as a result there were too little musical features in the genre of musical, but there is no denial of the power of its musical pleasures.⁹³

In 2015 film musicals were still being remembered and honored. During the 87th Annual Academy Award Lady Gaga performed a tribute to *The Sound of Music* (1965) to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the film, which in 1966 went on to win the Oscar for Best Picture. The singer performed a medley that included her renditions of *My Favorite Things*, *Edelweiss*, *The Sound of Music* and *Climb Ev'ry Mountain*, afterwards introducing to the stage Julie Andrews herself. One of the highlights in musical film productions of 2015 was the already mentioned *Pitch Perfect 2*, but the next important moment in the history of this genre was about to come only next year.

They year 2016 was fruitful with animated film musical productions like Disney's *Moana* (2016), which gained two Academy Award nominations for Best Animated Feature and Best Original Song, and told

⁹³ *Jersey Boys* (2014), http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/jersey_boys/ [accessed: 24.03.2017].

the story of Moana, a resolute daughter of a chief of a Polynesian tribe, who devotes herself to the hope of saving the people of her tribe. DreamWorks' *Trolls* (2016), which also gained a Best Original Song nomination, was inspired by the famous *Troll* dolls and it featured voices of such contemporary musical stars like Anna Kendrick or Justin Timberlake, who served as an executive producer for the film's music and released the original song *Can't Stop the Feeling*. Timberlake even performed his nominated song during opening of the 89th Academy Awards ceremony. *Sing* (2016) was another successful animated musical production, produced by Illumination Entertainment, featuring songs by Stevie Wonder, Ariana Grande and Jennifer Hudson.

However, the year 2016, in terms of movie musical production will always be remembered by Damien Chazelle's love letter to Hollywood in the shape of his original film musical *La La Land* (2016). A seemingly simple story of an aspiring actress (Emma Stone) and jazz musician (Ryan Gosling), trying to boost their careers in Los Angeles, turns out to not have a typical Hollywood romance happy ending... Maybe that is one reason why it is so memorable, but other evident reasons are manifested in the range of musical and dance numbers that were carefully and subtly designed to recall famous film images. There are plenty of references to previous film musicals and movies, ranging from those famous musicals produced by MGM to French New Wave movies. The film received critical acclaim and gained fourteen Academy Award nominations including Best Picture, Best Actor, Best Actress and Best Director. These fourteen nominations tied a record previously held by 1997's *Titanic* and 1950's *All About Eve*.⁹⁴ The film's intertextuality and a feeling of nostalgia as well as the role which such a successful movie musical carries for the genre will be closely examined in chapter 8.

⁹⁴ G. Kaufman, *2017 Oscar Nominations: 'La La Land' Ties Record with 14 Nominations*, <http://www.billboard.com/articles/events/oscars/7668114/2017-oscar-nominations-la-la-land-14-moonlight-manchester-by-the-sea> [accessed: 24.03.2017].

As for film musicals in 2017, Disney's big screen live-action remake of *Beauty and the Beast* had its premiere on March 17th and started with a bang. With grosses circulating around \$ 175 million only during the opening weekend, this production has already become highest grossing and most successful movie musical ever,⁹⁵ it has already overtaken *Grease*, which was on the top of the list since 1978. The modern *Beauty and the Beast* was directed by none other than Bill Condon, whose achievements in film musicals are evident in *Chicago* (2002) or *Dreamgirls* (2006). It is based on Disney's 1991 classic animation of the same name, with Emma Watson as Belle and Dan Stevens as the Beast in the title roles. Despite the fact that for the main two actors working on a musical could be an unfamiliar experience, for the actors in the supporting roles it was nothing new. The cast, among others, consists of such musical stars, like the six-time Tony Award winner Audra McDonald, who plays the role of Madame Garderobe. Emma Thompson, who recently starred in the Broadway/West End revival of *Sweeney Todd* takes the role of Mrs. Potts, and Ewan McGregor, known from his musical role in *Moulin Rouge!* (2002), plays Lumiere. The soundtrack is created of the famous old melodies with music by Alan Menken and lyrics by the great late Howard Ashman, with addition of some new melodies once again written by composer Menken and lyrics by Tim Rice (who has worked on *The Lion King*). Unfortunately, the latter are not so memorable and catchy as the former. One of the most memorable musical as well as dance numbers is (similarly to the animated version) *Be Our Guest*, the so called "culinary cabaret,"⁹⁶ in which plates, platters and utensils perform a Busby Berkeley-styled spectacle. The director through the choreography of the dance routines pays tribute to such musical milestones like *West*

⁹⁵ *Beauty and the Beast* (2017), <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=beautyandthebeast2017.htm> [accessed: 25.03.2017].

⁹⁶ R. Ebert, S. Wloszczyna, *Beauty and the Beast*, <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/beauty-and-the-beast-2017> [accessed: 25.03.2017].

Side Story (1961) or *Les Misérables* (2012). A novelty regarding the genre of film musical in that case is that *Beauty and the Beast* was shot as a 3D movie, which took almost three years to make.⁹⁷ There was some controversy concerning “gay moments” in *Beauty and the Beast*. One of the characters, LeFou (Josh Gad), has a crush on his buddy Gaston (Luke Evans) and then dances with other male actors. It should not come off as a shock, considering that year’s Oscar winner *Moonlight* (2016), but still the movie was a Disney production and countries like Russia and Malaysia raised their concerns and tried to censor the movie in their countries.⁹⁸

Several film musical productions of 2017 are still waiting for their premieres at the time of writing of this book, like the already mentioned *Pitch Perfect 3*. Regarding the future, classic movies, like 1937’s *A Star is Born*, will have their remakes. It is confirmed that Lady Gaga will be playing the female lead, making her first major film role and Bradley Cooper will star, co-produce and make his directorial debut with the remake.⁹⁹ Another classic and a musical one, *Marry Poppins* (1964), will be brought back to the big screen and have a sequel under the title *Marry Poppins Returns* (2018), the plot will be set 25 years later after the 1964 film. After *Into the Woods*’ (2014) success, Disney again teamed up with the director/choreographer Rob Marshall, casting some of the same actors as in the earlier production.

⁹⁷ G. Kilday, ‘*Beauty and the Beast*’ Director on How ‘*La La Land*’ Is Bringing Musicals Back, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/beauty-beast-director-bill-condon-bringing-musicals-back-981418> [accessed: 25.03.2017].

⁹⁸ L. Barraclough, *Russia May Ban Beauty and the Beast Over Gay Character*, <http://variety.com/2017/film/global/russia-ban-beauty-and-the-beast-josh-gad-gay-lefou-1202002198/> [accessed: 4.03.2017]; *Disney Refuses to Cut ‘Gay Moment’ from ‘Beauty and the Beast’ for Malaysia*, <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/disney-refuses-to-cut-gay-moment-from-beauty-and-the-beast-for-malaysia> [accessed: 25.03.2017].

⁹⁹ *A Star is Born* (2018), <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1517451/> [accessed: 25.03.2017].

The title character will be portrayed by Emily Blunt and she will be accompanied by one of the brightest contemporary musical stars Lin Manuel Miranda in the role of Jack, and Meryl Streep as Topsy Poppins, along with other great actors like Dick Van Dyke, Angela Lansbury, Julie Walters, Colin Firth, Emily Mortimer and Ben Whishaw. Similarly to *Into the Woods*, *Marry Poppins Returns* is scheduled for release during Christmas time, on December 25th 2018.¹⁰⁰ It has been also announced that *Mamma Mia!* (2008) will have its sequel. *Mamma Mia: Here We Go Again!* is scheduled to premiere exactly ten years (and two days) after the original movie, in July 2018. It will be directed by Ol Parker and completed with a soundtrack of ABBA songs not featured in the first film, along with some reprised favorites. The original cast is expected to return with new additions joining them.¹⁰¹ A lot of stage musicals were announced to be adapted as films in the future, *Matilda* and *Wicked* among others are scheduled for release in 2019.

3. EXCEPTIONAL FILM MUSICALS OF 21ST CENTURY – AREA OF ANALYSIS: TRACING NOVELTIES AND POSTMODERN ELEMENTS

Three discrete areas of investigation immediately present themselves as a means of examining the movie musical: (1) technology, (2) genre and (3) style. [...] Under technology the principal areas of focus are advances in sound and colour, the mobility of the camera, and the way in which such changes affect the way musicals look and sound. Questions of genre explore the difference between stage transfers (those based on a pre-existing stage

¹⁰⁰ *Marry Poppins Returns* (2018), <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt5028340/> [accessed: 25.03.2017].

¹⁰¹ A. Lefkowitz, *Here We Go Again! Mamma Mia! Movie Sequel with Original Cast Set for 2018*, <http://www.broadway.com/buzz/188680/here-we-go-again-mamma-mia-movie-sequel-with-original-cast-set-for-2018/> [accessed: 30.05.2017].

*show) and original movie musicals (those with no stage musical precedent, different versions of a show, and the sources of the music. Also important is the sub-genre of biopics, movies about the life and work of actual show-business personalities. Issues of style subdivide into three areas: musical, visual and dance.*¹⁰²

From the mentioned quote it appears that there are many ways and areas of examining and investigating the film musical. The multiplicity of elements, constituting film musical causes a possibility of diverse interpretations. For the purpose of this publication, six exceptional movie musicals of the 21st century will be analyzed in all those three areas and compared to the composition and aspects of earlier film musical traditions. Additionally special attention will be paid to the postmodern elements occurring and sometimes dominating those movie musicals.

Postmodernist elements and narrative in film serve as an attempt to undermine mainstream conventions of narrative structure. Generally postmodernist films break down the cultural divide between high and low art and often convert typical portrayals of race, gender, class, time or genre to create something different from the traditional narrative expression. At the same time postmodernism draws from the past tradition, as it cannot create anything modern or new. Postmodernist narrative film style is characterized by deliberate rejection of “realistic” principles in cinema. It contains “breaking the fourth wall” (when a character talks directly to the camera, addressing the audience), hyper-reality (closely related to the concept of simulacrum, hyper-reality is the result of the technological mediation of experience, where what passes for reality is a network of images and signs without an external referent, such that what is represented is representation itself¹⁰³),

¹⁰² G. Wood, “Distant cousin or fraternal twin? Analytical approaches to the film musical”, in: W.A. Everett, P.R. Laird, *The Cambridge Companion to the Musical*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 212–230.

¹⁰³ *Postmodernism*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/postmodernism/#6> [accessed: 26.03.2017].

pastiche (the imitation of some unique, past style and merging different genres) connected with intertextuality (refers to the linkage across texts or films, when one refers to the other) and neglecting of what is seen as traditional style of film-making in regard to camera movement and editing techniques. An important postmodern technique is also the disruption of time and space, about which Frederick Jameson writes:

*a constitutive and essential part of the film's structure: we are now, in other words, in 'inter-textuality' as a deliberate, built-in feature of the aesthetic effect and as the operator of a new connotation of 'pastness' and pseudohistorical depth, in which the history of aesthetic style displaces 'real' history.*¹⁰⁴

Nostalgia is another element related to postmodernism, it is connected with pastiche and intertextuality regarding references to the past, but as Linda Hutcheon claims *"The aesthetics of nostalgia might, therefore, be less a matter of simple memory than of complex projection; the invocation of a partial, idealized history merges with a dissatisfaction with the present."*¹⁰⁵ Postmodernism and its elements in film are creating a deeply subjective view of the world and identity or art, and seem to assume that there is no possibility of creating something unique, as there is an endless process of signification and different signs could be traced in every aspect of the movie. Postmodern films also, in contrast to the classical narrative, do not hide the fact that they are a fictional product, but the editing of the movie is constructed in such a way as to let the viewer know and recall its modes of construction. Thus, playfulness and self-references are evident and recognizable in postmodern films. The essence of post-

¹⁰⁴ F. Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991, p. 20.

¹⁰⁵ L. Hutcheon, *Irony, Nostalgia and the Postmodern*, University of Toronto English Library, <http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/criticism/hutchinp.html> [accessed: 26.03.2017].

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modernity is expressed in words of Jean Baudrillard, a French sociologist and philosopher, who claimed that

*postmodernity is said to be a culture of fragmentary sensations, eclectic nostalgia, disposable simulacra, and promiscuous superficiality, in which the traditionally valued qualities of depth, coherence, meaning, originality, and authenticity are evacuated or dissolved amid the random swirl of empty signals.*¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ J. Baudrillard, quoted in: *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, <https://books.google.pl/books?id=s4FMCAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=The+Oxford+Dictionary+of+Literary+Terms+google+books&hl=pl&sa=X&ei=ufyTVYJdyPFS-wICBaA&ved=0CCAQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=The%20Oxford%20Dictionary%20of%20Literary%20Terms%20google%20books&f=false> [accessed: 26.03.2017].

Chapter 3

MOULIN ROUGE! (2001)

1. STORY SYNOPSIS

Baz Luhrmann's love story is set in 1899, in the Montmartre district of Paris. The main location is the iconic nightclub, dance hall and bordello *Moulin Rouge*, famous for its can-can dancers, and rich men who patronize it. The club is located in a shabby area, inhabited not only by the outcasts of the society like pimps and prostitutes, but also by artists and members of the Bohemian movement and vagabond writers like Christian (Evan McGregor), the hero of this love story. The story is told in a manner of a retrospection, starting with Christian writing a story and bringing back the events from the previous year. He moved to Paris from London to become a writer and accidentally encountered a performance of a Bohemian group of artists lead by Toulouse-Lautrec (John Leguizamo). Christian's writing skills led to him establishing a cooperation with the artists and finishing their proposed show *Spectacular, Spectacular*, which they wished to sell to Harold Zidler (Jim Broadbent), the owner of the *Moulin Rouge*. With the help of his new friends, Christian visits *Moulin Rouge* to witness a classic French dancehall romp, can-can. Toulouse arranges for Christian to see Satine (Nicole Kidman), the main star and courtesan of *Moulin Rouge*, the writer is to present to her his work and to convince her to persuade Zidler to produce *Spectacular, Spectacular*. At the same time Zidler arranges a private meeting with Satine for the Duke of Monroth (Richard Roxburgh). Zidler and *Moulin Rouge* are in a financial crisis, which is why Satine is to persuade the Duke

to invest in their new productions. Satine, by mistake takes Christian for the Duke, and by the time she learns he is just a writer they have already fallen in love. In order for *Moulin Rouge* to remain open as a theater with Christian directing the new show, the Duke demands Satine's love and devotion. Now Satine has to find a way to balance the Duke's demands, in order for *Moulin Rouge* to work and for her to fulfill her dream of becoming a real actress, and to stay true to Christian.

The story of Christian – a writer, who idealizes the bohemian way of life and the idea that love conquers all, while falling in love with a courtesan, who he does not now is dying – is strongly based on *La dame aux Camélias* (1852), a play adapted from the novel by Alexandre Dumas. Baz Luhrmann, as an opera director, was also influenced by Giuseppe Verdi's opera adaptation of this story – *La traviata*. The Australian director of *Moulin Rouge!* revealed that he drew a lot from the Greek myth about Orpheus and Euridice. Orpheus was a musical genius, outperforming anyone in his time. To replicate this fact, the creators decided to use music from the 20th century, many years away from the film's 1899 setting, to make Christian look ahead of his time as a writer and musician.

