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**The Presentation of Culture and Identity in the  
Contemporary Film Musical Soundtrack: An  
Exploration of *Moulin Rouge!* and *Burlesque***

Hannah Rachel Clewes

A Thesis Submitted to the University of Huddersfield in  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts by Research in Music

The University of Huddersfield

**September 2020**

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# Abstract

Film musicals convey meaning through soundtrack in ways that no other film genre can. This audio performance space, in which deeper thoughts and emotions are performed in such revealing and intimate ways, allows for levels of expression above that which can be achieved through words alone, or through music ascribed to a character with which they cannot interact. In contemporary musical films particularly, this space has come to be occupied by explorations of culture and identity, as investigated in this thesis.

This study analyses the presentation of culture and identity in the soundtracks of two contemporary movie musicals: *Moulin Rouge!* (Luhrmann, 2001) and *Burlesque* (Antin, 2010). Particularly focusing on performing masculinities and femininities, the project explores how gender identity is presented, as well as sexuality and race. In a modern context, these are more widely represented due to a society-wide focus on representation, inclusivity and acceptance. By studying existing literature, alongside the exploration of contemporary case studies, this project draws conclusions on identity and culture based on many theoretical models, including film, music and queer theory.

The analysis shows that many factors influence the messages conveyed through soundtrack, such as vocality, vocal quality and the context of a pre-existing song, and that these particularly influence how messages are interpreted by the listener. The research also shows how other factors influence how the soundtrack is interpreted, such as the role of celebrity, stereotyping, and the aesthetic look of the film. This research demonstrates the possibility for further research into the role of both compiled and composed soundtracks in contemporary film musicals, as the popularity of the genre grows, and filmmakers approach scoring identity in new and refreshing ways.

# Contents

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>CONTENTS.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>TABLE OF FIGURES.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>TABLE OF TABLES.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1 .....</b>	<b>9</b>
INTRODUCTION.....	9
<b>CHAPTER 2 .....</b>	<b>12</b>
IDENTITY IN FILM .....	12
<i>Studying and Categorising Identity</i> .....	12
Gender .....	12
Sexuality .....	13
Culture and Race .....	14
<i>Representing Identity in Film</i> .....	15
<i>Conclusion</i> .....	24
<b>CHAPTER 3 .....</b>	<b>25</b>
MOVIE MUSICAL GENRE AND FILM MUSIC. ....	25
<i>Defining the Film Musical</i> .....	25
<i>History of the Genre</i> .....	26
<i>Theorising the Film Musical</i> .....	30
<i>Performance and Singing</i> .....	35
<i>Identity in Musicals</i> .....	37
<i>Identity in Film Music</i> .....	39
Classical Scoring .....	40
Popular Scoring .....	42
<i>Relating to the Movie Musical</i> .....	44
<b>CHAPTER 4 .....</b>	<b>46</b>
PERFORMING GENDER AND IDENTITY IN MOULIN ROUGE! .....	46
<i>Introduction</i> .....	46
<i>The Bohemians: Masculinity and Non-normativity</i> .....	49
Introduction to the Bohemians .....	49
<i>Satine: Female Sexuality and the Role of The Performer</i> .....	51
Sparkling Diamonds.....	51
<i>The Duke and Zidler: Camp Masculinity</i> .....	57
‘Like A Virgin’ .....	57
<i>Christian: Love and Masculinity</i> .....	63
‘Your Song’ .....	63
‘Elephant Love Medley’ .....	65
‘Come What May’ .....	68
<i>Masculine Control over Female Sexuality</i> .....	69
‘El Tango De Roxanne’ .....	69
<i>Conclusion</i> .....	74
<b>CHAPTER 5 .....</b>	<b>76</b>
PERFORMING GENDER AND IDENTITY IN <i>BURLESQUE</i> .....	76
<i>Introduction: Welcome to Burlesque</i> .....	76
<i>Cher: Technology and Sexuality</i> .....	78

'Welcome to Burlesque' .....	79
'You Haven't Seen the Last of Me' .....	82
<i>Christina Aguilera: Beautiful People, Distinctive Voices</i> .....	85
'Express' .....	89
'Bound to You' .....	93
<i>The Other Dancers: They Don't Come to Hear Us Sing</i> .....	94
<i>The Men of The Lounge</i> .....	98
<i>Conclusion</i> .....	100
<b>CHAPTER 6</b> .....	<b>102</b>
CONCLUSION.....	102
<b>REFERENCE LIST</b> .....	<b>107</b>
<b>AUDIO-VISUAL REFERENCE LIST</b> .....	<b>113</b>
<b>APPENDIX A</b> .....	<b>115</b>
<b>APPENDIX B</b> .....	<b>121</b>

## Table of Figures

<i>Figure 1: Moulin Rouge!: Right: Crotch-grabbing Narcoleptic Argentinian (Luhrmann, 2001).</i>	50
<i>Figure 2: Moulin Rouge!: Centre: Audrey, cross-dressing character and original writer; Right: Satie, composer (Luhrmann, 2001).</i>	50
<i>Figure 3: Moulin Rouge!: Bohemians’ reverential reaction to Christian’s singing (Luhrmann, 2001).</i>	51
<i>Figure 4: Moulin Rouge!: The ghostly glow of a pale and sickly Satine (Luhrmann, 2001).</i>	53
<i>Figure 5: Marilyn Monroe as Lorelei Lee in Gentlemen Prefer Blondes (Hawks, 1953).</i>	55
<i>Figure 6: Madonna as Monroe in the ‘Material Girl’ Music Video (Lambert, 1985).</i>	55
<i>Figure 7: Moulin Rouge!: Kidman as Satine, surrounded by men (Luhrmann, 2001).</i>	56
<i>Figure 8: Moulin Rouge!: Zidler playing the virginal Satine (Luhrmann, 2001).</i>	60
<i>Figure 9: Moulin Rouge!: Duke’s comical physical performance, chasing Zidler (Luhrmann, 2001).</i>	61
<i>Figure 10: Moulin Rouge!: Duke singing directly to Zidler (Luhrmann, 2001).</i>	62
<i>Figure 11: Moulin Rouge!: Champagne cork ejaculations- the climax of ‘Like a Virgin’ (Luhrmann, 2001).</i>	62
<i>Figure 12: Moulin Rouge!: Holding each other, beginning to fall in love (Luhrmann, 2001).</i>	64
<i>Figure 13: Moulin Rouge!: Dreamlike performance on the rooftops of Paris, featuring singing moon (Luhrmann, 2001).</i>	65
<i>Figure 14: Moulin Rouge!: Performance of ‘Heroes’, the point the characters sing together (Luhrmann, 2001).</i>	66
<i>Figure 15: Moulin Rouge!: NA’s control over Nini, his passionate jealousy framed as her ‘fault’ (Luhrmann, 2001).</i>	71
<i>Figure 16: Moulin Rouge!: Christian’s pained performance (Luhrmann, 2001).</i>	73
<i>Figure 17: Burlesque poster, showing emphasis on the star cast (Antin, 2010).</i>	76
<i>Figure 18: Burlesque: Burlesque Dancers, draped bodies, blue lighting (Antin, 2010).</i>	82
<i>Figure 19: Burlesque: Tess’s revealing costume (Antin, 2010).</i>	82
<i>Figure 20: Burlesque: Tess’s performance of ‘You Haven’t Seen the Last of Me’, intimate staging (Antin, 2010).</i>	83
<i>Figure 21: Burlesque: Mostly descending melody (Transcribed by the author)</i>	84
<i>Figure 22: Burlesque: ‘Books’ (pictures) Ali uses to research Burlesque (Antin, 2010).</i>	88
<i>Figure 23: Burlesque: Ali’s Suggestive Costume (Antin, 2010)</i>	90
<i>Figure 24: Cabaret: Liza Minelli’s ‘Mein Herr’ performance (Fosse, 1972).</i>	90
<i>Figure 25: Burlesque: Punchy syllables, end of the number (Transcribed by the author)</i>	91
<i>Figure 26: Burlesque: Ali’s classic beauty as opposed to sexual beauty (Antin, 2010).</i>	93
<i>Figure 27: Burlesque: ‘Diamonds Are A Girls Best Friend’ Performance (Antin, 2010).</i>	95
<i>Figure 28: Burlesque: ‘Long John Blues’ Performance (Antin, 2010).</i>	96
<i>Figure 29: Burlesque: Octave leap representing sexual pleasure (transcribed by the author)</i>	96



# Table of Tables

<i>Table 1: Table of Moulin Rouge! performances</i> .....	47
<i>Table 2: Moulin Rouge!: Analysis and comparison of Male vocal performance in 'Like a Virgin' (Transcribed by the author)</i> .....	59
<i>Table 3: Moulin Rouge!: Balance of Singing and Speaking in 'Elephant Love Medley'</i> .....	67
<i>Table 4: Moulin Rouge!: Analysis and comparison of Male vocal performance in 'El Tango de Roxanne' (Transcribed by the author)</i> .....	72
<i>Table 5: Table of Burlesque performances</i> .....	77
<i>Table 6: Burlesque: A Comparison of Cher's Vocal Performances (Transcribed by the author)</i> .....	80
<i>Table 7: Burlesque: A Comparison of Christina Aguilera's Vocal Performances (Transcribed by the author)</i> .....	92

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Music and sound play a vital role in cinema, and in no genre is its importance more obvious than the movie musical. The space for the physical and aural performance of a character's innermost feelings allows a level of expression and understanding that, arguably, other genres cannot achieve. While this role of music is certainly a Romantic commonplace, it is not the only function it fulfills, lending itself also to representing geographical location, create mood, and foreshadow events. Movie musicals have seen a resurgence in recent years, with many filmmakers opting to return to this classic, much loved genre and bring it firmly into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.<sup>1</sup> It is important, therefore, to consider how they have developed, and what exactly has needed to change in order to give the genre a new lease of life. In keeping with current societal attitudes and academic scholarship, I argue that these contemporary films are more aware and inclusive of different identities, and that this is expressed through the soundtrack. This project will examine how two contemporary movie musicals have used musical elements in their soundtrack in order to present more nuanced examinations of gender, sexuality and culture.

As contemporary films are less discussed in academic literature (due to the nature of publishing and the length of time the process takes) I will examine texts from a variety of sources, including public discussion forums, looking at a film, actor or singer's reception, and the films themselves. It is vital to consider how an audience member with a non-musical background reacts to the soundtrack, as well as a musicologist listening specifically for these reasons. This range of research also reveals the level at which they are believed to be successful. It is also important to examine these films from a position of feminist critique, queer theory and film theory, as this multi-disciplinary approach encourages a more holistic final view on conclusions made about the soundtrack specifically. Although the project focuses on the soundtrack, and the role music plays in expressing identity through

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<sup>1</sup> In their introduction to *Contemporary Musical Film*, Donnelly and Carroll define the resurgence of contemporary musical films as beginning in 2000 (2017, p.3).

performance, it does not undertake a note-by-note analysis of each number, but rather examines all aspects of the performance, including aural, visual, narrative, and wider context elements in order to achieve a thorough, well-rounded summary of the material. Specifically, this involves examining the songs that are used in both their original, real-world form, and their adapted, film-world context. Cue sheets for every number, based on the template provided by Kassabian (2016, p.44), have been produced, some of which are attached in Appendix A and B.

The scope of the research is somewhat limited by the size of this project, and explores in great detail two backstage movie musicals released after 2000. The two case studies: *Moulin Rouge!* (Luhmann, 2001) and *Burlesque* (Antin, 2010), have been chosen specifically because of the similar female identity types they explore in interesting ways. The presentation, narrative, and sound of the performing woman is handled differently in the two films, and both are arguably different from the traditional film musical style of the Golden Age. Both films also explore different masculinities, including queer and 'effeminate' men as well as more 'normative' men. This is particularly significant, as research in this area has arguably, in the past, 'tended overwhelmingly to centre on the representation of women' (Neale, 1992, p.277). The exploration of masculinity is therefore somewhat neglected, except in being assumed to be opposite to femininity. Gender as a topic, I would argue, is difficult to separate from other facets of identity, such as sexuality and culture, and so, the project will also explore the presentation of all of these in order to conclude how they are presented in the contemporary movie musical era.

Another important element to consider between my case studies is the decision to use actors or singers in lead roles, and use pre-existing music as opposed to original. These factors arguably mark a musical apart from other films, as the performer is judged based on their singing ability firstly, and arguably this varies greatly between an actor who can sing and a professional singer who can also act. Ideas of stardom and celebrity are clearly central to the genre, as they can attract audiences that would not normally view this kind of film.

The thesis is structured in a thematic way. A review of existing literature is undertaken in Chapters 2 and 3, beginning with more general studies of identity in film, followed by an examination of existing literature on film musicals and film music specifically. The

knowledge gained is then used to inform the analysis of the case studies in Chapters 4 and 5, where the musical characteristics of key scenes and characters are examined in specific detail.

# Chapter 2

## Identity in Film

Films often emulate real life situations, reflecting the themes and ideals judged to be important in society. The way that actors perform roles that ordinary people can relate to, and that some perform every day makes film a crucial marker for understanding cultural attitudes, especially towards identity. While musical films are often perceived as fantastical and unrealistic, they still explore these themes sonically and visually, and while not much academic research has yet been carried out into this, the portrayal of identity in other film genres have been analysed in much greater detail. This chapter explores how non-musical films have been analysed and discusses how this will inform analysis and conclusions later drawn. The aspects of identity examined are gender, sexuality and culture, as these are intrinsically linked to both physical and musical performance. This chapter briefly defines these aspects of identity in order to explore their portrayal in Hollywood film, leading to a more detailed examination of the film musical itself in Chapter 3.

### Studying and Categorising Identity

#### **Gender**

Historical discussions about gender identity often stemmed from an initial understanding of biological sex, the distinction between male and female, given at birth on the basis of their reproductive functions (OED, 2008). However, gender has not always been understood as binary opposition. As Laqueur suggests, the one-sex model of ancient times does not see women as opposite to men, but, in fact, as merely an imperfect version (1992, p.115). As time progressed and scientific understanding increased, the two-sex model became the accepted scientific explanation. This model places women as the physical opposite to men, however, the notion of inferiority still remained (Laqueur, 1992, p.115). Today, however, gender is perceived more as a social construct, or – following the work of Judith Butler (2007) – as something that exists as a ‘performance’, a learned behaviour that works to keep the structure of society in place. It is important, therefore that the cultural

contingency of sex and gender is understood, as history shows how opinion and understanding has changed before, and could well change again.

Despite this more flexible understanding of gender and its relationship to sex in contemporary society, gender-based cultural roles and expectations are still commonly found, and can be restrictive for both men and women (Gauntlett, 2008, pp.150-151). The use of gender to exert control is a factor that is central to our societal structure of patriarchy- where men and masculinity are privileged over women and femininity. As gender is learned, the people who conform to these gender stereotypes aid their proliferation, as children learn the behaviours they are surrounded by and commonly carry them into adulthood. In society, the pressures of existing gender stereotypes have had many negative impacts on people whose personal feelings do not conform to what is perceived as normal. For example, men who feel they cannot express their emotions often suffer from mental health problems, and women with career aspirations are made to feel guilty for not being stay at home mothers.

### **Sexuality**

Sexuality refers to aspects of sexual behaviour, including preference, orientation and desire. Historically, sexuality has been categorised as either heterosexual (attracted to members of the opposite sex) or homosexual (attracted to members of the same sex), a binary opposition much in line with opinions on gender- a person is either one or the other. However, as is the case with gender, in recent years, different sexual identities have also become more widely accepted. As visibility and acceptance has grown, so too has the number of 'non-normative' sexualities people identify with. In academia, this has come to be referred to by the all-encompassing term 'queer' (Peraino, 2013, p.826). According to Buhler, queer theory 'seeks not only to unmask stereotypes but to analyse their discursive functions in order to displace and destabilise the social structures and power relations that support them' (2013, p.370). In 1994, Phillip Brett's article 'Are You Musical?' explored the rise of gay and queer musicology, explaining that the history and idolisation of western classical music led to anything queer- in fact anything that may have been described as 'other'- being ignored or repressed.

The relationship between music and sexuality in musicology is further explored by Peraino and Cusick in *Music and Sexuality* (2013), a collection of articles which explores a range of topics; including an introduction to the origins of homosexuality and the modern construction of contemporary notions of sexuality and identity in 'Calling Names, Taking Names' (Morris, 2013, pp.831-834). Other chapters look at sexuality in relation to spectatorship, authorship, film, country music, and the relationship between that and gendered performance. These articles provide a theoretical example of how music can be used to suggest something about a person's identity; a communicative signifier of sexuality through 'excess' that bears some similarities with the use of camp in film (and elsewhere). As a cultural phenomenon, Sontag claims that camp is a celebration of the artificial, arguably in line with the idea of living a lie, hiding your true identity for your own protection ([1964] 2018, p.1). Musicologists such as Freya Jarman-Ivens have since taken Sontag's arguments and adapted them into an exploration of camp in music (2010, pp.189-203). Musical camp is an idea further explored in Chapter 3.

### **Race, ethnicity and culture**

The concept of race is 'heavily dependent upon social, ideological, and historical' ideas (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009, p.47), and is often handled differently to other factors of identity, as it is often possible to recognise or assume a person's race by their outward appearance- the colour of their skin etc. This tendency comes from a history of scientific categorisation of humanity, where scientists attempted to prove that people from different places, bearing different physical characteristics were intrinsically different. Historically, this has been used as justification for the treatment of people from different racial groups as inferior. Closely related to race is ethnicity, a factor of identity determined by a number of social constructs; a 'social grouping based upon shared culture and custom' (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009, p.48). Culture can be described as what is considered excellent or intrinsic to a certain society, community, or race. As with all the elements of identity discussed previously, 'other' cultures require outward expression in order to be recognised, most typically done by playing on, and exaggerating, cultural stereotypes.

It must be recognised that the factors of identity studied here are by no means the only ones. Indeed, it is the intersectionality and combination of different factors and

experiences, that makes identity such a personal trait. Intersectionality is defined by Collins and Bilge as 'a way of understanding the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences', an understanding which is 'shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways' (2016, p.11). It is the ways in which the factors of identity mutually influence experience and sense of self that makes this study intersectional. It must also be noted that positioning identity in fixed terms such as those definitions previously mentioned is a delicate matter, as often people do not identify with certain traits that have been used to categorise in the past. Resistance to any form of categorisation or positioning is therefore understandable. However, more recently, categories have also been used to celebrate difference, as embracing personal identity has become more widely practiced. Indeed, even the previously offensive slur 'queer' has been reclaimed by the community, and even adopted into academia as an accepted, inclusive category for 'other' communities.

In conclusion, history has led to the identity of the straight, white male being taken by society as the normative against which all other identity traits are judged. Furthermore, straight white masculinity is also assumed, until physically proven otherwise. As I will discuss in the next section, this has been shown as portrayed in film through the use of visual stereotypes and character types.

## Representing Identity in Film

Arguably, the societal view of gender as a binary opposition of masculinity and femininity is encouraged by gender stereotyping seen in films. This could be due to the influence they have over people and their behaviour, but also through the subconscious power of suggestion- a learned behaviour that is almost impossible to resist. Susan Haywood describes how the screen is a mirror, and that each time a film is viewed, knowledge is unconsciously gained on identity and subjectivity (2006, p.324). The gendered performances seen in film are arguably designed to help the audience recognise and identify the characters, as it is not possible to hear the inner workings of their mind, to know their own thoughts on their gender identity. As this is the case in this format, this argument lends itself to Butler's idea of gender as a performance based on cultural expectations and sexual



desire (Butler, 2007, p.XV). Building from Butler's example, Gauntlett argues that gender is something personal and individual (2008, pp.145-163). He argues that the binary opposite we see between masculinity and femininity in everyday life (and therefore also in film) is supported and encouraged by people who perform outwardly what they feel to be expected of them due to their biological sex (2008, pp.145-163).

Laura Mulvey's 1975 article 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' explores how gender influences what the director does with the camera, and how this is often used to empower men and belittle women. Mulvey argues that women in film are viewed through male eyes, through the 'male gaze' (1975, p.11). She argues that putting a woman in a position where she is supposed to be looked at puts power in the man's hands, regardless of whether the character is expressing agency or not- in real terms, the actress has almost always been choreographed or directed by a man to satisfy the viewing pleasures of a man as an active viewer (1975, pp.11-13).

Mulvey's argument has been widely revised and developed since its publication in 1975. Arguably, the 1992 book *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality* does this in most detail, as the Mulvey article is reprinted as a starting point for a wider discussion. This collection brings together articles on sexuality from over two decades of *Screen* publications, split into 5 key areas of research: Psychoanalysis and Subjectivity; Pornography; The Female Spectator; Images of Men; and The Social Subject. Although these essays deal only with the visual portrayal of characters, their conclusions can also be supported by analysis of the recurring musical themes that accompany the examples they present. Many articles take Mulvey's themes of female spectacle and argue this point further, however some articles also take her argument and reverse it in order to explore the performing male. This criticism relates to the way Mulvey presents only women as objects, grouping all men into the 'active/looking', aggressively masculine category. This binarism does not allow for the range of both masculine and feminine identities which do not conform to these stereotypes.

The chapter 'Images of Men', is particularly vital for my research, as it introduces a new line of thought, whereby Mulvey's concept of the gaze is analysed with regard to male

characters as opposed to female. The chapter looks at both still images of men in media (Dyer, 1992, pp.265-276) as well as their roles in films (Neale, 1992, pp.277-287), and discusses how these representations differ to those of women. This chapter also includes a brief allusion to males and masculinity in musicals, as Neale refers to the feminisation of male characters, which 'tend also to appear in the musical, the only genre in which the male body has been unashamedly put on display in mainstream cinema' (1992, p.286). This analysis, though brief, starts a discussion about males and masculinity in musicals which will be explored further later, particularly the presentation of the 'effeminate' singing and dancing male, and the implied queer identity that many are given, both visually and through the soundtrack. The final chapter acknowledges that previous research has 'ignored other crucial differences' and aims to start a conversation around factors such as 'race, colour, class, age [and] sexual preference' (Caughie & Kuhn, 1992, p.291).

In film, men are privileged as 'the active and powerful heroes of Hollywood film, while relegating women to the role of love interest waiting to be rescued' (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009, p.213). The privileging of men and relegation of women arguably reflects society's treatment of women, as inferior, second class citizens. For some, the visible treatment of women this way on screen justified the same treatment in real life. This section also explores the role of gender in film's production, looking at both men and women in filmmaking.

Another scholar who draws attention to the treatment of women directors is Yvonne Tasker (1998). One of Tasker's main arguments in relation to film production and academia is that the scholar's desire to show how male dominated the industry was has led to the repression of vital work that women were also doing at the same time (1998, p.198). The juxtaposition of authorship and directorship in this chapter helps to identify how women's contributions to cinema have been forgotten, as women's stories are either adapted because of male pressure (Tasker, 1998, pp.198-199), or censured as women playing a man's game (p.203). As is discussed later, the prejudice against women directors is visible to this day.

