



Linnéuniversitetet

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Bachelor's Thesis

The American Film Musical Genre Today: A New Breed or Just More of the Same?

*The Development of the American Film Musical
2000-2013*



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Abstract

Since the introduction of synchronized sound at the end of the 1920s the film musical has had a special place in American film. But even with that special place the interest in the film musical has varied a lot during the 20th century. From the high interest during the “Golden Age” in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, through low interest in the following decades and then renewed interest in musicals with the animated film musicals from Disney in the 1990s. But what has happened after the millennium? Has there been any development in the American film musical genre or is it just more of the same? This thesis tries to answer the question by analyzing three successful film musicals from the period 2001-2013, *Moulin Rouge!* (Baz Luhrmann, 2001), *The Phantom of the Opera* (Joel Schumacher, 2004), and *Les Misérables* (Tom Hooper, 2012) and comparing them to classical traditional musicals. According to this thesis there is a split answer, some areas of the classical American film musical have developed while other areas still remains the same.

Keywords

American Film Musical, Hollywood Musical, *Moulin Rouge!*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Les Misérables*

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1 Introduction

When the film first learned to speak, it sang instead.
Rick Altman¹

Ever since the release of *The Jazz Singer* (Alan Grosland, 1927), often cited as the first feature-length sound film and the first film musical, the American film musical has had a special place in American film.² Even with the technical limitations in the late twenties, the combination of speech, music and film was a hit.³ Sound together with film was nothing new but it had been music that was only audible to the spectators of the film and played live in the same room as the film was screened. The music was used to set the mood of the audience but one of the early writers on the subject of film music, Kurt London, even said the music was used to “[...] drown the noise made by the projector”.⁴ Soon the limitations of synchronizing just short bits of sound with some scenes were replaced with continuous sound through the whole film and *The Lights of New York* (Bryan Foy, 1928) is considered to be the first all-talking feature.⁵

After the first years of adding sound to the films the interest declined but was renewed when Hollywood started making musicals about making musicals in the form of the show or backstage musical that was developed in the middle of the 1930s. The development of the show musical was led by director Busby Berkley and his innovative use of perspectives in combination with music in films like *42nd Street* (Lloyd Bacon, 1933) and *Gold Diggers of 1933* (Mervy LeRoy, 1933).

Rick Altman has defined three types of film musicals.⁶ The first type of film musical is the show musical which Altman defines as to be in another body and relates it to the stage illusion.⁷ The second type of musical according to Altman is the fairy-tale musical, which he defines as to be in another place, for example *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939).⁸ The third type is the folk musical, defined as to be in another time, for example *Oklahoma* (Fred Zinnemann, 1955).⁹

¹ Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington & Indianapolis, 1987, p 131.

² Barry Keith Grant, *The Hollywood Film Musical*, Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester, 2012, p 11.

³ Grant, p 11.

⁴ Kurt London, *Film Music*, Faber & Faber, London, 1936, p 27.

⁵ Grant, p 11.

⁶ Altman, p 200-271.

⁷ Ibid, p 127.

⁸ Ibid, p 129-199 and p 127.

⁹ Ibid, p 272-321 and p 172.

The Wizard of Oz was produced by Alan Freed who led the development of the American film musical in the period Barry Keith Grant calls the height of the “Golden Age” of the film musical.¹⁰ It lasted from the end of the Second World War to the end of the 1950s. After this period, with the competition from television and new forms of music like rock’n’roll, the musical declined and in 1963 only four musicals were produced compared to 1943 when sixty-five musicals were made.¹¹ At the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s Disney released a number of animated musicals that appealed to a broad audience of both children and grown ups and made Disney dominate the genre.¹² But what happened after that?

In the second edition of her book *The Hollywood Musical* Jane Feuer asks if the new developments in the musical films of the 1980s challenges the ideas based on more classical films from the Golden Age?¹³ Feuer’s book was released in 1993 but her question is still relevant for film musicals produced after this. The new millennium has seen the film musical genre still being alive through a number of successful films but what has really happened? Have the musicals changed or are they just copies of the old classic musicals? Have the musicals adapted using new technology? Are they taking advantage of new types of media? Have the musicals changed in context or content?

2 Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to analyse films in the classical American film musical genre in the 21st century to see if the genre is following the same directions as during the 20th century or if the films has evolved into something new in either context or content.

3 Method

To get a more holistic view of the development of the American film musical I decided to look at the film musical genre from a classical viewpoint. To limit the scope I have concentrated my analysis on three successful musicals from the period 2001-2013 that can be compared both to each other and to older, classical musicals using previous research as a basis for my comparison. I have analysed the three film musicals from two

¹⁰ Grant, p 19f.

¹¹ Grant, p 24.

¹² Grant p 36.

¹³ Jane Feuer, *The Hollywood musical, Second Edition*, Indiana University Press, Indiana and Bloomington, 1993, p 123.

perspectives, firstly the context of the films including the narrative, representation and secondly the content of the films. To analyse the context of the musicals I have created a model divided into three areas: production, distribution and consumption. These three areas covers the life cycle of films and by analysing the different ways of adaptation in these three areas it will be possible to analyse the development of the genre over a specific time.

As part of my method of analysis I have also used an adaptation model based on Linda Hutcheon's model from *A Theory of Adaptation*.¹⁴ Hutcheon presents a structure for analysis of adaptations that she calls the *what, who, why, how, when* and *where* of adaptation.¹⁵

This adaptation model is also used to analyse the other perspectives as the narrative and representation of the movies. The adaptation analysis is done on basis of the research presented by Rick Altman in *The American film musical* (1987) and Jane Feuer in *The Hollywood musical* (1993). Both works are from the 1980s, although Jane Feuer updated her book in 1993, and they may in some cases be outdated. Still, they are perceived as the standard works on the subject and valid as the basis for my analysis. Other scholars in the field often refer to them in their research. To complemented the research from the 1980s I have added a newer essay by Janet Feuer that develops and updates some parts of her earlier work.

I have also included more recent research such as Susan Smith's *The Musical, Race, Gender and Performance* (2005) and Barry Keith Grant's *The Hollywood Film Musical* (2014) to get a current view of the American film musical and the development after Altman's and Feuer's research.

To limit the analysis I have focused on some of the topics that are prominent in the classical American film musicals either as part of the definition of the genre in the research above or as part of the tradition. I will look at gender, love and sexuality that are key to the classical Hollywood film in general and soliloquy, audience and spectators, level of diegesis and the dual-focus narrative that are important to the American film musical in particular.

¹⁴ Linda Hutcheon with Siobhan O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation 2nd edition*, Routledge, Oxon/New York, 2013.

¹⁵ Hutcheon, p xvi.

4 Analysed Films

To analyse a genre over a specific period a selection of films must be made to cover the genre in a representative way. The selection of films analysed in depth must cover as much as possible of the genre but for obvious reasons the number of films must be limited. I have chosen three different films made during the period 2000-2012 which represent classical American film musical but also have some interesting common denominators, *Moulin Rouge!* (Baz Luhrmann, 2001), *The Phantom of the Opera* (Joel Schumacher, 2004) and *Les Misérables* (Tom Hooper, 2012). The most obvious common factor is that they are all set in Paris, France, in the nineteenth or beginning of the twentieth century and the main focus in all of them is love. The stories are all based on classic literary works either through adaptations of the stage version of the musical or as in the case of *Moulin Rouge!* using both the stage version of an opera and the underlying literary work as the base for the film musical. I wanted to analyse film musicals that are made in the classical film musical tradition to be able to compare them to older musicals to see if there has been any development regarding the narrative, representation or content in the new film musicals.

I consider all three films as part of the classical American film musical genre but this raises a few questions. What is a musical? What makes a classical American film musical? And what is a genre? Obviously we need to define these terms to make certain that the selection of films is representative.