2. MOULIN ROUGE! AND TRADITIONAL MOVIE MUSICAL. WHAT'S NEW?

Moulin Rouge! was influenced by a long list of traditional movie musicals, without reference to which the narrative could have turned out to be pointless. However, in contrast to many of the successful movie musicals of the Golden Era and subsequent times, this one did not have its origins in theater. One of the conventions similar to the so-called *traditional movie musical* is that Luhrmann's musical can be called a *backstage musical*, as it tells a story about convert-

ing a famous nightclub into a theater and creating a piece called *Spectacular, Spectacular*, and often the musical numbers are being performed on the stage. Simultaneously, the movie fits into the *integrated musical* formula, as well. This narrative formula, prevalent during the Golden Era of musicals, can be clearly noticed in Luhrmann's movie, because the performances of songs and dances are fully integrated with the plot and the lyrics of the songs serve as an emphasis to characters' emotions and inner feelings. Traditionally, in *Moulin Rouge!* characters burst out into singing in any given moment, this causes a popular and previously often used activity, so called *a suspension of disbelief*, when the recipient of the movie sacrifices the realism and terms of logic for the sake of enjoyment. In this movie musical every song has a purpose. They are used as a narrative of the story (Toulouse singing *Nature Boy*, bringing closer the character of Christian), as dialogues (*Elephant Love Medley* performed by Christian and Satine, giving voice to their love), monologues and expressions of one's feelings (*One Day I'll Fly Away* by Satine) and songs of performances (like *Coup d'État (Finale)* sung by the performers of *Spectacular, Spectacular*). The songs serve as an exploration and investigation of one's soul. Like traditional movie musicals, *Moulin Rouge!* does not always place its songs in the reality of the piece, songs become a medium of communication that plain words cannot express.

Therefore, we can say that songs and their lyrics are the main device for Baz Luhrmann to connect with the audience. Because of the recognizable existing popular songs that he is using, "*the audience participates in a telling of a story.*"¹⁰⁷ Although this method – to use

¹⁰⁷ B. Luhrmann, quoted in: S. Sheikha, B. Mahmoodi-Bakhtiari, *The Evolution of the Twenty First Century Musical Film*, https://www.academia.edu/7228467/The_Evolution_of_the_Twenty-First_Century_Musical_Film_A_Comparison_Between_Contemporary_Hollywood_Musicals_to_those_of_the_Golden_Age_of_Cinema [accessed: 3.01.2017].

already popular songs – have been used in famous movie musicals before, like in *Signin' In The Rain* (1952), however it had never been to this extent.

To capture the heavy excitement of *Moulin Rouge*, Baz Luhrman and his collaborators blended modern pop, rock, techno, opera, and Broadway show tunes, spanning the entire 20th century, their only rule was that every song had to help to tell the story. To receive the character and tone of the famous nightclub, they not only scanned hundreds of songs to respond to the story, but they also implemented Luhrmann's unique dazzling visual style. The word *spectacle* was used to describe the movie musicals made during the Golden Age Era, but now it is used to describe the visual style of Luhrmann's movies.¹⁰⁸

The specific cinematic technique that Luhrmann represents, with lush imagery and lavish production style, along with incredibly frenetic pace is called by Luhrmann himself as *The Red Curtain* cinema¹⁰⁹ and is reminiscent of classical Hollywood movie musicals. As a consequence of Baz Luhrmann's recognizable cinematic style and close cooperation with the same film-making team, he is considered to be an *auteur*. *Auterism* attempts to detect "*consistent themes, motifs and/or styles across a body of films made by the same director.*"¹¹⁰ *Moulin Rouge!* is the movie where *The Red Curtain* cinema style explodes, but the director's use of technology and modern day hyper-kinetic editing techniques is what sets the movie apart from the traditional movie musicals. In the Golden Age Era of musicals, or the times of Busby Berkeley's musicals, the early dance scene of can-can

¹⁰⁸ S. Sheikha, B. Mahmoodi-Bakhtiari, op. cit.

¹⁰⁹ S. Busari, *Luhrmann brings down Red Curtain with new epic*, <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/SHOWBIZ/Movies/06/26/baz.luhrmann/index.html?iref=24hours> [accessed: 3.01.2017].

¹¹⁰ R. Coyle, *Love is a Many Splendored Thing. Love Lifts Us Up Where We Belong. All You Need s Love – Baz Luhrmann's Eclectic Musical Signature in the Red Curtain Trilogy*, <http://www.screensoundjournal.org/issues/n4/06.%20SSJ%20n4%20Coyle.pdf> [accessed: 3.01.2017].

in the movie would be presented in a single, wide angle unedited shot, and the whole body of the dancer would be visible. However, Luhrmann does not focus on the dancing routine, but more on the overall atmosphere of the nightclub using rapidly changing images and saturated colors, and thus mentally transporting the audience into the frenzy and dizzying world of *Moulin Rouge*. According to Rebecca Coyle, Luhrmann visual techniques are similar to those used during the time of early animations:

*The spectacular sequences and other aspects of Luhrmann's approach to music in his films can be likened to techniques used in animation. The excessively literal treatment of lyrics to match on-screen narrative that is evident in Moulin Rouge!, for example, is not unlike many of composer Carl Stalling's techniques in early animation films for Disney and Warner Bros.*¹¹¹

Beside animations, film critics and scholars indicated a few other earlier popular formats that may have had influenced *Moulin Rouge!*, like the MTV video format. Luhrmann supposedly used MTV inspired technological effects such as the speeding up and then slowing down of action, as well as the fast paced editing of the movie. This venture was purported to make the movie popular among the younger crowds, who had been raised on fragmentary and visually opulent style of MTV music videos. In other words, Luhrmann used and experimented with a cinematic language which contemporary audience were familiar with and could understand.

Moulin Rouge! can be also interpreted and seen through the prism of rock opera, or more of a satire on the rock opera. The rock opera was popular in the 1970s when rock music was new music, not the most favored style at the time. Its objective was to use this kind of music as a mean of communicating certain moods and conditions that could only be expressed through rock music. What *Moulin Rouge!* does in juxtaposition with the rock opera is to use the modern music to speak

¹¹¹ Ibidem.

across the times. The evidence of it is an initial comment made by a film critic Owen Gilberman:

*The rock opera of course is nothing new, but in *Moulin Rouge!*, the spectacle of rock employed in a period setting, funny, absurd as it often appears, speaks to us in a new and galvanizing way. It slashes through the distance that so many of us feel toward musicals, not just because the songs here really are our songs, but because the very incongruity evokes that casual, private dream world in which rock has become the daily libretto of our lives.*¹¹²

Again, it was another effort to make the movie memorable.

3. POSTMODERNISM IN *MOULIN ROUGE!*

The first postmodernist elements in *Moulin Rouge!* can be traced even from the brief outlook of the storyline (3.1.). Intertextuality of the plot of the movie and the previous texts like *La dame aux Camélias* is evident. The plot of the Alexandre Dumas' novel revolves around a love story between Marguerite Gautier, a courtesan suffering from tuberculosis and a young provincial bourgeois, Armand Duval. The character of Satine from *Moulin Rouge!* is almost identical reflection of Marguerite, they both suffer from and at the end die of the same disease. Christian on the other hand, like Orpheus tries to rescue his love from the "underworld," but fails dramatically. In the case of Orpheus *underworld* meant a place where the soul journeys after death, in the case of *Moulin Rouge!*, *underworld* is the seedy underbelly of Paris. Additionally, Orpheus' purity is signaled in Christian's name, who is a follower of Bohemian virtues like truth, beauty, freedom, love; and

¹¹² O. Gilberman, quoted in: J. Zoref, *The Postmodern Movie Musical, or, How Moulin Rouge! Changed a Genre*, <http://gradworks.umi.com/14/72/1472217.html> [accessed: 5.01.2017].

Euridice is Satine (her name originating from something in between *satan* and *satin*). This postmodern tendency towards generic cross reference (opera, comedy, drama) and intertextuality creates a relationship with the audience by both playing with and complementing their knowledge of the film. As the director Baz Luhrmann stressed: “*Our recognizable story, though Orphean in shape, is derived from Camille, La Boheme – whether you know those texts or not, you recognize those patterns and character types.*”¹¹³ The audience could also recognize some real life personas included in the movie, like the French painter of the late 19th century – Henri de Toulouse Lautrec, portrayed in the movie by John Leguizamo. Baz Luhrmann, in the documentary about creating the famous musical, revealed also that the placement of the plot in the time of 1899 and the turn of the 20th century was deliberate. The movie production started in 1999 and the director along with the movie creators, felt like it was a reflection of the times that they were living in: “*the world was moving forward into a new time and backward into the old time,*”¹¹⁴ which is also a strong intertextual operation.

The director’s unconventional treatment of time and place – we know that the story is set in Paris circa 1900, but any sense of historical context is minimized by anachronistic references – is a strongly postmodern project. Realistic and naturalistic principles are consciously rejected. The unrealistic hyper-reality created by the director is constructed and emphasized in such a way that the audience is aware of its artificiality. Luhrman himself calls it the *contract of the film*¹¹⁵ – into which the audience have entered and must accept that construct that does not go along with the rules of

¹¹³ B. Luhrmann, quoted in: *Baz Luhrmann (I)*, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2001/sep/07/1> [accessed: 5.01.2017].

¹¹⁴ See: B. Luhrmann, *Backstory – Moulin Rouge! Part 1*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vbZNqUXA1Nk> [accessed: 6.01.2017].

¹¹⁵ B. Luhrmann, quoted in: J. Zoref, op. cit.

realism. The perfect example of the break with the realistic and naturalistic presentations in the movie is the sequence when Christian is singing “Your Song” to Satine, while the couple falls in love. That is the moment when ordinary transfers into extraordinary. When Christian starts to sing all of the lights in the entire Paris light up. As Christian’s song and Satine’s feelings swell, he whisks Satine out of the window and onto the top of a cloud, which takes them to the roofs of Paris, where it rains silver glitter. Christian is able to jump on the Eiffel Tower, while the moon is singing along with him in the voice of the opera tenor Plácido Domingo. The scene is a visualization of the first stages of falling in love, where the characters cannot keep their feet on the ground. It is also a pastiche of love songs and how sentimental they could be, but also how the characters and the audience can be involved in a spontaneous moment of the movie. Another interpretation of the scene is clearly Orphean in shape. When Christian starts to sing, the whole environment quiets down and focuses on him. Significant and symbolic are also the first words of the song: “My gift is my song” – which practically define the persona of Orpheus. The scene is one of the essential ones in the movie, as it deals with the notion of love, which is the main subject of the movie. That the story is about love is stressed several times in the movie itself and even after the closing credits, the creators placed the movie’s mantra: “*This story is about truth, beauty, freedom, but above all love.*” The theme itself is as clichéd as it can be and was used in a great majority of movie musicals, but this time it is reinvented in quite a postmodern way.

Along with movie’s disjointed camera work, a manifestation of fragmentation (typical for postmodernism, as recognized by Jameson and other scholars of postmodernity) and special effects, *Moulin Rouge!* presents a special reality, evident only in the movie itself. Frederic Jameson, who wrote a lot about postmodernism, noted something similar:

*If there is any realism left here, it is a "realism" that is meant to derive from the shock of grasping that confinement and of slowly becoming aware of a new and original historical situation in which we condemned to seek History by way of our own pop images and simulacra of that history, which itself remains forever out of reach.*¹¹⁶

The whole story in *Moulin Rouge!* is told by those "pop images and simulacra of history." Despite the fact that the time and the location of the plot is the 1899 Paris, the movie uses famous images from popular culture and history of the 20th century to tell its story. For example, the reference to the famous movie musical *The Sound of Music* (1965), one of the most popular and iconic movie musicals of all time is used when Christian "invents" the lyrics for *Spectacular, Spectacular*. Another reference to the queen of pop – Madonna, can be traced when Zidler is singing her hit song from 1984 (*Like a Virgin*) to the Duke, trying to explain why Satine could not come to see him. Here, a song of Madonna, a symbol of sex and promiscuity, is used to justify non sexual behavior of a courtesan – the audience gets the intertextual joke made by Luhrmann.

Another postmodern in nature element is repeated in the story itself and in the general perception of this particular movie musical as opposed to what the director thinks of it. The interweaving of high and low culture can be traced in the fact that *Moulin Rouge*, a typical venue of popular culture (in the movie and in reality), is to be replaced into theater, and the courtesan is to become an actress. Those attempts represent a crossing between popular entertainment and artistic endeavor. We can assume the same fact about the movie itself. As a movie musical it is seen as the product of popular culture. However, the director does not see his film entirely as a popular product and recalls that Shakespeare at his time also was taken for popular culture; he states: "*popular culture today becomes*

¹¹⁶ F. Jameson, quoted in: J. Zoref, op. cit.

classical culture tomorrow."¹¹⁷ Thus the postmodern blending of high and low culture in *Moulin Rouge!* is observed on many layers.

Aside from drawing from the traditions of classic Hollywood movie musicals and incorporating collage techniques, typical for post-modernism, Baz Luhrmann leaves a remarkably unique mark on the film. Although in the selection of songs he is using preexisting material, there is a sense of a totally new soundtrack. Previous associations of the musical numbers are mingled with new ones, stylistically disconnected from the story's setting, however creating his authorial voice. The effects were called "*postmodern eclecticism on a deeper creative level.*"¹¹⁸ In a movie like this, a soundtrack movie, the compilation scores do not have one fixed meaning, but carry with them a great deal of discourses, including the style of the song or the original performer. To Luhrmann musical composition and lyrics are as important as the connotations they bring with them. The chosen songs, for instance, not only have to tell a story, but also reveal a character's personality. This kind of approach to the song and its central place in the movie comes from the director's fascination with Bollywood. In the Indian film industry, soundtracks and recorded musical numbers from the movie are released before the movie premiere, to boost the movie's promotion. Luhrmann's movie marketing is clearly more common to the Bollywood or even Broadway than to a classical Hollywood musical. For instance, a song and music video for *Lady Marmalade*, performed by singers who did not star in the movie, contributed greatly to its promotion. Christina Aguilera, Lil' Kim, Mya and Pink's cover and first single for *Moulin Rouge! Soundtrack* became a number-one hit on the U.S. Billboard Hot 100 chart.

¹¹⁷ B. Luhrmann, quoted in: A. Van Der Merwe, "Music, the Musical, and Post-modernism in Baz Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge!*", *Music and the Moving Image*, Vol. 3, No. 3, University of Illinois Press, 2010, p. 31.

¹¹⁸ A. Van Der Merwe, op. cit., p. 31.

A closer look at the musical complexity and hidden meanings, in particular at musical quotation, is essential to understanding the movie's relationship both to postmodernism and the Hollywood musical. The following examples show how important every small detail is to the director, and how many intertextual connotations are hidden in Luhrmann's world.

In the beginning of the movie the story is being told jointly by Christian and a lisping Toulouse-Lautrec, who is singing the opening song *Nature Boy*. Originally the song was written by Eden Ahbez and here some knowledge of his persona is substantial to the story. The song tells a story of a boy, here – Christian, who is a talented vagabond (“*There was a boy, a very strange enchanted boy. They say he wandered very far, very far, over land and sea. A little shy and sad of eye, but very wise was he.*”) Ahbez was himself some kind of a vagabond, spending most of his life in Griffith Park in Los Angeles, where he managed to sell his song to Nat King Cole in the late 1940's. In *Moulin Rouge!* the song is performed in a tradition established by Nat King Cole, a kind of free-floating rhythm, owning only small hints of its waltz origins (in the movie implemented as the rotating arms of Moulin Rouge – the Red Windmill). Thus, the song is a vagabond song in its nature, at the same time it evokes a sense of loss, which in the movie can be assigned to Christian's current arrival to a new, unknown place (he moved from London to a foreign Paris). The song itself and how it is utilized in the movie is an evident example of Luhrmann's attachment to detail and how many intertextual layers one number might have.

In another scene, when Christian accidentally finds himself in the middle of the rehearsal for *Spectacular, Spectacular* – to focus attention on himself and his ideas for the show – he uses and sings a verse (“*The hills are alive with the sound of music, and songs they have sung for a thousand year*”) from *The Sound of Music* (1965). The melody and lyrics are used without alteration and anyone who

is familiar with the famous musical will notice the humor added to the scene with the alpine setting of the Bohemian's play or that Toulouse is dressed as a nun (main character in *The Sound of Music* is a nunnery initiate on a break). Christian singing the famous verses as his own invention makes him look like a master of theatrical song. Luhrmann uses this famous preexisting material in order to make his character look credible as a creative talent, though the final effect depend upon audience's familiarity with its original performance.