Benshoff and Griffin describe how despite recent independent films, produced by both men and women, which have focused on exploring gender in new and inventive ways;

‘mainstream Hollywood entertainment still negotiates gender in ways that uphold and maintain patriarchal privilege’ (2009, p.297). They argue that while strong female characters are becoming more prevalent, they are also still feeding the to-be-looked-at stereotype, as film makers ‘try to appeal to heterosexual male spectators by objectifying their female performers’ (2009, p.298). They also argue that in these films, these women succeed by behaving like men (for example Lara Croft in *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (West, 2001), an attractive woman who fights villains in order to retrieve powerful ancient artefacts), rather than being shown to excel in their own right, thereby ‘endorsing patriarchal attitudes about masculine prowess and violent privilege’ (2009, p.299). While the construction of masculinity in musicals is arguably different to that in other film genres, I argue that this ‘aggressive’ masculinity still holds a place in the narrative side of these films, as the male characters often show their masculinity in order to neutralise an arguably more ‘effeminate’ or non-normative performing persona.

The contemporary Hollywood industry can be accused of ‘drawing on certain representational patterns and formulas left over from previous decades’ in order to ‘marginalize women and women’s issues while both subtly and forthrightly privileging men and masculinity’ (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009, p.301). It must also be acknowledged that men still dominate the industry both behind and in front of the camera, continuing to make nostalgic films that the consumer continues to lap up; films which, primarily, focus on how women need men to survive and thrive. Despite this, however, change is beginning to take place, as ‘more and more women and people of colour are entering the Hollywood industry every year, and as the social understanding of gender in America continues to evolve, film in America will be part of that process’ (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009, p.301).

While the industry is improving for women, it cannot yet be claimed that the playing field is entirely level. The only woman to have ever won a Best Director Oscar was Kathryn Bigelow for her film *The Hurt Locker* (2009) in 2010 (Filmsite, n.d). In the 2020 Oscars, not a single woman was nominated for best director, despite women such as Greta Gerwig directing highly acclaimed, highly successful films such as *Little Women* (2019), which was nominated for awards in six other categories (Oscars, 2020). In fact, a total of eight women directors were snubbed this award season, a fact brought to public attention by Natalie Portman,

who wore a cape to the ceremony into which the names of all eight snubbed female directors were stitched (Owen, 2020). In terms of actors, the academy has solved this issue by splitting both 'Best Leading Role' and 'Best Supporting Role' into two categories, one for actors and one for actresses. This separation, however, is also viewed as controversial by some, as, today, we describe female performers as 'actors' as opposed to 'actresses'. The specific gender label is in the process of being removed in some areas, yet, it is clear that all actors and all directors are not yet treated equally. The historic treatment of women directors raises the question as to whether the same pattern would be repeated had this not taken place.

In film, the identification of non-standard sexuality is consistently used to mark characters as 'other'. During the classical Hollywood era, when sexuality could not be explicitly expressed, other stereotypes were used to suggest a queerness about a character, such as a love of fashion, fussy room decorations, and a specific tone of voice and pattern of speech (Barrios, 2003, p.162). An example of this type of character is that of Waldo Lydecker from the film *Laura* (Preminger, 1944), whose homosexuality is suggested visually in his introduction to the film through the use of lavish excess in his apartment, and the way he exposes himself to another man, as he climbs out of the bath (Kalinak, 1992, p.164). Furthermore, queerness has been described as 'the source of many comedic pleasures' for audiences, suggesting that the view of these characters as unserious is deeply ingrained in the subconscious of the spectator (Doty, 2000, p.81).

Sexuality, particularly the portrayal of normative masculinity in the male performer, has been analysed in *Singin' in the Rain* (Donen & Kelly, 1952) (Whitesell, 2013, pp. 838-840). Although the analysis does not contain much exploration of the actual music, the characters, narrative and performances are examined to discern how this musical can be read from an alternative viewpoint. Whitesell refers specifically to the 'erotic potential in the highly physicalized buddy relationship between Kelly and Donald O'Connor' as a sign of implied homosexuality, but goes on to admit that the Broadway ballet sequence 'clinches the romantic plot, by giving Kelly strong heterosexual credibility' (2013, p.839). This kind of analysis, where the arguably non-normative performance of Gene Kelly is highlighted and interpreted in this way, is central to the way I will carry out my own research, while also

studying how musical signifiers are used to support or oppose what is being presented visually and narratively.

Arguably, 'like whiteness or masculinity, heterosexuality has often been hard to "see" because it has been naturalised by patriarchal ideologies as being the "normal" state of affairs' (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009, p.309). Sexual stereotyping is incredibly widespread in classical Hollywood cinema<sup>2</sup>, as a storyline 'almost always includes the struggle to unite a male-female couple', no other sexual orientation is presented, and sexual identity is never questioned (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009, p.309). While contemporary films do incorporate a more diverse set of characters, heterosexuality remains the privileged position. The history of the 'pansy character' shows an attitude towards homosexuality akin with derision, where the male character acts in effeminate ways in order to gain a laugh. Actors who made names for themselves portraying this type of character included Edward Everett Horton and Eric Blore, both of whom acted alongside Fred Astaire in *Shall We Dance* (Sandrich, 1937), playing a manager and a hotel manager respectively. The interaction between the two characters particularly highlights how these character types were exploited for comedic effect. When discussing the sleeping arrangements of the unmarried couple, Blore exclaims 'Not married?! Ooooh' in a tone depicting his horror, while also incorporating an overreaction typically linked to camp (Sandrich, 1937). Another version of homosexuality presented to audiences in classical Hollywood was that of the psychotic criminal. Filmmakers such as Hitchcock worked to 'conflate deviance from traditional norms of gender and sexuality with murderous and psychotic criminality' (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009, p.316). This linking of homosexuality with mental illness became accepted in American society, leading to fear, suspicion and further persecution of gay people.

A potential vehicle for the expression of sexual identity in films is through the stylistic use of camp. Steven Cohan's *Incongruous Entertainment* (2009) examines sexuality in the MGM Musicals of the Hollywood studio era. Cohan's investigations centre mainly on the studio's use of camp, as he argues this is a 'response to the era's oppression and censorship of

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<sup>2</sup> Classical Hollywood Cinema is described by Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson as combining 'distinct aesthetic qualities (elegance, unity, rule-governed craftsmanship) with historical functions (Hollywood's role as the world's mainstream film style)' (2019, p.3)

homosexuality' (2009, p.1). This opinion arguably aligns with Brett's claims of Western Classical music, described previously, where anything deemed to be 'different' or 'other' was ignored or repressed (1994). While the films produced were certainly not repressed, it could be argued their camp and potentially gay subtexts were overlooked in favour of the heterosexual romantic spectacle. Cohan describes the people who worked on these musicals as a 'closeted labour force which articulated its presence through a distinctive camp style' (2009, p.3). As mentioned earlier, it is important to understand the people working behind the camera when analysing films, as the material produced can be interpreted very differently, depending on the subjectivity of the viewer. Understanding the people behind the films gives more of an insight into their intentions, and is useful when considering how these films are viewed with retrospect. However, it is also important that films are analysed through perception, as how they are received by the general audience, who potentially have no idea who is behind the production or their possible intentions, shows how successful films are at conveying conscious or subconscious meaning.

Another point Cohan makes in relation to camp is that viewers today watch and interpret these films with vastly different eyes and ears to the ones that viewed them at the time of their production (2009, pp.5-6). This links to Rick Altman's theory that a musical can be watched and interpreted for many different reasons over many years (1989, p.3). Altman is an author I will return to in Chapter 3. This potential situational bias is why it is important to study contemporary films close to the time of their release. A contemporary audience watching an older film may read certain things into the narrative which were never intended, whereas a contemporary audience watching a contemporary film are more likely to recognise and interpret signs and signifiers just as the producer would have wished. It has, however, also been widely argued that the experiences contemporary audiences bring to a film viewing may also hinder the expression of meaning, as a lived experience deemed similar to a storyline may obstruct the films 'objective' in that person's opinion (if an 'objective' exists at all). Having said this, there is no right or wrong way to read a text, and meaning can be garnered from the smallest detail consciously or unconsciously planted in a film. Examining and revisiting films leads to more understanding, benefiting the field of study immensely.

The influence of subjectivity on an audience member's interpretation of a filmic text can also be linked to literary 'Reception theory' which was 'a reaction against the New Critical insistence that all meaning was contained entirely within the text alone, without regard for any external factors' (Klages, 2012, p.72).<sup>2</sup> Reception theory argues that, in reality, people 'engage with texts and form interpretations based on subjective experiences as well as on what the text says' (Klages, 2012, p.72). When applied to film, the concept is described by Susan Haywood as 'viewer reception' (2006, p.328), and essentiality follows the same idea, that the eclecticism of viewers leads to different interpretations of film, depending on factors such as 'class, age, race, creed, sexuality, gender and nationality' (2006, p.328). This infinitely broadens the horizon of meaning, and makes it personal to each viewer's lived experiences, making them 'an active producer of meaning' as opposed to a passive spectator (Haywood, 2006, p.27).

In classical Hollywood films- and, I would argue, to this day- a lack of racial diversity has led to racial stereotyping, where negative behaviours and even certain character types are associated with racial 'otherness' through outward appearance. As culture is often so tightly entwined within race and ethnicity, it should be handled delicately by filmmakers, especially when exploring something culturally significant to a minority or marginalised community, such as music, religion or other cultural activity. While many film genres handle this well- particularly independent films, and those that have diversity within their production teams- I would argue that many contemporary film musicals do not handle this so well, as their reliance on tradition hinders their ability to keep up with contemporary societal attitudes.

It can be claimed that 'the average moviegoer thinks about issues of race only when seeing a movie about a racial or ethnic minority group' (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009, p.52).<sup>3</sup> This supports the theory that the culture of cinema is so engrained, that the typical movie goer has come to expect 'whiteness' and does not recognise the lack of diversity in the industry. Furthermore, cinema today thrives on the 'Hollywood assumption that all viewers... should be able to identify with white characters' (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009, p.52). The issue with

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<sup>2</sup> See also *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* by Hans Robert Jauss, trans. by Timothy Bahti, 1982.

<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, this implies that 'the average moviegoer' is assumed by Benshoff and Griffin to be white.

this industry assumption, is that films ‘fail to point out their whiteness and therefore work to naturalize it as a universal state of representation’ (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009, p.53). It can be further argued that the lack of diversity in current films feeds its own future, as people who do not see themselves represented on the big screen are less likely to pursue a career in it themselves, fearing failure, stereotyping, tokenism, or discrimination. This fear is particularly understandable when characters of different races are represented on film, as the blatant stereotyping is often shown to be an inversion of what is used to depict whiteness. For example, that ‘people of colour are stereotyped as physical and passionate’ or that they ‘are naturally more in touch with their physicality’ (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009, p.53). Musicals particularly feed into this diversity issue, as their traditional, old fashioned values and reliance on what has come before holds them back from making attitudinal progress.

As with gender, a bias towards the normative has been clearly visible in this season’s academy awards, where out of twenty nominations for best actor, best actress, best supporting actor and best supporting actress, Cynthia Erivo was the only black person to make the shortlist, highlighting a diversity issue in both the actor and actress category (Oscars, 2020). In contrast, other highly influential production companies such as the BBC have plans and strategies in place to ensure diversity throughout the organisation. Their Creative Diversity Report shows how they are taking steps to ensure representation in all areas of its work, both in front of and behind the camera, who is seen and who is heard.<sup>4</sup> They have also set targets to improve in these areas.<sup>5</sup> This clearly shows how equal representation can be achieved, and is potentially a model that other broadcasters and filmmakers can adopt.

In depicting race in this way, negative stereotypes are also formed in relation to culture. For example, jazz is a style of music synonymous with black, African American culture, and has repeatedly been used in cinema as a signifier for deviance and rampant sexuality (Gabbard,

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<sup>4</sup> Report found at <http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/reports/reports/creative-diversity-report-2020.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Found at <https://downloads.bbc.co.uk/commissioning/site/diversity-inclusion-commissioning-guidelines-bbc-content.pdf>



1996, p.8). An example of this which further links racial stereotype with the primitive man, is that of 'Prehistoric Man' in *On the Town* (Donen & Kelly, 1949). The performance is highly stylised to show how early man was a primitive species, and uses visual signifiers that link this primitivity with 'other' races.<sup>6</sup> These stereotypes and Ann Miller's character, anthropologist Claire Huddesen's apparent desire to be handled like a prehistoric woman (dragged around by her hair etc), is highly questionable when examined with retrospect. The music that accompanies this scene links their prehistoric man to African American man, by using jazz music and tap dancing- both of which have a highly racialised history. The tap-dancing style originates from African American slaves who used the percussive style of dance for religious ceremony- this tradition was taken, made secular and exploited by Americans to make their own American style jazz dance- tap (Miller, 2014, pp.138-142).

## Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, the way identity is (often negatively) represented in film, using stereotypes has been explored. While there is clearly an abundance of literature on the subject of identity much less material relating directly to identity in the film musical has come to light. Those that have been uncovered, however, are examined in Chapter 3, where film musicals more specifically, and the representations of identity in the soundtrack will be explored.

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<sup>6</sup> Gabbard describes how 'the black male is stigmatized as primitive and eroticized as all body' in *The King of Jazz*- this is similar to the associations made here, as race is linked to primitivity (1996, p.13).

# Chapter 3

## Movie Musical Genre and Film Music.

The movie musical is a much loved, much discussed genre of film, arguably owing to the escapism it provides for its audience. A common theme that runs throughout these films is the journey the characters undertake to find love, or self, which is conveyed through the narrative and expressive freedom allowed by the performance of a musical number. This chapter defines the movie musical, charts its history, including the rise and fall of the musical heyday, and begins to look into how identity is represented in the genre. Finally, it looks into how music is used to represent identity in film, as the techniques used as these analytical techniques are what this research is based upon.

### Defining the Film Musical

Defining the movie musical is a task that many scholars have attempted to complete. However, for the sake of clarity, I will here attempt to provide a definition as it will be used throughout the project. A movie musical is a film that incorporates song and dance into the narrative, as expressive, performative acts. Although music is often incorporated into films, it is the performance and active engagement of a character with the music that separates a film musical from a film with music. It is a convention that arguably challenges other film genre's apparent desire for relatable content, but allows for a level of expression above what can be achieved through words alone. Although the case studies I will examine are both original screenplays, this does not mean to say that stage musicals adapted for the screen do not fit into this category also, just that they will not be examined specifically in this project.

The heyday of the movie musical genre was centred in Hollywood, ran from 1927 to the mid 1950s (Feuer, 1993, p.ix), and encapsulated a taste for excess, expense and prestige. Particular studios (such as MGM) and even particular people (Arthur Freed) became synonymous with a genre of film that was designed to please and satisfy its audience. The

wild success of these early films and the subsequent successful resurgences of the genre have made it a topic of immense interest to scholars, who have studied them from all angles.

## History of the Genre

Music has always played an integral part in cinema and the cinematic experience, as even before the days of synchronised sound, retrospectively named 'silent films' were accompanied in theatres by live performers, in order to 'enhance the drama and increase the sense of continuity' (Knapp, 2009, p.65). The provenance of sound as an enhancer of the visual, therefore, is well established. The technological advancement that brought about the introduction of integrated sound to film inevitably led to the birth of the movie musical, as film makers and audiences alike wanted to test the limits of the technology. The movie musical became the point at which music and pictures could combine to create the biggest spectacle (Altman, 1989, p.2). At first, these musical numbers were seen as intrusive, as they opposed the preference for relatability of other films at the time, however, as the genre came to develop, these numbers came to represent an escape from the real world (Knapp, 2009, p.67). As sound and the soundtrack became an intrinsic part of the cinematic experience, composers began to use music to add extra layers of meaning to the characters. Especially during the time of the Production Code<sup>7</sup>, music could be used to suggest content that words and pictures would not have got away with.

Often, the justification for a character's remarkable ability to sing and dance is explained through the narrative of the backstage musical (Knapp, 2009, p.67). When a character that is shown to be preparing for a show bursts into song, it is often framed as a rehearsal. This allows the audience to see the expression, but also keeps the performance firmly rooted in the narrative. This narrative device also helps to explain the level of professionalism achieved by the performer, as filmmakers constantly try to achieve naturalness as well as

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<sup>7</sup> This code was applied strictly from 1934 and ruled the industry roughly until the late 1950s. The Hays Code aimed to 'project a positive image of the industry by pledging to establish a set of moral standards for films' and was applied to visual and textual references to sin and sexuality, suggesting instead that films should contain a moral message that would not corrupt the nation's children (Kuhn & Westwell, 2012b).

spectacle. Naturalness here refers to the believability or the authenticity of the narrative, for, as Cohan states, a sudden musical performance 'breaks with cinematic realism' (2001, p.1). By at least rooting the characters in a firm, believable narrative, the inclusion of spontaneous performance is somewhat expected. The backstage musical also raises the question as to whether musical numbers are diegetic (the world inside the film, within which the narrative events occur) or non-diegetic (the world beyond that portrayed in the film), a distinction that is further explored later.

Arguably, the film industry is so reliant on the will of the consumer, that audiences have some influence over the kinds of films that should be made. Entertainment in the film musical industry appears to work because 'it is not just leftovers from history, it is not *just* what show business, or 'they', force on the rest of us, it is not simply the expression of eternal needs- it responds to real needs *created by society*' (Dyer, 2002, p.26).

Unfortunately, the society the industry looks to satisfy is the society that is willing or able to pay for the entertainment they produce. However, as wider society's attitudes towards factors of identity such as gender, sexuality and culture have become more accepting in recent years, a shift in the viewpoint of cinema is also noticeable. Historically, this has been shown in the 1970s and 1980s, where a raft of new musical films were produced that focused on music and performance in relation to 'real life'<sup>8</sup> (Telotte, 2002, pp.48-61), as will be discussed later. The industry is led by what the public wants to see, and, therefore, what they are willing to spend their money on. However, if a film is produced that grabs the attention and imagination of the audience, by, for example, foregrounding an under-represented community, then audiences will come to experience it. This fuels the idea, opposing that of Dyer discussed previously, that the audience does not know what it wants, until it sees or hears it. Also, for the more represented communities, these issues may not have even occurred, as they have never had to consider not seeing relatable characters in the films they consume. Musicals in particular have drawn these audiences in recent years, as the genre has undergone somewhat of a renaissance, with films such as *Moulin Rouge!* (Luhrmann, 2000) and *Pitch Perfect* (Moore, 2012) exploring difference, and achieving huge

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<sup>8</sup> Although described as 'real life' these situations are still quite fantastical, and still require the audience to suspend some of their disbelief in order to accept the narrative.

box office success (Carroll, 2017, p.59). The spectacle and escapism these particular films provide have resulted in an audience desperate for more nostalgia-ridden, all-singing, all-dancing productions.

Telotte argues that the 'new musicals' of the 1970s and 1980s gave the genre a much-needed 'reality check', as the accepted formula of song and dance no longer sat as comfortably within the context and social climate of the time. Films such as *Saturday Night Fever* (Badham, 1977), *Flashdance* (Lyne, 1983) and *Footloose* (Ross, 1984), were designed to portray a world that 'bears down' on the character, causing a barrier between their everyday lives and their singing and dancing dreams (2002, pp.52-53). These films began to show performance as a separate entity from everyday life, as they were taken out of the everyday context and set in arenas where performance is deemed acceptable, for example, on a stage, a dancefloor or at a party. Telotte argues that this approach seemingly negates the intentions of musicals that had come before, musicals that tried to show spontaneous performance as natural and acceptable, and instead made them into shows, accepting that musical expression does have a place in our lives, but also highlighting that it is impossible to 'withdraw from the real world to immerse ourselves fully in the expressive one' (2002, p.53). The focus on the real world, and real-life situations allows the filmmaker to express facets of identity, as the demand for representation of real-world struggles is easily appeased in this context. This idea of exploring and solving real world struggles through musical performance is what Dyer describes as a utopian sensibility, taking 'from the real experiences of the audience' (2002, p.27). He describes entertainment as 'escape' and 'wish-fulfilment' which neatly resemble 'utopianism'- 'alternatives, hopes, wishes... the sense that things could be better' (Dyer, 2002, p.20). Although there are clearly links between how films represent utopianism and the music that underscores this sensation, it is not something Dyer explicitly analyses in this chapter. His sense of utopia is more practical and physical, based more on the reaction of the audience to what is provided than how these thoughts and reactions are provoked. It is not a leap, however, to imagine how music is used in these situations, particularly in the film musical, to facilitate the escape to take place.

Telotte goes on to analyse *Saturday Night Fever* (Badham, 1977) in greater detail, discussing how John Travolta's character Tony Manero is almost destroyed by the music and dance community to which he belongs. The film shows how his everyday life is influenced by the skill which remains hidden, as 'in the real world... natural rhythm and dancing ability count for very little' (2002, p.55). Tony's performance is always shown to be impressive and spectacular, but outside of the world of disco and dancefloors, his world is shown to be falling apart. Although Telotte goes into great detail to analyse the visual elements of the film, the music itself and its own set of signifiers is barely discussed, except in relation to its success as a separate soundtrack album. The album highlights the role consumerism plays in these films, as the production of the film was not enough, the decision was made to produce a marketable CD of the film's soundtrack to produce more revenue. The music, performed by the Bee Gees, eventually became one of the 'top selling record albums' (2002, p.58). The commercial success of the film soundtrack is specifically explored by Jeff Smith, who describes the tactics that made the film and soundtrack such a major success (1998, pp.197-198).<sup>9</sup> The evidence that Telotte presents in this article shows a clear shift from the traditions of the classical Hollywood musical, and shows that attitudes can change. The success and popularity of these films shows that the break from classical movie musical tradition was extremely beneficial, as new, more relatable storylines refreshed the feel of the narrative, and the audience attitude towards it. The way genre has adapted historically to accommodate changing audience expectations is a sign for how it may do so again, for example, in relation to identity and representation.

When considering the development of a genre, it is important to acknowledge what has come before, and the role that it has played in shaping what is being produced today. A source that brilliantly documents the journey and development of the film musical is Neil Brand's three-part BBC series *The Sound of Movie Musicals* (2018) which charts the story of the genre's biggest and most beloved productions. By analysing the music, as well as the drama, and the context within which they were produced, Brand highlights the almost formulaic approach filmmakers took to producing successful shows, and how the songs are

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<sup>9</sup> Smith's book *The Sounds of Commerce* (1998) looks in detail at how film soundtracks in particular have been marketed and used not only to advertise films, but also exist in their own right, and sell records (pp.25-26).

foregrounded as the biggest talking and selling points. This point is also supported by Telotte, who claims that the MGM 'musical factory' brought together all elements of the performance to establish 'a fairly consistent narrative formula' (2002, p.53). Brand takes these films apart, breaking them down into the most recognisable melodies, and describing what each one came to represent.