What is a musical? Not all films with music in them are musicals although, according to Altman, that is the film industry's definition.¹⁶ Music appearing during the narrative portion of a film is considered to be diegetic or non-diegetic. Diegetic music, or source music, is heard as part of the drama itself. For example music played by musicians or a radio in the film. Non-diegetic music or underscoring has no logical source in the film. It is played by unseen musicians to create a mood and guide the audience emotionally and psychologically through the course of the film.¹⁷

To get to a more precise definition of musicals we can start by excluding films with only non-diegetic music in them, music that is only audible to spectators of the film and not the characters in the film. Secondly we can exclude all films with diegetic music that are considered documentary films as the music is only recorded as

¹⁶ Altman, p 12.

¹⁷ Roger Hickman, *Reel music: Exploring 100 years of film music*, W.W.Norton, New York/London, 2006, p 37.

part of a concert or equivalent function and not connected to the narrative. This leaves the rest of the films with diegetic music in them that can be considered to be musicals. Only films where the music supports, promotes or evolves the narrative should fall in the category of musicals.

So if we decided what a musical is, what makes it an American film musical? Altman uses the term the American film musical but both Feuer and Grant uses the term the Hollywood musical or the Hollywood film musical. Hollywood in this case does not mean the physical place but rather that film musicals are made in the Hollywood tradition that follows the classical Hollywood cinema model as defined by David Bordwell, Janet Steiger and Kristin Thompson in *The classical Hollywood cinema*.¹⁸ The American film musical is character centric and the characters acts as casual agents through their traits and desires with their opponents used to create conflicts.¹⁹ The American film musical uses the same levels of devices, systems and relation of systems and the systems are the same, narrative logic, representation of cinematic time and space.²⁰ It also puts the same emphasis unity, continuity and closure and the focus on heterosexual love is the same for both classical Hollywood cinema and film musicals.²¹

Altman says that it does not matter if a film musical is made in Hollywood or New York it is still an American film musical.²² This is the same view that Bordwell uses for films that adhere to the classical Hollywood cinema. The films do not have to be made in Hollywood as long as they are constructed according to the narration of the classical Hollywood cinema.²³ This means that both American and Hollywood musicals conforms to the definition and for this thesis the term American and Hollywood can be used interchangeably.

From the perspective of national cinema it can be questioned if the chosen films are American film musicals since they are made in Australia, *Moulin Rouge!*, and the United Kingdom, *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Les Misérables*. But my assessment is that they all belong to the American film musical genre since they are produced by US production companies.

¹⁸ David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson. *The classical Hollywood cinema: Film style & mode of production to 1960*, Routledge, Oxon, 1985.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p 13-17.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p 6.

²¹ *Ibid*, p 16, 19-20, 29, 33, 39.

²² Altman, p 112.

²³ David Bordwell/Kristin Thompson, *Film Art An Introduction*, 9th edition, McGraw-Hill, New York, 2010, p 102-104.

They also have the language in common. The art of filmmaking has become increasingly global and the concept of the national cinema is questioned especially since it becomes more and more difficult to define what is national and what is not. Andrew Higson has set up four criteria that has to be considered when deciding if a film belongs to a national cinema, economics, narrative, audience and quality.²⁴ Do the films only support a local film industry? Do they show a national view of the world? Are they only for a national audience? Are they perceived as art films with a national heritage? The analysed films are all produced by US production companies or with the help of such. They do not show a national view of the world but rather a general one and they are not intended only for national audience. They are also perceived more based on the classical Hollywood cinema group style than an art film style. So from a perspective based on Higson parameters, none of the analysed films is a national film.

So what is a film musical and how do we define the film musical genre? The film musical genre is as every genre a way to define a film by placing it into a certain category. In *The American Film Musical* Rick Altman proposes a genre model that is a combination of both semantics and syntactic characteristics to define the musical genre. Altman also points out that a genre is something that develops from values and history and not just suddenly exists, ready to use. He also concludes that no major genre remains unchanged over time for example it develops subgenres to specify different types within the genre.²⁵ For this thesis I will use the definition of the musical genre as a genre of films where the diegetic music supports or promotes the narrative in the film through song and dance.

Since the musical genre is mostly driven by the film industry I have also used the Academy Awards as one reference for my selection. The Academy Awards is presented by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, which is based in Los Angeles. The Academy uses the English language as one of their deciding criteria for its selection of films to nominate for the awards. This means that the films I've compared are viewed in the same way as any other American film when judged by the Academy's members. The American film musical genre is deeply rooted in Hollywood and the American film and all three films have also been nominated for multiple Awards by the Academy.

There are some other musicals that also conform to the model of American film musicals in whole or part and could be candidates for analysis. In 2003 *Chicago*

²⁴ Andrew Higson, "The Concept of National Cinema", Screen 4/1989, p 36-37.

²⁵ Altman, p 93 and 97.

(Rob Marshall, 2002) by John Kander and Fred Ebb was nominated for thirteen Academy Awards and won six of them, among others for Best Picture. The awards gave the film musical genre a lot of focus and since *Chicago* grossed 300 million USD from a budget of 45 million USD it naturally sparked the interest of the film industry.²⁶ *Chicago* is set in the 1920s and based on a play by Maurin Dallas Watkins. It differs from the analysed films in that it is not based on a literary work.²⁷ One of the things I wanted to analyse was if the new films had changed the 19th century or early 20th century view in the underlying literary works on topics like gender, love and sexuality to reflect more modern views.

Another American film musical that might be considered is Jonathan Larson's *Rent* (Chris Columbus, 2005). *Rent* is like *Moulin Rouge!* based on the opera *La bohème* by Giacomo Puccini and its sources, the book and the play *Scènes de la vie de bohème* by Henri Murger. The original stories was set in Paris in the first half of the nineteenth century.²⁸ The story in *Rent* was transferred to New York at the end of the millennium and adapted to the current challenges in the society for example drugs and HIV. The filmed adaptation of *Rent* was a major critical and commercial disappointment according to Steven Cohan.²⁹ *Rent* grossed only 31 million USD worldwide with a production budget of 40 million USD and it was not nominated for any prizes by the Academy.³⁰ I made an analysis of *Rent* and my assessment is that it does not fit within the analysis in the thesis so I choose to exclude it.

There are also new types of musicals that I considered to include in the study but they are not in the classic tradition of the film musical and they would have made the study to large. These new types of musicals make interesting use of TV and/or digital technology. TV musicals are usually made as episodes of TV series for example the TV series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* that made an episode in form of a musical.³¹ Another example is *Dr Horrible's Sing-along Blog* (Joss Whedon, 2008). This musical was initially produced for Internet distribution only but because of the success of the Web release it was later released on disc together with bonus material.³²

²⁶ <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=rent.htm>

²⁷ Based on the play *Chicago, or, Play Ball* by Maruine Dallas Watkins.

²⁸ *La Bohème*'s first performance 1896, Turin, Italy. *Scènes de la vie bohème* published 1851.

²⁹ Steven Cohan, "Introduction: How Do You Solve a Problem Like the Film Musical?", in Steven Cohan's (ed.) *The Sound of Musicals*, London: BFI 2010, p 1.

³⁰ <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=rent.htm>

³¹ *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Once More, with Feeling* (Joss Whedon, 2001). Season 6, Episode 7 aired the first time 6 November, 2001.

³² The three episodes were released on the Internet July 15, 17 and 19 2008 and later on iTunes. The disc version was released in the USA 18 december 2008.

4.1 Moulin Rouge!

Moulin Rouge! (Baz Luhrmann, 2001) is the third part of what is called *Baz Luhrmann's Red Curtain Trilogy*. Both its predecessors in the trilogy, *Strictly Ballroom* (1992) and *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) put an emphasis on music but none of them were musicals. *Strictly Ballroom* uses the music as the basis for dancing and *Romeo + Juliet* uses the music as background to the verse in an abbreviated version of Shakespeare's dialogue.