Before meeting with Satine, while Christian and his new friends are in Moulin Rouge, they are being entertained by Harold Zidler and his can-can dancers. The ladies present themselves with the words of *Lady Marmalade* – *Voulez vous coucher avec moi ce soir?*, and the male patrons of Moulin Rouge answer them with lyrics of the famous Nirvana song from 1991 – *Here we are now, entertain us*. Luhrman uses exactly the same words from *Smells Like Teen Spirit* and he even retains the grunge sound of the song, but the lyrics' meaning in the movie are absolutely opposite to those of the band. Nirvana's song aimed to ironically showcase music's and culture's general commercialism and the quoted lyrics were anything but literal in meaning. However, the lyrics in the movie are totally literal and prosaic. When sung by a Parisian group of gentlemen waiting for their favorite courtesans, it becomes a normal informative sentence rather than a rock's band musical rebellion against both musical and social authority. This simplification is a mockery of the original complexity of the number. Additionally, the group who now sings the song is precisely the mass audience that Cobain was opposing and rebelling against. Above all, the movie version parodies the most problematic contradiction of the song – its great success and popularity among mass audiences.

Another example of multi-layered story and the director's meticulousness can be seen in a comedic scene, when Zidler tries to find an explanation for Satine's illness and her inability to meet with

the Duke. Zidler's excuse is that his most famous protégée went to confess her sins to feel "like a virgin" before the encounter with the Duke. The absurdity of his excuse and of that scene in general, is manifested in the exaggerated staging of the number. A bunch of waiters turn into a chorus of dancers, which recalls a romantic reality of traditional Hollywood musical. What Zidler is saying is as unrealistic as the fact that the supper turns into a full range musical number with Zidler parodying not only Madonna's song *Like a Virgin*, but also the singer herself. He wraps himself in white tablecloth in a manner that recalls the imagery of the Virgin Mary. Noteworthy is also the fact that Luhrmann established the character of Duke in total contrast to Christian – essentially a non-musical character. Despite the fact that the above mentioned scene is the largest one relating to Duke, he almost does not have a voice in it, and the entire performance is made by Zidler and other performers/waiters.

The song chosen for the climax of the movie fits perfectly, as The Police's *Roxanne* was written in Paris and was inspired by prostitutes that Sting saw near the band's hotel. However, Luhrmann makes the song even more tragic by performing it as a tango, a dance which has been long associated not only with physical passion, but unfortunately also with prostitution. The scene involving *El Tango de Roxanne* consists of different images that cross over each other. The tango, danced by one of the Moulin Rouge dancers performed with several men, is a symbolic projection of Satine's life as a courtesan and her current encounter with the Duke. Near the conclusion of the song the female dancer is passed roughly from man to man, and finally thrown to the floor violently, the scene is an equivalent of the scene taking place at the same time, involving Duke's attempt to rape Satine in the tower. Because of the duality of the scene, the tango scene and the tower scene performed at the same time, the number seems real and imagined at the same time, which is quite a post-modern effect. Despite the fact that *Roxanne* is the most modified

musical quotation of the movie, it is used exclusively for the lyrical purpose, because of the lack of connotations that the director could draw from.

Music is the most central element of the movie and it functions on every level, from the different sounds and melodies, through lyrics and undertones it hides. This is an outcome of Luhrmann attention to detail, for which he is both admired and despised. As a result there is a multitude of allusions and meanings that can be easily recognized by the audience, but also have their new, sometimes dramatic significances in the movie. Largely, the movie is a celebration of popular culture with its many references to songs and celebrities of the popular culture of the 20th century, but at the same time it parodies this culture and establishes new meanings, forcing also its critical analysis. In this way, *Moulin Rouge!* is breaking the barrier between popular culture and art, between high and low culture, in a distinctively postmodern manner.

Both signature elements of Hollywood musical and postmodern film are evident in *Moulin Rouge!* Its characters sing and dance as a part of a show-within-a film formula as well as burst into singing or dancing in any given situation to give full rein to their emotions, in a manner of a typical film musical. On the other hand, Luhrmann's extensive use of intertextual connections and pastiche of preexisting material represent postmodernism. If we add his unconventional treatment of reality and time, as well as the fast paced storyline and fragmented images, obtained by rapid camera movement, we can say that *Moulin Rouge!* deserves to be called a truly postmodern film. Moreover, at a time when *Moulin Rouge!* was released, it was a time when a great majority of successful film musicals were adapted from the stage. This production stood out like an ultimate movie musical, not adapted and it seemed like also not adaptable for the stage, because of its eclectic style and rapid pace. However, in September 2016 it has been announced that Baz Luhrmann's

revolutionary film will come to the theatrical stage as a new musical with a book by John Logan, directed by Alex Timbers, created by an international touring theater company – Global Creatures.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ *Moulin Rouge! The Musical*, <http://www.global-creatures.com/productions/moulin-rouge/> [accessed 08.06.2017].

Chapter 4

CHICAGO (2002)

Only one year after the release of *Moulin Rouge!*, next Hollywood movie musical had its premiere. *Chicago*, along with its predecessor, continued the reinvention of the musical and its success opened doors for next musical productions as well as convinced the film industry that the genre is not dead. *Chicago* still remains the one and only movie musical to have won The Academy Award for Best Picture in the 21st century.

1. STORY SYNOPSIS AND INSPIRATIONS

Rob Marshall's film debut is set in the Prohibition-era Chicago in the year of 1924. One of its main characters – Roxie Hart (Renée Zellweger) is naive to think that her recent lover named Fred Casely has some connections in the entertainment business and will make her a vaudeville star. Roxie visits *Onyx*, a nightclub, where a star Velma Kelly (Catherine Zeta-Jones) performs what is supposed to be a double, sister act – *All that Jazz*. However Velma is performing alone, her sister Veronica as she claims is “not herself tonight,” as she is already dead, murdered by her sister, who caught her and her husband Charlie during a sexual act. While Velma is performing, Roxie is imagining that she herself is singing and dancing on the stage. By the end of the show, police officers are entering the nightclub to arrest the star-murderess. In the meantime, Roxie is leaving with Fred, who keeps assuring her that she is going to be famous. When Fred gets

bored with Roxie and tired of her constant nagging he decides to leave her and reveals that he promised to help her with career only to get in her pants. Shocked and rancorous Roxie kills him with her husband's gun. Initially, Roxie's husband Amos (John C. Reilly) takes the blame for her, while being interrogated by a detective. While Amos is confessing to the police, Roxie fantasizes about singing a song about her loyal husband *Funny Honey*. Unfortunately for her, she is brutally pulled out of her daydream when Amos realizes his wife's infidelity and exposes the ugly truth about his spouse to the police. Roxie is taken to the Cook County Jail, where she is introduced to the prison's realities of "reciprocity" by Matron "Mama" Morton (Queen Latifah) – *When You're Good to Mama*. Both main characters of the movie – the murderesses – meet in jail. Roxie tries to befriend Velma, whom she idolizes, but she is ruthlessly refused. On Mama's advice, Roxie decides to employ Velma's lawyer, indispensable Billy Flynn (Richard Gere). He is for sure brilliant in his job, but he also demands total submission of his clients, as well as loads of money, under the threat of abandoning the case (his features impersonated in *All I Care About* number). Under Flynn's patronage, Roxie manipulates the press, displayed as puppets on strings (*We Both Reached For the Gun*) and suddenly becomes a heroine and celebrity (*Roxie*). Velma's lack of publicity forces her to look for support and cooperation with Roxie, whom she proposes to do her famed sister act with (*I Can't Do It Alone*). The ladies remain enemies as Roxie rejects Velma's proposal. While the lawsuit continues, Roxie performs a few other dirty tricks to gain some fame. Flynn makes some use of the murderesses' bad relations and he manages to free both of them at once, while turning the trial into a media spectacle (*Razzle Dazzle*). Eventually, both women lose their momentary fame connected with their committed crimes. Sometime later Roxie finally becomes a vaudeville actress, but without major successes. Velma, also unsuccessful at the times approaches her and the ladies conclude that they can perform with

each other despite the resentment that they both feel for one another. A pair of murderesses in vaudeville becomes a famous act and the final scene is their stage performances, which earns a standing ovation from the audience (*Nowadays/Hot Honey Rag*).

The background for the 2002 movie begins with Maurine Dallas Watkin's original play *Chicago* from 1926. The play was based on real life events and people. Watkins, as a reporter in 1924, was covering the story of murders and subsequent trials of Belva Gaertner, a cabaret dancer, and Beulah Sheriff-Annan. When writing about the crimes, Watkins focused on the cynical and sensational aspects of the cases. The interest in the two "jazz babies" claiming to be corrupted by men and liquor was enormous among the press and public. The writer probably facilitated the acquittal for both murderesses, as she made them "famous." What is more, Watkins is said to have fabricated a story about Beulah being pregnant, which was to have effect on the jury's verdict.¹²⁰ Watkins transformed the reported story into a play and Beulah Annan became the archetype for Roxie Hart and Belva Gaertner for Velma Kelly. The play was quickly transformed into a silent movie, also called *Chicago*, directed by Cecil B. DeMille in 1927. Subsequent adaptations included the 1942 *Roxie Hart*, one of the finest comedies of the era, but a tempered version of the story because of the Hays Code. Roxie was portrayed by Ginger Rogers and what is interesting the movie was not a musical. The story had then not been revived until 1975, supposedly because Watkins' bad conscience over her role in glorifying the murderers. Bob Fosse had sought the rights to *Chicago* to adapt it as a musical, but was rebuffed by the writer. After Watkins' death in 1969, he managed to buy the rights from her estate and developed the story into the 1975 musical *Chicago*. John Kander was responsible for the music and Fred Ebb

¹²⁰ R. Knapp, *The American Musical and the Performance of Personal Identity*, Princetown University Press, Princetown, New Jersey, 2006, p. 111.

for the lyrics. The Broadway production ran for 936 performances, up until 1977 and initially was only a moderate success, although expectations were quite high after the fame of the result of their earlier cooperation in the movie musical *Cabaret* (1972), which was also directed by Fosse with Kendar's and Ebb's music and lyrics. The film version was to have been the next project for Bob Fosse, but he did not fulfill his intentions before his death in 1987. However, he transported some of the plot intrigues and several of the show's songs into his 1979 movie – *All That Jazz*. The musical was revived on Broadway in 1996 and finally made as a movie musical in 2002 with the direction of Rob Marshall and screenplay by Bill Condon.

Among the works that influenced the movie Dennis Potter's musical drama series *Pennies From Heaven* (1978) is mentioned. It is said that as well as in *Pennies*, in *Chicago* the coldhearted observational style is a big influence. The trial and every event leading up to it are treated as a backstage preparation for something bigger. They serve as the dialogue providers to make the storyline more digestible. However, the eruption of musical numbers and emotions takes place in Roxie's mind, the unconscious sphere, where every, even the most challenging number, is realizable.¹²¹

The director himself indicated that *The King of Jazz* (1930) had some influence on him and partially inspired the atmosphere of *Chicago*, as well as Ken Burn's *Jazz* series (2000), which provided history of the jazz, emphasizing innovative composers and musicians and American history. Work of the vaudeville painter Reginald Marsh was also pointed out by the director, as having some impact on the movie.¹²²

¹²¹ E. Mitchell, "*Chicago*," *Bare Legs And All, Makes it to Film*, <http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9B0DE0DC113CF934A15751C1A9649C8B63> [accessed: 11.01.2017].

¹²² M. Ginsberg, *Marshall Law*, <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA96135325&v=2.1&u=fub&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w&asid=8d03a14110637af76e0a819279aa4c8> [accessed: 11.01.2017].

Despite the fact that Bob Fosse did not direct the film version of *Chicago*, the movie owes him a significant debt for its technique in presenting its musical numbers in an uncanny parallel to the main dramatic action rather than within it. In Fosse's *Cabaret*, the musical numbers served as a commentary to the ongoing events and they were fully diegetic, taking place inside the club and on the stage. *Chicago* refocuses this strategy – the numbers are still being performed diegetically on the stage, but they all take place in and derive from Roxie's imagination. That is the reason why the performances seem to be more embedded in the dramatical action of the film. Rob Marshall was not only the director, but also the choreographer of the movie and there is a visible honor that he pays to the famously distinct choreography of Bob Fosse. His original jazz choreography movements are evident throughout the movie and he is thanked in the closing credits.

Fosse's influence on the movie's representation of musical numbers is not the only one. As a matter of fact, throughout the film many relations and interconnections with *Cabaret* (1972) can be found; starting with the undeniable similarity of Velma Kelly to Sally Bowles, portrayed by Liza Minnelli in 1972. On the first sight, Velma may seem candidly and obnoxiously imitative. This impression is even intensified and confirmed, but kind of justified when we understand that Minnelli's Sally was also strongly modeled on Louise Brooks, an American actress, noted for popularizing the bobbed haircut. Brooks, like the character modeled on her – Sally Bowles – was an actress who achieved some success in Germany circa 1930, famous for her page-boy hairdo (which firstly inspired Minnelli's and of course Catherine Zeta-Jones' hairstyle in *Chicago*). She was also known for the movie *Pandora's Box* (1929) whose uncanny story revolves around a jazz-crazed femme fatale on trial for the murder of her husband.

The film version of *Cabaret* serves also as a model for the 2002 film's story. *Cabaret* is set in 1930's Berlin, the incipient environment

of Nazi Germany, so there is a big city in a quite dangerous period. And likewise, in *Chicago*, the plot is centered in a big city – Chicago, during the Prohibition era, where murderesses are treated as the heroes of the society, surely that is also an antonym of the safe period of American history; although *Chicago's* version of The Kit Kat Club (where all of the musical numbers take place in *Cabaret*) is mostly the creation of Roxie Hart's imagination. What is more, both titles of the movies are names of the places, rich in associations with decadency. Both of these movies refer to the place, a heart of immorality and degeneration. Problems, events and instances that the movies talk about all circle around those places and around the problematic relationship between those sometimes enchanted places (Roxie's imagination) and reality.

2. CHICAGO'S DISTINCTIVE PERSPECTIVE, CAMP, CYNICISM, AMORALITY AND MORE

In *Chicago*, the established perspective is that of Roxie Hart's. The story from the beginning is told from her point of view, as the first shot of the film is a close-up on her eyes. Roxie is attracted to the reality of jazz performers, thus the hyper-reality of her imagination can transform her quite average talents into those of a star. The main focus is on her, and her role as both the manipulator of the events, but also being manipulated herself. Through that project, the real-life situations become musical numbers in her head. In the first instance, when the camera makes a second close-up on her eyes, Roxie herself stars in those numbers, replacing Velma Kelly on stage, but along with the story more characters start to sing and dance in her imagined world. Each of these numbers is introduced by the pianist-emcee working in the Onyx club, where the story begins. However, the original stage show *Chicago* was not created to

be a result of Roxie's mind; it was Rob Marshall's original idea, which is why for subsequent performances the POV is moved between hers and that of Billy Flynn. However, one of the numbers – *We Both Reached For The Gun* combines their two perspectives. That moment of the film is where the previous visible division is affected, as the "real-life" referent – the press interview – is already a kind of a performance with evident partition on character's roles.