## Theorising the Film Musical

As the popularity and huge success of the genre continued to grow, it was finally noted by academics as worthy of study. It is interesting that this notice should have occurred as late as the 1980s, especially considering the heyday of the Hollywood musical was well over by this point, described by Feuer as running from 1927 to the mid 1950s (1993, p.ix). Feuer argues that this lack of academic attention was because musicals were seen as purely entertainment (1993, p.ix), whereas it may also be argued that many styles, repertoires and periods of history were neglected at a time when musicological exploration was centred around the celebrated Canon. While Feuer is suggesting that academics have previously used 'entertainment' as a term of derision, other scholars such as Richard Dyer have rejoiced in the importance of entertainment, as an escape from the drab weariness of everyday life, responding to 'real needs *created by society*' (2002, p.26).

One of the first writers to define the genre was Rick Altman, whose works include *Genre: The Musical: A Reader* (1981) and a 1989 book *The American Film Musical*, which combines and presents a theoretical genre argument, a discussion of structure and style, and a historical account of the films that made the genre so popular. As a genre theorist, Altman was captivated by the highly formulaic nature of the film musical and was driven to write more specifically on what he describes as 'a fascinating multi-media celebration constituting the world's most complex art form' (1989, p.2). The genre developed from the amalgamation of various departments, including film, music, dance, and technology, which resulted in a genre rich in spectacle and celebration. This celebration arises from the American attitude to cinema in general, as an escape from the boring monotony of everyday life. Altman argues that cinema in general- and musicals more specifically- provide

distraction, and arise from the duality that they themselves aim to portray in a self-reflexive manner, between the everyday and mundane, and the fantastical (pp.59-60). The unrealistic excess of early musicals was welcomed, therefore, as a reminder that the viewer is there to be entertained and pleased.

Altman argues that film musical texts can take on many different forms and meanings, depending on when, and to what purpose they are being interpreted (1989, p.3). Altman believes that there is no way to pin down what a movie musical means, as these texts can be read and reread in many ways, (for example, in recent years, in order to study culture and identity), thus providing layers of meaning beyond his own imagination. Like the songs in a musical itself, audience members bring with them their own experiences and associations, and so to give definitive meaning to something so subjective is impossible. Kassabian refers to the personal associations the viewer brings to the viewing of any film as 'affiliating identifications', explaining that 'these ties depend on histories forged outside the film scene, and they allow for a fair bit of mobility within it' (2001, p.3). Although Kassabian is not specifically referring to musical films here, her theories can easily be transferred to study the use of music in a genre in which it is the main feature.

It must be recognised that Altman's work is now 30 years old, and some of the arguments he presents are outdated. Altman's belief that the narrative of every musical is built around the heterosexual couple would certainly have been true for the audience for which he was writing, however, since then, cultural attitudes and cinematic expectations have become more inclusive, and fields such as queer theory have come to question the heteronormative assumption of even the earliest musical films. Although, admittedly, the primary coupling of these films is heteronormative, there is potential to read alternative, queer interpretations into these films, such as the 'erotic potential' of the Gene Kelly/ Donald O'Connor buddy relationship (Whitesell, 2013, p.839). Altman argues that 'the outcome of the male/female match is entirely conventional and thus quite predictable' (p.19), which, while being true at this time, has been shown to be false in contemporary films such as *La La Land* (Chazelle, 2016), where the expected heteronormative coupling never materialises. The primary heterosexual presumption of the films that Altman studies is always fulfilled, as the expectations of the audience were designed to be satisfied. Indeed, the success of these



films stemmed from their predictability- they did not challenge or present the audience with any shock.<sup>10</sup> Although many aspects of the industry have changed over recent years, the original classification of the film musical could still be largely described as true, as many films still retain the features of the early films that equated in success, namely the heterosexual love story. The believability of the storylines, the relatability of the characters, and the spectacle of the show as a whole, are still important today. While it is important to acknowledge the significance of Altman's work in the development of film musical genre theory, it is also important that the conclusions drawn are reconsidered from a contemporary perspective.

Since the early academic analysis of the film musical, studies have begun to recognise their own shortcomings, and, in some cases, address them by updating and expanding the scope of their research. As films started to incorporate more varied storylines, including characters with more complex identity traits, the research that underpinned the academic understanding of these films also needed to update. A slightly more recent study by Jane Feuer: *The Hollywood Musical* (1993), produces a development of the ideas first presented by Altman and by herself in the first edition of the same book. Feuer reiterates Altman's categorisation of film musicals as either: 'the show', 'the fairy tale' or 'the folk'- three distinct narrative patterns that covered all Hollywood film musicals and, Altman believed, allowed for comparison with other media. The fairy tale musical, Altman describes as picking up where European operetta 'left off' (1989, p.131). The show musical delves regularly into the world of the stage, borrowing all but text, but justified because it is 'about the stage and the related world of show-making' (Altman, 1989, p.131). The show musical is what we today would refer to as a backstage musical, where the success of the romantic couple is directly linked to the success of the show (Altman, 1989, p.200). Finally, the folk musical 'is a joint production of Broadway and Hollywood' (Altman, 1989, p.130). The folk musical provides the viewer with a 'mythical vision' of 'the world, with the transforming power of memory' (Altman, 1989, p.272). These categorisations are particularly significant for a study of identity in the film musical, as the 'Folk' refers namely to the community

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<sup>10</sup> Again, primarily, the formula for the successful musical genre was there to be adhered to. People came to see these films for entertainment, not to be challenged.

(Feuer, 1993, pp.130-131) and to family (Altman, 1989, p.273). Community and shared experience are an important factor in terms of identity. Feuer expands on Altman's work to show that the original ideas and theories of the genre are still relevant and can be reinterpreted to suit.

As well as reiterating and justifying what was said previously, Feuer's second edition includes 'A Postscript for the Nineties' (1993, pp.123-143) in which she acknowledges the shortcomings of the first edition and begins to rectify this by examining recent developments in the study of teen musicals (pp.126-138), and the Queer theory study of 'Gay Readings' (pp.139-143). The argument Feuer proposes for the development of the teen musical shows how the genre has developed out of a respect for what has gone before- for example their structuralist approach and critical reflexivity (1993, p.126), while also satisfying a demand for updates to sit more comfortably within the current social climate. Feuer states: 'teen musicals may acknowledge their debt to Hollywood, while at the same time distancing themselves from the old conventions' (1993, p.137). The 'reconstructive' nature of films like *Dirty Dancing* (Ardolino, 1987) is typical of a teenpic musical of this era, as the coming of age story appeals to young people with money who feel they can relate. This is arguably emblematic of a younger generation of film goers and filmmakers, demanding representation and acknowledgment, while also respecting traditions and satisfying a nostalgia for what has come before.

Another work that builds on these concepts of tradition and innovation is *Hollywood Musicals, The Film Reader* (Cohan, 2002). This collection of essays explores nuanced themes such as gender and feminism, camp, stardom, race and ethnicity in classic Hollywood films. In his introduction, Cohan describes how 'many viewers appreciate these old films for their nostalgic value as conservative, wholesome entertainment of a bygone era' (2002, p.1) while also admitting that they are not to every modern day audience members taste, due to the 'alienating' convention of spontaneous performance which 'breaks with cinematic realism' (2002, p.1). In discussing the types of musical films that do attract a younger audience, Cohan directly references Feuer's concept of the teen film, as 'film that incorporates dance into its narrative' (2002, p.2). Although this description seems to fall short of an adequate representation of the subgenre, it shows how intrinsic the music is to

the musical- not even worth mentioning. This is why the music is so rarely analysed when discussing movie musicals- it is seen as one and the same with the drama and the visual.

This reader also questions the suitability of analysing films of the past by standards of today. This is something Cohan questions himself in his later book *Incongruous Entertainment* (2009) where he questions whether marking a film as 'camp' is 'a mocking affection for the films as outlandish artefacts, enabled by historical distance from their moment of production' (2009, pp.5-6). This is one of the main reasons this project studies contemporary films, as they were produced in a time of current societal understanding. Bias is, however, inevitable. All historical research, and indeed contemporary research, is done from a position where it cannot help but be hindered by biases the researcher may not even be aware of themselves. While it does not necessarily follow that bias is unhelpful, I would argue it is more appropriate to study current films in this way than to look retrospectively at films from the past.

Contemporary films are, understandably, less written about in academic literature, as it is impossible to keep pace with the ever-changing, constantly evolving world of cinema, and the nature of writing and publishing academic articles arguably inhibits the potential to remain up to date. However, *Contemporary Musical Film* (2017) is a collection of essays which explores the movie musical and soundtrack in a contemporary context, examining films released after 2000, primarily from the modern perspective of culture and identity study. The film musical has always been a genre that looked to follow traditions, and in their introduction, Donnelly and Carroll acknowledge this, arguing that since 2000, the resurgence of film musicals has seen a return to traditional musical form, while also experimenting with the unconventional (2017, p.3). The way certain chapters within this collection explore the theme of identity within the soundtrack is pivotal to the way this project explores its own contemporary film musical case studies. As these films are recent, the amount of academic literature about them is scarce, so this collection begins to bring knowledge of the genre up to date.

A noticeable trend in recent years has been the surge in the number of 'jukebox musicals', where existing pop music is used to tell or embellish a narrative. While some films use a

seemingly random collection of pop songs, other films take the work of one band or artist and tell either a fictional narrative: *Mamma Mia!* (Lloyd, 2008) and the songs of ABBA; *Yesterday* (Boyle, 2019) and the music of the Beatles; or tell a biographical story about an artist: *Bohemian Rhapsody* (Singer, 2018) and the story of Queen and Freddie Mercury; and *Rocketman* (Fletcher, 2019) and the story and music of Elton John. The use of pre-existing songs in the compiled soundtrack has a double benefit, as it works as an advert for the music, and it allows the performer and director to develop extra musical meanings to the songs, giving them context and setting them firmly within their own narrative journey of self-expression (Haworth, 2017, pp.109-111). This form also allows for a degree of audience participation in the narrative, as each person who sees these films brings with them a different personal experience connected to the music they contain (Kassabian, 2001, p.3). As music is such an emotional and personal experience, the subjectivity of the audience provides a layer of meaning beyond what the filmmaker could have intended. This again highlights the importance of both reception theory and Kassabian's 'affiliating identifications', as the viewer experiences film differently due to external factors relating often to a memory connected to music. Although the jukebox musical is explored in *Contemporary Musical Film- Catherine Haworth's 'Star Quality? Song, Celebrity and the Jukebox Musical in Mamma Mia!'* (2017, pp.107-122) explores aspects of the film through the musical numbers- arguably the collection is lacking a detailed analysis of identity in a contemporary backstage musical soundtrack, a trend found in most works about the genre.

## Performance and Singing

One of the biggest features of the film musical, that sets it apart from other film genres, is the performance of musical numbers. In the beginning, these numbers felt awkward and intrusive to an audience of film goers accustomed to realism and naturalism in fashion at the time (Knapp, 2009, p.67). As the musical numbers often exist outside the realm of realism, it is a contested point within the literature as to whether or not they belong within the diegesis (Altman, 1987, pp.62-74) (Knapp, and his employment of 'MERM'<sup>11</sup>, 2009,

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<sup>11</sup> 'MERM' or 'Musically Enhanced Reality Mode' is Knapp's way of describing how music is used in musicals to enhance the narrative, while also trying to maintain a sense of reality, permitting 'both audio and visual violations of what might actually be possible' (2009, p.67).

p.68). As the genre developed, and the musical numbers became more integrated, they began to be used to advance the narrative, rather than as a break from it. This opened a discussion as to whether musical numbers belong in the diegetic world of the musical, or whether they exist beyond that. In response to this, Penner (2017) argues that all numbers belong on a spectrum of fantasy to realism, as the genre does not lend itself to a definitive binary distinction between diegetic and non-diegetic. However, Penner finally argues that: 'virtually all numbers, whether realistic or fantastical, are diegetic' (2017, p.12).<sup>12</sup> This sets musicals apart from other film genres, as the audience is asked to accept and believe the unrealistic event of a group of characters bursting into song and dance at key moments of the narrative. This adds to the experience of spectacle, as the characters appear to exist on another level of expression, where they are attuned to their own, and each other's emotions, and are able to come together to show these through a performance that has no explanation within their film world. This request is for the benefit of all, as the freedom to express thoughts and feelings through music provides opportunities for filmmakers to show emotion and aspects of identity in ways in which words alone could not do justice.

Music and musical numbers have an ability to lift a sentiment beyond real life and into the world of fantasy. Although many musical films use the setting of a show within a film to ground their performance as justifiable, the act of bursting into song remains alien to the real world, but essential to the narrative of the musical film. Laing argues that musical scoring allows emotions to be expressed in finer detail than visual or words could, as its 'removal from the definitive expression of spoken language could explain its ability to fulfil this emotional role', evoking the Romantic notion of instrumental music as pure and unburdened from the meaning of words (2000, p.6). Laing continues to discuss the use of Romantic composition techniques in film scoring, looking at how the voice is also used (although second in priority behind the melody) as central to the production of meaning. Laing further argues that the music in the musical film is foregrounded above and beyond any other film genre, as the characters' interaction with what to the audience appears to be a nondiegetic musical source adds to the wonder, and I would argue, the sense of community (2000, p.9).

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<sup>12</sup> See also Julian Woolford's *How Musicals Work* (2012).

Laing also argues that song works so well within the musical genre as it allows the character to show the deepest emotions of their hearts within a safe space. The audience needs not fear what will happen to the characters after their outburst, because they understand the context and can expect a sense of closure (2000, pp.11-12). Again, this can be linked back to Dyer's classification of entertainment as utopia, as existing to satisfy 'wish fulfilment' (2002, p.20). This expectation also derives again from the formulaic nature of the musical genre, expectations are always met because this is what the audience demands (Altman, 1989, pp.59-60). While this article does not apply its theory to any particular musical, the discourse can easily be exemplified in films both new and old, making this a strong article on the theory behind the use of songs and music in the musical, although not an analysis of the music itself.

## Identity in Musicals

As well as spanning a large period of time, Brand's analysis is also more inclusive than most popular documentaries, aimed at a more general audience. He looks not just into the world of Hollywood, but also Bollywood and, albeit briefly, Chinese cinema (2018, Episode 2). Although literature does exist that examines aspects of these genres, such as Steven Cohan's *The Sound of Musicals* (2010), it is clear that not as much academic attention has been paid to these as to their western counterparts. As well as looking at different cultural approaches to movie musicals, Brand also examines films which represent different identity types in their narrative, multiculturalism, low and high budget productions, and productions aimed at all ages, from children, to teenagers, to adults. This allows the series to cover a lot of ground, provide a wide, unprejudiced view of the genre, and examine what Brand believes makes it so great. In the concluding moments of the final episode (2018, episode 3) Brand describes how it is 'pure euphoria' which has 'brought the musical its success from the very beginning'. His closing statement says:

the movie musical has done an amazing job of moving with the times, evolving to satisfy audiences throughout its 90-year history, and I think that's because the movie musical is, at heart, a method of channelling moments of pure joy. And we carry

those moments with us in the hope that maybe one day, real life may turn out to be just as joyous (Brand, 2018, episode 3)

The series was made so recently, that the works mentioned also include very recent productions such as *La La Land* (Chazelle, 2016) and *The Greatest Showman* (Gracey, 2017), examining how these films came into existence and how they fit with today's cultural climate, and the demands of a new generation of filmgoers (2018, Episode 3). The approach of the series is somewhat refreshing, as it is aimed at a non-academic audience. That is to say, that Brand is talking to lovers of musicals as entertainment, rather than people looking to study them intently. This gives the series a freedom to investigate a wide, often unrelated selection of films, and explore why it is so many people derive pleasure from watching them.

Some literature has also begun to look specifically at the way identity is expressed in the musical. For example, Knapp argues that film musicals are a way to express identity, introducing the idea that musicals are focused on the personal, on the individual, and that this allows for a focus on identity, or a shift towards 'exploring different kinds of identities and relationships' (Knapp, 2009, p.3). Knapp further argues that the performance of identity in musicals inspires the audience to perform their own identity, as 'we learn how to live our lives through musicals' (2009, p.103). This again links to reception theory, and the idea of the screen as a mirror that reflects how lives should be lead, or how identity should be performed (Haywood, 2006, p.324). Knapp's exploration of the relationship between musical and identity goes beyond the movie musical, and into the stage musical also, investigating a musician's approach to identity as opposed to a filmmaker's. While this divergence is not something this project replicates, the way in which Knapp explores the performance of identity is of vital importance to the way the case studies are examined. It is, however, true in this case, as in many others that study the movie musical, that the meanings implied through music itself are strangely overlooked. The visual and cinematic techniques are analysed, but the features of the music itself are not examined in relation to the presentation of facets of identity such as gender, sexuality and race.

## Identity in Film Music

Scholars such as Robynn Stilwell have argued that music can influence emotion particularly, linking emotion to femininity, as well as music and sound. The argument presented in 'Sound and Empathy' works closely with Mulvey's theory of the 'male gaze', where the visual is active/ masculine, but the aural is passive and therefore feminine (2001, pp.170-171). Stilwell argues, however, that both genders are represented through sound, as 'the male voice is that of the law; the female voice is reduced to meaningless babble, incoherent sound or- significantly- music' (2001, p.171). Stilwell argues that sound is feminine because it envelops us as the mother's womb did to us as babies- in the cinema setting, we are separated from the (masculine) image (the screen) but surrounded by and even touched by the (feminine) sound (2001, p.172). Stilwell's gendered approach to discussing meaning in film sound is fascinating, as what the listener hears can be thought of as truth and emotion- even if this has been negatively portrayed in the past as feminine 'irrationality' (2001, p.172). This argument does raise striking views about the meaning behind sound, and as with Mulvey, relies heavily on gender stereotyping. As more recent research acknowledges that explorations such as these rely heavily on the biases they seek to condemn, these studies clearly relate to films of the past. Arguably this is of note, but little consequence. However, the bias of this theory should be acknowledged and, wherever possible, counteracted.

Although all of the literature previously discussed builds an understanding of the presentation of identity in film and the basis of the genre of the movie musical, few amongst them speak specifically of the music and musical numbers. The extra meaning that filmmakers can express through the use of music is reasonably well documented. Works such as Janet Halfyard's article 'Cue the big theme? The sound of the superhero' is one such, where she suggests the Superman leitmotif is used to signify a heroic act (2013, p.171). Similarly, Catherine Haworth suggests the 'big band brass' in the Bond theme is a signifier of male sexuality (2012, p.119). These are techniques that can and should be applied to the contemporary film musical soundtrack. As previously discussed, the study of identity in the musical film has been taking place, however, this has not been consistently linked to the



music itself as of yet, focusing more on the visual spectacle. It is, however, widely accepted, and has been often demonstrated, that aspects of identity can be portrayed through music.

Scoring in the film soundtrack arguably works on a subconscious level, as associations with certain types of music have been quietly developed and established over many years of cinema. Through repetition, composers were able to develop their own musical language for certain types of characters, their themes saying things about their identity, and even foreshadowing their fate without uttering a word.<sup>13</sup> Although these have developed into an automatic recognition within the mind of the audience, these associations do stem from a logical grounding in semiotics. Put simply, 'semiotics is the study of the sign' (Cobley, 2009, p.3), where anything and everything signifies something, and carries meaning. In film, this can refer to the visual- for example the use of the colour red to signify danger- or to the aural- for example the use of string melodies to signify romance. These stereotypes are discussed here in both classical scores and pop scores, as both approaches require separate attention, although they arguably produce similar results.

### **Classical Scoring**

Classical film scoring techniques allow composers a lot of freedom, as the range of instruments, styles and timbres provide a plethora of options for expressing identity. As this music is written specifically for the purpose of the character, place, or occasion within the film world, composers could be highly specific about the associations they were trying to draw (Gorbman, 1987, p.30)- arguably this is not possible to the same level in a pop scored film. Buhler argues that the linking of music with emotion and therefore gender 'was established in the nineteenth century, and the style of Hollywood film music therefore is not accidental, and it comes with real consequences' (2013, p.368). This suggests that the conventions film composers were putting into practice were tried and tested, and existed already in the subconscious of the viewer.

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<sup>13</sup> A theme is described by Gorbman as 'any music- melody, melody fragment, or distinctive harmonic progression- heard more than once during the course of a film' (1987, p.26).

Kalinak argues that women in film are categorised in two ways: the fallen woman; and the virtuous wife. These categories fit with an outdated view of women and femininity, prioritising and idolising the pure, untouched, ideal woman who goes on to become the perfect, virtuous wife. The women who fit this category, Kalinak argues, are scored in a particular way, aurally marking them out as perfect and ideal specimens of femininity. This includes the use of: orchestral instrumentation, where 'violins usually carrying the melody'; 'lush' harmonies; 'even and lyrical' rhythms; and melodies that often 'had an upward movement' (1982, p.76).

In contrast to this, the 'fallen woman' is scored very differently. A female character who is shown to be different, independent, or in any way comparable to a man is scored in a way to mark her out as potentially dangerous. Kalinak describes the fallen woman's music as: having an association with 'decadent musical forms such as jazz, the blues, honky-tonk, and ragtime' (1982, p.76); containing 'saxophones and muted horns'; including 'unusual harmonies, chromaticism and dissonance'; and using 'dotted rhythms and syncopation' (1982, p.77). The use of jazz style music to represent this type of character is heavily related to stereotypes to do with jazz and deviance in African American culture, as discussed previously. Kalinak argues that this type of scoring sends a subliminal message to the viewer, as they subconsciously associate the sound of the music to the type of character presented. The connection of sexuality and morality with certain music- particularly the music of a certain race- is highly problematic.

This type of character is also explored by Catherine Haworth in *A Woman's Secret* (Ray, 1949), where the character of Susan is depicted as desirable yet deviant, through the use of her jazz style singing performance (2012, pp.113-117). Like Kalinak, Haworth points to the use of 'portamento' and 'jazz harmony' used by composers in classical Hollywood to 'suggest ideas about loss of control and moral deviance' (2012, p.115). Again, a certain style of music is demonstrably used to suggest something negative about the identity of the character, her internal thoughts and feelings.

As well as exploring the scoring of female characters, Haworth also looks into masculinity, in the Bond film *Diamonds are Forever* (Hamilton, 1971) (2012, pp.117-119). As previously

discussed, masculinity is an interesting study, as it often assumed to be opposite to femininity- that masculine is standard, and feminine is the area requiring academic attention (Neale, 1992, p.277). Haworth's analysis here examines the difference in scoring between the heroic Bond and the hitmen Mr Wint and Mr Kidd. Through the use of chromatic harmonies, Wint and Kidd are shown to be 'not just evil, but also effeminate' (p.118), their morality linked to their sexual otherness- again a negative stereotype that influenced the public into mistrust of the queer community.

In contrast, Bond's scoring uses 'strident and dynamic big band brass' and contains 'militaristic styling', which 'acts as a continual reminder of his heterosexual virility, his attractiveness and thereby also his heroism' (2012, p.119). Bond's visual masculinity is therefore confirmed through his soundtrack. Bond's leitmotif is used in moments of heroism, in the same way Halfyard argues the Superman theme is used- as a 'heroic signifier' (Halfyard, 2012, p. 172) to confirm that a heroic act has taken place. The use of brass and the militaristic march are aural links between these two heroic masculine characters.