The story of *Moulin Rouge!* is based on different sources. In an interview with Baz Luhrmann he says "Our recognisable story, though Orphean in shape, is derived from *Camille*, *La Boheme* – whether you know those texts or not, you recognise those patterns and character types".³³ Kathrine R Larson argues that *La Boheme* plays a pivotal role due to Baz Luhrmann's focus on Puccini's opera over the years.³⁴ Baz Luhrmann have both before and after *The Red Curtain Trilogy* directed stage versions of *La Bohème* both in Australia and USA.

Moulin Rouge! is a musical that uses popular songs that are already established outside of the musical. The opposite to this are musicals where all or at least the majority of songs are written especially for the musical. Examples of such musicals are the other two analysed film musicals, *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Les Misérables*.

Moulin Rouge! was made at Fox Studios in Australia but produced by a major US studio, Twentieth Century Fox, together with Bazmark Films.³⁵ The film had a budget of 50 million USD and grossed 180 million USD worldwide.³⁶ In 2002 *Moulin Rouge!* was the first film musical that was nominated for an Academy Award in the category Best Picture since Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* (Gary Trousdale, Kirk Wise, 1991) was nominated in 1992.

Moulin Rouge! is the story of the night club with the same name and its owner, Harold Ziedler (Jim Broadbent). He wants to change the night club into a theater and set up a show for his star Satine (Nicole Kidman). Satine is a courtesan and the main attraction at the night club but she wants to be a real actress. To get the money for the production of the show Ziedler offers a duke to invest in the show in exchange for

³³ Geoff Andrew. "The Guardian/NFT interview, Baz Luhrmann", *The Guardian*, 2001

³⁴ Kathrine R Larson. "Silly Love Songs: The Impact of Puccini's *La Bohème* on the Intertextual Strategies of *Moulin Rouge!*" *Journal of Popular Culture*, Dec 2009, Vol 42 Issue 6, p

³⁵ Cohan, p 1.

³⁶ <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=moulinrouge.htm>

Satine's services. The young English writer Christian (Ewan McGregor) arrives in Paris to write about love but get drawn into the work with Satine's show. Through a misunderstanding Satine mistakes Christian for the Duke and tries to seduce him. She fails but instead Christian and Satine fall in love. The Duke promise to invest in the show when Satine promise to have an affair with him. Satine manages to postpone the date with the Duke until after the premier. During the rehearsals Christian and Satine tries to keep their affair a secret but the Duke finds out and gets furious. He threatens to have Christian killed and plans to do it during the premier performance of the show. The show is a big success but Satine, who has been ill with tuberculosis, dies in Christian's arms after the curtain fall.

4.2 The Phantom of the Opera

The Phantom of the Opera (Joel Schumacher, 2004) and its sequel *Love Never Dies* (Brett Sullivan, 2012) is an interesting combination of adaptations. *The Phantom of the Opera* is Andrew Lloyd Webber's adaption of Gatou Leroux' story with same name.³⁷ The story has been adapted to film a number of times before but not as a musical.

The huge success of the stage version of the musical made it possible to invest in a big production when the musical was adapted to the screen. According to the *Making of* documentary included on the DVD release, with a budget of 70 million USD this was the most expensive independent film made at the time and *The Phantom of the Opera* grossed 155 million USD worldwide. The DVD and IMDB lists either Warner Bros. or Odysse Entertainment presenting the film together with Andrew Lloyd Webber's own film production company, Really Useful Films but the documentary says that the movie was made with no major financial or studio backing.

According to the documentary the musical was initially planned to be made into a film in the beginning of the 1990s but for personal reasons Andrew Lloyd Webber decided to wait.

Eight years after the film release of *The Phantom of the Opera* the sequel *Love Never Dies* was adapted for the screen but this time for a quite different reason than *The Phantom of the Opera*. The stage production of *Love Never Dies* did not have a successful first run when it opened in London's West End in 2010 so it was revised and rereleased 2011 in Melbourne. To renew the interest for the reworked stage musical it was decided to release a filmed version on DVD and Blu-ray. The adaptation was

³⁷ *Le Fantôme de l'Opera* published 1910. 1040 ff

made with a limited budget compared to its predecessor. I have used *Love Never Dies* as a reference together with a stage adaptation of the musical that was made to celebrate the 25th anniversary of *The Phantom of the Opera*'s stage version in London's West End, *The Phantom of the Opera at the Albert Hall* (Laurence Connor, 2011).

The Phantom of the Opera is the story about the Opera Populaire in Paris that is haunted by the Phantom (Gerard Butler) that terrorises the opera and the opera management. In 1870 the opera gets two new owners that arrives to the opera for the first time. They are accompanied by the operas new protector Raoul, viscount de Chagny (Patrick Wilson). The Phantom leaves a letter demanding that the star of the opera, Carlotta (Minnie Driver) should be replaced by Christine (Emmy Rossum), a young girl from ballet, at the evening performance of the opera Hannibal. The Phantom almost kills Carlotta by making a back drop fall on the scene. Carlotta refuses to sing and Christine gets the role. The performance is a success and Raoul who attends the opera realises that Christine is his friend from their childhood's summers. He meets with Christine and she agrees to have supper with him. Christine is the Phantom's protégé and she calls him the Angel of Music and believes the Phantom is the spirit of her dead father. The Phantom lures her to down to his secret hideaway in the cellars of the Opera. Christine removes the Phantom's mask and sees his scarred face but she is not scared by the sight and only feels pity for him. The Phantom brings Christine back to the Opera. At another performance where the Phantom once again forces the management to replace Carlotta with Christine the Phantom kills a stagehand. In the turmoil after the Christine meets with Raoul and he tells her that he loves her. The Phantom gets furious when he sees Christine kiss Raoul.

Later the Phantom appears at the new year's masquerade with an opera that he has written and he demands that the opera shall be performed with Christine in the leading female role. After some time the management agrees but secretly plans to capture the Phantom at the performance. The Phantom takes the place of the male lead, Don Juan, at the performance but is revealed and forced to run taking Christine with him. He escapes to his secret hideaway but is followed by Raoul and the policemen that was part of the plan to capture him. The Phantom captures Raoul and plans to kill him but Christine begs him to spare Raoul's life and and the Phantom releases both Raoul and Christine. The Phantom disappears and when the mob arrives only the mask is left behind.

4.3 Les Misérables

Les Misérables (Tom Hooper, 2012) is based on Victor Hugo's novel with the same name. The musical is created by Alain Boubil and Claude-Michel Schönberg and differs from the other two analysed musicals by being a French production from the beginning that was later reworked for the English stage. After the rework *Les Misérables* got its breakthrough when it was opened in London in 1985 and the stage version of the musical has been running in the West End ever since.

Les Misérables has been adapted to the screen a number of times but as with *The Phantom of the Opera* this is the first musical version. The film was nominated for eight Academy Awards in 2013 and won three of them. The film was produced by Universal Pictures with a budget of 61 million USD and grossed 442 million USD worldwide.

Les Misérables is the story about the convict Jean Valjean (Hugh Jackman) who is released after 19 years in jail for stealing a loaf of bread. At his release Valjean is told by his jailer Javert (Russell Crowe) that he is an ex-convict and not a free man and this is the start of a lifelong struggle between Valjean and Javert. Valjean finds that it is hard to survive for an ex-convict and he steals the silver from a church where the priest have helped him. He is caught and taken back to the priest to give the silver back before he is going back to jail. To Valjean's surprise the priest tells the police that he has given Valjean the silver. Valjean is released and decides to create a new life with the help of the silver. He gets a new identity and becomes a factory owner and mayor in a small town. But suddenly Javert comes to the little town and Valjean is afraid to be exposed but seems to go unnoticed. Fantine (Anne Hathaway), who is one of the workers in the factory, loses her job because she has an illegitimate child and is forced to prostitute herself to get money to pay to have her child taken care of by a couple who owns an inn. Valjean finds Fantine and takes her to a hospital but it is too late. Before Fantine dies Valjean promise to take care of her child, Cosette. Javert has found out that Valjean is the ex-convict number 24601 and Valjean has to run. He picks up Cosette and they escape to Paris. Javert promises that he will find Valjean and take him back to prison.