What is one of the movie's socially offensive elements, is the representation of values, which in *Chicago* are diametrically opposed to the conventional understanding of decency and morality. Furthermore, the only innocent defendant of the Murderess Row, the Hungarian ballerina, is sentenced to death, while the obviously guilty murderesses (revealed during *Cell Block Tango* performance) are allowed to get away with their crimes. This invalidation of conventional norms had been presented in a cynical manner throughout the film. Partially, this is a true representation of how the society worked at the time, but on the larger scale it was part of *Chicago's* camp dimension, since "*the most extreme forms of camp have an overriding concern with presentation and must at least in some way invert expressive expectations in order simply to be camp.*"¹²³ Generally camp is associated with social, cultural and aesthetic style and sensibility based on deliberate and self-accepted theatricality. Camp is also characterized by inverting aesthetic attributes like beauty, values or taste through a presentation of different types of perception and consumption. In other words, camp changes what is widely accepted as normality, morality or common sense. In a situation where the audience do not see the story through the prism of cynicism, camp will remain offensive for those who take the serious stance. It is a conscious project, because we as the audience can take Roxie seriously and notice not only the imagined world

¹²³ R. Knapp, op. cit., p. 114.

she lives in, but also the fact that she suffers, thus she is not purely cynical. In fact, the events played out in Roxie's hyper-reality have real consequences, so those fantasies are fulfilling two roles, the one that isolates the reality and one that unites with it, which is the duality of camp.¹²⁴

The values presented in the movie equal the character values which the protagonists share. When comparing *Chicago* to the traditional movie musicals, what stands out is that the leading ladies, who in traditional manner should be heroes and someone to look up to, in the realm of *Chicago* are actually anti-heroes; furthermore, brutal murderesses, who build their career on their merciless vices and crimes. That is a major change in the tradition of movie musicals, taken straight out of the theater and promoting the emergence of later protagonist in musical film, like Sweeney Todd. Maybe presenting the lead characters as anti-heroes was something new in the spectre of movie musicals, however, as the director accurately noticed in 2002, at present the prevalent cases of celebrity that people idolize were (and unfortunately still are) people of low level of decency, like stars of reality shows. In one of the interviews, Marshall said:

*It's more about self-love. Which is much more modern. It's about the perversity of celebrity and whom we chose to celebrate – which in this case, was female murderers, which were actually rampant in Chicago in the Twenties, which was like the damn of feminism. Women were suddenly drinking and dancing – and killing their boyfriends. It empowered them. And they got famous for it. Maybe we're not celebrating murderers anymore, but Tanya Harding and Monica Lewinsky aren't exactly wholesome. There's a line in the song Renée sings, 'Nowadays ':' In 50 years, it's all gonna change.' Well, it hasn't changed – and it's been 82 years since the Twenties. Look at reality television and celebrity boxing. It's really fascinating, isn't it?*¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Ibidem, pp. 110–115.

¹²⁵ M. Ginsberg, op. cit.

In this manner, the director is making a link between now and then, between the movie and real life, and how what we see on the screen is easily transferable to our reality. In contrast to the traditional movie musical there is a great shift in portraying the world of entertainment and show business, those spaces are not glorified in the same way as they used to be in the past. A darker side of fame and infamy is shown, that simply would not endure during the cheerful period of the Golden Age era musicals. It is also a confirmation that history likes to repeat itself, maybe in a slightly different setting, but still, and that no matter what time in history the emotions are always the same. *Chicago* is one of the musical movies that started to catch up with social events and current issues.

On the other hand, what the Oscar-winning movie did not draw from theater was its professional performers. From the main characters, only Catherina Zeta-Jones had previously had professional dance training. As of the rest, like Renée Zellweger and Richard Gere they – were musical novices. Still, Rob Marshall stated that the stars had been practicing for months and that nobody was understudied and they were prepared so well, that they could take the show on the road and it would be just as good.¹²⁶ One can wonder then, why the closing credits highlight the fact that the numbers were performed entirely by this cast. It could be to point out to the musical talents of the novices and to make the musical itself more credible as a genre. The fact that neither Renée nor Roxie were professional performers served the plot well, as this character was not supposed to be a star, but a star wannabe. Thus the amateur performance is a part of the point, the magic, the cinematic dimension, in which the numbers take place would distract from the professional dancing routine. How to fool the audience and hide one's possible shortcomings is plainly stated in the *Razzle Dazzle* number, when Billy Flynn sings:

¹²⁶ Ibidem.

"Give'em the old Razzle Dazzle. Razzle dazzle'em. Show'em the first rate sorcerer you are. Long as you keep'em way off balance, how can they spot you've got no talent?" Just as Roxie razzle dazzles the jury, *Chicago* razzle dazzles its audience with opulent and lush, cinematic scenography. Such a flamboyant background can be a successful distraction from performers' weakness.

3. IS CHICAGO A POSTMODERN MOVIE?

There had been some discussion among film critics whether *Chicago* is a postmodern film musical. For those rooting for the realm in which the movie is postmodern, some characteristic postmodern elements, like abandoning the notion of "historicity" had been pointed out. According to postmodern theoretician Frederic Jameson, the historical realness is miniaturized, and instead the reproduction of the era is simply a "*stylistic connotation, conveying 'pastness' by the glossy qualities of the image.*"¹²⁷ Following this trace, Rob Marshall's indifference to a realistic depiction of 1920s Chicago would be typical of postmodernism. Additionally the MTV-influenced format and the fast editing of the movie stay in contrast even to the stylistic evocation of the past, in favor of implementing such postmodern stylistic conventions. It is said that the movie pays tribute to its past models of the story in particularly postmodern ways, by dismantling them in order to revive them and bring some freshness to the piece. A film scholar Michael Dunne argues that the movie breaks up with the contemporary audience's dislike of a format where performers burst out into singing without any given reason.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ F. Jameson, quoted in: M. Charlton, *Performing Gender in the Studio and Postmodern Musical*, <http://www.alphavillejournal.com/Issue%203/HTML/ArticleCharlton.html> [accessed: 19.01.2017].

¹²⁸ M. Dunne, *American Film Musical Themes and Forms*, McFarland, London, 2004.

In *Chicago* this artificiality is replaced by the original idea of staging all of the numbers in a character's imagination, thus making them more believable. It is not hard to presume that a fame and show-business obsessed characters would imagine themselves in scenarios in which they are performing on stage. Following the post-modern formula, the audience of *Chicago* is being constantly reminded that what they see is far from reality, through images from Roxie's imagination the movie is composed in such a way as to let the viewer know about its mode of construction. Another postmodern element – nostalgia – is spotted in the movie through Roxie's resemblance to the character of Marilyn Monroe, especially to the famous images from *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953), reshaped in *Chicago* during the performance of *Roxie*. Roxie, imagines herself dressed in a diamond dress, surrounded by handsome men, performing a number which is an imitation of Monroe's number from 1953. The nostalgia and feeling of longing and desire to become a star of Marilyn Monroe's scale is evident in Roxie's appearance, the lyrics of the song, as well the choreography of the number.

On the other hand, despite its many obvious postmodern stylings, *Chicago* was undermined as a postmodern movie. James Leve, in his discussion of the 2002 film had stated that indeed, what Marshall did with placing the numbers in Roxie's imagination was proper to incorporate music more realistically than in the Broadway version, but the acquired realism that makes it work simultaneously questions its postmodern nature.¹²⁹ Nevertheless, despite the critique *Chicago* obviously carries many postmodern elements, maybe it is hard to call it the ultimate postmodern musical like *Moulin Rouge!*, but the adjective *postmodern*, surely finds its place in the movie's interpretation.

¹²⁹ J. Leve, quoted in: A. Van Der Merwe, op. cit., p. 31.

Chapter 5

MAMMA MIA! (2008)

Despite the fact that *Mamma Mia!* initially received mixed reviews from critics – from describing it as “*the closest you get to see A-List actors doing drunken karaoke*”¹³⁰ to “*finding a film a total shambles was sort of a shame, but I have a sneaking suspicion I’ll go to see it again anyway*”¹³¹ – it did not stop this production from becoming a great worldwide success and receiving a warm response from the audience. As of 2017, this famous jukebox musical remains the sixth highest grossing musical movie of all time.¹³²

1. STORY SYNOPSIS AND THE FEMALE AUTHORSHIP

The action of this British/American/Swedish musical movie, based on the songs of the outstanding 1970s Swedish group ABBA and directed by Phyllida Lloyd, is set on a Greek island of Kalokairi. The story kicks off when a twenty year old soon-to-be bride Sophie (Amanda Seyfried) sends out three separate wedding invitations to her three potential fathers (*I Have A Dream*). As it turns out, she had recently found her mother Donna’s (Meryl Streep) diary, which revealed that

¹³⁰ Mark Kermode *Reviews Mamma Mia! – BBC Radio 5 live*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=61UolzFTVPI> [accessed: 1.02.2017].

¹³¹ T. Robey, *Film Reviews: Mamma Mia! And More*, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/filmreviews/3556138/Film-reviews-Mamma-Mia-and-more.html> [accessed: 1.02.2017].

¹³² *Musical 1974-Present*, op. cit.

she is not sure who is the real father of her child, as during one of those extraordinary summers over twenty years ago she had three love affairs. The possibilities are: an Irish-American architect Sam Carmichael (Pierce Brosnan), English banker Harry Bright (Colin Firth) and Swedish sailor and travel writer Bill Anderson (Stellan Skarsgård). Soon the three former lovers and potential fathers of Sophie arrive on the island and Donna is completely unaware of it. Sophie believes that after spending some time with those men she will realize who is her real father (*Honey, Honey*). At the same time, two of Donna's former band members and girlfriends come to the island on the occasion of the wedding. The former *Donna and the Dynamos* bandmates are the unmarried, fun-loving and wisecracking author Rosie (Julie Walters), and a wealthy, three-time divorcée, men-obsessed Tanya (Christine Baranski). Donna is a single mother, who runs a hotel on the island by herself and she thinks that Sophie is too young to be getting married; she reveals her concerns to her girlfriends. Subsequently, Donna accidentally finds three of her former lovers and firstly is dumbfounded but later adamant that they leave (that is one of the movie's climatic moments, performed during *Mamma Mia* number). Donna shares her uncertainty about who is Sophie's father to Tanya and Rosie (*Chiquitita*) and they decide to raise her spirits by dancing and singing with the female staff of the hotel and the islanders (*Dancing Queen*). Later at Sophie bachelorette party she learns different facts about her potential fathers, but still cannot decide who her real father is, she asks all of them separately to give her away on her wedding day, but overwhelmed by the consequences of her actions she faints. On the wedding day Donna confronts Sophie, she is sure that she fainted because of the stress connected to the wedding and asks her daughter if she wants to call the ceremony off. Sophie snaps that all she wants to do is avoid her mother's mistakes and then she leaves. Sam approaches Donna, concerned about Sophie getting married so young. The couple confront each other and realize that they still have feelings

for each other (*SOS, The Winner Takes it All*). At the wedding ceremony Sophie asks her mother to walk her down the aisle, and Donna reveals that any of the three men could be Sophie's father. The men agree that they would be happy to be one-third of a father for Sophie. She decides to postpone the wedding and travel around the world with her fiancé Sky (Dominic Cooper), as they always wanted. Harry confesses that Donna was the first and last woman that he had ever loved, and declares that he is a homosexual. Sam seizes the opportunity and proposes to Donna (*I Do, I Do, I Do, I Do, I Do*), she accepts him and they are married. At the reception Rosie is flirting with Bill (*Take a Chance on Me*) and at the end all of the couples present (Donna and Sam, Sophie and Sky, Rosie and Bill, Tanya and one of the young Greek men, Harry and a waiter from tavern) declare their love (*Mamma Mia* reprise). During the primary credits, Donna, Rosie and Tanya, dressed in famous ABBA-like satin costumes with a lot of sequins, perform *Dancing Queen* one more time and are subsequently joined by the rest of the cast singing *Waterloo*.

This romantic comedy film musical was adapted from the 1999 West End and 2001 Broadway stage musical of the same name. Both versions, the theatrical one and its film adaptation, were created by three women: director Phyllida Lloyd, producer Judy Craymer and screenwriter Catherine Johnson. In Judy Craymer's own words, she, Phyllida and Catherine were "*the tribe of women*,"¹³³ who first had overseen the enormously successful stage musical and next they were essential for its fortunate adaptation to the screen, despite their lack of feature film experience. The trio of female creators played also an important role in the marketing of the movie. There was a strong connection made between the three female characters of the movie and their off screen equivalents. Those three are

¹³³ J. Cramer, quoted in: L. FitzGerald, *Mamma Mia!: the movie; exploring the cultural phenomenon*, I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, London, 2013, p. 39.

indeed crucial to the story as the tripartite authorship is repeatedly presented and stressed, exceeding the usual representation of authorship as the director exclusively. Actually, it is the producer Judy Cramer, who is often referred to as the architect of first the stage show and all its subsequent adaptations. She was the first to (after having worked with ABBA's composers Benny Anderson and Björn Ulvaeus in the mid-1980s) convince the group composers to grant permission for her project to go ahead. Having three women in this crucial film jobs makes *Mamma Mia!* a rarity in the movie business. Although we are in the 21st century, still as studies reveal, only 4.6% of Hollywood films in 2014 were directed by women.¹³⁴ Comparing these statistics to those from 2007, when *Mamma Mia!* was about to be released, where 6% out of 250 top films had a female director and 10% had a female screenwriter,¹³⁵ the numbers do not bring comfort to women working in the film industry and they remain as shamefully low as five, ten, or twenty years ago. However Judy Craymer claimed that she did not mean to make a feminist point when she first invited Lloyd and Johnson to cooperate. Still, somehow the production team came in as mainly composed of women, with Maria Djurkovic as the production designer, Ann Roth as the costume designer and Lesley Walker as the editor. Craymer said that they all just "got" the *Mamma Mia!* factor, and Phyllida Lloyd added that "*the female team thing*" came from "*personality and talent rather than, Oh we're going to have an all-girls team.*"¹³⁶ The film is seen as a *most thoroughly brought-to-you-by-women package*, as Colin Firth stated in one of the interviews, but its origins and songs that create

¹³⁴ D. Rabouin, *Oscar 2015: Analysis Finds Only 4.6% of 2014 Movies Directed By Women*, <http://www.ibtimes.com/oscars-2015-analysis-finds-only-46-2014-movies-directed-women-1824076> [accessed: 2.02.2017].

¹³⁵ S. Gold, *The "Mamma Mia!" Factor, Times Three*, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/06/movies/06gold.html?_r=0 [accessed: 7.02.2017].

¹³⁶ Ibidem.

the musical are the work of two men, composers from ABBA. As a consequence, as the female team noted themselves, it was not an easy case to please the musicians and initially the women felt more like the handmaidens to Benny and Björn's vision, rather than original creators, but those feelings were mostly the result of musicians' desire to present their songs in the best possible way.

Noteworthy are also particular inspirations to the story drawn from the authors' own life. The screenwriter Catherine Johnson, was mostly written about in British newspapers in terms of being a single mother and of a maternal identity that is often a subject of vilification, frequently internalized by mothers themselves. As Johnson confirmed herself, in the past, before *Mamma Mia!* she was that kind of a mother and her self-image was not that of a successful person. Those experiences of Johnson are clearly seen in the character of Donna, a single mother, struggling with money, hoping for the best future for her child, fantasizing about getting a break, preferably somewhere far away. Johnson's past can be also traced in young Donna images restored in her former lovers' memories as a rebel heart.

The director of the movie, Phyllida Lloyd was seen by the cast members as a calm and methodical director that never gets upset. For many it may seem as rather uncharismatic approach, especially in contrast to the vocal, mainly male directors, who bring tense atmosphere to the set and are often labelled as auteurs. However it may also serve as a refutation of a shallow criticism often striking female directors concerning their proneness to hysterical behavior under the pressure of being the leader of a production. Another charge that does not concern Lloyd as a female director is that of the prediction that women are uncomfortable with the spectacular in the movies and are better suited to more smooth and affectionate drama. Lloyd, coming from directing opera, had been working on bigger scale productions, but still was criticized as a novice director of films. As a female director, she is dismissing some of extremes of autism and represents the banal

assumptions that women have a different modes of working than men, abandoning the individual desire of glory for collaboration and partnership not only with other authors, but actors as well. Some of the obvious film criticism modes point to the fact that the gender of the filmmaker inevitably informs the on-screen content. In case of Lloyd this notion is evident, for instance in the beach scene, when Amanda Seyfried is in a one-piece swimsuit rather than a tight bikini. Those kind of projects are increasing female audience's comfort while watching a movie and prevent misogynistic images that are unfortunately prevalent in male directed movies and thus may be the reason why the movie was so popular among female audiences. It is an exemplification of the female director's interior knowledge of the female experience that enables them to approach their work in a different way than male directors. Covering all that, Phyllida Lloyd's sexuality, which is not a secret, was not even mentioned in the marketing of a movie, which could be promoted as female empowering, as it was created by a lesbian director. Instead, the movie achieved its success because of the equal status and credence given to the three women. Along with the continually reiterated status of the movie as a collaborative female enterprise and its critique of the conventional representation of older women in film, by placing them in the center of the story instead in their usual position in the background. In this way, *Mamma Mia!* may be placed in the domain of post-feminist culture, rather than in activist feminist culture.