The categorisation and subsequent scoring of masculinity in the classical soundtrack is therefore a fascinating study, as, like the fallen woman and the virtuous wife, the non-normative man and the heroic man sound very different. In film musicals, the performing male is already effeminised, as he sings and dances about his thoughts and feelings, and so the normative masculinity of these characters is often depicted in other ways.

### **Popular Scoring**

In contrast to the classical score, the popular score utilises musical styles (newly composed material in a popular style) and sometimes entire songs (a compiled 'jukebox' style) that already exist in the knowledge of the audience. Popular soundtracks are split into these two categories (composed or compiled), but these are not strictly adhered to, as some films may use a combination of each. This flexibility is arguably another signifier of the modern, popular approach to film scoring. While the musical techniques arguably relate to the classical score in ways such as the use of style and instrumentation, the extra associations that the individual viewer brings to a song they already know is much harder to replicate in

a classical film score that they have never heard before. Kassabian refers to this prior knowledge as an 'affiliating identification' (2001, p.3). This concept is useful when considering the way a filmmaker draws on the context and associations of existing music within a soundtrack, while also accounting for the deeply personal and unintentional reactions an audience member has to a particular piece. This can in no way be predicted or expected by the filmmaker, and so can cloud or even contradict the intended meaning, if such a thing exists. It could also be argued to blow the possibilities for interpretation wide open, allowing an audience member the freedom to enjoy the film in their own way.

Kassabian explores how popular music is used in film in order to signify something about the characters (2001). In the chapter 'Woman Scored', she looks into the recent cinematic trend for compiled pop scores, and how this has potential to increase both the commercial success of the film, through the production of the separate CD soundtrack, and broaden the possibility of audience interpretation of the text. Kassabian argues that popular music has the ability to engage any audience member subconsciously, as they will have associations with the genre (if not the particular song) that could resonate with, or oppose entirely, the associations of the person sitting next to them (2001, p.70). The compiled pop score therefore gives the filmmaker freedom to express, while still giving the audience the opportunity to give their own meaning to the text.

Kassabian's analysis of *Dirty Dancing* (Ardolino, 1987) provides a fascinating insight into how music is used in the teen film to produce nostalgia and longing for a time before the target audience was necessarily born (2001, pp.76-79). The filmmakers used the soundtrack, specifically 'The Time of My Life', to hook the younger audience before they had even seen the film. The song, (composed specifically for the film rather than chosen), spent many weeks in the pop charts, and so was part of popular culture before the accompanying film was released. This composed piece therefore had a feeling of being compiled when the audience did see the film. This synergy between music and film led to huge box office success. The film score itself comprises of a range of scoring techniques, from current pop to 1960s pop, and from mambo and cha cha to classical Hollywood scoring, as the characters Baby and Johnny embark on a coming of age journey, ending, typically, in sweeping romantic gestures and a profession of love. Kassabian argues that the music leads

the viewer on this journey with the characters by tracking their attachment to and identification with the songs (2001, p.79).

A further comment that Kassabian makes in this chapter is that popular music (in this case in the compiled soundtrack to *Thelma and Louise* (Scott, 1991)) grounds the film narrative in the everyday, that the fantastical action is legitimised by the aural link to the real world (2001, p.81). While this is the case in this particular film, it is not necessarily the case in the film musical. Where the narrative and aesthetic of the film is designed to be unrealistic and fantastical, I would argue that using real world music only adds to the absurdity, driving the narrative even further away from any potential grounding in the real world- for example in *Moulin Rouge!*.

Haworth shows how compiled pop scores can be used to ascribe meaning to sexual identity in the film *Muriel's Wedding* (Hogan, 1994). Haworth analyses Muriel's association with the band ABBA, and the associations this evokes within the viewer to show how sympathy can be created. Haworth documents how Muriel's own relationship with the soundtrack changes throughout the film, but also closes with the idea that despite the film being centred around the heterosexuality of Muriel's desire for the wedding, there are factors which point towards this being 'an archetypal coming-out story' (2012, p.123). The themes of camp and kitsch- which Haworth links to both Australian cinema (p.121), Europop, and ABBA specifically (p.123)- lend themselves to this narrative when coupled with the relationship Muriel shares with Rhonda. Haworth's closing argument in this section is that 'the camp, glitzy artifice of ABBA's music and its romantic simplicity are presented as key to the soundtrack's communicative and transformative potential' (2012, p.123) showing that pop music with previous meaning can be used to impart new meaning and can depict a journey of self-discovery in film narrative.

## Relating to the Movie Musical

As demonstrated here, the literature exists to support the argument that film soundtracks carry meaning. As Buhler states: 'music allows audiences to believe that they experience

moment to moment something like the feel of a characters fluctuating emotions' (2013, p.369). He further argues that 'the soundtrack imposes normative gender roles and lines of sexual desire on the film's characters', showing that the music has the ability to influence the way the viewer perceives not only the identity of the character on the screen, but potentially their own too (2013, p.371).

The success of these authors in finding this meaning in other film genres lends itself directly to the study of the musical film, as the importance of the performance is heightened, and, I would argue, the implied meaning carries more significance. In the films discussed in this section, the music is ascribed to that character, it carries meaning, yet it does not appear to be coming directly from them. The music represents them and is about them, yet it usually occurs outside of their perception. The film musical provides a totally different perspective on this, as the music comes directly from the character- they perform their own identity through their song. The next two chapters will showcase this in relation to two contemporary movie musicals, exploring how gender, sexuality and culture are expressed through musical performance.

# Chapter 4

## Performing Gender and Identity in *Moulin Rouge!*

### Introduction

Baz Luhrmann's 2001 film, *Moulin Rouge!* combines elements of Altman's show and folk musical styles to tell an age-old love story with a classically tragic ending (1989, pp.130-131). It is a backstage musical, which places the performances in the setting of an in-film rehearsal or show which helps to maintain some illusion of reality for the audience and gives it some authenticity. Although presented and sold as 'a love story' (Kidman, 2015), the film also explores a complex and diverse range of identities. As it utilises mostly pre-existing pop music in a compiled soundtrack, it is described as a 'jukebox musical' (Haworth, 2017, p.108). The choice of songs becomes as important in the jukebox musical, as the choice of instrumentation and themes in a classical score, their cultural context and 'affiliating identifications' (Kassabian, 2001, p.3), lending extra meaning to their position within the film. A full list of songs used in the film is available in Table 1. The context in both the film and real world are used by Luhrmann to suggest more about the characters than may immediately meet the eye. This is further explored in the cue sheets (Appendix A), an extremely useful resource for combining all elements of the visual, aural and cultural context, forming a coherent argument as to the presentation of identity, as is pointed out by Kassabian (2016, p.44).

The sound team that worked on this film was headed by Baz Luhrmann, arguably an auteur.<sup>14</sup> Van der Merwe argues that Luhrmann had a lot of influence over the tracks that went into the film, he is repeatedly noted to have gone 'to great lengths to find the best possible matches for his plot' (2010, p.32), taking more than two years to secure all of the necessary rights. 'Luhrmann is as eccentric in his methodology as he is in his musical tastes. He does more than weave together diverse musical strains; he intertwines the scoring

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<sup>14</sup> An artist whose personality or personal creative vision could be read, thematically and stylistically, across their body of work (Kuhn & Westwell, 2012a)

practices of the Hollywood musical with the more recent soundtrack film' (van der Merwe, 2010, p.31).

Performance	Songs Used- Original Performer	Character
Introduction to the Bohemians	<b>'The Hills are Alive'</b> - From <i>The Sound of Music</i>	The Bohemians and Christian
Introduction to The Moulin Rouge and The Diamond Dogs	<b>'Lady Marmalade'</b> - Christina Aguilera <b>'Smells like Teen Spirit'</b> - Nirvana <b>'Because we can'</b>	Whole Cast
'Sparkling Diamonds'	<b>'Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend'</b> - Marilyn Monroe <b>'Material Girl'</b> - Madonna	Satine and Diamond Dogs
<b>'Your Song'</b>	Elton John	Christian
Spectacular Spectacular Rehearsal	<b>Cancan</b> - Offenbach	Christian, Satine, Zidler
Bohemian Celebration	<b>'Children of the Revolution'</b> - T.Rex	The Bohemians
<b>'One Day I'll Fly Away'</b>	Randy Crawford	Satine
'Elephant Love Medley'	(See Table 3)	Christian and Satine
<b>'Like a Virgin'</b>	Madonna	Zidler and the Duke
<b>'Come What May'</b>	Original Song	Christian and Satine
'El Tango de Roxanne'	<b>'Roxanne'</b> - The Police	Narcoleptic Argentinian and Christian
<b>'The Show Must Go On'</b>	Queen	Zidler and Satine
Spectacular Spectacular	<b>'Hindi Sparkling Diamonds'</b> <b>'Nature Boy'</b> - David Bowie <b>'Come What May'</b> <b>'Children of the Revolution'</b> - T.Rex <b>'Your Song'</b> - Elton John	Whole Cast

Table 1: Table of Moulin Rouge! performances



While van der Merwe leaves a lot of the musical decision making at the door of Luhrmann, the songs he chose clearly went through a transformation to gain their distinctive *Moulin Rouge!* sound. This transformation was headed by Glaswegian arranger, Craig Armstrong: 'the string arranger the big names... call when they want to sound lush' (Adams, 2002). While Luhrmann is arguably responsible for the content of the film, the distinctive sound of the film's music is down to Armstrong. 'Armstrong's lush setting of classic hits were the backbone of the film' (Farquharson, 2005) and his handling arguably shows an affinity to his own youth, as he grew up in the 70s. He has, however, also been described as 'chief offender' of 'the tendency to over produce every number... [which] often tips its mostly 1970s fare into near kitsch' (Spencer, 2001). Despite this censure, Armstrong confesses to his love of the symphony orchestra and to his desire to 'bring that into the geography of the 21<sup>st</sup> century' (Farquharson, 2005). His use of orchestral scoring in key narrative moments certainly shows this, and gives classic, popular favourites new meaning, promoting the feeling of excess and spectacle that is the core aesthetic of the film.

The film strongly utilises the techniques of camp in order to put on a spectacular show (Cohan, 2009, pp.5-6), both the visual and aural excess showcases the character's inner feelings – aspects of their identity. The film begins with the main character, Christian (Ewan McGregor), sat at a typewriter, writing the story he is also narrating. From the outset, therefore, the viewer is aware that everything they see and hear in the subsequent film is from this perspective, and potentially biased point of view. Christian is presented to us as an innocent writer, who came to Paris in order to write and fall in love- to live a Bohemian lifestyle, one brimming with art, pleasure, and, most importantly for camp, excess. However, throughout the film he is stylistically kept quite distant from the Bohemians, as he is arguably the only main male character presented as strictly heterosexual, his costume, voice and desire separating him from the men surrounding him. This is striking, as we remember the tale is being told from his own point of view. In discussing representation in films with a biased narrator, Buhler argues that the narrator becomes the 'authoritative norm' against which everyone else is judged, and almost always understood as deficient, as is certainly seen in this example (2013, p.379). Christian creates a camp spectacle that he himself does not fit in to.

## The Bohemians: Masculinity and Non-normativity

### Introduction to the Bohemians

The Bohemians that Christian meets shortly after his arrival in Paris are notably non-normative males (compared to normative masculinity discussed previously). The unconscious Argentinian, found to suffer from narcolepsy, seen later putting his hand on Christian's crotch (Figure 1); Toulouse-Lautrec, a dwarf with a softly spoken, lisping voice (Figure 3, right); Audrey, the person Christian replaces as writer, a cross dressing male to female (Figure 2, centre); and Satie (thought to be named after composer Erik Satie, although bearing little resemblance), the show's composer, softly spoken, dressed in a rainbow scarf, and described by Knapp to suffer from AIDS- an assumption made retrospectively, on behalf of a 21<sup>st</sup> Century audience due to his emaciated appearance (2009, p.110) (Figure 2, right), make up the main male characters who take in Christian. All of these characters display queer tendencies, and set the tone of the film for exaggeration and excessive camp.

As the Bohemian's introductory scene shows, their music is disjointed and lacks coherence – that is, until Christian appears and gives them clarity and direction, the opportunity to give their movement a voice, by completing the line from *The Sound of Music* (Wise, 1965) with ease. The use of 'The Hills are alive' is ironic as *The Sound of Music* follows Maria (a Nun), and her journey to knowing her place in God's plan, whereas the Bohemians are known for 'living in sin'. It could be argued, therefore that Christian is their God-like figure, as he has come to save them and lead them in their cause. Once again, this is intriguing when we consider the story is narrated from Christian's own point of view. Christian is also comparable to Orpheus, a mythological Greek musician, who was able to charm animals with his playing, and whose greatest adventure was travelling to the underworld to save his wife, Eurydice. In this scenario, Christian becomes an Orpheus-like character, and the Bohemians are likened to the animals- their othered identities likened to lesser beings.

Another narrative interpretation of *The Sound of Music* is that Maria leaves her life of devotion to God, breaks her vow of chastity, and, as a result goes on to live 'in sin'. The

many ways of interpreting this song choice shows how the understanding of a songs context outside of the film adds extra layers of meaning and potential interpretation. Arguably, the success of this musical choice depends on the viewer knowing the context of this song, and having a very specific affiliating association with it. This is an expectation Luhrmann relies on consistently in this film, as the musical choices have many layers of meaning behind them.



Figure 1: Moulin Rouge!: Right: Crotch-grabbing Narcoleptic Argentinian (Luhrmann, 2001).



Figure 2: Moulin Rouge!: Centre: Audrey, cross-dressing character and original writer; Right: Satie, composer (Luhrmann, 2001).



Figure 3: *Moulin Rouge!*: Bohemians' reverential reaction to Christian's singing (Luhrmann, 2001).

This first poetic/musical breakthrough from Christian comes at a key moment for the viewer, as the Bohemians' struggle is almost painful to watch, and the relief when Christian breaks through and corrects them is palpable. This idea that Christian is the straight white man who is going to save their movement is a fascinating concept when he is compared to those whom he is leading, he is in a position of ultimate power. The incompetence that the Bohemians present is shown through their inability to make the song fit. They struggle to pronounce the words they are reaching so desperately for, marred by either a lisp or an accent, they cannot decide on a pitch or key, and the chaos and squabbling that ensues is quieted only by Christian's interruption. Their differences are highlighted, exaggerated and mocked. The Bohemians react to Christian's intrusion with reverence, he appears to them to be miraculous (Figure 3).

## Satine: Female Sexuality and the Role of The Performer

### **'Sparkling Diamonds'**

In contrast to Christian's opening scene, Satine's introduction is anything but pure and innocent. Following a raunchy introduction to the Moulin Rouge, Harold Zidler, the Diamond Dogs, and the men that frequent it, Satine's entrance sees a complete change in mood. Lowered from the ceiling on her perch, introducing bird imagery that permeates the whole film, Satine is seen by the gathered crowd before the film audience, and their reaction to what they evidently see influences how the viewer reacts also. The reverential silence that

her appearance warrants is broken only by the sound of falling confetti which provides a shimmering sound, perfect for the 'Sparkling Diamond'. This introduction clearly places Satine as a main character: a Courtesan; a trapped performer; and the jewel in the crown of the Moulin Rouge.

A similar real-world example of the Satine character could be seen as Rita Hayworth, who worked hard to 'become a fine actress' (McLean, 2004, p.37). The association of the character with a real person arguably gives her authenticity, as the audience is aware that this is a narrative that has been explored before. McLean argues that Hayworth had to endure a lot in order to change people's perceptions of her as a dancer, to become the actress she wanted to be (2004, p.37). This matches the narrative of Satine- the courtesan who wants to be a 'real actress'. Striving to achieve something greater does give the impression that the woman has agency over her actions, as everything she endures is in pursuit of something better. McLean further argues (in relation to Betty Grable as well as Hayworth) that female performers have a certain amount of agency above the level that Mulvey's male gaze theory would allow<sup>15</sup>, as they exist beyond the flat, fetishized image of woman, becoming singers and dancers who express emotions- including enjoying what they do (2011, p.175).

The visual appearance of Satine is designed to hint at the fate of her character, as her pale face and red lips could be interpreted as the historically popular face of consumptive beauty (Hutcheon & Hutcheon, 1996, p.48). Add to this the ghostly glow she acquires by the use of blue lighting (Figure 4), and things already look bad for our heroine - trapped in a lifestyle that has evidently led to this illness, which will eventually bring her love story to a premature end. Historically, illness, particularly consumption, has been used to link sexuality and lifestyle with morality and eventually death. Operas such as Verdi's *La Traviata* and Puccini's *La Bohème* also use it as a narrative tool. In this film, illness is used to highlight the vulnerability of such a woman, as she is often viewed as weak, unable to care for herself, always in need of saving and rescuing, and constantly manipulated by men – be that Zidler, the Duke, or even Christian.

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<sup>15</sup> Mulvey's Male Gaze theory only classes women on film as to be 'looked at and displayed' (1975, p.11).



Figure 4: *Moulin Rouge!*: The ghostly glow of a pale and sickly Satine (Luhmann, 2001).

The performance which follows carries on in the same way as it began, quietly, as Satine speaks the opening words 'The French are glad to die for love...'. The use of the unaccompanied spoken voice is described by Jarman as creating intimacy, tension and anticipation, founding elements in the production of camp (2010, p.201), further emphasised by the contrast between the former party atmosphere and the current hushed atmosphere. Satine swings round on her perch, while the camera stays still, putting her in the position of the woman as image, the object of desire, and the men as the bearers of the look (Mulvey, 1975 p.12). This anticipation is soon relieved however, when, on speaking the word 'jewels', Satine flies into her full performance of 'Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend'.

'Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend' is originally from the film *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (Hawks, 1953), performed by Marilyn Monroe - one of the most popular female sex symbols of the 1950s and 60s, she arguably represented a changing attitude towards female sexuality. In *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, Monroe performs the part of a flirtatious woman whose love of diamonds shows an aspiration for material things, gained from making men fall in love with her. This is certainly a connection Luhmann is trying to draw through this choice of music, as Satine's role as a courtesan is very similar. Also, in this scene, Satine briefly sings Madonna's 'Material Girl'. Like Monroe, Madonna is widely seen as a female

sex symbol, possessing the same blonde hair and 'ideal body type'. The two songs fit together well as the video for 'Material Girl' (Lambert, 1985) is a direct parody of Monroe's performance in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, therefore, the popular culture link is already established (see Figures 5 and 6 for comparison). Luhrmann hopes to slip Kidman's performance into this category, utilising existing stereotypes that are already likely to exist in the subconscious of the viewer.

This is another unusual example of Kassabian's 'affiliating identification' (2001, p.3), where audience members bring personal associations to their viewing of a film, as Luhrmann clearly aims to remind the audience of this particular performance, rather than an individual association. He aims to rekindle musical stereotypes and suggest something specific as opposed to allowing the audience member to come to their own conclusions. Setting Satine's introduction to these songs sets her performing identity on a par with these divas, the sexualised image of the performing woman.



Figure 5: Marilyn Monroe as Lorelei Lee in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (Hawks, 1953).



Figure 6: Madonna as Monroe in the 'Material Girl' Music Video (Lambert, 1985).



While clearly deriving from these performances, Kidman's portrayal in this film must be recognised as being much more extravagant, and much more camp than its predecessors. It is authentic to the original in terms of the use of the diva persona, but is also authentic to the tone of the film in terms of the scale of the performance and the desire for excess. Compared to the original, the number of adoring men is much larger, and the implied sexuality in the performance is more visually and aurally apparent. Her costume is more revealing, and her act is more interactive, rather than taking place on a stage (Figure 7). The musical accompaniment, once the number properly begins, is bold and brash, heavy in both bass and brass, and utilising syncopation- all typical of the stereotypical 'fallen woman' signifiers identified by Kalinak (1982, pp.76-77).



*Figure 7: Moulin Rouge!: Kidman as Satine, surrounded by men (Luhrmann, 2001).*

This performance, and the brutal lack of satisfactory ending, foreshadows the fact that Satine will not make it to the end of the story. The bird will fall from her perch, within her gilded cage, before she has the chance to fly away.

As scholars such as Judith Butler argue, all identity is a performance (2007, p.46). In this film, Satine's identity is enacted on different levels, representing a lack of choice in some situations. She appears to change her behaviour depending on who she is performing for, exhibiting separate public and private personas, performing her identity differently to suit. The private Satine is shown to be more emotional, in scenes such as 'One Day I'll Fly Away' and 'Come What May' (see Appendix A1 and A2). Satine's private performances are

messages of hope and of dreams, suggesting that she wishes to escape from this life. The breathy quality of her singing gives these numbers a dreamlike quality, in clear contrast to 'Sparkling Diamonds'.

## The Duke and Zidler: Camp Masculinity

Like the Bohemians, the Duke is presented as a non-normative male character, due to his voice and small, slight, arguably feminine appearance. Visually and aurally, he is likened to Toulouse, but in terms of narrative, he is the love rival of Christian.

### **'Like A Virgin'**

The scene that arguably portrays the performance of queer identity most explicitly is the 'Like a Virgin' scene. In the narrative, this number comes after Satine has disappointed the Duke once again, by failing to arrive for a supper in the Gothic Tower. Zidler rushes to the Duke to apologise and invents an elaborate story to explain her absence and appease his bad feelings. The story Zidler tells is that Satine is confessing her sins, as she wishes to marry the Duke a virgin. The reality is very different, as Satine is in fact unconscious, following another collapse.

In order to support his claims, and dissuade Duke from dwelling on Satine's absence, Zidler arouses his desire by performing this number, talking about her as a 'virgin'. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century (and to some extent to this day), female purity and innocence were seen as an essential quality. Clearly Satine is not a virgin, she is a courtesan, however, the way the thought of her virginity arouses the Duke shows that it was an ideal.

This song was chosen, not only because of the lyrics, but because of the context. Released by Madonna in 1984, this was her 'first chart-topping single' (Prieto-Arranz, 2011, p.175). It is the second use of her music in the film, again linking the performative aspect of Satine's identity with the diva, the sex symbol, and the highly sexualised woman- utilising Madonna's 'bad girl' image (McCarthy, 2006, p.74). 'Like a Virgin' is a much-analysed piece of music, as, along with the video, it raises thought-provoking arguments as to the existence

of 'virginity', the virgin/whore dichotomy, and the visual interplay of sex and religion (Prieto-Arranz, 2011, pp.175-176) (McCarthy, 2006, p.81). The video (Lambert, 1984) is filled with images of water, as water is linked to cleanliness and purity, as well as to femininity, fluids, and latterly desire (Cooper, 2009, p.197). As well as the black outdoor dress, Madonna is seen wearing white dress indoors (Aufderheide, 1986, p.67), connoting marriage, suggesting that the sexual woman is to be saved by the love of and marriage to a good man. The 'good man' status in this situation is questionable however, as she is stalked throughout the video by either a lion or a man in a lion mask. The predatory connotation of this image shows how vulnerable a woman in this situation is seen to be, a narrative that certainly links to *Moulin Rouge!*. Also, the two versions of Madonna appear in the video, the outdoor (public) and the indoor (private) personality types arguably reflect the two versions of Satine presented in the film. Again, this is a specific association Luhrmann is trying to depict, one which does not allow for much personal variation.