Years later, Cosette has grown up to be a young lady with Valjean as her father. She falls in love with Marius, a young man who belongs to a group of students who wants a revolution and overthrow the king. The students see the death of general

Lamar, a member of the government, as a signal and at his funeral they start their revolution. Valjean who knows about the love between Cosette and Marius joins the revolutionaries to protect Marius. He discovers that Javert has tried to infiltrate the revolutionaries but has been caught and is sentenced to death. Valjean persuades the revolutionaries that he will kill Javert but instead he releases him. Javert does not understand why Valjean did not kill him and commits suicide since he cannot live when the values he lived all his life for turned out to be wrong. The revolution is very short lived since nobody joins the revolutionaries and almost all of them are killed. Valjean manages to save Marius who has been badly wounded and takes him back to his home. Cosette and Marius decides to get married but Valjean disappears since he does not want his history to be known. After the wedding they find out where Valjean is and gets to him before he dies. At his moment of death he sees Fantine who has come to accompany him to heaven.

5 Hypothesis

My hypothesis for this thesis is that the American film musical has evolved in the same way as film in general but that there are areas where the musical has used the new forms of production, distribution, consumption and adaptation in unique ways. The film musicals have also used the narrative, representation and content in new ways. The reasoning behind my hypothesis is that the musical always has been a part of the traditional film production and especially the classical Hollywood film but with a special audience and special possibilities because of the added dimension of the music, the songs and the dance in the films.

6 Research Overview

As the most complex art form ever devised, the American film musical presents an unprecedented challenge to the critic and historian.

Rick Altman ³⁸

The so called Studio era or “Golden Age” of the American film musical from the 1930s to end of the 1950s has been thoroughly researched and documented.³⁹ After the Studio era the musical genre has not been the subject of the same attention. This is probably

³⁸ Altman, p ix.

³⁹ Grant, p 19-24.

mostly due to the decline of the genre from the 1960s and into the 1990s when Disney according to Steven Cohan could successfully carry the banner of the traditional film musicals with its animated musicals, the ‘toon tuners’. Disney’s animated musical had a format that suited “ a cinematic genre that unabashedly allow characters spontaneously to burst into song or dance”.⁴⁰ After the millennium there have been even less focus on the film musical in academic works since academic research often requires some time and distance to be able to analyse a subject in a structured way.

To analyse the development of the film musical genre I have based my work on earlier material and what I perceive as the standard work on the subject, Rick Altman’s *The American Film Musical*. The book gives a good overview of the genre from its beginning to the middle of the 1980s with the focus on the Studio era. In combination with Altman’s other works on the genre as a subject it provides a good base for an analysis of the American film musical genre in the 21st century.

To complement Rick Altman’s research I have used the book *The Hollywood Musical, Second Edition* by Jane Feuer. She worked together with Rick Altman at the University of Iowa in the late seventies and her book is aligned with his work even if she does not agree on everything Altman says⁴¹. From my perspective the 2nd edition of Feuer’s book published in 1993 is especially interesting since she added a postscript that looks at the film musical genre in the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. In the postscript of the book Feuer analyses the development of the genre based on what she calls the teen musicals, *Flashdance* (Adrian Lyne, 1983), *Dirty Dancing* (Emile Ardolino, 1987), and *Hairspray* (John Waters, 1988). Although it can be argued that these films are not musicals in the classical sense but Feuer adapts a very broad view on what is a musical and what is not in both in the book and in a later essay, *The International Art Musical*.

In *The Hollywood Musical* Feuer raises the question if the musical films of the 1980s challenge the ideas of more classical films.⁴² This is the same question that I want to investigate regarding the American film musical genre after the shift of the millennium.

I have not found many studies on the film musicals that have been produced after 2000 but Barry Keith Grant’s *The Hollywood Film Musical* published 2014 looks at the genre from a more current perspective by analysing films from the last

⁴⁰ Cohan, p 3.

⁴¹ Feuer, p xi.

⁴² Feuer, p 123.

eighty years. Grant includes in his analysis some newer musicals, the most recent example is a musical based on the music by the Beatles, *Across the Universe* (Julie Taymor, 2007). Another book published after the millennium that I chose to include in my research is *The Musical: Race, Gender and Performance* by Susan Smith. Even if the study is published in 2005 it is mostly the part on gender that is interesting for my thesis.

Finally I have found some articles on relevant subjects for example the articles by Paul Tingen from the magazine *Sound on Sound* on the live recording of songs in *Les Misérables*.⁴³ Overall, the focus of the research on the American film musical is on the golden years and the most famous films from that era has been thoroughly analysed by many scholars. The research done on the American film musical after 2000 is limited but this was expected as I concluded earlier that time is often needed in academic research to be able to include and analyse all relevant factors.

7 The American Film Musical in the 21st Century

The American film musical as a genre started with the introduction of the talking pictures. As noted before *The Jazz Singer* lead the way in 1929 but it was just the first of a long line of film musicals. In the 1930s the musicals both mirrored and was a remedy for the depression and were very popular with the depression-era audience.⁴⁴ During the 1940s and 1950s the musicals became a product of the Studio system and the star structure that the Studio system promoted. In the 1960s the genre declined even with the release of some of the best known American film musicals for example *West Side Story* (Jerome Robbins, Robert Wise, 1961), *My Fair Lady* (George Cukor, 1964) and *The Sound of Music* (Robert Wise, 1965). Leonard Kniffel's opinion is that a more cynical era began after 1969 where musicals that tried to mimic older successes were not successful in doing that⁴⁵. In the eighties he thinks the musical moved away from the social issues to a me-centred attitude for example with the teen musicals.

It was in the 1990s that the genre recovered through the release of several animated Disney musicals. The concept of a full-length animated musical was nothing new. The format was introduced with the release of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*

⁴³ Paul Tingen, *Inside Track: The Les Misérables Sound Team: Part 1*, *Sound on Sound* Vol 28 Issue 6/2013, p 108-121 and *Inside Track: The Les Misérables Sound Team: Part 2*, *Sound on Sound* Vol 28 Issue 7/2013, p 138-151.

⁴⁴ Grant, p 16.

⁴⁵ Leonard Kniffel, *Musicals on the Silver Screen*, Huron Press, Chicago, 2013, p 87 and 105.

(David Hand) in 1937 but it was with a row of musicals like *The Little Mermaid* (Ron Clements, John Musker, 1989), *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin* (Ron Clements, John Musker, 1992), *The Lion King* (Roger Allers, Rob Minkoff, 1994) and *Pocahontas* (Mike Gabriel, Eric Goldberg, 1995) that the musical made its comeback to the screen and made Disney dominate the field.⁴⁶ This also led to a renewed interest for the musical genre as whole and some of the Disney film musicals were also adapted for the stage. Both *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Lion King* became successful stage musicals.

During the first thirteen years of the new millennium the American film musical has evolved and even if it isn't at the level of the Studio era there has been a steady flow of musicals, some of them becoming very successful.

Even if Academy Awards and Golden Globes are not official measures they a good view of the market at least in USA but there are other prizes and the new millennium started with the release of *Dancer in the Dark* (Lars von Trier, 2000). The film was nominated both for an Academy Award and a Golden Globe for best song in 2001. *Dancer in the Dark* is not perceived as an American film musical but as an art film. It is not produced by a US production company as the analysed film but instead of a group of European production companies led by Lars von Trier's own Zentropa Entertainments.⁴⁷ Jane Feuer calls *Dancer in the Dark* an independent art film but also argues that it is part of a subgenre of the Hollywood musical genre.⁴⁸ *Dancer in the Dark* is according to Feuer part of a cycle of international art films that culminates with "[...] the big-budget studio musical *Moulin Rouge!*"⁴⁹. *Dancer in the Dark* was viewed as an art film but since the language is English it met the criteria of the Academy. *Dancer in the Dark* did not win an Academy award but it won two prizes at the Cannes Film Festival in 2000. The most prestigious award, the Palme d'Or and the leading female role, Björk won the award for Best Actress. In 2002 *Moulin Rouge!* won two Academy Awards out of a total of eight nominations.⁵⁰

So the American film musical was back on top at the beginning of the century but was this because the old musicals had a revival or because the new film musicals actually added something new? Or were the new musicals in fact new forms of musicals?