2. MAMMA MIA! AND ITS DOUBLE DUTY

Movie musicals are having a comeback in the 21st century; however, their popularity is still the biggest among the female audiences. A professor of theater Stacy Wolf argues the musical has an "*ability to do double duty*" and "*like many forms of mainstream culture,*

musicals can contain both explicit and covert allusions. Therefore musicals are necessarily political, even as they appear to be only entertainment." The reason why musicals are so popular among female dominated audiences may be because they prove to be "*sources of pleasure and power for feminist and lesbian spectators, as well as providing conservative representation of women and heterosexual couples.*"¹³⁷ Musical's cultural function is to uphold some of the conventional social norms as the heterosexual relationships, while at the same time presenting empowering images, varied on the importance of issues depending on when the movie is released.

Mamma Mia! is the kind of a movie which, while providing empowering representations of women, still affirms the conservative ideologies of the time. Although the movie was called a romantic comedy and at the first glance the story revolves around Sophie, her upcoming marriage and search of her father who could walk her down the aisle, according to some scholars it could also be placed in the genre called *the female friendship film*.¹³⁸ If we investigate the minutes in film devoted to different subjects, we can find out that most of the scenes are devoted and built around Donna and her two girlfriends, next in that terms are scenes devoted to show different female relationships. In juxtaposition to the mere three minutes devoted exclusively to the three men – Harry, Sam and Bill, it is clear that the narrative focuses mainly on the three women and presents different modes of non-romantic relationships. Even though the film tackles such traditionally female subjects as romance, motherhood, female autonomy, maturity, and sexuality, it also places female friendship in the spotlight. Except the number *The Winner Takes It All* when Donna confesses to Sam that she still have feelings for him,

¹³⁷ S. Wolf, *A Problem Like Maria: Gender and Sexuality in the American Musical*, University of Michigan Press, United States, 2002, pp. viii–ix.

¹³⁸ K. Hollinger, quoted in: L. FitzGerald, op. cit., p. 97.

most of the powerful performances include women and their relations like *Chiquitita*, which shows Donna as vulnerable and in need of support and where Rosie and Tanya help their friend to get over her problems.

Additionally, the three of middle-aged women that are center to the story are representing different modes of female empowerment. Rosie takes on a femme-butch aesthetic, and when we first meet her, her tomboyish look and strange behavior may cause questioning of her sexuality. The fact that she is also single and financially independent may raise some more questions, which are being answered by the end of the movie, when Rosie starts a relationship with Bill. Therefore, the *double duty* idea is recognizable through affirming her heterosexuality, but at the same time providing an empowering representation of an ambiguous independent woman. Tanya, in contrast to Rosie, is empowered in a very obvious manner. She is the most rich, glamorous out of three, and exudes sexual confidence which is visible in her flirtation with Pepper in number *Does Your Mother Know?* Furthermore, Harry, one of the fathers, provides another kind of empowerment, a queer one, with his revelation at the end of the movie that he is gay. Reverse are Sam and Bill, they introduce heterosexual romance, which is usually required for a musical, thus promoting conservative values. After all female solidarity is central to the movie with another representation of a mother – daughter relation, during *Slipping Through My Fingers* number, when Donna is helping Sophie get ready for the wedding. *Mamma Mia!* may not offer solutions to the ongoing feminist debate, but it surely accentuate the relationship of female protagonists to show that there is more to female fulfillment than just romantic love.

3. POSTMODERN READING OF *MAMMA MIA!*

One of the postmodern elements that is apparent throughout the entire movie is a feeling of nostalgia, recalled by the employment of the songs of the successful 1970s group – ABBA. Big part of the movie's audience were women over forty, and the invocation of partial history (in *Mamma Mia!* in the form of the songs popular decades ago) provoked a feeling of dissatisfaction with the present. ABBA songs along with the movie's message recalled some of the virtues embedded in the melodies and lyrics of the Swedish group, like female liberation, empowerment, and general well-being. Despite the fact that the group is often referred to as the culmination of the 1970s kitsch, they are simultaneously associated with appreciating and celebrating the glorious transcendent quality of their music, which manages to combine unstoppable catchiness with unsuspected musical complexity.¹³⁹ That nostalgic feeling of longing for something in the past that is not replaceable in the present was prevailing among the audiences, in particular the older group of spectators.

What is also characteristic of the postmodern narrative film style is the deliberate rejection of realistic principles, like "breaking the fourth wall," when a character is directly addressing the audience. When *Mamma Mia!* concludes with the cast dressed in 1970s thigh boots, platforms, flares and medallions, the performers are marching towards the camera and Meryl Streep is asking: "Do you want another one?". The question concerns another performance, to which the answer is, of course – "yes". Through that performance, not only postmodern stylistics are highlighted, but also the film's connection to the *Mamma Mia!* stage show, which regularly used to include the audience.

¹³⁹ L. FitzGerald, op. cit., p. 12.

Additionally, the story presented in *Mamma Mia!* drew from past traditions like myths (Dionysian principle – especially in *Voulez-Vous* where women are passionate, orgiastic and dangerous for men) or fairy tales (the triad structure – three fathers, three “mothers” and three young girls). The movie musical also merges high and low culture, with its star cast like Meryl Streep, Pierce Brosnan, and Colin Firth converting typical portrayals of gender or class and singing campy songs. Also the disruption of space and time, so appropriate for postmodernism is visible in the movie; the Greek island refers to the magical island in William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, which is a place of searching and transformation. The time in the movie is not evident. The first record from Donna’s diary in the film gives date of July 1970 and Sophie is 20 years old, so the diegesis takes place in 1990. However, the whole film is saturated by the desire to emulate the 1970s (images of young Donna, Bill is presented as a hippie) as a period of liberation, which is exactly reverse to the commonsensical version of the 1970s as the decade of strikes, social insecurity and global crisis.

Summing up, *Mamma Mia!* is a rich cultural text, which carries a wide range of interpretations and it can be discussed in terms of female authorship, feminism, queer theory, or nostalgia movie. Because of that this 2008 movie musical is correctly placed among other 21st century musicals responsible for the return of the Hollywood musical.

Chapter 6

***LES MISÉRABLES* (2012)**

Les Misérables movie musical is based on the 1985 West End and Broadway musical of the same name, created by musical theater composer Claude-Michel Schönberg and lyricist Alain Boublil, which was based on the 1862 novel by Victor Hugo. The *Les Misérables* theater version is the world's longest running musical, in 2017 in its 33th record-breaking year.¹⁴⁰ The movie production had been planned for many years before, but the producer of the play sir Cameron Mackintosh was postponing the film adaptation, since it could have overshadowed the Broadway and London productions and he was very protective of his stage show. Finally, after his initial success and Oscar winning movie *The King's Speech* (2010), director Tom Hooper signed on to direct *Les Misérables'* film musical version, produced by Mackintosh and with screenplay by William Nicholson. As Mackintosh claimed, he decided to make a movie musical, because of the influence of earlier musical productions like *Moulin Rouge!*, *Evita*, *Chicago* and *Mamma Mia!*, which have paved the way for subsequent movie musicals.¹⁴¹ There had been many film adaptations of the novel before (1934, 1935, 1952, 1995, 1998), but none of them was a musical. Hooper's *Les Mis* proved to be an enormous success, with eight Oscar nominations, including Best Movie, and three wins, including the Best Supporting Actress statuette for Anne Hathaway, as well as the American Film Institute award for Movie of The Year.

¹⁴⁰ *Les Misérables*, <https://twitter.com/lesmisofficial> [accessed: 16.02.2017].

¹⁴¹ B. Nightingale, M. Palmer, *Les Misérables. From Stage to Screen*, Carlton Books Limited, China, 2013, p. 66.

1. STORY SYNOPSIS

The story revolves around the life of a convict Jean Valjean (Hugh Jackman) who is released after nineteen years in prison, sentenced for stealing a loaf of bread. At his release, Valjean is told by his jailer Javert (Russell Crowe) that he is not a free man, but an ex-convict, and this exchange inaugurates a lifelong struggle between the two men. Valjean struggles to find a job because of his paroled status, but he finds shelter in Bishop of Digne's church. Valjean steals silver from him during the night, but the Bishop tells the police that it was a gift and thus saves him from another imprisonment. Moved by the bishop's grace, Valjean decides to start his life again with a new identity and soon becomes a factory owner and a mayor in a small town. Unfortunately, Javert has been assigned as the new chief of police in the town. Valjean is afraid to be exposed, but initially Javert does not recognize him. One of the workers in Valjean's factory – Fantine (Anne Hathaway) loses her job, accused of promiscuity on the news of her illegitimate daughter, Cosette. She is forced to prostitute herself to pay to have her child taken care of by a couple who own a hotel, Thénardier (Sacha Baron Cohen) and Madame Thénardier (Helena Bonham Carter). Valjean finds Fantine in a really bad shape and takes her to the hospital, but it is too late. Before she dies Valjean promises her to take care of Cosette. In the meantime, Javert discovers that Valjean is an ex-convict and tries to take him back to prison. Valjean takes Cosette and escapes to Paris. Year later, Cosette has grown up to be a young lady (Amanda Seyfried) with Valjean as her father. She falls in love with Marius (Eddie Redmayne), a young man who belongs to a group of students who initiate a revolution to overthrow the king. As the June revolution starts, and Valjean joins the revolutionaries to protect Marius, he knows that Cosette cares for him. He also discovers that his long time enemy Javert tried to infiltrate the revolutionaries, but was caught and sentenced to death.

Valjean persuades them that he will kill the traitor, but instead sets him free. Javert does not understand why Valjean did not kill him, and he commits suicide, since he cannot live knowing that the values that he cherished so much turned out to be wrong. Almost all of the revolutionaries are killed, Marius is badly wounded, but saved by Valjean, who takes him home to Cosette. The young couple decides to get married. Valjean disappears, as he does not want people to know his story. After the wedding, Cosette and Marius find out that that he is sick and manage to find him before he dies. At the moment of his death he sees Fantine, who has come to take him to heaven.

2. LES MISÉRABLES MANY “FIRSTS”

In the past, during the traditional era of musical Golden Era and after, the vast majority of musicals were all made in the same way, music-wise. Few months before the start of shooting the actors would go to the studio, to record their vocals with the musical background. Later during the filming of a movie, they would hear their prerecorded soundtrack and lip-sync to it. The next step was to merge images with sound by the editors in the studio. However, Tom Hooper wanted and did something totally different and new. It was crucial to the whole project and when the producer heard that he wanted to record the whole music live, he was positive and convinced. Hooper claimed: *“I became intrigued with this idea that the key to doing it was to do it live. I find with musicals on film that sometimes you don’t quite believe in the reality of what you are watching.”*¹⁴² Therefore, the director’s aim was to obtain the most realistic effect of the movie as possible. Since the actors had the possibility to sing live their parts, they could make their own subtle variations of the performed

¹⁴² T. Hooper, quoted in: B. Nightingale, M. Palmer, op. cit., p. 82.

numbers, like changing the tempo or the rhythm, thus more inhabiting and feeling the character they were portraying. The actors stated that this kind of filming gave them more creative freedom, and both actors and producers felt and believed that this choice of production method would make the film feel much more emotional, raw and real. This unique live recording method has been called the world's first, although it was not the first time where the songs were recorded live, it really was the *first* time to this extent. The other *first* of *Les Mis*, is that the songs were sung to live piano. This means that every actor had to wear a tiny earpiece, and while singing they were accompanied by a pianist, who played live, somewhere out of the reach of camera, and the actors heard him through the device. The rest of the arrangement with the orchestral accompaniment was recorded in post-production. When the movie was filmed on location, the pianist stayed in a canvas tent close to the set, and if they were filming in the studio, they were playing from the main sound stage. Additionally, every actor was equipped with a small microphone that would register their voice. It was first such a project, made possible by the appearance of new technology; in 2012 a small portable microphone could be a replacement for an earlier solid microphone used in the recording studios. The mode of recording live meant also that the actors taking part in it had to show a lot of stamina, as they sometimes were singing from an early morning to the late night. This project was an innovation and a total contrast to the techniques applied for example in the 1960s musicals. Here, the whole story is driven through the music, the creators were reinventing the genre, they had the opportunity to be pioneers in a technique and that hardly ever happens.

The film uses almost every song from the original stage musical with the exception of *I Saw Him Once* and *Dog Eats Dog*, although many songs for the cinematic purposes were partially or extensively cut. In addition, some of the lyrics of the songs were changed to

suit the movie narrative and setting. Top Hooper decided to create one new, original song for the film adaptation of *Les Mis*, *Suddenly* was written by the people responsible for all of the songs in the musical, Claude-Michel Schönberg and Alain Boublil, as well as their long time collaborator Herbert Kretzmer. The song is performed by Hugh Jackman and it expresses the wonder of love that Valjean feels when he is given the charge of Cosette. Soliloquy is often used by characters through their songs, but one of the most praised performances of the movie is *I Dreamed a Dream* sung by Anne Hathaway, which is also the soliloquy and it is described as an almost direct address to the audience. For a moment it seems she looks right into the eye of camera and thus connects with the spectator, and although she does not, the combination of her singing live and the close up of the handheld camera made the song a very special experience, not only for an actress to whom it brought an Oscar, but also for the audience.

Les Misérables is not only the first ever film musical to be recorded entirely live, it is also the first one that does not feature any elaborate dance numbers and instead focuses on characters' inner life and emotions. Real life difficulties and struggles are more important here, than the typically cheerful subjects of film musicals during the Golden Age. Also the story itself, kind of sad and rather heartbreaking is an element that places *Les Mis* in juxtaposition to traditional movie musicals. It is hard to imagine that a plot of a typical 1960s musical centered around the unfairness of the judicial system or on a mother forced into prostitution in order to take care of her illegitimate child, nor could we imagine those musicals revolving around the group of students revolting against the leaders who made his subjects live in extreme poverty. Moreover, a lot of characters from *Les Mis* – including a ten year old boy – die a tragic death. However, this is the story told and knowing the facts of it, it is not hard to understand that there is not much place for joyous dance routines in

the middle of the scenes. In contrast, the movie presents a bunch of angry, revolutionary songs, which sets it apart from its earlier counterparts. The live singing and focusing on emulating inner emotions, paired with a sad ending and kind of an antihero as a protagonist, drastically cuts off this movie musical from previous genre's works. However, the realness of the story and the production success, both theatrical and film, reintroduced the audiences to the genre in a slightly different fashion and presented diverse themes and patterns that the musical can also focus on.

It is also interesting to compare the usual fast editing found in the majority of musicals in the 21st century, to those of *Les Mis*, as it has a big impact on the overall impression of the film. Since actors sing the entire songs live, they are not shot in quite the same way in each take. When the sound or tempo varies from take to take it is harder to edit the film, comparing to the traditional lip-syncing way, when everything is already prerecorded. Hooper's solution to this problem was not to edit and instead use the long shots of the actors singing the numbers without any editing. This is again to underline the desire to obtain as much realness as possible. Furthermore, the creators of the movie decided to use handheld cameras and to shoot the scenes while being a part of them, dressed in period costumes. This mode of recording, as well as many close-ups, gave a very realistic – and intimate at the same time – feeling when viewing the film.