The fact that this performance is about Satine, but does not feature her is also indicative of the message portrayed about her identity. In this case, the highly sexualised image of the woman is created and proliferated by a man (Zidler) for his own gain.

The performance begins with a close up of Zidler's mouth as he pronounces the word 'virgin'. The uncomfortable close up and the intimacy of the topic he is discussing creates tension, and sets the tone for the performance. Table 2 shows the spoken words. The emphasised words, represented in red, show how the image he is trying to create is of a sexual nature. The Duke is clearly aroused by the thought. As Table 2 also shows, the sound of Zidler's gravelly voice has a different quality to The Duke's softly spoken lisp, however, both men sound creepy and camp. When the performance does begin properly, Zidler moves into a vocal style somewhere between speaking and singing, allowing him to emphasise words such as virgin, which he splits over 5 syllables, also shown in Table 2. This sexualises the concept of virginity further, ridiculous in this context, as he is singing about his famous courtesan.

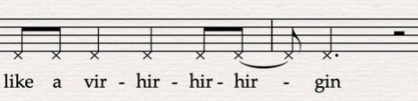
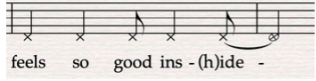
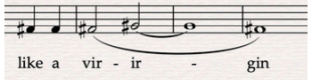
Scene	Like a Virgin	
Character	Harold Zidler	The Duke
Emotion Portrayed	Silliness- Dressed as a bride, begins to entice the Duke, spends the rest of the performance running away from him	Desire- image of Zidler conflated with that of Satine
Vocal Timbre	Gravelly to begin- words spoken in a creepy tone of voice: '... <b>virgin</b> You <b>know</b> Touched for the very first <b>time</b> She says it feels so <b>good, inside,</b> When you <b>hold her</b> And you <b>touch her</b> '	Thin, soft- certain words have strange pronunciation on 'O': 'she's so fine And she's mine Makes me strong Yes she makes me <b>bo(w)ld</b> And her love thawed <b>out (aht)</b> Yes her lo-o-o-o-ove thawed <b>out</b> What was scared and <b>co(w)ld</b> '
Vocal Quality	Sung spoken, breathy- evokes panting and sexual desire: 	Lisping, softly spoken- unusual pronunciation continues in singing:   Bursts into operatic tenor- lots of vibrato, the climax of the piece: 
Pitch	Low	High
Accompaniment	Nothing in the spoken section, his words need to come across on their own to make their impact. Followed by orchestral strings, pulsing rhythm, chorus of dancing waiters, triumphant brass	Follows an emotional break in the performance, to see Satine and Christian. Dark and sinister to begin, starts to build back to Zidler style performance afterwards. Utilises harps and bells, twinkling scales to suggest queerness

Table 2: Moulin Rouge!: Analysis and comparison of male vocal performance in 'Like a Virgin'. (Transcribed by the Author)

The mood switches, and lightens considerably, when Zidler, sure of The Duke's compliance, ramps up his performance, becoming an extremely excessive camp spectacle. While this switch seems to have turned a creepy, sinister number into something more light-hearted, the topic being discussed is still a woman's virginity- she is still being exploited as a sexual commodity. The way in which this is done, however, is designed to make fun of the Duke, as the arguably queer aspects of his identity are highlighted and played upon throughout. Nowhere is this clearer than when the Duke conflates the image of the virginal Satine with the image of Zidler, wrapped in white material, stood in front of him (Figure 8). While chasing Zidler round the tower, The Duke's singing voice is heard for one of few times in the show. The quality of this singing performance is also analysed in Table 2. The Duke's conflation of virginal Satine/Zidler, is particularly comical in the chase, shown physically by images such as Figure 9.



Figure 8: *Moulin Rouge!*: Zidler playing the virginal Satine (Luhmann, 2001).



*Figure 9: Moulin Rouge!: Duke's comical physical performance, chasing Zidler (Luhrmann, 2001).*

The act of singing is used in musical performance to express an emotion on a level above what the spoken word can achieve (Laing, 2000, pp.11-12). Therefore, it is curious that this should be the moment we hear him perform. Through this performance, the Duke is expressing his lust and desire for a woman, while surrounded by 12 camp, exaggerated dancing men, and Zidler, suggesting that his desires are not all that they appear. The use of such a large number of male servant dancers adds to the spectacle and in fact the mockery of the Duke, as he is taken in by Zidler's story and ultimately made a fool out of. His queerness is used to ridicule him. His audible difference (shown in Table 2) arguably stems from his strange pronunciation (shown in blue) and the emphasis he puts on the middle of words (such as 'inside'). The burst of operatic tenor style singing at the climax of the piece again highlighting the queer and camp, as after dancing down the table, waving around the sides of his smoking jacket, he sings directly to Zidler, looking into his eyes as he stands over him (Figure 10).



*Figure 10: Moulin Rouge!: Duke singing directly to Zidler (Luhrmann, 2001).*

The end of the performance marks the pinnacle of the spectacle. The shot cuts out onto the balcony of the tower, where nine of the Duke's servants stand ready for the champagne ejaculations that mark the climax (Figure 11). This imagery is highly suggestive that the Duke enjoyed the performance, and, when coupled with his audible performance, adds to the argument of his queer identity.



*Figure 11: Moulin Rouge!: Champagne cork ejaculations- the climax of 'Like a Virgin' (Luhrmann, 2001).*

This 'queerness' clearly marks the Duke as unsuitable for Satine in the mind of the audience, lowering him, yet again, when compared to Christian. However, I would also argue that this performance highlights Zidler's unsuitability to protect Satine. Although a sexual relationship is never explicitly suggested, Zidler is the man who looks after the girls, and

clearly dotes on Satine particularly. The way he jokes about her in this scene, and the way he has clearly exploited her for some time, begins to make the audience unsure about the quality of his character. Knapp arguably sums up this feeling of inability to pin down the character of Zidler down when he describes his actions as 'asexual buffoonery', queering his unconventional identity (Knapp, 2009, p.110). Zidler's relationship with Satine is justifiable in three ways: doting on her sexually; doting on her because she's his main money maker; and doting on her because he genuinely likes her. In terms of this performance, his valuing her because of her monetary value appears to be his main motivation, as he wants the Duke to forgive her in order to save the Moulin Rouge. However, throughout the film, I would argue he displays signs of all three, at different times producing performances that place him as an admirer (Sparkling Diamonds), a pimp (Like a Virgin), and a father figure (The Show Must Go On).

## Christian: Love and Masculinity

### **'Your Song'**

The journey of Christian and Satine's relationship is clearly visible in three key scenes. The first scene in which they are alone together is during the 'poetry reading' which turns into Christian's performance of Elton John's 'Your Song'. The performance does not get off to a good start, as Satine constantly interrupts with cries of 'yes', but when he does eventually start to sing, he has an Orphean effect on her. The evocation of Orpheus and Eurydice is poignant here, as their story does not end happily. Orpheus loses Eurydice before they return to the human world.

Ewan McGregor's performance of the romantic Elton John classic is designed to put the character firmly in the position of favourite with the audience. The quiet, unaccompanied way in which it begins is timid, endearing, and provides welcome relief from the noisy excess that has come before. Shepard would describe the timbre of Christian's voice as typical of 'the boy next-door' (Reale, 2012, p.141), a timbre which locates any performance in the 'tradition of saccharine love songs' (p.142). The apparent shyness of Christian shows him to be innocent and genuine, if slightly effeminate. As shown in the cue sheet (Appendix



A3), this performance serves to highlight the contrast between Christian and Satine- his timidity and inexperience to her confidence and self-assurance.

The high register in which Christian sings- reaching A<sub>4</sub> at its peak<sup>16</sup> – represents a boyish identity, and a childish obsession with love. Similarly, the opulent orchestral accompaniment and addition of the opera singing moon adds to the emotional response of the audience and explains Satine’s ideological conformation. This exuberance is highly typical of the camp spectacle (Jarman-Ivens, 2010, p.191). This expression seems excessive for people that have only just met, yet, again, we must consider that the drama we see unfolding is being retold from Christian’s own future point of view, putting him in the ultimate position of power. The climax of this performance comes towards the end, when Satine is in his arms, and Christian’s emotions take them into a dream-like state where they leap from the window of the elephant and dance among the clouds over Paris (Figures 12 and 13). As Whitesell says of Kelly in *Singin in the Rain*, this romantic dream ballet gives Christian ‘strong heterosexual credibility’ (2013, p.839). The removal of the performance into a dream-like space is significant because this is the only place this love can exist. The sweetness and smoothness of the vocal performance further connotes innocence and foreshadows a happy ending. A hope very soon negated when the mix-up is revealed.



Figure 12: *Moulin Rouge!*: Holding each other, beginning to fall in love (Luhrmann, 2001).

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<sup>16</sup> ASPN Pitch notation where C<sub>4</sub> is middle C. C identifies the pitch and <sub>4</sub> identifies the octave. A<sub>4</sub> therefore represents the A less than an octave above middle C.



Figure 13: *Moulin Rouge!*: Dreamlike performance on the rooftops of Paris, featuring singing moon (Luhrmann, 2001).

Although this song provides the moment the characters connect, the misunderstanding and the subsequent tainting of the song by the successful use of it with the Duke makes it unsuitable to be the song that represents the couple.

### **'Elephant Love Medley'**

The second significant performance in the relationship is the Elephant Love Medley scene. This scene shows the moment the two main characters decide they will fall in love, through a lot of begging and coercion on Christian's side and a reluctant surrender on Satine's. This performance is made up of ten popular songs (examined in the cue sheet, Appendix A4), all of which are about love, and many of which are, significantly, about short time frames. The repeated mentions of 'one night' and 'one day' seem juxtaposed to Christian's idea that love should last forever, however it is very fitting to their own narrative, as their timeframe is extremely limited. This could potentially be explained by the fact that Christian is our narrator, and he cannot help but impose his future knowledge onto his retelling.

A further interesting element of this performance is the way the characters change throughout it. At the beginning, Satine is set against falling in love, or even spending a night with Christian, as it goes against her role as a courtesan. However, through Christian's unrelenting nagging, she starts to come around to his way of thinking. Musically, this is shown when they sing together for the first time in David Bowie's 'Heroes' (Figure 14). This

can be described as an assimilation of musical styles, where, as Altman states, themes become more alike as the musical goes on, until finally becoming the same when they fall in love (1989, pp.50-52). By examining all of the songs previous to this in the film, and those after it, as I have done in the cue sheet (Appendix A4), this point in this performance marks a clear turning point, where the very different public characters are brought together in a moment of private connection. Table 3 shows the structure of the performance, the balance of the singing between the characters and the subsequent assimilation of performance during 'Heroes'. Christian's masculinity is arguably proved here by his persistence and the eventual submission of Satine to do what he wants.



*Figure 14: Moulin Rouge!: Performance of 'Heroes', the point the characters sing together (Luhrmann, 2001).*

Time Code	Song	Christian	Satine
<b>47:05</b>	<b>'All You Need is Love'- The Beatles</b>		
	(Spoken reply)		
	(Sung reply)		
	(Spoken reply)		
	(Sung reply)		
	(Sung reply)		
<b>47:17</b>	<b>'I Was Made for Loving You'- Kiss</b>		
	(Sung reply)		
<b>47:28</b>	<b>'One More Night'- Phil Collins</b>		
	(Sung reply)		
<b>47:34</b>	<b>'In the Name of Love'- U2</b>		
	(Sung reply)		
<b>47:47</b>	<b>'Don't Leave Me This Way'- Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes</b>		
<b>48:02</b>	<b>'Silly Love Songs'- Wings</b>		
	(Sung reply)		
	(Sung reply)		
	(Sung reply)		
<b>48:34</b>	<b>'Up Where We Belong'- Joe Cocker and Jennifer Warnes</b>		
	(Sung reply)		
<b>48:34</b>	<b>'Heroes'- David Bowie</b>		
	(Sung reply)		
	(Spoken reply)		
	(Sung reply)		
	(Sung reply) 'We should be lovers'		
	(Spoken reply) 'We can't do that'		
	(Sung reply) 'We should be lovers, and that's a fact'		
	(Sung reply)		
	(Sung reply)		
	Sung Together 'Just for one day'		
	'We could be heroes'		
<b>48:55</b>	<b>'I Will Always Love You'- Whitney Houston</b>		
	(Sung reply)		
	(Sung reply)		
<b>49:59</b>	<b>'Your Song'- Elton John</b>		
	(Sung together)		

Table 3: *Moulin Rouge!*: Balance of Singing and Speaking in 'Elephant Love Medley'

The medley flows seamlessly from one song to the next at a fast pace, referencing 4 songs in the first 30 seconds. This rapid pace works, however, because each song becomes the next so effortlessly. The success of this lays at the hands of the arranger, the orchestral

accompaniment and the way the instruments interact with the characters and the lyrics. Setting the familiar lyrics in a new way ties them together without burdening them with too much external meaning. This meaning, however, is still relevant if it was sought (Appendix A4).

The lush orchestral scoring, a signifier of Armstrong's work, also serves to give the medley a dreamlike quality, as the slick nature of the apparently improvised performance is unrealistic. This could either serve to highlight the opulent excess of the film's general aesthetic, or to remind the viewer that they are watching a product of Christian's memory. As this is the case, regardless of whether the meaning was intended or not, the performance could be biased towards showing an easy and peaceful transition of Satine's feelings from anti to pro falling in love. Christian's influence showing his controlling masculinity.

As with 'Your Song', this performance shows Luhrmann borrowing from pre-existing material in order to represent Christian's love. The next performance I will examine shows a new approach, a newly composed song with no external cultural affiliations which can represent their love and their love only.

### **'Come What May'**

A particularly compelling performance in the film is the Lovers' secret song, 'Come What May'. Christian wrote this song for Satine in order to reassure her that no matter how bad things get, they will always have each other. The secret song is particularly poignant because not only does it belong to them in the film world, but in the real world too, as this is the only original song in the film.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, as well as having secret meaning to the other characters in the film, it also has secret meaning from the audience, as the viewer has no pre-existing associations with it.

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<sup>17</sup> Although technically true, this song was first intended to be used in another of Luhrmann's films *Romeo + Juliette* (1996) but was never used. Therefore, when examined more closely, 'Come What May' could in fact be designed to liken the story to Shakespeare's tale of love and tragedy- a fitting comparison for this narrative.

This is also a joint performance that moves seamlessly between private and public presentation. Although the rehearsal is public, the camera serves to pick out the couple's looks, and highlights that they are still singing to each other, despite the setting. The expression in both McGregor and Kidman's vocal performance shows that both characters mean what they are singing, however, their promise to 'love you... until my dying day' is about to come true, far sooner than they imagine. Therefore, this performance takes on more poignancy to the viewer than it potentially does to the characters themselves.

Arguably, this song is another example of Christian's control over Satine. Although writing her a song may seem romantic, writing a song so loaded with private meaning and putting it into a public show which ultimately puts her at risk, is dangerous. This is shown to be true when the Duke hears the song and realises the connection that exists between them. That Christian would put Satine in such a position shows a carelessness for her safety, and an attempt to control her performing identity.

The journey of the relationship, shown in these three performances shows Satine becoming more under the influence of Christian's control, which can be heard through the gradual assimilation of their musical styles. While Satine's illness arguably marks her out as weak and vulnerable, Christian's growing confidence gives him an air of masculinity arguably not seen by any other characters in the film. In fact, Christian and Satine could be described as the only straight characters.

## Masculine Control over Female Sexuality

### **'El Tango De Roxanne'**

Arguably the scene where female sexuality is shown at its most overt, is 'El Tango De Roxanne'. In the lead up to it, the Duke has found out about Christian and Satine, and she agrees to sleep with him in order to placate him, and save the Moulin Rouge. Christian's reaction is one of jealousy, spurring the Narcoleptic Argentinian to perform The Police's 1978 hit, 'Roxanne', in order to warn Christian about the danger of falling in love with a prostitute. The song is written from the point of view of a man who has fallen in love with a

prostitute, becoming increasingly jealous of her affairs. This is not a new concept within the film, as the women are constantly spoken for, mainly because the overall narrator is Christian. It is therefore clear why it was chosen, it fits the narrative perfectly. The lyrics of the original song are all that is really recognisable in this performance, as the levels intimacy and sexuality are heightened by re-orchestrating the song into a tango.

The tango is a Latin American dance, believed to have originated in the brothels of Buenos Aires. Mike Gonzales (a Professor of Latin American studies) and Marianella Yanes (a Venezuelan writer and journalist) claim that 'only prostitutes danced in the Buenos Aires of the late nineteenth century', explaining the sexual and erotic nature of the movements that survive in the style to this day (Gonzalez & Yanes, 2013, p.27). Its use in this context, is therefore justified. Further to this, Gonzalez and Yanes argue that 'In this male-dominated world, the tango dramatized the struggles between men for possession of women, and (from the predominantly male point of view) the cynical way in which the women exploited the loneliness and frustration of men' (2013, p.27). This description of the dance's early life is particularly poignant to *Moulin Rouge!*, and to this scene especially, as Christian and The Duke's struggle for possession of Satine, and the Argentinian's view that loving someone in this line of work is impossible, comes to a head here. The choice of musical style makes this performance feel authentic.

As well as the tango performance, this scene also incorporates elements of Satine's meeting with the Duke. She has gone to the Tower to prove that she does love him and that Christian means nothing to her. Her visual appearance at the beginning of the scene positions her illness at the forefront of the viewers mind, as she looks pale and sickly, again linking her sexuality with her sickness. Satine's entire encounter with the Duke shows her playing the part of the performer, the courtesan, carefully manoeuvring around her object. Similarly, the performance in the Moulin Rouge between the Narcoleptic Argentinian and Nini, a Diamond Dog (Figure 15), depicts in more blatant song and dance, the intricate routine Satine is going through in the Gothic Tower. The entire performance is arguably designed to show how these women are the playthings of more powerful men, and that, however much they may appear to have agency over their actions, the story is always told from the point of view of the man. The men always hold the power and the influence.



*Figure 15: Moulin Rouge!: NA's control over Nini, his passionate jealousy framed as her 'fault' (Luhrmann, 2001).*

Aurally, the performance is given a Latin American feel through the use of instrumentation, designed to make the original song sound and feel more exotic and erotic. As mentioned previously, the dance style of the tango helps to create the mood of the performance, but the traditional Latin instrumentation of guitar, violin and piano further emphasises the intricacy and intimacy of the steps. The Narcoleptic Argentinian himself adds a layer of exoticism to this scene, as his voice lends a particular distinction to the performance. Koman has a distinctive, rough, passionate sounding voice, presenting a picture of virile masculinity, as shown in Table 4. I would argue this character was chosen for this performance because of the visual and aural contrast he provides for Christian, as well as his cultural suitability for the style.





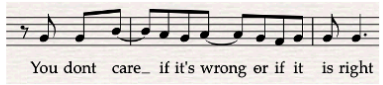
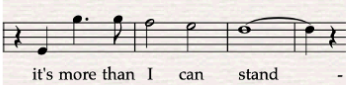
Scene	El Tango de Roxanne	
Character	Narcoleptic Argentinian	Christian
Emotion portrayed	Passionate jealousy- anger rather than pain	Painful jealousy- pain rather than anger. More sensitive and innocent
Vocal Timbre	Gravelly, very resonant- although it is placed low in the texture, it is still audible	Smooth- more amateurish, shows his innocence and inexperience
Vocal Quality	Rough, Growling- particularly on the 'Ro' of Roxanne: 	Smooth- scalic lyrical passages: 
Pitch	Low	High
Pitch Range	F <sub>3</sub> -Db <sub>4</sub> – highest note on word 'sell', the jealousy stems from the profession	D <sub>3</sub> -G <sub>4</sub> – high notes full of anguish, he sings up in the highest ranges quite often
Melody	Static 	Descending 
Accompaniment	High violin very prominent in the mix, instruments and voice weave in and out in an intricate dance	Higher violin lower in the mix, lets this countermelody shine through

Table 4: Moulin Rouge!: Analysis and comparison of Male vocal performance in 'El Tango de Roxanne'. (Transcribed by the author).

Although clearly also emotional and passionate, Christian's vocal quality has more of a pained, sentimental sound, as he is shown to be inexperienced (see Table 4). His display of emotion is arguably more feminised than any other character, however his jealousy also shows a more active masculinity- this performance showing his inner turmoil and pain (Figure 16). As Table 4 shows, the contrast between the melody and countermelody presents a fascinating comparison between the sound of masculinity at different levels of emotion. The contrast between these character's vocal performances also arguably presents a queer coupling, as happened with The Duke and Zidler previously in the film.

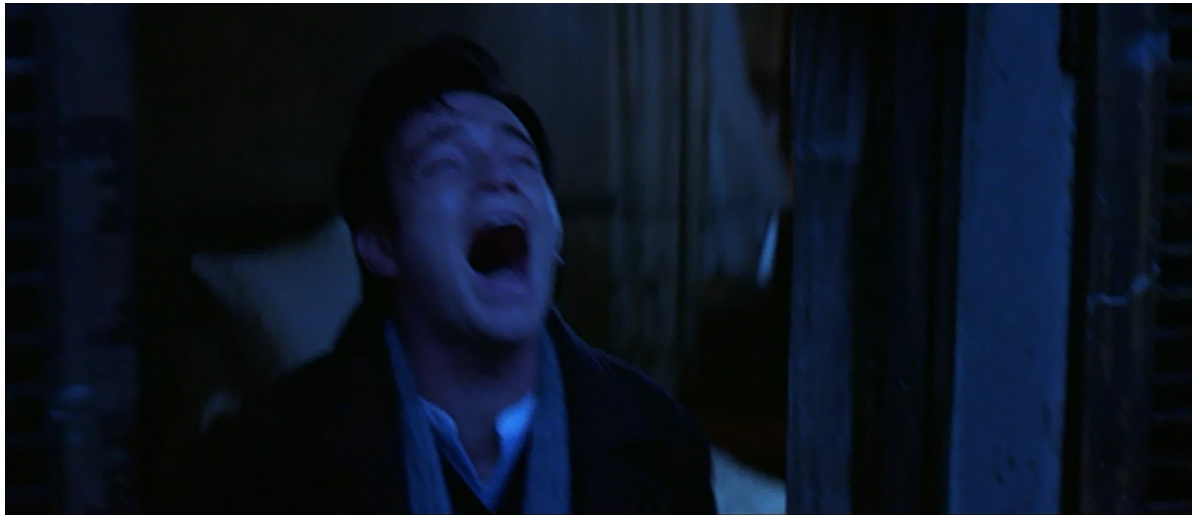


Figure 16: *Moulin Rouge!*: Christian's pained performance (Luhmann, 2001).