⁴⁶ Grant, p 36.

⁴⁷ http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0168629/companycredits?ref_=tt_dt_co

⁴⁸ Jane Feuer, "The International Art Musical: Defining and Periodising Post-1980s Musicals", in Steven Cohan's (ed.) *The Sound of Musicals*, London: BFI 2010, p 55.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p 56.

⁵⁰ *Moulin Rouge!* won Academy awards for Best Art Decoration-Set Decoration and Best Costume Design.

8 Adaptation, Production, Distribution and Consumption

To cover the context in which the film musicals are created and used I have included four areas, adaptation, production, distribution, and consumption. Firstly to cover the physical equipment and technology that allows for mass duplication of an original in the media for dissemination to a wide public. Secondly to cover the related aesthetic, economic and ideological structures and contexts within which that medium exists.

The introduction of new technology, especially in the field of computers, the Internet, and digital formats has made a huge impact on film and filmmaking during the last five decades and has provided grounds for development in all of the four areas.

8.1 Adaptation

The American film musical can, but does not have to be, an adaptation of a stage version of the musical. Of the analysed films both *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Les Misérables* are adaptations from stage versions. But the American film musical can also be made directly for other media. For film, as *Moulin Rouge!* and Disney's animated musicals. For TV, as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Once More with Feeling* or for the Web/Internet as *Dr Horrible's Sing-along Blog*. The adaptation made to the Buffy the Vampire Slayer TV episode is interesting since it is not adapted from a literary work or the stage. Instead it is an adaptation of the form of the TV series to the musical form.

Regardless of the media, from a contextual perspective the adaptation is about the way the film is made and the form in which the film musical is presented. In my opinion there are three types of adaptations that can be used when adapting the film musical to film depending on what the producers want to achieve with the production. In the Applied Adaptation Model the choice of type of adaptation is answered by the Who and Why keywords in Hutchinson's model and it is often based on economical considerations. Naturally there are variations within the three adaptations but the differences between the adaptations should be clear.

The Concert Adaptation. In the concert adaptation the musical is performed as a concert normally set on a stage with or without props. This implementation focuses on the music but the narrative is still important and used to set the songs in the right order. I noted earlier that if the narrative is missing then the film does not qualify as film musical. Instead it is a concert film. Examples of concert implementation of

film musicals are the two films made to celebrate the 10th and 25th anniversaries of the London stage version of *Les Misérables*, *Les Miserables 10th Anniversary Concert At The Royal Albert Hall* (Gavin Taylor, Paul Kafno, 1995 (1998/2008)) and *Les Misérables in Concert: The 25th Anniversary* (Nick Morris, 2010). Both adaptations use costumes and some props to set the scene for the songs. This is usually the adaptation that has the lowest production cost.

The Filmed Stage Adaptation. In this adaptation the musical is filmed as a stage performance or using the stage as the base and format for a filmed version of the musical. Since it limits the scenography needed it also limits the costs of filming the musical. Leonard Kniffel remarks that the early musicals in America also were filmed as if they were being performed on stage with the camera being the substitute for the seated live audience.⁵¹ An interesting parallel is the Japanese film. In the beginning of film production in Japan the film was viewed as an extension of the staged play as opposed to the American/European view on the film as an extension of the photography.⁵² Most Japanese films were filmed as stage performances either in theatres or specially built scenes with a fixed camera to give the audience the experience of seeing a play. The same experience might be something the director wants to achieve with a stage musical too. The filmed stage adaptation is often used when a stage version of the musical is adapted for TV or video or to lower the production cost. It can be filmed using one or more cameras which can be fixed or mobile. And it can be filmed with or without an audience. Examples of this type of filmed stage musical is *The Phantom of the Opera at the Albert Hall* and *Love Never Dies*.

The Film Adaptation. This is the film musical done as a film using the same techniques as standard films. The scenes are set in a scenography made for film and it is not limited to the stage and the stage's limitations. The filmed version can be made in a studio or on location. All three of the analysed films are examples of this type of adaptation. Of the three types of adaptations this is usually the type with the highest production cost.

⁵¹ Kniffel, p 1.

⁵² Donald Richie. *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film, A Concise History, with a Selective Guide to DVDs and Videos*. Kodansha USA, New York, NY, 2012, p 23-24.

8.2 Production

Today a film can be created in either analogue or digital mode or any combination of the two but the film will in some phases of the production be transferred to a digital environment. All three analysed films are good examples on how the new technology for example Computer Generated Imagery, CGI, is used in different ways to create and support the end result.

Moulin Rouge! is using CGI to produce much of the scenes and the environments in which the film takes place. According to the director Baz Luhrmann on the commentary track on the DVD no scenes were shot outside the studio so everything had to be created either in the studio or the computer.

Moulin rouge! is edited in a very fast form, especially in the music scenes. This is reminiscent to the type of fast editing that is often used in music videos. Roger Ebert comments the editing in his review of the film:

I am often impatient with directors who use so many cuts their films seem to have been fed through electric fans. For Luhrmann and this material, it is the right approach. He uses so many different setups and camera angles that some of the songs seem to be cut not on every word of the lyrics, but on every syllable. There's no breathing room. The whole movie is on the same manic pitch as O'Connor's "Make 'em Laugh" number in "Singin' in the Rain." Everything is screwed to a breakneck pitch, as if the characters have died and their lives are flashing before our eyes.

Roger Ebert ⁵³

This type of fast editing that is depending on the beat, the rhythm and visuals can also be found in other contemporary musicals for example the opening number *All That Jazz* in *Chicago*. This type of editing is greatly facilitated by using digital techniques and computer support.

The Phantom of the Opera is created using traditional film sets in the Pinewood Studios, England but uses CGI for some of the key scenes for example the transformation of the opera house from the burned out, dusty version of 1919 to the time of the story when the opera is presented in its full splendour.

⁵³ <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/moulin-rouge-2001>

Les Misérables is also using CGI in combination with standard film sets but the director Tom Hooper is using new technology to support the actors so they can sing live during the shots. This is the opposite to the traditional way of shooting film musicals.⁵⁴ Normally the songs are recorded in advance in a studio and the actors lip-sync to the songs during shooting. This doesn't give the actors much freedom to develop their characters on screen since they have to decide in the recording studio how the character shall behave during filming. In *Les Misérables* the actors actually steer the music and the tempo it uses since all music is added and adapted in post-production based on the actors performances. According to the article in *Sound on Sound* this was a requirement from Tom Hooper if he were to direct the picture.⁵⁵

It is interesting to compare the fast editing of *Moulin Rouge!* with the editing in *Les Misérables* as it has a big impact on the overall impression of the films. Since the actors in *Les Misérables* sing the songs live they are not performed in quite the same way in each take. When the sound varies it makes it harder to edit the film compared to the traditional way when using lip-synchronization to a pre-recorded track. The solution was not to edit, instead the director used long shots of the actors singing the whole song without any editing. This give two different types of songs when you compare *Moulin Rouge!* to *Les Misérables* and also two different types of film musicals. According to the commentary track on the DVD a few songs in *Moulin Rouge!* also are recorded live.