Les Misérables seems to be a totally new kind of a film musical. It is based on an already known and famous stage version, but it uses the cinema medium in a thoroughly different way than before. It does not seem to share any postmodern elements of the 21st century movie musicals already discussed, nor does it share any principal elements of the traditional film musical. It is not joyous, it is not filled with dance and happy-go-lucky behavior, and characters do not burst out into singing, because the movie is constructed

in a manner that even the dialogues are melodic, so there is not a visible transition from the talking mode to singing mode. Instead it touches upon serious matters and personal tragedies of the characters. It brings freshness to the genre and can be called a new kind of folk musical, because it generates a sense of community and access to a shared mythological past. It's innovation and realness – so rare in the genre of the movie musical - had been appreciated by the film industry, and so far *Les Misérables* remains (along with *Chicago* and *La La Land*) one of three movie musicals to be nominated for The Academy Award in Best Movie category in the 21st century.

Chapter 7

INTO THE WOODS (2014)

Into the Woods is the splendid Disney film adaptation of James Lapine's and Stephen Sondheim's 1987 Tony Award-winning Broadway musical of the same name. It is however totally different than earlier Disney films based on the concept of entertainment "for children of all ages." This one takes a much darker and gloomy turn and confronts overjoyed habitat of fairy tales with ordinary dilemmas of people in real life. In *Into the Woods* the characters do not have their happy endings and "they lived happily ever after" formula known from traditional fairy tales, in return the main message is turned into "a be careful what you wish for." There are no simple characters, instead each character grows as a person and experiences a life-long process of self-discovery. Those tales are retold in a way to relate to the modern audience. It may serve as a perfect transition from being a child to being an adult and the transition happens in the woods which is a metaphor for the big and brutal world. Young adult viewers of the movie may feel like they are watching the second part of their favorite tales from childhood, with a gateway to adolescence and its complicated truths.

After Marshall's success with *Chicago* in 2002 and the first Oscar for a movie musical since 34 years, the director approached Stephen Sondheim (he worked with him before as a choreographer) and asked him if he could adapt one of his musicals into a movie. Sondheim suggested *Into the Woods*, Marshall approved, but the project was postponed as the director focused on *Memoirs of a Geisha* (2005) and another movie musical – *Nine* (2009). Marshall's interest in

the project was revitalized in 2011 after hearing president Obama speech on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of 9/11. The President was speaking to the families of the victims of the attacks and Marshall noticed that deliberately or not, he had quoted lines from the show's central number: "*You are not alone, no one is alone*". Besides its themes of loss, the main importance of the story is the community. After Obama's speech Marshall believed that *Into the Woods* is a fairy tale for the post 9/11 society and he decided to start the project.¹⁴³

Unlike the much-talked-about *Les Misérables* which was recorded live, *Into the Woods* was recorded traditionally in the studio and then the actors had to match their singing on the set. However, the cast rehearsed singing entire month before going into the studio, so the performances were well studied. Altogether around 90% of studio recording ended up in the film, but for instance the "witches rap" during the prologue as the Witch explains the curse of the family was did entirely live by Meryl Streep on set.

1. STORY SYNOPSIS AND TRANSFORMATION FROM STAGE TO SCREEN

Into the Woods gathers and merges different tales from the Grimm Brothers. Characters from tales like Cinderella (Anna Kendrick), Little Red Riding Hood (Lilla Crawford), Rapunzel (MacKenzie Mauzy) and Jack (Daniel Huttlestone) from *Jack and the Beanstalk* are reimagined through a post-Freudian prism. The musical weaves together those Grimm characters with three new ones: the Baker (James Corden), his wife (Emily Blunt) and their neighbor the Witch (Meryl Streep) who has placed a curse on the couple which has rendered

¹⁴³ K. Brown, *How Into the Woods Conquered Disney's Fear of the Dark*, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/disney/11327267/into-the-woods-disney-feature.html> [accessed: 16.02.2017].

them childless. Each of the characters has their particular life wish and they journey into the woods to try to achieve them. The Witch offers to lift the curse and make the couple have the child that they dream of, but only if the Baker and his wife obtain four characteristic items for her to make a certain potion: a cow as white as milk, a cape as red as blood, a hair as yellow as corn and a slipper as pure as gold. The Baker and his wife head into the woods to get the pieces. Jack who lives with his mother (Tracey Ullman) in a dilapidated house travels through the woods to sell his beloved Milky White cow to earn some money to help his mother. Baker meets Jack in the woods and offers him five magic beans for the cow. The beans later grow into a huge beanstalk upon which Jack climbs and thus transports himself into the world inhabited by Giants. Red Riding Hood also travels through the woods to get to her granny (Annette Crosbie) and bring her some sweets. Initially she does not want to give her cape to the Baker, but after he rescues her and her granny from the Big Bad Wolf (Johnny Depp) she decides to present him with the cape. He and his wife also meet Rapunzel closed in a tower in the woods, the Baker collects her hair. The Baker's wife stumbles upon Cinderella who runs away from the Prince (Chris Pine), she urges her to give away her golden slipper. After a series of attempts, the Baker and his wife are able to collect all of the items and everyone gets their "happy ending." Cinderella and Rapunzel marry their Princes; Jack provides for his mother by stealing from Giants and kills one of them by cutting the beanstalk; the Baker's wife is pregnant and the Witch regains her beauty by drinking the potion. This is how a traditional fairy tale would end, but in *Into the Woods* the audience is able to see what happens next. As the characters will soon get to know their happy endings are not happy at all and soon they would have to meet with the consequences of real life. The second act of the story is much darker and children raised on fairy tales must finally quit magical thinking and face the music. As Marshall

himself states: “*this is a fairy tale for the 21st century, for the children of today, who live in a much more unstable and complicated world than I did growing up.*”¹⁴⁴ The world discovered by Marshall in the second act of the movie is darker even in the colors used in the production design; the background for the upcoming events is catastrophic and filled with fog. The characters find themselves in an ostensibly pleasant situation, because they achieved what they wanted, but the doubts start to appear. The Baker starts to worry that he is a poor father, like his father was to him. Cinderella is disillusioned by the royal life and finds out that she does not like it at all. Rapunzel cannot find a way to live her life in the outside world, she is constantly scared having never really experienced it and the Witch learns that along with having back her beauty she lost most of her magical powers. The whole kingdom is devastated with the descent of a female Giant (Frances de la Tour) who escaped her world to take revenge on Jack who killed her husband. She is angry and she stomps through the entire kingdom, bringing death and destruction. In the meantime, what once were the characters’ dreams now start to haunt them: Cinderella’s Prince cheats on her with the Baker’s wife, who soon dies after falling from a cliff when running away from the Giant. The Witch’s greatest treasure, her daughter Rapunzel, escapes her overprotective mother with her Prince (Billy Magnussen). Cinderella breaks up with the Prince after hearing of his betrayal (Prince’s famous line: “*I was raised to be charming, not sincere*”). As if that was not enough of tragic experiences, Jack’s mother dies along with Red Riding Hood’s mother and grandmother in the female Giant’s rampage. In the aftermath of that events, the characters that survived – Cinderella, Baker, Jack and Red Riding Hood along with the Witch – debate over the morality of handing Jack

¹⁴⁴ R. Marshall, quoted in: J. Burlingame, *Rob Marshall Boldly Explores Disney’s Take on Twisted Tale ‘Into the Woods’*, <http://variety.com/2014/film/features/into-the-woods-rob-marshall-disney-1201346785/> [accessed: 17.02.2017].

over to the Giant, but quickly begin to blame each and every one of them for their individual actions that supposedly led to the tragedy (*Your Fault*). Finally, they all decide to place the blame on the Witch, because generally witches are perceived to be bad and because it is always easier to handle the consequences when there are others to blame. However, what seems to be obvious is usually not in Sondheim's stories and the Witch turns out to be the voice of reason in the movie (as she herself states: "*witches can be right, giants can be good*"), except when dealing with her own daughter, over which she is totally nannyish and does not follow her reason. She is so upset with the rest of the characters during *Your Fault* that they cannot be reasonable and acknowledge that partially they are all to blame and that they cannot understand that people have to take responsibility for their actions, that she curses herself. She scatters around her mother's magic beans, one of her most precious treasures and decides that she prefers to be ugly again, rather than participate in that chaos that all the characters have created. She disappears (commits a suicide?) in the fog, leaving the rest of them to stumble without having a reasonable person to guide them. The characters decide to kill the Giant and Cinderella and the Baker try to explain to the younger characters the human nature and that people make mistakes and they have to accept it, but also remember that there always will be someone by their side to help them. *No One is Alone* is one of the most influential Sondheim's songs in *Into the Woods*. It reminds the audience and the characters that everyone has someone on their side, even when they made some mistakes and think that there is no one to support them, there is still someone out there that will. The song explains that some people will always leave us in some difficult situations, but we should not focus on them. On the other hand, besides the obvious point of the song, it also focuses the attention on the fact that we are not alone, meaning – there are other people living around you, therefore we should not make

decisions based only on ourselves, because those decision may affect others. This second interpretation seems to be more valuable from the story's point of view. When the Giant is killed, the characters move forward with their ruined lives, Cinderella decides to stay with the Baker and help him with his newborn son, and Jack and Red Riding Hood stay with them. The final song of the story brings moral: *"Careful the words you say, children will listen"* as the Baker start to tell their story to his son.

When before the filming of the movie it was reported that Disney had decided to make some major plot changes for the film version in order to make it more family friendly and Disney-like, Stephen Sondheim revealed that this was not the case and that all of the changes had been approved by the original authors, himself and James Lapine. However, the film does slightly differ from the stage production and some of the songs had been cut back or erased, but this is a common procedure while adapting the stage version of a musical, which is usually longer than the film version. Some of the changes include reduction of some plot details related to the toning down of violence and sexual content. For instance, Prince's affairs with Snow White and Sleeping Beauty, as well as Rapunzel's pregnancy were omitted. One of the characters, *Mysterious Man* of the stage version, who is eventually revealed as Baker's father and who manipulates much of the action in the first act is reduced from the film version as well. Nonetheless, even if cinematic version of *Into the Woods* was tempered a little bit it is still an *"un-Disney film"*, as Emily Blunt states, she also poses that *"It is very funny, very human. I think kids will enjoy it but there are very adult themes running through it."*¹⁴⁵ Disney's decision to make *Into the Woods* was critical and the movie financial as well as critical success may hopefully originate another Disney Renaissance, filled with musicals, which

¹⁴⁵ E. Blunt, quoted in: J. Burlingame, op. cit.

this time may adopt more mysterious, and simultaneously more interesting stories which can reach wide audiences.

2. METAPHOR, SYMBOLISM AND AMBIVALENCE

This movie musical seems to have many messages, from “be careful what you wish for” (because the repercussions of that may be nothing that you ever envisioned) to “be responsible for your actions.” Yet Stephen Sondheim had another idea of the most important things – that first the stage show and then the movie are about – namely the relationship between parents and children and the communal responsibility.¹⁴⁶ The Witch and Rapunzel are not the only parent and child in conflict. Jack and his mother, as she is irate that he sold the cow for some magical beans, are also constantly at odds. Motherhood is one of the most poignant and sad themes of *Into the Woods*. The first couple may serve as a warning for parents not to be overprotective of their children and to try to give them some freedom, because otherwise they may leave them when they are all grown up. The second couple represents the kind of a relationship between the mother and the child who have hard time communicating, thus resulting in perpetual troubles. What is interesting, both families lack a strong father figure, which may be an indication that such incomplete families do not function well. The community’s responsibility in the movie’s view is general, that of one another. However, during the premiere of the stage show everyone was making connections to the communal solidarity during the AIDS crisis, “*which at the time was stomping around the theatre*

¹⁴⁶ S. Sondheim, quoted in: R. Keegan, *Stephen Sondheim, Rob Marshall and Meryl Streep on ‘Into the Woods’*, <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/la-et-mn-stephen-sondheim-meryl-streep-into-the-woods-20141214-story.html#page=1> [accessed: 18.02.2017].

world like an angry giant,”¹⁴⁷ and even though Sondheim had downplayed the AIDS connection in the film adaptation, it is unavoidable. Still the show is a psychological shift from childhood to adolescence and the woods are a metaphor for the obstacles every human encounters during this transformation. Everyone in *Into the Woods* (as well as in reality) who go in the woods, come out a different person. The woods in this manner may be a metaphor for many things in life: one’s wishes, dreams, hopes, but also fears, sexual awakening, dark forces, knowledge, and power – just to name a few. What is exciting about this production is that the symbolism of Sondheim and Lapine is never actually determined and the spectator may interpret it on his or her own way.

The production also breaks up with a common representation of well-known characters like Prince Charming or Cinderella, here characters are complex and self-aware. The two Princes, for instance, emphasize their blissfully ignorant narcissism and sense of entitlement in the campy number *Agony*. The Cinderella’s Prince is a fairly noble figure from the first act, but in *Agony* the audience begins to realize that both of them are not quite so noble or essentially good, but rather a pair of self-centered young men. This image becomes complete when Prince Charming seduces the Baker’s Wife. In contrast, Cinderella is not a typical girl who would love to marry a prince, but a complicated character who cannot decide what exactly she wants in life. She demonstrates her inner strength and independence during the second act and she reaches a satisfying decision completely on her own. Red Riding Hood is nothing like a spectator raised on traditional fairy tales would expect her to be. Her encounter with The Big Bad Wolf is charged sexually and her being eaten by the wolf is read as an allegory for a sexual awakening.

¹⁴⁷ M. Schulman, *Why “Into the Woods” Matters*, <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/why-into-the-woods-matters> [accessed: 18.02.2017].

What is characteristic of *Into the Woods* and of Sondheim's numbers in general, is its ambivalence. It is evident in each and every number of the story – undermining fixed morals and rules. It is visible when Red Riding Hood sings to herself “*It’s nice to know a lot? And a little bit not*” or Cinderella talks to Prince: “*My father’s house was a nightmare; your house was a dream. Now I want something in between.*” So what Sondheim wants to teach his audiences is saved in the words of the Witch: “*sometimes the things you most wish for are not to be touched.*”

3. POSTMODERN ELEMENTS IN *INTO THE WOODS*

Into the Woods, without any hesitation can be called a thoroughly postmodern movie musical. To start with, postmodern films challenge the mainstream conventions of narrative structure and characterization. Indeed, *Into the Woods* is not exactly mainstream material, especially for Disney audiences used to mild and family friendly narratives.

The titled *woods* is, as mentioned before, an ambiguous metaphor, but they are also the place where the majority of the story happens. Moreover, this is a charmed and magical place, where wishes come true and the worst nightmares come to life. In other words, it is a specific hyper-reality, so characteristic for postmodernism, which is the result of technological mediation of experience, where what passes for reality has no reference in the external world (outside the diegesis). Besides that, the woods are the ideal projection of the *charmed spaces* that Barry Keith Grant wrote about, and Rick Altman’s *place of transcendence*, in which the characters can get in touch with and simultaneously let go of their true feelings in the process of self-discovery, which is one of the central issues of *Into the Woods*.

Genre blurring and intertextuality are also prominent in the production, as the story is based on well-known fairy tales, with a twist. The boundaries between genres are crossed, within the narrative there are created scenes of horror, tragedy, adventure and fantasy with elements of fairy tales and even comedy and romance. The genre blurring leads to uncertainty and the loss of context, because there is a feeling that there are no genre rules and the representations only make reference to other representations. Uncertainty, visible throughout the second act of the story, is the result of shaking up of previously understood beliefs and roles (among the characters, but for the audience as well). *Into the Woods* seems to perfectly fit in the postmodernism model, where it is impossible to create anything new, because everything was already created, and an artist can only make variations of previous designs.