The climax of this scene comes at a particularly poignant moment in the narrative. After leaving the Moulin rouge, Christian steps out onto the street, where he is seen by Satine from the balcony of the Gothic Tower. After seeing him, she realises that she cannot go through with her lies to the Duke, and after singing their secret song, pronounces the word 'no', softly, but clearly enough to provoke the Duke's anger. After this revelation, the string instruments create a sense of fear, as the viewer realises Satine is now in danger. The Duke, furious that he has been lied to, drags Satine inside and attempts to rape her, while the strings play sharply and violently, arguably reminiscent of the scoring for strings from Bernard Herman in Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960). The timbre is thin, the pitch is high, and the accompaniment is menacing, a three-note rising and falling motif.

This scene is visually and aurally designed to heighten the tension<sup>18</sup> by putting the identities of those involved into perspective. Satine is paired with Nini, who the viewer believes is a prostitute who enjoys her work, and Christian is paired with the Narcoleptic Argentinian, who, in this scene, presents more normative heterosexual masculinity. The contrasts are designed to show how love is possible, but the inclusion of the rape shows the dangers of playing with this. The violence of the scene shows how little control women who are labelled as 'other' have over their situation, and shows the levels of control that come with masculinity. This powerlessness is a staple of traditional opera, as described by Clément, where certain voice types are destined to meet certain ends- for example the description of Sopranos as victims (1989, p.2). In this film, I argue the vocal types are less important, but the female gender in general is treated in this way. While it appears the Duke is going to get his wish and Christian is going to miss out, the viewer is aware of a power switch between the characters.

## Conclusion

Throughout *Moulin Rouge!*, identity is explored in many ways, particularly gender and sexuality. This film clearly links female sexuality with illness and mortality, as is historically contingent in opera. The treatment of masculinity and particularly queerness is interesting, because the characters against which McGregor's character is judged can all be described as non-normative. Luhrmann purposely heightens the camp spectacle throughout this film, both visually and aurally, in order to foreground the narrative of the heterosexual couple. Performances such as 'Like a Virgin' are designed to show the audience the unsuitability of a match between Satine and the Duke, and even Satine and Zidler, as we see the joke he makes out of her situation.

The musical choices made throughout the film show Luhrmann's connection to the context outside of his film world, and the associations he is trying to encourage, particularly with Satine and the performances of Monroe and Madonna. I would also argue that his use of Elton John, David Bowie and Freddie Mercury for male performances, also shows an

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<sup>18</sup> Therefore the camp (Jarman-Ivens, 2010, p.201).

attitude to masculinity and love that is focused on the camp and the ridiculous, utilising the non-normative male performer to connote similar associations in the characters. The associations he evokes appear to be carefully chosen, and do not allow for much personal interpretation by the audience. Both Kassabian's theory of 'affiliating identifications' and Haywood's 'viewer reception' are called into question here, when the filmmaker has gone to great lengths to suggest specific associations through his choice of the compiled soundtrack. It must also be noted, however, that music can be open to many interpretations, and even a viewer unfamiliar with any of the songs from this film could draw conclusions about the characters from the performances themselves. I believe it is the contest between the real-world and film-world context, and between the performance and authenticity that heighten the camp spectacle, and so make the expression of identity so successful.

# Chapter 5

## Performing Gender and Identity in *Burlesque*

### Introduction: Welcome to Burlesque

Antin's 2010 film *Burlesque* explores the gender and identity of female performers. This has even more real-world context as the two main characters are played by Cher and Christina Aguilera, performing women who, throughout their careers have been known for looking, sounding and acting differently. The weight of these two stars is clear even from the way the film was advertised. Figure 17 shows the main poster and DVD cover for the film, and shows that *Burlesque* was billed as being about these two stars, with little other context. This technique is not new in the film industry, as previously, singers such as Shirley Bassey 'brought a distinctive star presence to the Bond soundtrack [*Goldfinger*, Hamilton, 1964] that provided additional marketing potential' (Haworth, 2015, p.162). This suggests these stars are chosen for their popularity and their potential to increase revenue, as well as for their fit in the film more generally.



Figure 17: *Burlesque* poster, showing emphasis on the star cast (Antin, 2010).

The film follows the story of Ali (Christina Aguilera) who moves to LA in order to work as a performer. Upon finding the Burlesque Lounge, owned by Tess (Cher), Ali quickly becomes part of the team, working as a waitress before becoming a dancer, and eventually, their singing, dancing main attraction. As in *Moulin Rouge!*, the setting of the club, where a show is performed gives the film authenticity and lessens the jarring nature of spontaneous performance. The beloved club, however, is in immense financial trouble, and Tess's main narrative is her battle to save her business, despite the efforts of the men who believe they know better. This is a very common narrative in terms of typical movie musical structure, as discussed by Altman in terms of the dual focus narrative (1989, p.16). The modernisation of this traditional form comes in the female, and un-romantic nature of the 'couple'. Table 5 shows how the performances in the film are shared between the two characters, as well as the historic performances.

Performance (Historic/Original)	Performer heard Performing	Character seen Performing	Other Details
<b>Somethings Got a Hold on Me</b> (Historic)	Christina Aguilera	Ali	Original performance by Etta James
<b>The Beautiful People</b> (Historic)	Christina Aguilera	Montage sequence- Ali looking for a job	Original performance by Marilyn Manson
<b>Welcome to Burlesque</b> (Original)	Cher	Tess and Burlesque Dancers	Original song
<b>Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend</b> (Historic)	Marilyn Monroe and Christina Aguilera	Burlesque Dancers and Ali	Final chorus taken over by Ali in her imagination
<b>Long John Blues</b> (Historic)	Megan Mullally	Burlesque Dancers	Plays underneath scene in Tess's office
<b>Ray of Light</b> (Historic)	Madonna	-	Montage sequence- Ali rehearsing
<b>Tough Lover</b> (Historic)	Etta James and Christina Aguilera	Burlesque Dancers and Ali	Begins as a lip-synch performance, music cuts and Ali sings
<b>But I am a Good Girl</b> (Historic)	Christina Aguilera	Ali	Historic Burlesque number
<b>Guy What Takes his Time</b> (Historic)	Christina Aguilera	Ali	Originally released by Mae West in 1933
<b>Express</b> (Original)	Christina Aguilera	Ali	Original song
<b>Last of Me</b> (Original)	Cher	Tess	Original song
<b>Bound to You</b> (Original)	Christina Aguilera	Ali	Original song
<b>Show Me How You Burlesque</b> (Original)	Christina Aguilera	Ali	Original song

Table 5: Table of Burlesque performances

Central to the identity of the characters in this film is the way they look<sup>19</sup> as well as the way they sound. Both Cher and Christina Aguilera have distinctive singing voices as well as recognisable faces which bring a 'star quality' to the film<sup>20</sup>, but the other Burlesque dancers' singing voices are never heard. This raises questions about the value ascribed to them, when their ability to vocally perform in a musical is taken away, but their bodies are exhibited in such an erotic, provocative way. They cannot sing because they do not sound like 'that', but they can be looked at because they are physically attractive. I would argue this shows how agency is ascribed to characters, it has more to do with aural than visual, more to do with the ears than the eyes. This is a topic explored in more detail later in the chapter.

As well as the female identities explored in the film, there are also a range of masculinities examined, although not in the performative nature of the women. Marcus, the rich/ bad guy, Jack, the compassionate, caring musician/ barman, and Sean the costume designer/ Cher's gay best friend, all have non-performing roles to play in the film's club setting. Arguably this presents the question of whether the men are in fact the puppet-masters in this overt display of female sexuality, as they are behind the scenes, pulling the strings, but never put themselves on display in the same way. The role of these men is explored further, later in the chapter.

## Cher: Technology and Sexuality

In more recent history, a large part of Cher's performing persona stems from her use of technology to change both her visible and audible identity. For women, 'the body is their instrument' (Dickinson, 2001, p.337) and so seeing an icon such as Cher changing both her bodily appearance (through plastic surgery) and sound (through technology such as auto-tune and the vocoder) has led to derision from critics who now view her as unnatural or as having a 'cyborg feel' (2001, p.336). Cher's audible use of technology in her 1998 hit

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<sup>19</sup> While they are displayed as strong female characters, they are also there 'to-be-looked-at' (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009, p.298)

<sup>20</sup> Just as how McLean describes Rita Hayworth as desperate 'to prove that she [is] more than just a lovely face and body' (2011, p.181), Ali strives to be heard as well as seen- her stardom and charisma challenging the pre-conceived ideas of women who dance.

'Believe', unearthed the problem of 'authenticity': does her historic use of technology make her a less 'worthy' performer? I would argue that this uncertainty may have stopped the academic exploration of this film previously, for example its only mention in a recent work on contemporary film musicals saw the film dismissed as a 'rather less-acclaimed' recent success (Carroll, 2017, p.59). It is plausible that the use of Cher's star persona is a factor in this neglect.

### **'Welcome to Burlesque'**

Cher's character, Tess, is the owner of the club and choreographs the shows. As a mainly 'behind the scenes' character, she is comparable to Zidler in *Moulin Rouge!* (Luhmann, 2001). She mainly looks after her dancers, arranging them and trying to save the business, a position questioned by a dancer, Nikki, when she asks: 'what are you, my mother?'

However, Tess also performs in the show, firstly in the opening number that introduces the viewer to the dancers. 'Welcome to Burlesque' utilises Cher's star quality, as her distinctive voice and 'iconic presence' (Dickinson, 2001, p.340) are audible through the pitch range, timbre, hint of technology<sup>21</sup>, and cheeky, sexually suggestive lyrics, highlighted in Table 6. The number is styled as a tango (see discussion of tango in Chapter 4, p.67), using instruments such as piano, violin, double bass and drums to set the tone for a sexual, camp spectacle to follow. The rhythm section of the band maintains a beat that is easy for the dancers to perform to- the percussive elements certainly designed to complement the staccato movements of the dancers, while the violin adds melodic interest to complement Cher's voice, weaving in and out of the texture throughout. This performance is authentic to both Cher's performing persona, and the aesthetic and style of the fictional club- the setting of the Burlesque Lounge legitimising the sexualised performance.

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<sup>21</sup> The technology used is almost certainly auto-tune. The manipulation of her voice is audible, although less pronounced than in numbers such as 'Believe', as discussed previously. As is fitting with her film and real-world character, this shows Cher's defiance in the face of her critics.



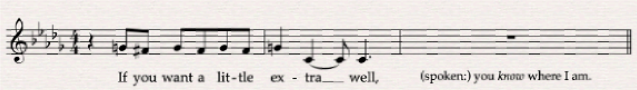
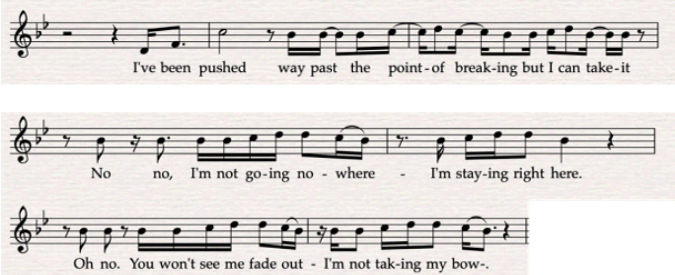
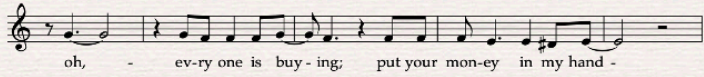

Cher as Tess		
Scene	Welcome to Burlesque	You Haven't Seen the Last of Me
Emotion Portrayed	Pride, desire	Resilience, determination, optimism
Vocal Timbre	Cheeky, enticing, hint of something technological- maybe auto-tune	Emotional, full, rich
Vocal Quality	Smooth, powerful, occasionally breathy, some suggestive spoken lines: 	Smooth, powerful, shows some strain- particularly in the higher registers: 
Pitch Range	F# <sub>3</sub> -C# <sub>5</sub>	Ab <sub>3</sub> -D <sub>5</sub>
Melody	Rhythmic, static, more percussive than melodic: 	More static than a CA arguably would be, no real melisma. Mainly descending, upward passages take effort: 

Table 6: Burlesque: A Comparison of Cher's Vocal Performances (Transcribed by the author).

This performance serves to introduce the viewer to the style of the show, but also to its voiceless cast, as Tess introduces the girls individually with a small quip about their performing persona. For example: 'Jesse keeps you guessing, so cool and statuesque'. This line is significant as it likens Jesse- a very minor character who is not referred to again in the course of the film- to a statue, an inanimate object whose only purpose is to be looked at. It is also a reference to her height and slim, perfectly sculpted body, again sexualising and objectifying her. This way of talking about women is particularly significant in that it comes from a woman also, and that woman herself is never talked about in this way during the film- and indeed, we would believe it is a way she would not accept to be spoken about. This is a theme throughout the film of an 'us and them' dynamic between the agent Ali and Tess and the voiceless dancers, which I will return to discuss later in this chapter.

It could be argued this is no different to Zidler's handling of the Diamond Dogs in *Moulin Rouge!*, however, the stricter look but do not touch environment of the Burlesque Lounge is more aligned to an artistic experience rather than a sexual one. Having said this, Tess definitely knows how to control the 'gaze' of the viewer- a gaze which is constantly shown to be both male and female in the lounge audience<sup>23</sup>- and this performance highlights the sexuality of the performers through their scant costumes, body contact and intriguing blue lighting (Figure 18). It must be remembered, however, that Tess also performs this number, and is a part of this aesthetic, wearing a costume few women of 64 would brave (Figure 19), continuing to present herself as 'a triumphantly active and sexual older woman' (Dickinson, 2001, p.342). Although she allows only herself the expression of singing, Tess does put herself in the same position as her girls visually, arguably removing any accusation of pimping. Her own celebration of her body and the inclusion of women in the audience helps to position this as a kind of third wave feminist statement, rather than being straightforwardly sexist. Both aurally and visually, this performance is a celebration of unapologetic female sexuality and by pointing this out, Cher is arguably authentic to her own 'star persona' (Haywood, 2006, p.113).

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<sup>23</sup> This is certainly a conscious decision made by the director, as, even a few years earlier, this arguably would have been the domain of solely male viewers. I feel this is reflective of the target audience of the film, as it appears more palatable to a young female viewer for the audience to be both male and female.



Figure 18: *Burlesque*: Burlesque Dancers, draped bodies, blue lighting (Antin, 2010)



Figure 19: *Burlesque*: Tess's revealing costume (Antin, 2010)

### **'You Haven't Seen the Last of Me'**

While 'Welcome to Burlesque' is a cheeky introduction to the world of the Lounge, Cher's other number hits a more powerfully emotional note. 'You Haven't Seen the Last of Me' is a power ballad Tess sings at arguably her lowest point in the film. This number is stripped back in comparison with the other numbers in the film, featuring only Tess, singing to an empty club, sitting on a single chair, in the light of a single spotlight (Figure 20). The staging is reminiscent of Cabaret, and the inclusion of the chair is a striking addition, 'a staple of interwar burlesque and cabaret, [which] also acknowledges Orientalist dance forms such as those documented in early belly dance films' (McGee, 2012, p.211). Traditional Burlesque chair dance movements include: 'circling the chair, sitting down on it and changing positions

on it' which is taken to another level by the Pussycat Dolls<sup>24</sup> who also incorporate 'the opening of legs, shuddering toned-torsos, and standing on the chair' ((Miller, 2007) in McGee, 2012, p.227). This arguably shows a generational divide between Cher and Aguilera also, as the different use of the chair is highlighted between 'Express' and 'You Haven't Seen the Last of Me'. Cher's performance here certainly utilises the former elements of the chair dance, as she sits, straddling the chair, and stands, but nothing more sexualised than that. Indeed, it could be argued that this is a deliberate attempt to de-sexualise the chair dance, as the content of the song does not fit with an erotic spectacle.

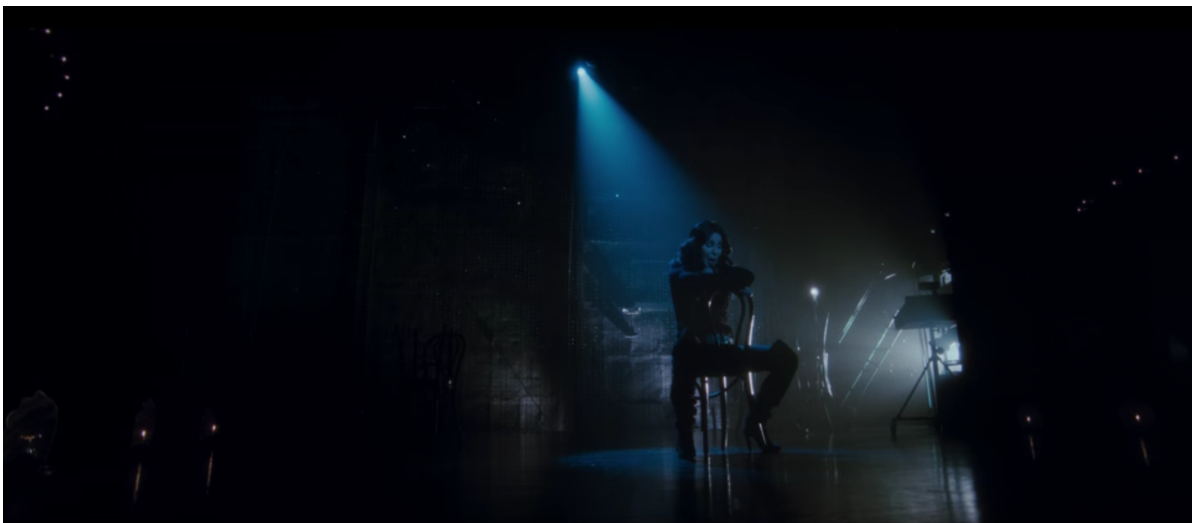


Figure 20: *Burlesque*: Tess's performance of 'You Haven't Seen the Last of Me', intimate staging (Antin, 2010)

The intimacy of the performance shows that we are viewing her innermost private feelings, rather than a showy erotic spectacle. The opening particularly promotes this mood, as she is accompanied only by piano, and even when other instruments do join, the position of Cher's vocals in the mix keeps the feeling of intimacy. Intimacy is key, in Jarman's opinion, to the production of tension, and therefore camp (2010, p.201). The viewer feels a connection to Tess and her struggle, and wants things to work out well for her.

A comparison of this song and 'Bound to You' is interesting, as Cher and Aguilera's vocal styles are shown to be very different, even when portraying similar emotions. Strikingly, the

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<sup>24</sup> The links between the aesthetic and choreography of this film and the Pussycat Dolls music videos are numerous, potentially owing to the fact that their founder member, Robin Antin, is the sister of *Burlesque*'s director, Steven Antin.

pair never sing together. Touching moments are shared in the backstage area but never in performance- a decision I believe was made so that the two singers are never compared to each other, but instead are appreciated for their separate styles. This could also be a decision to deny the viewer the 'high point' the duet provides in Altman's model of the classic movie musical (1989, pp.16-27), so as to present this as a clearly updated, contemporary version of a classic style. Their successes at conveying emotion are achieved differently, as Cher sings more syllabically, unreliant on the chromatic melisma Aguilera is so famous for. The notorious characteristics of the artists are being passed on to their characters. For example, the way Cher expresses emotion is more timbral, emphasised by vibrato on certain notes, and the obvious effort she puts in to singing in the higher registers. This powerful, distinctive, female tenor voice is symbolic of a femininity that is strong and active. Cher also serves an aural contrast to Aguilera's voice. The remarkably low pitch of her voice presents Cher as more of a maternal, older woman, as this is how low female voices are associated historically within opera.

Aurally, this emotional performance portrays Tess's resilience, determination and optimism, as well as vulnerability, as the lyrics speak of her will to 'get up again' because 'you haven't seen the last of me'. Despite this positive outlook, this is going to be a battle, the key of F minor setting a tone of melancholy from the beginning. The melody is mostly descending, representing the downward spiral she finds herself in, but the upward moving passages come in steps with frequent downward movements too, showing that the journey back to the top is going to take effort (Table 6 & Figure 21). This example also shows Tess's self-belief, as she knows she is stronger than people who count her out.

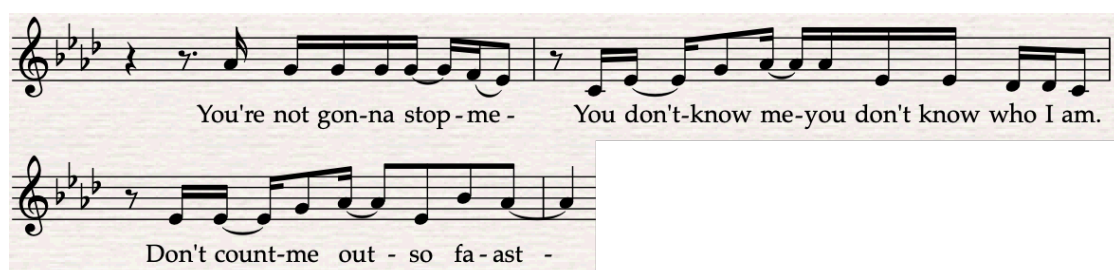


Figure 21: *Burlesque: Mostly descending melody (Transcribed by the author)*

The wide vocal range (Table 6) further represents the ups and downs of her journey, as the extremes highlight emotion and vulnerability, but also passion and resilience. This performance is designed to show the power and determination of an older woman who has been knocked down for doing something she truly believes in- remarkably reminiscent of Cher's own journey in the music industry, post-'Believe'. Today, Cher is certainly being rewarded for this later success. Her popularity is only increasing, as can be seen by her recent world tour, coming from her appearance in another movie musical, *Mamma Mia! Here We Go Again* (Parker, 2018), where her character arguably steals the show at the very end.

The two numbers Cher performs in the film show how her vocal style is adaptable to suit the situation and the character she is trying to portray. By comparing 'Welcome to Burlesque' and 'You Haven't Seen the Last of Me', it is clear that Cher's technical vocal style does not materially change, however the emotional expression is portrayed through timbre. The cheeky and enticing sound of 'Welcome to Burlesque' is very different to the emotionally charged, full, rich sound of 'You Haven't Seen the Last of Me'. I would argue that, as was the case with Satine in *Moulin Rouge!*, Tess's public and private performing personas are shown to be different, but in this case, both are firmly rooted in the performing persona of Cher.

### Christina Aguilera: Beautiful People, Distinctive Voices

Like Cher, Christina Aguilera has a very distinctive singing voice. Also, like Cher, her voice has garnered both praise and derision from fans and music critics. Her vocal chromatic acrobatics require an enormous amount of skill and virtuosity, producing powerful, emotive performances that often amaze the listener. However, her critics -in this case, Bicknell<sup>22</sup>- argue that her performances are left feeling 'insincere' (2018, p.88), because she focuses more on the display of her own vocal prowess than the message she should be trying to express. The article explores instances of 'oversinging', defined as: 'liberal use of melisma'

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<sup>22</sup> Bicknell's article is on the topic of oversinging more generally, but her observations on the reception of Aguilera's 2011 Super Bowl National Anthem performance are certainly relatable to this film- as the style is argued to be unsuitable for that particular occasion. Her academic interests include the philosophy and aesthetics of music.

and taking ‘considerable liberties with the song’s rhythm’ (Bicknell, 2018, p.85). As this style is utilised heavily by Aguilera, is she therefore being criticised for sounding different to how women are supposed to sound, and is this the same negative attention Cher receives for her use of technology? I would argue that this is a reasonable comparison, and would further argue that this is a comparison particularly relevant to the film *Burlesque*, as the two singers are the main characters and the main narrative follows the performing baton being passed from Cher to Aguilera. Other artists that are placed in the same ‘oversung’ category as Aguilera include Mariah Carey, Whitney Houston and Céline Dion, posing the question as to why Aguilera is not always treated with the same reverence as these women. Oversinging can also be described as a display of virtuosity. These techniques are difficult to learn and master, and yet the performers who can achieve these vocal feats are not treated the same way as a classically virtuosic performer. This is arguably down to the popular music aesthetic, which privileges sounds of ‘ease’ and natural talent as opposed to something that sounds practiced and difficult to replicate.