An interesting subject regarding film musicals is casting. The film industry wants make as much money as possible from the films so they want to use known actors that will draw the audience to the cinemas or make them consume the film in some other way. But not all actors are good singers and musicals usually puts high demands on the singing parts of the roles. In the analysed films the actors have been chosen both for their abilities to act and sing. If an actor does not have the voice required for singing the traditional way of handling this is to dub a singer's voice lip-synced to the actor's performance. The only place where this is done in the analysed films is in *The Phantom of the Opera* where Minnie Driver who plays Carlotta have been dubbed by Margaret Preece. But Minnie Driver can sing, which she proves by singing the final song *Learn to be lonely* that is played during the film's end credits.⁵⁶ But there are other examples of musicals produced after 2000 where actors with very

⁵⁴ <http://www.soundonsound.com/sos/apr13/articles/it-0413.htm>

⁵⁵ <http://www.soundonsound.com/sos/apr13/articles/it-0413.htm>

⁵⁶ http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0293508/soundtrack?ref_=tt_trv_snd

limited singing abilities have not been dubbed for example *Mamma Mia* (Phyllida Lloyd, 2008).⁵⁷

Another aspect regarding production is economy. Every way possible to finance the film or to lower the cost of its production is examined. It can be anything from crowd funding to product placement and in the analysed films in their historical setting there actually is one example of product placement. In one of the black and white scenes of *The Phantom of the Opera* Raoul looks into the store window of Swarovski's in Paris. In the film Swarovski made the crystals for the chandelier in the opera house which falls down at the audience at the end of the film. This is common in today's films where sponsorship and media exposure is very important but it is not so common in historical film musicals.

8.3 Distribution

Distribution has changed completely since the millennium. The traditional ways are still there with celluloid film used in some cinemas but it is becoming more and more unusual and today most of the distribution is done as streaming files or on a physical disc. For home use DVD and Blu-ray are used as disc formats and have the advantage of being able to include extra material together with the films. But today Internet and other networks often replace the physical media. The increased network bandwidths makes transfer of high resolution films possible and today films are often streamed through computer networks. Traditional TV distribution made through terrestrial, cable or satellite broadcasts has also been complemented with computer networks. This changes the consumption of films or any kind of multimedia dramatically since a user can consume films almost anywhere and anytime.

The three films have all had a standard distribution for major productions. This means that the first run is made through cinemas and this establishes the base for the distribution of the films. Later the distribution of the films was complemented with disc and streamed distribution together with standard TV programming.

Musicals have an advantage over traditional films. The soundtrack and its songs are potential music hits and can be distributed through radio, disc or streams without the pictures. *Moulin Rouge!* is a good example of this where the cover version of the song *Lady Marmalade* with Christina Aguilera, Lil' Kim, Mya and Pink became a big hit. In 2001 the song topped the charts in more than 10 countries including the

⁵⁷ Grant, p 2.

American Billboard Hot 100 chart copying the achievement 25 years earlier of the original version of the song with Labelle in 1975.⁵⁸

Using published songs is not a new idea. Already in the early twentieth century, before the breakthrough of recorded sound for home use, sheet music was the primary medium for retailing of popular music and hit songs could sell millions of copies.⁵⁹

Some musicals are released without being shown at the cinema. Instead they are directly transferred to disc or only distributed through broadcasting or the computer networks. An example of the latter is Josh Wheadon's *Dr. Horrible's Sing-along Blog* which was only meant to be distributed as a three part musical series through the web but became so successful that it was released both on DVD and Blu-ray and with the soundtrack released as an audio CD or through digital download.⁶⁰

8.4 Consumption

The new forms of distribution have opened for new forms of consumption of film musicals. Not only can the audience decide on how to consume the musical but also when they want to do it. A musical streamed via Internet can be viewed on almost any device from a smartphone to a home cinema with projector and multichannel sound. And the consumption is more dependent on the user's preferences than on any limitations in the technology.

Consumption of film in general has changed a lot during the last twenty years. The Internet gave way to new forms of distribution and new ways of consumption. Consumption used to be dependent on fixed schedules at the cinema or on TV. Today most films are available through different streaming services where the viewer decides when he or she wants to watch the films. This is huge difference compared to the situation before the breakthrough of the video cassette. Lenoard Knieffel says that the VCR revolutionized the access to film and that access has become better with the introduction of each new technology.⁶¹ There has been a huge development from the rental service of video cassettes where the type of media meant that viewer had to adapt to the limitations of open store hours or number of available copies. The

⁵⁸ <http://www.billboard.com/archive/charts>

⁵⁹ Grant, p 9.

⁶⁰ www.drhorrible.com

⁶¹ Kniffel, p xiii.

streaming services gives the viewer the possibility to consume the films whenever he or she wants in almost any way they wish.

There are also new ways to consume the film musicals depending on the media chosen. DVD's and Blu-ray discs can include both extra material, for example documentaries about the musicals, but also jukebox or karaoke features. A good example of the jukebox feature is the TV series *Glee* where all episodes on the DVD or Blu-ray edition can be watched as a jukebox feature where only the song parts are shown. And the karaoke feature can be found on the DVD edition of the sixth season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* with the musical episode *Once More with Feeling*.

Glee (2009-) is also interesting from the perspective of generating hit songs for the charts. *Glee* uses established songs in the same way as *Moulin Rouge!* it has surpassed both Elvis Presley and The Beatles in the number of hits that made it to the Billboard Hot 100 chart but with the comment that only a quarter of all songs stay for a longer time on the chart. The users download the songs from an episode the week after the episode is shown on TV but the downloading of a specific song is just for a week until the next episode is shown. This means that the songs have a big impact on the chart the first week but the songs does not have a lasting effect and they very quickly drop out of the chart.

9 Narrative, Representation, and Content

So there are new ways of using the context to adapt, produce, distribute, and consume American film musicals but are there any development or differences in what it contains? Are there any differences in narrative, representation and content compared to the classic American film musicals? Have the values presented in the films changed? I have focused my analysis of the three films to a limited number of topics: gender, love and sexuality, soliloquy, audience and spectators, level of diegesis and the dual-focus narrative. I believe these topics gives a representative view of the narrative, representation, and content of the films. So are the analysed films a new breed of musicals for the 21st century or are they created in the legacy of the traditional American film musical?

9.1 Gender

One of the topics that has changed a lot during the last century is the view on gender. Pelle Snickars and Cecilia Trenter says in their essay *Det förflutna som film och vice*

versa that historical films are a form of historical document and sources and that the films reflect the current times.⁶² If this is correct the gender representation in the analysed films will reflect a modern view on gender compared to the literary och musical sources used as basis for the films.

The modern view on gender is not reflected in *The Phantom of the Opera* where Christine is just a pawn in the game between the Phantom and Raoul. She is a prize worth fighting for but with no will of her own. The relationship between the Phantom and Christine is more interesting from another aspect. The Mentor-Pupil relationship between them is very similar to the relationship displayed Professor Higgins and Eliza Dolittle in the play *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw or more recently in the musical version *My Fair Lady* (George Cukor, 1964) except that in Christine's case the focus is on singing instead of talking but the focus on the female voice is the same as in *The Phantom of the Opera* as Susan Smith describes in her analysis of *My Fair Lady* and *A Star Is Born* (George Cukor, 1954).⁶³ You can compare Christines development as a singer to the transformation Eliza must do to be aristocratic or "Audrey Hepburn" as Susan Smith calls it.⁶⁴ Christine is used to obey in her role as a girl in the ballet at the opera and this mean that she lacks the will to revolt as Eliza did. And if you compare her to Judy Garlands character, Vicki Lester, in *A Star Is Born*, Christine lacks the strength and pride that Vicki Lester has. The lack of these feelings is probably why Christine does not become more than playing prize in the struggle between the Phantom and his opponents. She never evolves into the same strong person as Eliza or Vicki although she has the same chance to mature and create her own identity as they did.

And in *Les Misérables* Cosette is just the same type of prize as Christine is in *The Phantom of the Opera* but this time the fight between Jean Valjean and Marius is different. Valjean is the father who has to give up his daughter, and Marius is her romance. Eponine who is the daughter to Thernadiers and is in love with Marius has an active role in the story but knows from the start that she can't reach her goal and get Marius since he does not love her. Marius only sees her as his friend so she makes the ultimate sacrifice and gives her own life to save Marius.

⁶² Pelle Snickars & Cecila Trenter. "Det förflutna som som film och vice versa. Om medierade historiebruk – en introduktion", *Det förflutna som film och vice versa, Om medierade historiebruk*. Pelle Snickars & Cecila Trenter (ed.) Studentlitteratur, Lund, 2004, p 21.