The film was both critically and commercially successful, it received praise for its cast, tone and production merits and gained three Oscar nominations, including the Best Supporting Actress for Meryl Streep. It ranks on the seventh position in the ranking of the musicals with the total highest grosses. Its success at the time of its release allowed the audiences to look with optimism at the further fate of the movie musical genre and strengthened the position of Disney in the this category, resulting in an even greater success of *Beauty and the Beast* in 2017.

Chapter 8

LA LA LAND (2016)

1. HOW FIRST ORIGINAL MOVIE MUSICAL OF THE 21ST CENTURY CAME TO LIFE

La La Land is not only one of the most successful movie musicals in the 21st century and simultaneously in the movie musical history, but it is also an original Hollywood musical. There were many great film musicals in the 21st century that were Broadway adaptations, like *Les Misérables* (2012) or *Mamma Mia!* (2008), others like *Across the Universe* (2007) or even *Moulin Rouge!* (2002) were technically jukebox musicals. In *La La Land* the story was adapted neither from a play nor a book, it was entirely written and directed by Damien Chazelle, with music that was composed by Justin Hurwitz. However, making a movie musical, especially an original one in current times, where the film market is dominated by superheroes and *Star Wars* is not an easy thing to do, which is why the beginnings of this creation reach as far back as 2010. It went on for the whole six years, from writing a screenplay to having the story shown on the big screen. The movie was conceived while Chazelle and Hurwitz – classmates and roommates – were studying at the Harvard University.¹⁴⁸ The screenplay was already written by Chazelle in 2010, but at that time, the young and unknown director could not find a studio willing to produce his piece without major changes to the script.

¹⁴⁸ C. Walsh, *From Harvard to 'La La Land'*, <http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2017/01/harvard-and-its-la-la-land-connection/> [accessed: 29.03.2017].

Still, *La La Land* was not the first musical that the Chazelle – Hurwitz duo had worked on. The archetype for the movie was created by the colleagues as their senior thesis project, it was a low budget musical called *Guy and Madeline on a Park Bench* (2009). The plot of the prior movie was uncannily similar to the subsequent 2016's musical hit – in *Guy and Madeline* the main characters were Boston based jazz trumpeter and graduate student looking for work, the plot later revolves around their relationship and further break-up. In *La La Land* the story was set in Los Angeles and concerned a jazz pianist and a young actress wanting to 'make it' in the big city while also trying to make their relationship last. Correspondingly to *La La Land* the earlier musical was inspired by previous film traditions – the 1920s symphony films like *Manhatta* (1921) or *Man With a Movie Camera* (1929) – and paid tribute to the cities, which were equally important actors in both productions.¹⁴⁹ *Guy and Madeline* was also the movie in which the helmer found his cinematic style, his distinctive technique can be seen through employment of camera whip-pans, a shot where the image is quickly changed (whipped) between two subjects and the imagery between them becomes blurred.¹⁵⁰ This system can be evidently noticed through all of his movies, in *Guy and Madeline* it is seen between a musician and a dancer, in *Whiplash* (2014) the final scene shows the tension between the harsh conservatory instructor Fletcher (J.K. Simmons) and drummer Andrew (Miles Teller) and in *La La Land* the whip-pans are used during the Lighthouse

¹⁴⁹ M. Murphy, L.A. *Transcendental: How 'La La Land' Chases the Sublime*, <https://mobile.nytimes.com/2016/11/06/movies/la-la-land-stars-ryan-gosling-emma-stone-and-los-angeles.html?referer=https://www.google.co.in/> [accessed: 30.03.2017].

¹⁵⁰ Ch. Hooton, *La La Land's Damien Chazelle Directing camera whip-pans shows his mastery*, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/la-la-land-damien-chazelle-behind-the-scenes-ari-robbins-camera-jazz-cinematography-a7542801.html> [accessed: 30.03.2017].

Cafe scene, while Sebastian is playing piano and Mia is dancing to its melody.¹⁵¹

La La Land was doubtlessly inspired by *Guy and Madeline on a Park Bench*, but its creation also owes to the success of the aforementioned 2014's *Whiplash*, which established Chazelle as an outstanding author in Hollywood and gained five Oscar nominations, including one for Best Picture. *Whiplash* as well as *La La Land* and *Guy and Madeline* was a cooperation between Chazelle and Hurwitz, and its main topic was music, as Chazelle, an ex-musician/drummer has a predilection for musical films. J.K. Simmons, who won an Academy Award for his supporting role in *Whiplash*, could also be seen in *La La Land*, starring as a character similar to Fletcher, a bitter manager of a supper club in which Sebastian works, trying to dissuade his pianist from playing anything other than *Jingle Bells* and not letting him show his jazzy potential. Therefore, it was only when *Whiplash* gained some critical acclaim, that producing *La La Land* became a 'real conversation.'¹⁵² Finally, the movie was picked up and produced by Lionsgate, where the producers liked the idea of making an original, old-Hollywood style movie musical so much that no one thought of changing the plot or the characters. Lionsgate provided the *La La Land* team with more resources than they have expected and increased the number of filming days from 24 to 40.¹⁵³ One of the last tasks before the team could start working on the project was casting the actors. Already during the promotion of

¹⁵¹ H.P. Horton, *The Whip-Smart Whip-Pans of 'Whiplash' Director Damien Chazelle*, <https://filmschoolrejects.com/chazelle-whip-pans-8c4e11b9f1c6> [accessed: 30.03.2017].

¹⁵² Producer J. Horowitz, in: A. D'Alessando, *Encore: How 'La La Land' Director Damien Chazelle, His Team & Lionsgate Faced The Music & Resurrected The Original Holywood Musical*, <http://deadline.com/2017/02/emma-stone-la-la-land-damien-chazelle-justin-hurwitz-oscars-interview-1201866006/> [accessed: 30.03.2017].

¹⁵³ A. D'Alessando, op. cit.

Whiplash in 2014, Miles Teller was speaking to the press about him and Emma Watson being the two lead actors in an upcoming musical. Unfortunately (or not), Teller departed from the project because of the long contract negotiations and Emma Watson dropped out over a commitment to another musical, an adaptation of *Beauty and the Beast* (2017). What is funny, Ryan Gosling passed on Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* to make *La La Land*.¹⁵⁴ Emma Stone and Ryan Gosling were cast as Mia and Sebastian, because as the director said, they had a "timeless glamour" and were the "closest thing that we have right now to an old Hollywood couple, like Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn or Fred and Ginger or Myrna Loy and Dick Powell,"¹⁵⁵ and *La La Land* indeed was about to become an homage to traditional Hollywood movie musicals with its star system personalities and charm. Chazelle seems to be following the footsteps of the creators of those traditional musicals created in the period of Great Depression or those made after World War II, not only in the understanding of how a musical should serve the society and make them forget what is going on in the real life for a moment, but also regarding the structure of a traditional musical and its simplicity. There is also a tribute to the city of Los Angeles and one can say that the city is actually one of the main actors in the movie. The director rather than romanticizing the city image, showed the themes that are distinctive to LA, like the traffic jam, the highways and the city landscapes with colorful skies. The film is made as a mixture of modern setting and film techniques with a style and aesthetics of a musical pulled out straight from the Golden Age of Hollywood. For

¹⁵⁴ B. Wiest, *Emma Watson, Ryan Gosling Almost Co-starred in 'Beauty and the Beast'*, <http://www.teenvogue.com/story/emma-watson-ryan-gosling-beauty-and-the-beast> [accessed: 30.03.2017].

¹⁵⁵ J. McGovern, *Ryan Gosling & Emma Stone, La La Land costars, discussed by director*, <http://ew.com/article/2016/08/30/ryan-gosling-emma-stone-la-la-land-2/> [accessed: 31.03.2017].

that reason the movie functions not only as an homage to the city of Los Angeles, or to the old Hollywood movies, but also to all of those hard-working people within the film industry, as well as to the recipients of their work, cinephiles and moviegoers.

Hollywood is a place where movie musicals were born, and though its Golden Age may be long gone, *La La Land* is proving that a seemingly simple story of a boy and a girl and their romance, accompanied by singing and dancing, can still work its magic. Hollywood is filled with simple stories like that, but in order to be interesting and successful, they need to offer something in exchange for their lack of narrative novelty. Beyond the ambiguous ending of the movie, *La La Land* from the very beginning can impress with cinematography, production design and eye-popping choreography. Linus Sandgren, the film's cinematographer, is responsible for the visual approach, which is characterized by long, fluid takes and vivid colors. There seem to be four predominating colors (blue, red, yellow and green) that at the same time determine the four seasons in which the plot is divided. Mandy Moore was responsible for the choreography in the movie, including the most talked-about and most memorable movie scene, the opening shot (*Another Day of Sun*) capturing a jammed highway, where over a hundred people were dancing on and between the cars. The number was actually shot in three takes, but was edited to give an appearance of a single six-minute long take. The part of the high-way was closed for two days and it was filmed when the temperature reached over 100 degrees, so it was not so easy to perform it (and it may look like that on screen). However, the scene was to serve as an announcement of the full maximum potential of the 'musicalness' of the movie, in order for the rest of the musical manipulations to feel natural.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ S. O'Connel, *La La Land Has An Incredible Opening Scene That Almost Didn't Happen*, <http://www.cinemablend.com/news/1579020/la-la-land-has-an-incredible-opening-scene-that-almost-didnt-happen> [accessed: 31.03.2017].

What singles *La La Land* out from other contemporary and older musicals, as well as from movies in general, are the visuals. From the inception of the movie, Chazelle wanted the film's musical numbers and choreography to be shot and performed in single takes and filmed in the style of the 1930s works of Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire – from “head to toe,” where the whole body of the dancers can be seen, with as little editing as possible. The director's aim was also to emulate the widescreen, CinemaScope look of the 1950s musicals – like in 1955 *It's Always Fair Weather* directed by Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen. Unfortunately, the CinemaScope technology is no longer available, however the film was shot, unlike most contemporary movies, on film, not digitally, with Panavision equipment in a widescreen format. The quality of the colors, for example, its richness in the skies, which play a very important role in the movie, owe to the fact that the movie was shot on film, and as Sandgren states, the variety of colors wouldn't have been present in the digital negative.¹⁵⁷

The huge success which *La La Land* turned out to be was not something the director took for granted, especially after the screenings of the movie, which did not go well. The musical premiered at the Venice Film Festival's opening night on August 31st 2016 and it was a great relief and satisfaction for Chazelle that it got standing ovation.¹⁵⁸ Following that, the movie earned critical acclaim at the Telluride Film Festival and won the top prize at the Toronto Film Festival. Later came the critical reviews and there was very little of negative criticism. The critics praised the movie in almost every possible aspect, from the outstanding performances by the lead actors, through direction and screenplay,

¹⁵⁷ *Shot in CinemaScope, La La Land vibrantly romances the olden days of Hollywood*, http://www.kodak.com/kodakgcg/us/en/motion/blog/blog_post/?contentid=4295000679 [accessed: 1.04.2017].

¹⁵⁸ R. Ford, *How 'La La Land' Went From First-Screening Stumbles to Hollywood Ending*, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/features/la-la-land-unreal-istic-hollywood-dream-critical-acclaim-942793> [accessed: 1.04.2017].

to the musical numbers and choreography.¹⁵⁹ Accolades and awards followed, the movie was nominated in seven categories at the 74th Golden Globe Awards and won in all the seven categories, breaking the record for the most wins by a single film (namely Best Motion Picture – Musical or Comedy, Best Director, Best Actor – Comedy or Musical for Ryan Gosling, Best Actress – Comedy or Musical for Emma Stone, Best Screenplay, Best Original Score and Best Original Song for *City of Stars*.)¹⁶⁰ Also the 89th Academy Awards were unforgettable for the crew of *La La Land*, not only because it was nominated in fourteen categories, tying records for most nominations for a single film with *All About Eve* (1950) and *Titanic* (1997), but mostly because of the now famous Oscar mix-up. During the ceremony, Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway announced that *La La Land* had won the best picture when actually it was *Moonlight* (2016). The whole confusion started when Beatty was given the wrong envelope, which was actually for Best Actress award that Stone had just won, he looked confused, passed the card to Dunaway, who read out *La La Land*. It took the show's crew more than two minutes and nearly three whole speeches to realize the mistake had been made and it was *La La Land*'s producer Jordan Horowitz who finally announced the legitimate winner. Eventually the movie won six awards, but did not win the most important award of the night, thus since *Chicago* (2002), we still have to wait for a movie

¹⁵⁹ R. Collin, 13.01.2017, *La La Land* review: you'll leave with a tear in your eye and a song in your heart, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/films/0/la-la-land-review-ryan-gosling-emma-stone-will-leave-tear-eye/> [accessed: 1.04.2017]; A. Hornaday, In '*La La Land*,' Emma Stone and Ryan Gosling pay homage to the musical, https://www.washingtonpost.com/goingoutguide/movies/in-la-la-land-emma-stone-and-ryan-gosling-pay-homage-to-the-musical/2016/12/15/3f748b9a-c055-11e6-afd9-f038f753dc29_story.html?tid=kp_google&utm_term=.4fb-5deebe3d8 [accessed: 1.04.2017].

¹⁶⁰ N. Robehmed, '*La La Land*' Breaks Record For Most Golden Globe Wins Ever, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/natalierobehmed/2017/01/09/la-la-land-breaks-record-for-most-golden-globe-wins-ever/#5d71a0c26bf9> [accessed: 1.04.2017].

musical to win in the Best Movie category. The Oscar fiasco does not in any way undermine the movie's success and its role in revitalizing and resurrecting the genre of movie musicals. Substantially, it is an unbelievable success for Damien Chazelle, who at the age of thirty two became the youngest director to win Best Director award.¹⁶¹

2. INTERTEXTUALITY, NOSTALGIA AND POSTMODERNISM

La La Land is in fact the first original movie musical in the 21st century, even though it is filled with unusual amount of influences and references to earlier great movies, not only musicals, as well as to paintings, places, and music. It is quite a challenge to find a single scene in this production which cannot be linked to a previous artistic work of various types. *La La Land* is a self-aware love letter to old Hollywood and can be thus called an utterly postmodern movie. The director did not conceal his many inspirations for the movie and talked about them, how they influenced him and the movie itself. To help his actors get the idea of what the movie should look like, he also organized and hosted screenings on the soundstages every Friday night of films that inspired the production, including *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* (1964), *Top Hat* (1935) or *Boogie Nights* (1997).¹⁶²

From the very opening scene to its grand finale *La La Land* is filled with tributes to the Golden Age Hollywood musicals. Actually, the references start even before the opening scene, at the opening credits, where it is announced that the movie was shot in CinemaScope,

¹⁶¹ J. Strause, *Oscar's 'La La Land's' Damien Chazelle Becomes Youngest Best Director Winner*, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/damien-chazelles-best-director-oscars-2017-win-makes-him-youngest-winner-980243> [accessed: 1.04.2017].

¹⁶² R. Ford, op. cit.

a format which popularity peaked during 1950s and 1960s. One of the most predominant movie musicals that influences the plot and the visuals is *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) and this fact can be noticed right away, without deeper analysis of the scenes. One of the most evident allusions is performed during *A Lovely Night*, a charming duet of Mia and Sebastian against the colorful skies of Los Angeles' landscape. It is one of the most characteristic scenes and numbers of the movie, the dancing duo was even presented on the movie poster. During this performance Sebastian does a quick swing around a lamp post, which looks almost exactly like famous Stanley Donen's swing around the lamp post in *Singing in the Rain* while singing the title song. In both cases the familiar scenes are one of the most distinctive from the movies. The dance routine that the duo is performing in *A Lovely Night* is also noticeably influenced by Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers' musicals, not only the choreography and dance moves are look-alike, but also the story behind the dance. The song itself is revolving around the two talking about and pretending not to fall for each other, while actually falling for one another. This scheme borrows from many other classic musicals, particularly Astaire and Rogers' *Swing Time* (1936), where in a number called *A Fine Romance*, Astaire's character, just like Gosling's, walks his partner to the car. The *La La Land* choreography also resembles Astaire-Rogers *Let's Call the Whole Thing Off* from *Shall We Dance* (1937) and *Isn't It a Lovely Day (to Be Caught in the Rain)* from *Top Hat* (1935).