Although the Super Bowl performance specifically referred to in Bicknell’s article took place after the film was made, the criticism is still highly relevant as it could also be viewed as a criticism of her entire performing persona, as is readily on show in *Burlesque*. Bicknell describes Aguilera’s oversinging as an attempt to ‘draw attention to herself... and away from the song’s function’, giving an impression of selfishness and disregard for other performers. In *Burlesque*, we certainly see this in practice, as Ali overpowers the rest of the company with both her physical and musical performance, and she clearly overpowers the old star of the show, Nikki, who is no longer allowed to perform. Is it selfish of Ali to accept this role? Or is she just a strong independent woman who has gone after what she wanted, worked ‘hard’ for it and has finally got what she deserves? Bicknell describes this type of self-promotion as a ‘moral error’ (2018, p.87), a highly problematic description.

A final observation made by Bicknell is that ‘what counts as “appropriate” expression (ie., not “overdoing it”) depends on musical genre, performance practice, public persona... and audience expectations’ (2018, p.91), and I would argue that in the case of *Burlesque*, the oversung, chromatic acrobatics of Christina Aguilera’s vocal style suit the general aesthetic of excess and extreme performativity. Presumably, she was hired specifically for this reason-

this is a continuation of her musical style rather than a departure from it. Bicknell's argument seems to rest on the fact that Aguilera's rendition of the national anthem lacked taste and tact, her style was not suited for the audience she was ultimately performing for. I would argue that her style is perfectly suited to the situation of the Burlesque lounge and so fits much better in that context- despite all the elements of her 'oversung' performance still being there.

Throughout the film, Aguilera's character Ali is constantly presented as undeserving of the things that go wrong for her, always striving to make progress despite the odds being ever stacked against her.<sup>23</sup> Throughout the film, every time she makes progress, she is knocked backwards again, from losing her Mother, to not being paid, having her room broken into and money stolen, and from not immediately fitting in with the girls she works with, to having her heart broken by Jack. The audience, therefore, feel sympathy for her, and want her to succeed. Although Ali seems to have a run of bad luck, she is not being punished for being a sexualised woman, as Satine is in *Moulin Rouge!*. Instead of facing illness and certain death, Ali gets to perform, she falls in love, she saves the club, and goes on to live happily ever after. Her vocal talent is her ticket out of trouble: the implication is that anyone that can perform like she can deserves only the best.

Ali is presented as a ditsy blonde, a beautiful person, but also a strong person. Her determination to become a Burlesque dancer sees her practicing wherever she can, and even revising the history of Burlesque- albeit by looking only at pictures (Figure 22). After her stint as waitress, Ali finally gets the opportunity to audition to dance, and successfully secures the job. At first, this means doing as the rest of the girls do, dancing and lip synching to pre-existing songs such as 'Tough Lover' (Etta James), however, sabotage by Nikki forces Ali to sing in order to finish the performance.<sup>24</sup> Once Ali's singing voice has been heard, Tess decides she must rewrite her show to star Ali's unbelievable talent, as 'they'll come to hear her sing'. The reworked show includes more covers of songs: 'But I am a Good Girl' and 'Guy What Takes His Time' are cheeky, provocative and well suited to the style, as discussed in

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<sup>23</sup> Strikingly similar to Aguilera's own backstory as described by Mary Anne Donovan (2010, p.ix).

<sup>24</sup> Female competition is also a theme in the film *Showgirls*, although set in a much more sordid narrative (Verhoeven, 1995).



cue sheets (Appendix B1 and B2); but also includes original performances by Christina Aguilera.

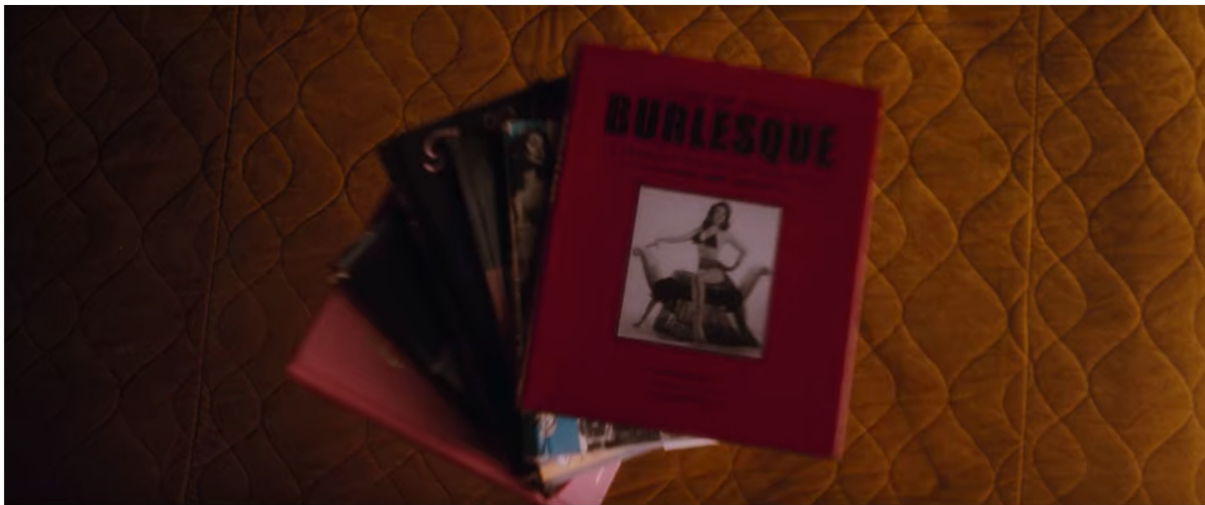


Figure 22: *Burlesque*: 'Books' (pictures) Ali uses to research *Burlesque* (Antin, 2010)

The sound of Ali's voice prompts a comment from another dancer, Coco, a black woman, who states: 'who knew any white chick could sing like that', feeding the argument that 'melisma and other vocal embellishment is a misguided attempt by white singers to sound "black"' (Bicknell, 2018, p.88). However, both of these comments could be described as narrow-minded, as musical styles are developed over many years, through collaboration and diversity between black and white musicians who copy, learn from, and inspire one another. For example, by the mid 1930s, Anette Hanshaw and Bing Crosby are examples of artists who 'thoroughly studied and assimilated the new markers of blackness' in order to produce a popular sound (Stras, 2007, p.217).

For many critics, the problem with Aguilera is that she does not look how people believe she should, based on how she sounds, and therefore she must be pretending to be someone she is not. She herself claims that: "I wouldn't be questioned [about my heritage] if I looked more stereotypically Latina... whatever that is" (Huffpost, 2012). This was also true of The Boswell sisters in the 1920s and 30s, who were 'the first white singers convincingly to "sound black"' (Stras, 2007, p.208). 'The Boswell Sisters grew up in an era in which the impersonation of blacks by whites was a commonplace of popular entertainment' (Stras, 2007, p.211), however this is a practice that never takes place today. Any attempt to appropriate another culture is seriously frowned upon, which has led to criticism for Aguilera, for appearing to appropriate a Latino heritage people believe she does not authentically belong to. For example, she has been highly criticised for recording albums in Spanish- a language she does not speak fluently (Huffpost, 2012). In the case of The Boswell Sisters, their cultural authenticity was arguably less problematic than it has been during Aguilera's career, because they were not as visible, performing via radio and records as opposed to live performing and film. Stras claims that 'for white female performers during the first years of the twentieth century, the perceived blackness of a performance resided... in a physical embodiment- a combination of "discrete physical, comic, aural, linguistic, and sexual cues"' (2007, p.212). It is the linking of 'blackness' with 'sexual cues' here that is particularly significant, as racial otherness is linked both aurally and physically to sexuality- links that are consistently made throughout *Burlesque*.

### **'Express'**

Following two cover performances from historic burlesque acts (Table 5), 'Express' is the first original performance by Christina Aguilera. This performance is a feisty celebration of female sexuality, promoting an unapologetic display of performing female bodies. Ali's costume has suggestive hand-shaped decorations on both the bust and bottom, designed to draw the attention (Figure 23). As discussed previously, the use of chairs in this scene is also more in keeping with a modern Burlesque style, pioneered by Robin Antin and the Pussycat Dolls, as the chair becomes a platform on which the dancers can unashamedly exhibit their bodies. Visually, this performance is also a reference to the stage or movie version of Kander and Ebb's *Cabaret* (1966), as the use of revealing costume and particularly the chairs

could be described as a homage to 'Mein Herr' (See Figure 24). The lyrics of 'Express' are also defiant and promote 'love, sex, ladies no regrets'. Both the visual and audible elements of this performance therefore promote female sexual confidence.

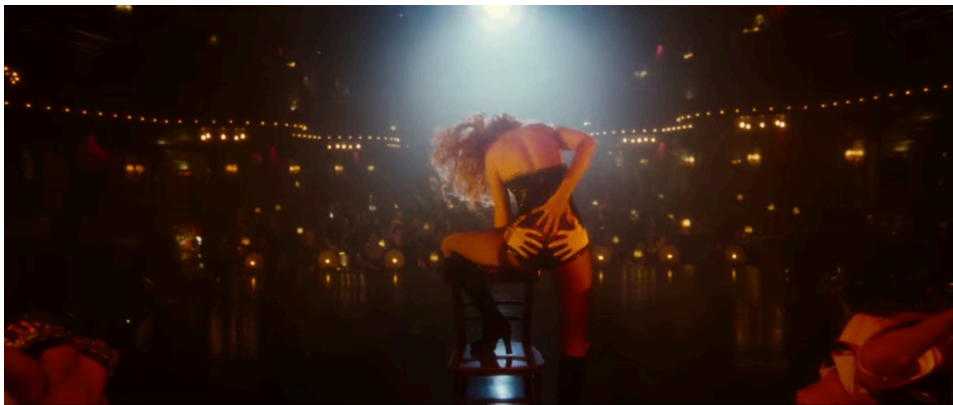


Figure 23: *Burlesque*: Ali's Suggestive Costume (Antin, 2010)



Figure 24: *Cabaret*: Liza Minnelli's 'Mein Herr' performance (Fosse, 1972)

The accompaniment to this performance is particularly striking, as the low, intimate vocal of Christina Aguilera is joined initially by a sultry saxophone and finger clicks. The instrumental



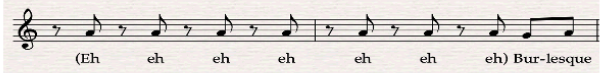


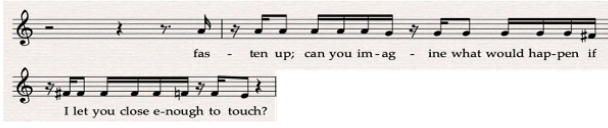

Christina Aguilera as Ali		
Scene	Express	Bound to You
Emotion Portrayed	Defiance, pride	Pain, fear
Vocal Timbre	Full, powerful, also some breathy moments- sound like panting: 	Full, rich timbre, occasional audible strain in emotional moments: 'If you walk away, I will suffer tonight' 'I am terrified to love for the first time'
Vocal Quality	Lots of spoken lines- reinforcing the image of owning and celebrating sexuality: 	Powerful, despite vulnerability- her voice is strong both at the top and bottom of the range: 
Pitch Range	2 Octaves E <sub>3</sub> – E <sub>5</sub>	2 Octaves E <sub>3</sub> -E <sub>5</sub>
Melody	Static melody, percussive, better to dance to: 	Mostly Downwards, melisma used to highlight pain and anguish: 

Table 7: Burlesque: A Comparison of Christina Aguilera's Vocal Performances (Transcribed by the author)

### **'Bound to You'**

Ali's most emotional performance of the film is undoubtedly the original song 'Bound to You' (Christina Aguilera & Sia Furler, 2010) which occurs at arguably her most vulnerable point in the narrative. After opening her heart to admit Jack, who had also just split from his own fiancée, Natalie, this song almost asks what could possibly happen next. As we know from the loss of her mother, she is used to losing the things she loves. The song opens with a gentle piano accompaniment, mirroring the tender way Jack touches her hair and skin, kisses her neck and looks into her eyes. As this continues, strings are added that swell underneath the piano and add an emotional level that makes the viewers heart swell- they are hopeful Jack will be Ali's ticket to happiness.

When the scene moves from the bedroom to the stage, Ali's appearance is shown to be more classically beautiful than the pretty but sexy image seen previously (Figure 26). Again, the staging is typical of film noir and of the femme fatale performing the torch song. The dress is also in a 1940s style. Indeed, the whole performance is an emotional expression of fear and love, a performance of her own inner conflict. Unlike Tess's 'You Haven't Seen the Last of Me', this is performed to an audience, however, regular flashbacks to Ali in bed with Jack provide intimacy and context for the message. The vocal performance is full in timbre, but frequent vocal breaks show the emotion she is feeling, shown by the words in blue in Table 7. These show that her emotions are linked to love and loss, and her fear that the latter always follows the former.



*Figure 26: Burlesque: Ali's classic beauty as opposed to sexual beauty (Antin, 2010)*

The pitch range of two octaves shows the emotional expression she is trying to achieve, as, as was also the case in Tess's emotional performance, the breaks are much more audible at the extremes. The extreme low of the pitch E<sub>3</sub> is in fact the lowest note of Christina Aguilera's recognised vocal range of four octaves E<sub>3</sub> - E<sub>7</sub> (Donovan, 2010, p.xi). Ali's use of melisma is also utilised in this performance in order to express emotion, as well as display her vocal virtuosity, emphasising words such as 'fall', 'trust', 'time' and 'bound'. These melismatic fragments are almost always moving downwards, suggesting an overall feeling of pessimism, as things do not usually work out well for this character, she seems to be wondering what could possibly go wrong next. These fears are shown to be justified in the very next scene, where Ali is lying in bed with Jack when his fiancée Natalie returns home unexpectedly, and Jack asks Ali to leave.

As previously discussed with Cher, and as is shown in Table 7 the contrast between these two performances highlights the capabilities of Aguilera's voice to portray different emotions, while maintaining her distinctive style. Aguilera's extremely strong sense of self comes across in both of these performances, despite them having very different meanings. From defiance, to vulnerability, the viewer sees, and indeed hears, how Ali's thoughts and feelings about love, and sexuality can be portrayed through the same voice.

### **The Other Dancers: They Don't Come to Hear Us Sing**

Throughout the film, the treatment of the other Burlesque dancers is somewhat troubling, as they are constantly presented as inferior. Firstly, in relation to Tess: no one in the club sings, however Tess performs the opening number herself. Secondly, in relation to Ali: once it is realised how well she can sing, the past notion of dancers not singing is thrown out, in favour of a show that stars Ali and relegates the others to backing dancers. Finally, the other dancers are inferior even to the narrative, as no performance of theirs is shown all the way through, there is always an interruption for a narrative purpose. Their performances are arguably more traditionally showy, fetishized and misogynistic than the performances in which Ali or Cher appear to have control.

While 'Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend' begins as a display of the skill of dancing and lip synching, the authenticity is quickly interrupted by a show of off stage bickering between the dancers, followed by a cut to a performance in Ali's imagination. She imagines herself singing the song on a rotating platform, arguably less sexual, but more dramatic, showing how suitable her voice is for this type of performance. This number particularly shows how easily Ali can take away the spotlight from these non-audible girls, because of the power of her singing voice. The relegation of the original performance is emphasised by the contrasting, heightened professionalism of Ali's imagined performance. The appearance of this number in yet another movie musical about female sexuality is interesting as even in its more modern context, it clearly still holds associations filmmakers want to exploit. I would argue this version is even more provocative than Nicole Kidman's rendition in *Moulin Rouge!*, as the costume is reduced even further to literal underwear and heels (Figure 27).



Figure 27: Burlesque: 'Diamonds Are A Girls Best Friend' Performance (Antin, 2010)

The next number the dancers perform is Megan Mullally's 'Long John Blues'. Again, this performance is lip synched, and features the original star of the show, and the character set up as Ali's professional rival, Nikki. As is shown in Figure 28, Nikki wears a black lace costume for this number, while the other three girls wear white, suggesting a dichotomy of good and bad girls. The 'bad' girl, 'sings' a song full of inuendo, while making sexualised movements and suggestive facial expressions, all designed to intrigue the viewer, and, in the case of the on-screen audience, make them laugh. This very audible laughter and the demographic of the audience shown is designed to neutralise the performance, making it



appear more cheeky than overtly sexual, as the crowd is filled with both young men and women.



Figure 28: Burlesque: 'Long John Blues' Performance (Antin, 2010)

The number begins in an intimate way, a single female performer in a single spotlight, accompanied by a single piano. As Jarman states, this kind of intimacy builds tension, which further aids the production of camp (2010, p.201). The breathy nature of the vocals is immediately suggestive, as it stresses the euphemisms to clarify the viewers' understanding of the lyrics. Furthermore, the octave leap on the syllable 'ev' in the line 'he answers every call' (Figure 29) cements this sexualised understanding in the viewers mind, as it arguably represents the climax of pleasure.

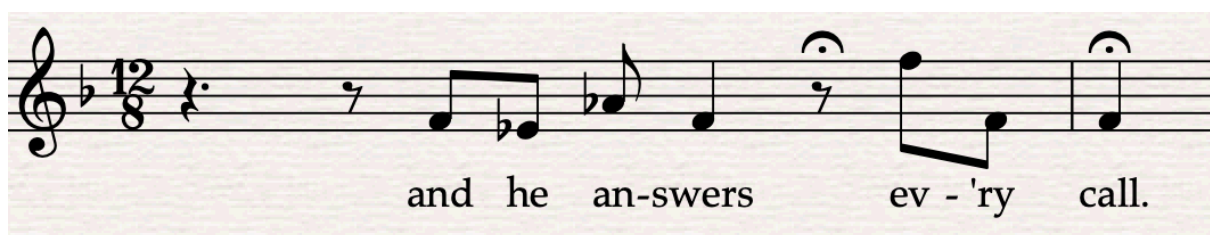


Figure 29: Burlesque: Octave leap representing sexual pleasure (transcribed by the author)

After only one minute of this performance, however, once the accompaniment begins properly, the scene cuts to Tess's office, and the narrative of the club's financial trouble. While the number is still audible in the background, it is merely there to add atmosphere and to locate the office within the club. It is no longer the viewer's focus. As a result, it is placed very low in the mix, much lower than the speaking voices of Tess, Vince and Marcus.

Although we do return to the performance once the business is concluded, it is only for the final few seconds, and does not add to the understanding of the characters, beyond reaffirming that they are nice to look at.

While the characters are shown to enjoy their work, and have an agency within that<sup>28</sup>, they are afforded no opportunity to express themselves musically, and so their minor narrative stories take on very different directions to that of Ali and Tess. Nikki, for example, is shown to have problems with drink, she is nasty to Ali and Tess throughout, and is made to leave halfway through the film (although she is welcomed back once the club has been saved). The lack of opportunities for expression by these characters shows them to be inferior to Ali's all-around spectacular talent. Their identities are, in a way, masked by their prevention from expressing what is actually going on in their lives, in the way Ali and Tess both do in 'You Haven't Seen the Last of Me' and 'Bound to You'.

Michel Chion states that: 'The mute character serves the narrative, and at the same time often plays a subservient role... He's rarely the protagonist or the crux of the plot; most often he's a secondary character' (pp.95-96). While these dancers are not technically mute- they do all speak and some have their own minor stories running alongside the main narrative- I would argue that a character in a musical who is not allowed to sing, is denied the opportunity to express themselves, and is therefore relegated to the subservient or secondary role in the same way Chion argues a mute character in classical film is treated. It is also fascinating to consider that in classical film, mute characters were often shown to be all seeing, whereas in this film, these female characters are there to be seen. Their bodies are displayed in a way that their voices are not allowed to be, making them appear objects in the narrative of the performances.

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<sup>28</sup> As described by Mclean in relation to Rita Hayworth (2011, p.175)

## The Men of The Lounge

Just as the female dancers do not vocally perform in this film, neither do the men. However, whereas the women are put in an inferior position by this, I would argue the men are portrayed as somewhat superior. The characters explored here, (Jack, Marcus and Sean) all play pivotal roles in the narrative, underpinning the journey of both Ali and Tess, without entering the performance space literally. Although the men do not perform, they do have music ascribed to them.

Marcus, the real estate tycoon, and admirer of Ali (or any girl who dances in her underwear for his entertainment), is accompanied by Alternative/Indie songs such as 'Animal' by Neon Trees (2010) and 'Fade Into You' by Mazzy Star (1993). As these songs sound quite different to the other songs on the soundtrack, they are purposely designed to make the listener weary of Marcus, and unsure of his suitability for Ali. Marcus is shown to be the bad guy in this film in several ways. Firstly, he is rich, and therefore has influence and control over other characters. He feigns interest in buying the club in order to help Tess, when in reality, he plans to knock it down and build. Secondly, he is shown to be predatory. A regular in the club, he is said to move regularly between the girls, and is only interested in Ali after hearing her sing. He is certainly the bearer of the 'male gaze' in a traditional sense, as he buys her things to make her look nice, takes her to fancy parties, and always watches her perform. However, it must be noted that Ali's apparent agency challenges any straightforward understanding of her as a passive recipient of this gaze, as she openly revels in it, and loves the attention and the pretty shoes she receives.

Jack, on the other hand, is shown to be much more suitable for Ali as he understands her, and even writes music for her. Ali initially mistakes Jack for being gay, a scene orchestrated to highlight her innocence, as opposed to any non-normative behaviour displayed on his part, except for wearing eyeliner for work. In fact, Jack is shown to have a very sculpted, muscly physique in various scenes, drawing the attention and putting his body 'on display' in a way Neale argues men have always been subject to in this genre (1992, p.186).

Throughout the film, Jack's compositions are gentle keyboard pieces that create a calm atmosphere for his apartment, however, the final performance, 'Show Me How You Burlesque', is very different. This vibrant, upbeat piece was specifically written by Jack for Ali to perform in the club, and shows how he has imagined her dancing within his work. It is an excessive, camp spectacle that shows the joy of all of the elements of the narrative coming together. This performance certainly is designed to satisfy his male gaze, as it is extremely sexualised, and shows the girls flaunting their bodies in extremely suggestive ways.