⁶³ Smith, p 54.

⁶⁴ Smith, p 59-69.

The only really strong female role in *Les Misérables* is Eponine's mother Madame Thernadier but she represents the evil poor and she is never presented as role model. Together with her husband she is used as an agent for the story or to add a touch of comedy to the musical. Interestingly she is not punished in the musical but merely carried out from Cosette's and Marius' wedding but with a feeling that she will land on her feet and she might be back later.

In *Moulin Rouge!* Santine is much stronger than the other women in the film but in the end she has to pay the price for being an independent, strong woman who wants to become a real artist and also for falling in love with Christian. All women roles in *Moulin Rouge!* are prostitutes and the night club is a place for men to come to, pay for whatever they want and then leave with no obligations. Only physical love has a place at Moulin Rouge.

None of the three films challenge patriarchal structures or traditions. Instead they seem to try to establish the man as the stronger sex and the woman as an object of desire.

9.2 Love and Sexuality

For love and sex the three analysed films follow the standard view and values of the American family film with a strict heterosexual approach. All three films are based on traditional American family values from the middle of the last century and this has always been a characteristic of the classical American film musical. There is almost nothing that is based on or even acknowledges LGBT-sexuality in the films except for the *Moulin Rouge!* and even then it is very carefully hidden in jokes. It seems that the directors and producers have worked very hard to exclude anything outside of the traditional heterosexual norm.

In all three films there is a big difference between sexuality and love. *Moulin Rouge!* focuses more on sex through the dance scenes than the other two films. The traditional replacement of sex with dance in musicals is only fully apparent in *Moulin Rouge!* and then especially in the tango dance scene. In *The Phantom of the Opera* the dance is a formal part of the life in the opera. It is only in the scenes between the Phantom and Christine that there is a tension between the characters. Dance is almost completely missing in *Les Misérables* except for the Thernadier couple's song *Master of the House* which is a comedy show number and different from all other songs in the musical. There is also formal dance at the wedding at the end of

the movie but more for atmosphere than as a code for sex. Sex in *Les Misérables* is only physical and business. Neither Valjean or Javert show any lust for sex. Valjean focuses on the fatherly love for Cosette and a platonic love for Fontine and Javert has replaced sex and love with honour and duty.

The sexuality in *The Phantom of the Opera* is focused on the relation between The Phantom and Christine. The sex is only implied in the musical but something must have happened when The Phantom took Christine to his underground lair because in the sequel *Love Never Dies* the Phantom turns out to be the father of Christine's son. The connection between Raoul and Christine is more of a love story between teenagers than showing any kind of sexual attraction.

In *Moulin Rouge!* the sexual attraction is mostly connected to the love affair between Christian and Santine. The rest of sexuality in the film is naturally based on the prostitutes on a commercial basis or part of the show numbers and in that case especially in the dance.

9.3 Soliloquy

Soliloquy is a passage in which a character expresses his thoughts or feelings aloud either alone or with the other actors keeping quiet. It was used in the theatre of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, the most famous one probably being the "To be or not to be" soliloquy in *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare.⁶⁵ Soliloquy is not used very often in films or plays except when a special effect is wanted through the use of a monologue.

The soliloquy is regularly used in the musical genre and the feature is accepted by the musical audience. The soliloquy gives the writer and director a unique way to convey thoughts and feelings from the characters to the spectator in almost any setting. The soliloquy is always directed to the audience and is one of the things that musical audiences accept as part of the musical form. It does not have to be in the form of a direct address but a character in using the direct address can extend the effect of the soliloquy. Direct address is something almost considered forbidden within standard films in Hollywood where the camera is considered invisible but is used in some rare occasions to create special effects. In *Gigi* (Vincent Minelli, 1958) Maurice Chevalier does a direct address but he was at the time the film was made considered a great artist and was as such allowed to directly address the spectators.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Soliloquy. Encyclopædia Britannica, April, 2014

⁶⁶ Feuer, p 39.

Soliloquy is used in all three of the analysed films but it is in *Les Misérables* where it really makes a difference. I have not found any direct address in the analysed films but the closest to a direct address is done by Anne Hathaway when she sings the soliloquy *I Dreamed a Dream* in *Les Misérables*. For a moment it seems she looks right into the camera and connects with the spectators and although she does not this perceived connection in combination with the song, the performance of singing live and the close up of the handheld cameras make the song a very special experience. Anne Hathaway won an Academy Award for her role as Best supporting actress in 2013. The same techniques with close up cameras which is perceived as an almost direct address is used in other soliloquys in *Les Misérables* for example *Valjean's Soliloquy*, *Stars* and *On My Own*.

Soliloquy is not the only example on this type of the audience acceptance in the musical genre. Another type is what Altman calls the audio dissolve, the diegetic natural rhythm of sounds or speech that pass over to the romantic diegetic music and enables the song and then sometimes back again when the song is over.⁶⁷ The audience not only accepts this but also accept that there is normally no visible source to the music. This is something that separates the film musical from the stage version which only have two levels to offer: not-singing and singing.⁶⁸

9.4 Audience and Spectators

The audience is a very important part of the American film musical especially in the show musical. Jane Feuer distinguishes between the terms audience and spectators where the audiences are the first person form, the diegetic audience and the spectators are the third person form, the non diegetic audience.⁶⁹ The audience and the spectators are often interchangeable depending on what the director wants to accomplish. Of the three films analysed both *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Moulin Rouge!* uses the audience as part of the narrative.

In *The Phantom of the Opera* the audience is a natural part of the performance but in some cases also interchanged with the spectators for example when Christine steps in for Carlotta in the *Think of Me* aria and is transferred between the rehearsal and the performance in the middle of the aria. In the sequel *Love Never Dies*,

⁶⁷ Altman. p 63, 67.

⁶⁸ Altman, p 66.

⁶⁹ Feuer, p 23.

which is a Filmed Stage Adaptation, the audience is only present in the beginning and the end of the performance and is converted to spectators for the rest of the film.

In *Moulin Rouge!* the audience and the spectators are even more linked to each other. The film starts with the spectator seeing the conductor leading the orchestra before the red curtain as part of the audience. When the curtain opens the spectators are moved into the story and becoming part of the audience.

In *Les Misérables* the audience is not a part of the movie except for the fact that many scenes are shot with handheld cameras using close-ups which gives a very intimate feeling when viewing the film. But even when there is a perceived contact between the actor and the spectator it is never actually realized as direct address.

9.5 Level of Diegesis

Steven Cohan thinks that one of the musical's distinctive formal convention as a genre derives from the ease with which it creates a dual-register and thereby breaks with the cinema's dominant codes of realism as a means of securing the unity of time and space for a film's fictive world or 'diegesis'.⁷⁰ In *The Wizard of Oz* Victor Fleming uses the black and white technique with a sepia tone to describe Kansas during the depression. When Dorothy arrives to Oz the film changes to Technicolor to emphasize that Dorothy has left the reality and arrived to another level of digesis, a fantasy or dream. This convention creates levels of diegesis but is not limited to the characters fantasies or dreams.⁷¹

Rick Altman calls this effect video dissolve and gives the example of the transitions from a monochrome picture of the Smith's house to colourful film frame of the same house in *Meet Me in St Louis* (Vincent Minelli, 1944).⁷² *Moulin Rouge!* and *The Phantom of the Opera* uses digital techniques to create the same difference between the ordinary world and the dreamed or remembered world. The distance between the worlds can be very short or very long and in *Dancer in the Dark* for example the distance is very short and the washed out colours that is used to represent reality is changed to bright colours during Selma's song fantasies. Jane Feuer points out that the distance can also be as wide as the distance between Kansas and Oz or Scotland and Brigadoon in Vincente Minellis *Brigadoon* (1954).⁷³ Sometimes, as in the end of *The*

⁷⁰ Cohan, p 3.

⁷¹ Cohan, p 3.

⁷² Altman, p 77.

⁷³ Feuer, p 70.