Another, more subtle allusion to *Singin' in the Rain* can be noticed in the scene when Mia and Sebastian meet at the pool party where Sebastian is playing in a 1980s rock cover band. Mia is making fun of him and annoyed Sebastian defends his honor by stating that he is a "serious musician," she answers that she is a "serious firefighter" which is a callback to the acting part she auditioned earlier. Similarly in *Singing in the Rain*, Kathy (Debbie Reynolds) mocks Don (Gene Kelly) by saying that she is a "serious actress" of the stage, and not

a movie star like Don. In both cases the couple soon fall in love. Later in the movie Mia and Sebastian can be spotted strolling past a row of different scenes being shot on movie sets which is reminiscent of a scene where Don and his best friend Cosmo (Donald O'Connor) do the same. Additionally, a few elements from *La La Land's* "Epilogue" (a dream sequence where Mia and Sebastian fantasize how their life together could have turned out) mimic elements from *Singin' in the Rain's* "Broadway Melody" ballet. The characteristic elements that are apparent in both films are the collage of neon lights, the presence of Mia's casting director, (in *Singin' in the Rain* Don was knocking on different agencies' doors looking for an agent) red and the yellow color scheme and appearance of dancers who were dressed and presented in the exact same manner as in Gene Kelly's masterpiece.

It was not a mystery that *Singin' in the Rain* was a huge inspiration for Damien Chazelle, as well as for the actors, Ryan Gosling during his acceptance speech at Palm Spring Festival revealed that he was watching the movie every day on set for inspiration. Emma Stone was particularly asked by Chazelle to watch lots of Debbie Reynolds to catch her naturalism.¹⁶³ However, *Singin' in the Rain* was not the only Gene Kelly musical that inspired Chazelle, *An American in Paris's* (1951) aesthetic is visible, especially in "Epilogue" with its Parisian themed set design and costumes of several male chorus dancers who wear black pants and short-sleeved shirts with white trim, the outfit Kelly was wearing in 1951.

Other great inspiration, maybe even more important than *Singin' in the Rain*, is the work of the French new wave director Jacques Demy. His 1964 movie – *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* (original title: *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg*) had a direct influence not only on the visuals (the kaleidoscopic color palette) but on the story and narrative

¹⁶³ *The Classic Movie-Musicals That Inspired La La Land*, <http://people.com/awards/la-la-land-movie-musicals-inspiration/> [accessed: 28.04.2017].

itself. Demy's movie is characteristic for its fusion of the realistic and the fairytale. The story of the daughter of an umbrella shop owner (Catherine Deneuve) who falls in love and gets pregnant by a local mechanic (Nino Castelnuovo), who then has to leave her and go fight in Algeria, is told entirely in song. Both of the stories end bittersweetly with the two former lovers reuniting shortly for the first time in years. *La La Land*'s narrative is also divided into seasons, that are announced with on-screen titles – that is a direct influence of *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* which was constructed in the same manner. Another delicate reference can be noticed in the scene where the couple is strolling through the movie set and Mia is pointing to the famous *Casablanca* (1942) window, there is a door marked *Parapluies*, as in the French original title *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg*.

However, there was more than one movie of Jacques Demy that influenced Chazelle. *The Young Girls of Rochefort* (French: *Les Demoiselles de Rochefort*) from 1967 also bears a lot of resemblance to *La La Land*, especially in its opening number. In both cases the opening scene is a highly choreographed dance number and in both cases the number is staged on a bridge and the characters are heading towards the cities in which the films are set in. In both films the opening number is a kind of a preview and announcement of what is going to happen later on. Still, the contrast between those two opening scenes can be found in *La La Land*'s colorfully clothed, excited multicultural dancing crowd against the wordless, delicate stretching-dance routine of characters wearing pastel costumes in *The Young Girls of Rochefort*. The music in those two productions was also described as similar, for instance *Rochefort*'s theme *The Twins* and *Planetarium* from *La La Land*, especially when transcribed through jazz and other forms of music in its "Epilogue."¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ 10 Movies That Had The Biggest Influences on "La La Land", <http://www.tasteofcinema.com/2017/10-movies-that-had-the-biggest-influences-on-la-la-land/2> [accessed: 4.05.2017].

The movie is filled with allusions to previous great movies and musicals, some of those references are explicit and need no further explanation, like the huge poster of Ingrid Bergman on Mia's wall or the window that Mia points to while on a stroll with Sebastian, the one Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman looked out in *Casablanca* (1942). References to *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) are also quite literal, first of all the movie itself is being played on-screen, while Mia and Sebastian watch it in the cinema. Later, one of the famous lines from the movie is also mimicked by Sebastian. Then the Griffith Observatory which was a set location for some scenes in *Rebel* is also an important location for *La La Land* where the couple go for a romantic date. The tension and excitement before the couple's first kiss is shown as the swirling dance above the clouds and among the stars and the planetary system. This magical scene brings to mind similar scene from *Moulin Rouge!* (2001) when Satine and Christian were falling in love and dancing on the clouds above the houses of Paris. The pool scene, during one of the parties that Mia attends in Los Angeles, is also familiar to spectator's eye, as it is derived from famous Mikhail Kalatozov's 1964 movie about life during the Cuban revolution. *Soy Cuba*, a movie from the first half of 1960s which opens with a technically astounding (for its time) long take showing the luxury life in one of Havana's hotels, finally ending with the camera diving into water, showing the underwater view of people in the pool. Later in 1997 Paul Thomas mimicked the particular pool scene in his movie *Boogie Nights* and Damien Chazelle made his own characteristic, but not unfamiliar pool scene in 2016.

The dance routines in *La La Land* can be called intertextual areas, where a musical spectator can find lots of allusions and homages to previous works. In the all-female sing and dance performance *Someone in the Crowd* Mia's girlfriends are taking her to a lavish party in Hollywood Hills after she had another bad day trying to make it in the business. Despite the fact that the choreography is

not as detailed and complex as Bob Fosse's, it is surely similar to the *There's Gotta Be Something Better Than This* number from *Sweet Charity* (1969), concerning the context of the number, the whips and employment of dancers' dresses in choreography as well as its colors. The theme of a bunch of girlfriends getting together and preparing for a party or dressing up and making fun is nothing unusual in musical movies, such scenes were parts of *Grease* (1978) in *Look at Me, I'm Sandra Dee*, or *West Side Story* (1961) in *I Feel Pretty* or even more recently in *Mamma Mia!* (2008) during *Dancing Queen*.

However, the most intertextually filled number seems to be the "Epilogue" which every scene and even frame is an homage to the cinema. Except the already mentioned allusion to *Singin' in the Rain* and *American in Paris*, the scene carries hints to *Funny Face* (1957) and its famous shot of Audrey Hepburn's character standing in front of Arc de Triomphe with a bunch of colorful balloons. In *La La Land* Mia is portrayed in similar manner on the movie set in front of a fake Arc de Triomphe having her make up done by a stylist and being handed the balloons. A moment later Mia and Sebastian are passing by a boy holding a red balloon – which is a famous figure from Albert Lamorisse's 1956 short film called *The Red Balloon*, they are also passing a couple on the bench uncannily similar to two main characters from *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*. Mia and Sebastian waltz in front of a black and white starry background which calls to mind Fred Astaire and Eleanor Powell's dance number *Begin to Beguine* from *Broadway Melody* (1940).

The feeling of nostalgia seems to be driving the plot of the entire movie. It not only manifests itself through permanent references to previous styles and works of art, but also is closely connected to the personal stories of the two main characters. Sebastian is a jazz pianist and he calls the genre the most pure art form and wants to restore its past glory. He is dissatisfied with the current position of jazz among popular music and is longing for the past times and

its atmosphere, even his outfits look old-fashioned. Mia's embrace of nostalgia is the most vivid in her audition song *Audition (Fools Who Dream)*, when she remembers and tells the story of her aunt, a failed actress herself and another "fool who dreams." It is a melancholic and thoughtful song about the value of never giving up on your art and dreams, such a notion seems to be taken right out of the Golden Age Hollywood musicals which constitute an obvious and recurrent leitmotif of the movie. Damien Chazelle's eye-popping and toe-tapping musical ranks fourth regarding lifetime grosses in the genre of live-action musicals, behind *Beauty and the Beast* (2017), *Grease* (1978) and *Chicago* (2002), none of them an original musical.¹⁶⁵ Its enormous success is unique not only because it has an original scenario, but also because it is sort of a double genre – a rom-com musical (besides musical, a combination of romance and comedy) popular among audiences. *La La Land* is a vivid example that the genre is resurrected and its created by the new generation of young artists who will hopefully continue to familiarize audiences with one of the oldest genres in Hollywood which can obviously still work its magic.

¹⁶⁵ *Musical 1974-present*, op. cit.

CONCLUSION

Evidently, film musicals are having a moment in recent times, there still may be no consensus of what kind of moment that exactly is, there is no specific name or trend, but certainly the genre of movie musical has been reinvented in the 21st century. The first musicals in the rebirth of the genre were the animated Disney musicals of the late 1980s and 1990s like *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *The Lion King* (1994) or *Pocahontas* (1995). That was the first step in getting the audiences used to characters breaking into song and dance on screen without having to provide a reason for it. In the context of animated movies it was possible because of the artificiality of the genre which is geared mostly toward children. Those musical animations opened the doors for more musical productions and then came *Moulin Rouge!* (2001), *Chicago* (2002) or *Dreamgirls* (2006), and each had a different approach to make it feel natural for the audiences when characters started to sing. However, they were all somehow connected to the stage so it was easier for a spectator to adjust. The next step in familiarizing the mass audiences with the genre came with the popular TV productions like *Glee* (2009–2015) and next great movie musical productions like *Mamma Mia!* (2008), *Les Misérables* (2012) or *Into the Woods* (2014) and the contract with the audiences has been renewed. Modern audiences grew up to feel comfortable when a character bursts out into song and the suspension of disbelief seems to be a natural state among the public nowadays. Until *La La Land* (2016), most of the film musicals released in 21st century were predominantly big, spectacular Broadway adapta-

tions or re-tellings and fictionalized stories of famous musicians' or bands' lives. These days favored genre variations, as Broadway adaptations and musical biopics had been visible in previous decades, but not so regularly as in the recent years. Both those genres proved to be profitable for the industry and beloved by audiences. As a result big studios were consistently attracted to this kind of productions. It is not a surprise that this type of movies became standards, as a lot of them are well-known stories, which an average moviegoer would not have a chance to see firsthand, unless he or she would be lucky enough to see a Broadway or West End version of the story or see a live performance of famous musician. However, *La La Land* paves the way for another kind of musical, an original one, which has been rare on-screen.

This comeback of the song and dance may be one of the few impulses pushing the film industry into engaging with new, creative formulas and stories. It could serve as a prevention of a recent trend in movie industry, which concludes that the future of Hollywood movies right now is in hands of five-year planners¹⁶⁶ who are focused on maximization of profits and are willing to produce only sequels as an unquestionable source of profit. Recent movies seem to also avoid reflecting and emulating the present times, which is why *La La Land* is so unique, as it touches upon real problems of real people in current times. Movie producers and people responsible for what is being shown on the screen are aware that there is less danger, and suppose that there is more profit, in making movies that completely depart from temporal or cultural specificity. There seems to be a general conviction that these practices serve only as limiting to the movie and preserve a movie from being timeless. Such an approach to movie industry is quite frightening for movie lovers.

¹⁶⁶ M. Harris, *The Birdcage. How Hollywood's toxic (and worsening) addiction to franchises changed movies forever in 2014*, <http://grantland.com/features/2014-hollywood-blockbusters-franchises-box-office/> [accessed: 4.05.2017].

Nowadays the importance of the next thing – the post-credit sequence or a teaser of the next movie or a sequel – exceeds the attention that should be paid to a recent production. The target audience is so obsessed with novelties that they are distracted from evaluating the quality of the contemporary productions. Consequently, there is little chance that Hollywood would create another great, unique era of musicals, like the Busby Berkeley days of 1930s or the *Golden Era* of musicals of 1950s and 60s. Nevertheless, if the recent trend for creating musicals will last and if Hollywood will be able to produce such successful productions like *La La Land* or even more recently *Beauty and the Beast*, this attractive counterbalance for all of the superhero movies can hopefully persevere. It is also worth to mention that it has been a great time for Broadway musical. Lin Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton*, has been running since July 2015 and it has been breaking all kinds of records and introducing the genre to a new, young audience. Additionally, TV has seen a trend of showing popular live versions of musicals like *Grease*, *Peter Pan* or *Hairspray*.¹⁶⁷

As evident from the examples of most successful movie musicals in the 21st century, the majority of them carry at least some distinction of postmodern elements, characteristic for the film genre. While there may be many reasons why that is so, I find the argument that the movie musical in its essence was always-already postmodern the most convincing. First movie musicals, the most successful movie musicals, and the largest number of movie musicals were – and still remain – adaptations. Whether they were adaptations of stage musicals, plays or novels, the stories presented in movie musicals already had some intertextual connotations to their originals. They were not new and unique, they were transformed and

¹⁶⁷ J. Noveck, *La La Land, Beauty and the Beast herald more musicals to come*, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/entertainment/movie-musicals-coming-1.4028198> [accessed: 8.05.2017].

reconstructed. Furthermore, the movie musical - as described by Rick Altman, Barry Keith Grant, and other scholars contributing to the more profound understanding of the genre – has the element of magic and fantasy, be it the *charmed space* (postmodern *hyper-reality*) or the saturation of emotions, which results in an outbreak of musical performance. Those features of movie musicals, along with unknown source of music, which in movie musicals seems to be coming out of nowhere, contradict the rules of realism, in an identical way to what postmodernism does. In this manner, musical's artificiality equals postmodern rejection of realistic principles in cinema. Nevertheless, we cannot deny movie musicals' artistry and brilliance and recognize them as fake. We should treat them as separate pieces of art, guided by words of one of the most recognized word composers, Igor Stravinsky: "*Lesser artists borrow, great artists steal.*"¹⁶⁸

Despite the fact that the movie musicals are shifting into more modern ways, touching upon current social issues and incorporating new technologies, they virtually serve the same purpose of escapism and pleasure, maybe not to the same extent that 1930s musicals did, but we still tend to go see a musical to enjoy ourselves. Certainly, the movie musical in the 21st century is different than the Golden Era Hollywood musical, but the current version, on many levels, is evidently deeply grounded and influenced by its prototype.

¹⁶⁸ I. Stravinsky, quoted in: *22 Inspiring Composer Quotes*, <http://www.classicfm.com/discover/music/inspiring-composer-quotes/igor-stravinsky/> [accessed: 8.05.2017].



Plate 1. Example of lavish production style
in *Moulin Rouge!* during movie's finale



Plate 2. *Chicago*'s Velma Kelly (Catherine Zeta-Jones)
with dancers performing *Cell Block Tango*



Plate 3. *Mamma Mia!*'s cast during movie's finale, performing *Waterloo* in ABBA-like costumes



Plate 4. *Les Misérables*' cast during *Do You Hear the People Sing?*, one of the most recognizable songs from the musical



Plate 5. *Into the Woods*'s Baker (James Corden), Baker's Wife (Emily Blunt) and the Witch (Meryl Streep) telling the couple how to lift the curse of infertility



Plate 6. Famous opening scene for *La La Land* on Los Angeles' freeway



Plate 7. *La La Land*'s Mia (Emma Stone) and Sebastian (Ryan Gosling) dance routine during *A Lovely Night*



Plate 8. Ginger Rodgers and Fred Astaire in *Swing Time* (1936) – one of the biggest inspirations for *La La Land*'s duo

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