Phantom of the Opera, the red rose with the engagement ring around it that symbolises the Phantom's love and memory of Christine creates, in an otherwise monochrome picture, a stunning effect that closes the distance between the present and the past. As mentioned before *The Phantom of the Opera* also uses an advanced form of CGI to create the flashback effect in the beginning of the movie from the burnt out opera house to the opera house of the story.

In *Moulin Rouge!* the red curtain together with the proscenium is also used as a portal but this time between the spectator and the diegesis. As the curtain lifts we are transferred from the reality and into the story. As we are moved from our spot in the audience onto the stage we are transferred from the first person view to the third person view. This is not a new effect it has been used for example in *Gypsy* (Mervyn Leroy, 1962) and also during overtures and entr'acte in films with intermission.

9.6 The Dual-Focus Narrative

Rick Altman introduces the dual-focus narrative "[...] built around parallel stars of opposite sex and radically divergent values".⁷⁴ In the classical American musical this is the standard way of introducing and developing the relationship between the two lovers in the musical. It is usually based on a song where the two protagonists share the song but with their own views. Since the male and female protagonists almost always are portrayed as different types of characters, part of the musical narrative is to make them influence each other. The result is that they learn from each other and change their persons to fit their partner.

A good example is *Grease* (Randal Kleiser, 1978) where the opening song between Danny and Sandy, *Summer Nights*, is their way of telling their respective friends about their summer love. They share the same melody but give their own version of what happened during the summer. In the film Danny and Sandy changes their roles based on their partners personality. Danny becomes the respected athlete and Sandy becomes the tough girl in the gang.

This is also apparent in the analysed film musicals but in different ways. Santine and Christian as the traditional loving couple is the most typical example of the analysed films. But couples like the Phantom and Christine, Cosette and Marius all evolve from their respective relationships although not as clearly as in the example from *Grease*.

⁷⁴ Altman, p 19.

As noted before according to Altman the lovers are almost always a heterosexual couple in the classical American musical. The musical genre is very popular in groups that does not live heteronormative. There maybe other ways to interpret and perceive the representation of male and female in the genre than the ones I have presented in this thesis. An example is camp reading, a highly stylized approach to decoding Hollywood film. “Camp reception is always a “double reading” in which the form and content of Hollywood film are both passionately embraced and simultaneously mocked”.⁷⁵

10 Conclusions

The classical American film musical is following the same concepts as classical Hollywood films. The same changes in the context of films that have changed American films and filmmaking for the last two decades are also valid for American film musicals. Example of this is new technologies, digitalization, computer networks and how the technology effects adaptation, production, distribution and consumption. But there is also a new culture and new technologies that are adapted from a musical perspective for example singing live.

The adaptation of *Moulin Rouge!* has modernised the show or backstage musical for example in the finale *Spectacular Spectacular* which is based on Bollywood show numbers while still retaining the links to the Busby Berkeley musicals of the 1930s. The musical numbers are using music videos as their basis while still keeping with some of the traditional techniques. A good example is the use of bricolage, the use of props at hand when the cast presents the idea for the new show to the duke. Bricolage is a technique used for example by both Fred Astaire and Judy Garland and it contrasts well with all the CGI and technological inventions and fast editing in the film.⁷⁶

Moulin Rouge! also keeps with the old traditions when it uses songs that has already been established on the charts for example Madonna’s *Like a Virgin* and David Bowie’s *Diamond Dogs*. By using the modern songs Baz Luhrmann wants to decode what *Moulin Rouge* was to the audience in 1899 and in a way that todays movie-goers can relate to. To use music already known to the audience is not something new.⁷⁷ It has been done since *The Jazz Singer* and many of the composers of the great

⁷⁵ Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin. *America on film: representing race, class, gender, and sexuality at the movies*. Blackwell Publishing Ltd, Malden/Oxford/Victoria, 2004, p 313.

⁷⁶ Feuer, p 5-7.

⁷⁷ Grant, p 35.

American song book has contributed their songs to different films over the years. Irving Berlin's *White Christmas* for example was a song sung by Bing Crosby's characters in two different films, *Holiday Inn* (Mark Sandrich, 1942) and *White Christmas* (Michael Curtiz, 1954).

The adaptation of *The Phantom of the Opera* is the next step for the song-through musical with roots in the operetta. It's a fairy tale musical set in a backstage surrounding. The consistent use of the film techniques makes the filmed musical a different experience compared to the stage version. The changes in the storyline is done to emphasize the story and building up the suspense and tension for the finale.

Les Misérables is a folk musical that is using the film medium in a new way. The live recording of the songs, the handheld cameras, scenes done in one shot, extreme close-ups and realistic sets makes *Les Misérables* a new kind of film musical. It's another type of experience compared to the stage version but still using the strength of the story and the music of the musical.

When I analyse the narrative, representation, and content not much seems to have happened compared to classical, traditional film musicals. The three analysed films convey very traditional and conservative values in different areas like gender, sex and love. This might be due to the fact that the three analysed films are based on older literary works and their values but other films have managed to use older material and still modernize the content and values. It is interesting to see how the older research material is still valid when used to analyse and describe the content of the new musicals.

So the answer to the question in the title of the thesis, if the film musical is a new breed or just more of the same, seem to have two different answers. From a technological perspective the traditional musical has changed a lot after the millennium and in some cases like the case with the live singing in *Les Misérables* the change has been almost revolutionary.

In the narrative, representation and content almost nothing has changed in the analysed musicals. To find changes in these areas we have to look at other film musicals than the ones I have analysed. There are examples of musicals that have a narrative and representation that is more in line with modern values but they are based on more modern material. If we want to keep with the traditional film musicals it looks like we have to wait. Maybe *Wicked* will be adapted to film as has been rumoured. This is a musical with its strong female characters and a refreshing view on the story of the

Wizard of Oz. While we wait for this we have to look outside the realm of classical film musicals to find modern values and representation in the film musical genre.

10.1 Proposals for future research

This thesis focus on the musical in the classical Hollywood form and how it has evolved during the first years of the 21st century. I have also given some examples of new types of musicals developed for other media than the traditional film. It would be interesting to further research the production, distribution and consumption of these new types of musicals that does not have the legacy of the Golden Age.

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Producer: Fred Baron, Martin Brown, Baz Luhrmann
Director: Baz Luhrmann
Writer: Baz Luhrmann, Craig Pierce
Cinematography: Donald McAlpine
Film Editing: Jill Bilcock
Original Music: Craig Armstrong
Cast: Nicole Kidman (Satine), Ewan McGregor (Christian), John Lequizamo (Toulouse-Lautrec), Jim Broadbent (Harold Zidler), Richard Roxburgh (The Duke)

Original title: *The Phantom of the Opera*
Production: Warner Bros., Odyssey Entertainment, Really Useful Films, Scion Films, UK, 2004
Producer: Andrew Lloyd Webber
Director: Joel Schumacher
Writer: Andrew Lloyd Webber, Joel Schumacher
Cinematography: John Mathieson
Film Editing: Terry Rawlings
Original Music: Andrew Lloyd Webber
Cast: Gerard Butler (The Phantom), Emmy Rossum (Christine), Patrick Wilson (Raoul), Miranda Richardson (Madame Giry), Minnie Driver (Carlotta)

Original title: *Les Misérables*
 Production: Universal Pictures, Relativity Media, Working Title Films, Cameron Macintosh Production, UK, 2012
 Producer: Tim Bevan, Eric Fellner, Debra Hayward, Cameron Mackintosh
 Director: Tom Hooper
 Writer: William Nicholson
 Cinematography: Danny Cohen
 Film Editing: Chris Dickens, Melanie Oliver
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 Cast: Hugh Jackman (Jean Valjean), Russel Crowe (Javert), Anne Hathaway (Fantine), Amanda Seyfried (Cosette), Eddy Redmayne (Marius), Sacha Baron Cohen (Thénardier), Helena Bonham Carter (Madame Thénardier), Samantha Barks (Éponine)

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Dirty Dancing (Emile Ardolino, 1987)

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