This performance marks the climax of the film, the extremely excessive, camp spectacle that signifies happy endings for everyone. Ali and Tess have saved the club and secured its long-term future, Nikki has returned to the Burlesque Lounge family, and Ali and Jack have made up. The song is a showcase of Aguilera's vocal and physical prowess, utilising her vocal chromaticism to the best potential. This triumphant number is melodically quite static; however, the rhythmic and percussive features make it a perfect number to dance to. Ali's melismatic flairs certainly add interest to the aural aspect, but it is arguably the visual elements that make this performance the climax of the film, returning to the classic musical taste for expense and prestige.

The culmination of the film, and the subsequent coming together of the heterosexual couple along with their musical styles, is certainly reminiscent of Altman's theory. Although Jack is not a performer, I would argue this song represents the moment characters fall in love, as their styles assimilate in that he has written it and she performs it. However, despite obeying this classic feature of the movie musical, the style of the performance and the narrative surrounding it is certainly a modern update.

The final male character I have identified is Sean, the openly gay<sup>29</sup> costume designer, and Tess's best friend. Although Sean does not perform, he is central to the aesthetic of the film, namely the feature of camp excess. Although visually he does not dress in a flamboyant

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<sup>29</sup> 'Openly gay' in that this is not just inferred through his role as costume designer, speech, or mannerisms, but in that his relationships with both men and women are also explored during the course of the narrative.

way, he fits in backstage as one of the girls, and when he is showing Ali through all of the costumes she will need for the show, he is accompanied by Madonna's 'Ray of Light'. As previously discussed, Madonna is famous as a diva, and gay-male icon, which can also be said of both Cher (Dickinson, 2001, pp.343-344) and Christina Aguilera (Donovan, 2010, p.50-54). The close association of the gay male character with this style of music and these characters is clearly reinforcing the previously discussed notion that sexuality is closely linked to musical preference, if not, in this case, performance. Tess's reliance on Sean particularly shows how valuable a character he is, as he is a problem solver and voice of reason- arguably the most grounded character in the entire film. This is a refreshing position to see a gay character occupy in the movie musical, as historically, the 'pansy character' was subject to derision (as discussed in Chapter 2) or as 'the source of many comedic pleasures' (Doty, 2000, p.81).

## Conclusion

Although the men play non-performing roles in this film, they are still crucial to the narrative. It could be argued that despite their lack of performance, they are the ones that run the show, the puppet-masters without whom, the show could not go on. This view of the men in charge of the beautiful dancing girls, but not joining in the performing elements of a musical, could be problematic, as the girls are objectified, and made to dance for the pleasure of men, satisfying Mulvey's concept of 'male gaze' in wider cinema in general. However, this is handled very carefully by the film's producers, and as a result, the film does not feel like an inappropriate exhibition. The film-world audience is carefully shown to contain both men and women, and the shows are put together as a work of artistic entertainment, as opposed to anything more unsavoury. Furthermore, the inclusion of incredibly strong female leads gives the female characters an authority they otherwise might not have possessed. Their ability to sing as well as dance and act arguably gives them more agency, as they satisfy more than just the eye or camera. Throughout the film, Tess and Ali are shown to stand up for themselves and get themselves out of trouble, all while maintaining their femininity and sexuality.

Both Cher and Aguilera possess diva-like personas that shine through their characters. The significance of the diva is explored by Haworth in relation to Shirley Bassey's performance of the title song 'Goldfinger' from the Bond film *Goldfinger* (Hamilton, 1964). Haworth argues that the visual title sequence of sexualised, silent trophy women is transformed by the inclusion of such a strong female vocal performance (2015, pp.159-162). This is achieved as 'the vocalist retains the agency of the survivor: she is a woman who desires to tell her story and vocalise her experience' (2015, p.161), and this is a theme that is certainly explored in *Burlesque* also- both characters express their joys and their troubles through song. As was arguably the case for Bassey, the use of Aguilera and Cher's voice and diva stereotype in the *Burlesque* soundtrack elevates it beyond the narrative, instead becoming an expression of female empowerment and defiance in the face of adversity. The significance of the diva role is to take back agency for a character the viewer already knows to be strong and independent outside of the film world, making it an authentic performance, and removing the need for the viewer to suspend their disbelief. The performances seem natural, thanks to the setting of the lounge, and the performers are already known to possess extraordinary vocal talent so the tension between authenticity and performance is somewhat removed. The unapologetic nature of this film is refreshing, as the powerful female characters are not punished for expressing their sexual identity, instead, they are rewarded and praised.

# Chapter 6

## Conclusion

Movie musicals remain an important genre of film, and have begun to be more inclusive of different gender and identity types. These contemporary case studies explore the identity of female performers, and particularly focus on whether female sexuality is celebrated or punished. Although both films were made after 2000, *Moulin Rouge!* was set 100 years before this, explaining the more old-fashioned attitudes to female sexuality and purity. Although the themes explored are arguably more feminine, both films were directed by men. *Burlesque*, however, feels like a film that has benefited from more female input. From choreography to the lead roles themselves, the influence of women in *Burlesque* is clear to see, as opposed to *Moulin Rouge!* which is a film about a woman, told from the point of view of many men. As these films seem to differ in these ways, they have been examined through the elements that do draw them together: their portrayal of identity through soundtrack.

Both *Moulin Rouge!* and *Burlesque* score the sexual woman with music of a diva- Marilyn Monroe, Madonna, and Cher and Christina Aguilera themselves- linking this identity type with the performing woman in general. The visually overt display of sexuality is an update on the classic style, as opposed to being only hinted at and suggested aurally. While this goes classically wrong for Satine in *Moulin Rouge!* (her eventual death could be read as a punishment for the morally corrupt lifestyle she has led), this is celebrated in a contemporary way in *Burlesque*, where the sexual characters are rewarded for performing in this way. The vocalicity of these characters further emphasises their sexuality, as certain vocal sounds are contingent in both films.

In keeping with a classic movie musical, both films unite a male-female couple, showing that heterosexuality remains the privileged position, classically shown through the assimilation of musical styles. Although Sean and Mark are brought together in *Burlesque*, it is momentary and by no means a main narrative thread. It must be recognised, however, that queer characters do exist in both films, and, rather than being subtle, as was often the case

in the classic movie musical, the characters in these films are much more openly recognisable, if stereotypical. This is interestingly shown through the differing use of camp between the two films, as in *Moulin Rouge!* it is arguably used to highlight queer tendencies (See 'Like a Virgin'), whereas in *Burlesque*, it is utilised to create art and spectacle.

While both of these films root performance in the narrative, the choice of the backstage musical appears to allow the audience to maintain some illusion of reality, as rehearsals and shows allow for spontaneous performance in a more natural, less jarring way. The main characters are performers, dancers, artists etc. (this gives the professionalism of the performances authenticity), whereas the bad characters (The Duke and Marcus) are not, this distinction marking them from the outset as different. Throughout *Moulin Rouge!*, the Duke is ridiculed and throughout *Burlesque*, the presence of Marcus makes the viewer uncomfortable, as they are characters that do not seem to fit the narrative. The distinction between performers and non-performers is therefore clear, however, it is possible to take this a level further, and argue that there is also a difference between a performer, and a performer that can sing. In *Burlesque*, this is clear through the foregrounding of Tess and Ali's experiences compared to the other characters, and arguably in *Moulin Rouge!*, the preferential treatment of Satine compared to every other female character.

In these films more generally, a clear difference is the use of actors versus singers in the main roles. The use of actors who can sing in *Moulin Rouge!* adds to the spectacle, as the viewer watches McGregor and Kidman in roles they maybe did not expect to see them in, whereas in *Burlesque*, the vocal talents of Cher and Aguilera are already well known, to the point the viewer is arguably more invested in the actual narrative, rather than distracted by an unexpected actors performance. This could also be reversed, however, as it could be argued the use of singers as actors is more distracting within the context of the internal action. Given the multiple layers of narrative at work in this film, it could be argued that this immersion was never the intention - the audience is supposed to see Cher and Aguilera, even though they are playing set roles. The role of celebrity and star quality in these films certainly adds to the importance of the soundtrack, as the distinction between amateur and professional is highlighted, especially through vocality and vocal quality. This is further emphasised by the use of pre-existing music in *Moulin Rouge!*, compared to the mostly



original music in *Burlesque*<sup>25</sup>, much of which was written by Aguilera herself. While the listener in *Moulin Rouge!* is distracted by recognisable songs, the way in which they are performed, and the often-complex context behind why these songs were chosen, *Burlesque* allows the listener to experience a style and aesthetic that is authentic to a Burlesque lounge, to Cher and Aguilera, and to an unashamed display of female sexuality. As a result, this has led to different approaches for the analysis of the two soundtracks, focusing more on the vocal qualities of Cher and Aguilera, and arguably more on the real-world context of the songs used in *Moulin Rouge!*, as composed and compiled scores respectively.

The final aspects of identity examined here are race and culture. It must be recognised that both of these films are almost exclusively white performance spaces. With the exception of Aguilera, whose 'controversial' Latina heritage is discussed in Chapter 5, all of the actors in lead roles are white. While both films do have black characters in the cast, it could be argued that this is evidence of tokenism- especially as these characters are named Le Chocolat in *Moulin Rouge!*, and Coco in *Burlesque*, clearly references to the colour of their skin. Furthermore, in their soundtracks, both of these films utilise music of 'othered' cultures to score sexuality. Both jazz and tango styles are used in key moments of the narrative when sexualised behaviours are shown to be taking place. This affiliation of another cultures music with sexuality is somewhat troubling to see taking place in a contemporary film, however, the ways in which it is celebrated rather than condemned in *Burlesque* is refreshing.

While this project looks at the soundtracks of two similar contemporary movie musicals, there is room for so much more exploration in this area. Other films such as *Mamma Mia* and *Mamma Mia: Here We Go Again* explore similar themes through a star cast, but differ slightly in that they utilise a soundtrack compiled of the music of one band exclusively. It is interesting how identity is explored in the soundtrack, when the choice of songs is arguably more limited. This area could further be expanded into the recent trend for musical biopics

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<sup>25</sup> The pre-existing music used in this film is mainly from many years ago, and, I would argue, from before the consciousness of the viewer, therefore, any identifying affiliations to these specific songs are unlikely. It is likely, however, that the listener will harbour affiliations for the style of the music, as it is nostalgic and contains themes relevant to this day.

such as *Bohemian Rhapsody* and *Rocketman*, compiled soundtracks which explore the journey of self-discovery of the artists. These films can arguably be more explicit in their use of music, as these songs literally relate to the action on screen, and have deeply personal associations to the characters, as well as affiliating associations for the audience.

Films such as *La La Land* and *The Greatest Showman* have completely original, composed soundtracks, and use predominantly actors in lead roles.<sup>26</sup> This area could be explored as a more direct comparison to films of the classical Hollywood era, where composed scores were the standard. Exploring how the presentation of identity has developed over time in films with clear stylistic similarities would allow an understanding of the journey the genre has undertaken over the last 90 years.

Another direction this research could take is the exploration of more recent original stage musicals such as *Hamilton* (Miranda, 2015), where the story of one of America's founding fathers is retold from a contemporary perspective, using modern styles of music including rap and hip-hop. *Hamilton* further prides itself on its diverse cast, and its accessibility, as in 2020, it was released onto the streaming platform Disney+, where it could be viewed by a wide and varied audience who may not traditionally visit a theatre. While the model of streaming services such as this improves access, they still remain expensive and out of reach for many people. The role of the music and the performance of identity in live performance such as this is another area for possible future research. The immediacy of a live performance gives a more first-hand (and arguably authentic) experience of the performance of identity, as, as in real life, these actors have one chance to portray their message.

The allowance for a multi-disciplinary approach within this project shows how vital an area this is for further research, as the benefits to understanding are wide-reaching. The fields of contemporary film, identity, and music scholarship are all utilised in order to investigate the way films are presented to us in a modern setting. This is an area of study with a wide scope

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<sup>26</sup> Hugh Jackman in *The Greatest Showman* is a professionally trained singer, but he mostly works as an actor who can sing.

for continuation, as new movie musicals appear regularly, and all appear to challenge one or more aspect of the classical style. In doing so, they often portray different identities, and regularly reinvent ways of expressing this through the soundtrack. Whether using pre-existing or original music, actors or singers, the contemporary backstage movie musical has begun to explore these themes.

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## Appendix A

Time	Music	Shot/ Editing	Sound	Story	Other Details	Significance
42:45	One Day I'll Fly Away, Randy Crawford, 1980-quiet, subtle accompaniment, makes the performance feel much more intimate.	Satine sings standing in her dark room, the shadows fall across her face making her look hidden and vulnerable	Satine's caged birds tweeting.  Satine's singing has a breathy quality, the emotion is audible in her voice	This is the first we see of Satine's emotions, the private setting reveals her true self. Sings of her longing to escape.	While it is likely this song was chosen for its imagery of the caged bird, hoping to fly away, further connections may be made to the original song.	Choice of song is significant because of all the references to birds made throughout the film so far. She swings on a perch; she is referred to by Zidler as 'pigeon' etc.; and she even owns a caged bird.
43:20	Accompaniment builds	She sees Christian, there seems to be some kind of communicative looks between them	Does she see Christian as a means of escape, or is she singing about being free and being able to make decisions for herself?			
44:33	Climax of the performance	Satine stands still and the camera swings around her, a reversal of how Diamonds was filmed in an earlier scene		She has climbed to the top of the elephant and sings into the night. The top of the elephant is a significant location because it seems to be removed from the room where her 'work' takes place. It's almost an escape for her.		The emotional style of this song seems to suit her better than the diva style performances she gave earlier in the film- this is more like the real Satine. The private performance allows us to see a side her performing persona could never get away with.

Appendix A1: Moulin Rouge!: 'One Day I'll Fly Away' Cue Sheet

Time	Music	Shot/ Editing	Sound	Story	Other Details	Significance
01:05:18	Come What May, Baerwald and Gilbert, 2001.	Begins as a duet between Satine and Christian, shot moves between the two of them, but even when the shot moves to the rehearsal setting, and more people are involved, the camera still picks out the two of them as if they are singing directly to each other. They share private and knowing looks during the public rehearsal.	Begins softly sung, emotional, a private conversation that is later performed publicly. The performance becomes more theatrical.	Christian writes a song for Satine as something they can both hold on to when their love doesn't seem like it can survive. The secret song is technically for the show, but really represents a message of hope.  The song comes from Christian's feeling of jealousy, because he believes Satine has spent the night with another man- her reputation overwhelms his love.	The only original song in the film, the only song which no audience member would have pre-existing associations with.  The song was not however intended for this film, but another of Luhrmann's 'Red Curtain Trilogy' films, Shakespeare's <i>Romeo + Juliet</i> (1996).	This is the only song in the film that belongs directly to these characters and their story. With no pre-existing associations to draw from, the song exists as a snapshot of the love and loss in this particular story.  They promise to love each other till their 'dying day' which is significant because they make this promise despite neither of them knowing how soon that will come.
01:08:33	Come What May	See Satine outside of the rehearsal, showing signs of her illness again.	Instrumental interlude in the middle, with soft piano playing.  Several conversations occur, including Nini telling the Duke that the Courtesan is choosing the writer rather than the sitar player- telling him about Satine and Christian.	By the end of the song, the Duke declares the song should not go into the play, and Satine is left with no choice but to sleep with him in order to placate him and secure the safety of everyone else- her sexuality is a commodity yet again.		Despite securing the love of a good man, Satine will still not be forgiven for her lifestyle- her fate is already decided because of her morality and sexuality.  It also becomes clear that she will not secure her happy ending, even in her own play.

Appendix A2: Moulin Rouge!: 'Come What May' Cue Sheet

Time	Music	Shot/ Editing	Sound	Story	Other Details	Significance
26:29	Your Song, Elton John, 1970		Christian speaks the lyrics of the beginning of the song, while Satine speaks between every line-passionate exclamations.	Christian believes Satine wants to hear his poetry, Satine believes Christian is The Duke who wants to invest in the Moulin Rouge and turn it into a theatre. What follows is comedic scene of double entendre.	The Elton John song seems to suit the situation well, as Christian has nothing to offer her, other than his work and his love.	The scene and the use of this song is used to highlight the contrast between Christian's innocence and purity, compared to Satine's experience and exaggerated performance.
27:20	Your Song, initially unaccompanied, but piano, string and vocal accompaniment join gradually as Christian's confidence appears to be growing.	Christian turns his back, the Bohemians begin to drink to celebrate, all of the lights come on in Paris	Christian now sings for Satine, and her noise making stops.	Satine is entranced by 'the Duke'		The endearing shyness and timidity of Christian puts the audience on his side straight away, as opposed to the side of the Duke. As his confidence grows, the audience is supporting him still.
29:10	Your Song, now with even more embellished accompaniment, tenor opera singer Alessandro Safina.	Christian and Satine leap from the window of the elephant and into the clouds above Paris. They perform in a dream ballet style, with Christian re-enacting the scene from <i>Singin in the Rain</i>	Accompaniment has reached full opulence now.  The addition of the opera singing moon adds to the camp excess.	The pair are shown to be falling in love, but Satine believes she is falling for a rich Duke, not a penniless writer.	Reaches a level of excess that the original version never does, John's Your Song remains subtle throughout, but this is arguably done to better display the emotions of Christian, the process of him falling in love.	Significance of the dream ballet is that dreams are the only place this love can take place. Once they land back in the real world it all starts to go wrong.

Appendix A3: Moulin Rouge!: 'Your Song' Cue Sheet

Time	Music	Shot/ Editing	Sound	Story	Other Details	Significance
47:05	All you Need is Love, The Beatles.	On top of the Elephant, Christian is desperate for her attention.	Christian is singing but Satine is replying to him in her speaking voice. Lyrics but no accompaniment.	Satine is currently refusing to be brought to his level, won't even entertain the idea of being in love.	Lyrics fit with the Bohemian and utopian ideals promoted throughout the film.	Sign of Christian's innocence, he doesn't seem to know how the world works.
47:17	I was Made for Lovin' You, Kiss, 1979.  Accompaniment kicks in the second Christian starts to sing.		Christian and Satine's parts in this song are accompanied very differently, Christian is strong and steady where as Satine is more delicate and unsure.	Satine references the fact that she is a courtesan herself.	Song was seemed by some Kiss fans as a sell-out – potentially chosen for the fact that Christian is encouraging Satine to sell out in order to spend a night with him.	The different accompaniment of the two parts of this song could represent how the two characters behave. Christian is steady and active, whereas Satine is more delicate and passive.
47:28	One More Night, Phil Collins, 1984.		Satine is laughing at Christian now, but she is now singing replies to his entreaties... possibly showing she is coming around to his way of thinking.	She tries to insult him by saying she can't sleep with him because he can't afford her.		'Just one night' shows a slight alteration to his thinking that they should be in love... but it is a more accurate timeframe for their relationship.
47:34	Pride (In the Name of Love), U2, 1984	Christian is swinging around a pole and singing, Satine is laughing		Christian begs her to forget about her job and just spend one night with him 'in the name of love'	Another song arguably chosen for its reference to love and short periods of time.	'One Night' again, a reference to a short amount of time.

47:47	Don't Leave me This Way, Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes, 1977.	Lots of shot-reverse shot.	Everything stops when Christian says 'don't'. This section is all Christian, his profession. Much softer.	When Satine starts to walk away, he knows how to arrest her.		Shows Christian's innocence and sensitivity.
48:02	Silly Love Songs, Wings, 1976.	Satine turns away	Accompaniment turns softer, possibly reflecting Satine's softening feelings towards Christian. She is more emotional now.	Christian doesn't let her dwell on her own thoughts, he still interjects then completely flips the mood again.	Written by McCartney as a rebuff for critics accusing him of only writing silly love songs. Also the way Christian is portrayed in the film.	Satine maintains that she can't afford to love, and so it is fitting that she has had enough of silly love songs, they promise a world she can know nothing of.
48:34	Up Where we Belong, Joe Cocker and Jennifer Warnes, 1982.	Christian runs to the top of the head of the elephant, the camera spins around him. He is at the highest point, showing where he believes love is taking him.	Accompaniment and tempo pick up again. Still answering one another like a conversation, she attempts to rationalise what he is saying.		From the film 'An Officer and a Gentleman', a film about seemingly impossible love that triumphs in the end.	
48:55	Heroes, David Bowie.	They climb back down from the top of the elephant into the room.	Silence while he says 'heroes', accompaniment returns with drums as Satine considers everything that would be wrong with their relationship.	This is the song in which the tables appear to be turning, Satine and Christian sing together for the first time in the medley. Marks Satine's decent into submission.	One of several David Bowie references in the film. This song is particularly chosen for its reference to 'Just for one day'- the reality is that they won't even get that.	Also, significant because this is arguably the assimilation of musical styles, as described by Altman.



49:59	I Will Always Love You, Whitney Houston, 1992.	Spark in their eyes as the camera spins around them and they move into a dream like state.	Opera singer is back, adding the dream like extra dimension to the song.	The moment Satine decides she could love him.	From the film 'The Bodyguard' a story about love that doesn't work out in the end- but the message of the lyric still applies	
50:21	Your Song, Elton John.	Brings them back down to earth, throws the remembrance back to the first time they met.	Ends on an uncertain note, which seems unusual because the pair seem to have decided to come together, however, can be seen as foreshadowing the narrative destination.			Ending on a song the audience is already familiar with within the film world. Your Song has already represented love, with Christian 'writing' it for Satine, to Satine repeating it to the Duke... the significance of the song is tainted by previous uses.
50:55	Your Song	Camera flies across from the room in the elephant to the room at the hotel?? Where we see Toulouse sitting on the windowsill.	His voice is very shaky, as he appears to be crying, but he sings Your Song- 'how wonderful life is now you're in the world'.			Significant because the viewer can't quite be sure what Toulouse is crying about: Singing to Satine; singing to Christian for bringing about the revolution; singing to Christian because he is in love with him. The tears in his eyes suggest some kind of forbidden love, something about what he wants will never come true.

Appendix A4: Moulin Rouge!: 'Elephant Love Medley' Cue Sheet

## Appendix B

Time	Music	Shot/ Editing	Sound	Story	Other Details	Significance
53:29	'But I am a Good Girl'	Begins Ali lying on a couch, she gets up and dances around, showing off her new short blonde wig and diamante encrusted costume. Pulls a rope that reveals a wider stage she performs more provocatively on. Joined by other dancers.	Brass, Saxophone, heavy percussive beats that Ali hits with her whole body every time. Sliding chromaticism in accompaniment, Ali's voice is more innocent sounding.	Ali's first proper performance as a singer and dancer. First time we see her playing the character of the Burlesque dancer.	Originally written for topless dancing bar The Crazy Horse in Paris by Alain Bernardin, Jaques Morali et B. Vilanch. Song is full of suggestive lyrics and sexual inuendo. Meaning is that girls misbehave to get nice things, but are still expected to be 'good girls' in public. The dichotomy of men's expectations.	Although the context of the piece is highly unlikely to be known by the viewer, the aesthetic of the performance and the suggestive lyrics makes it feel like an old-fashioned cabaret act. It places the narrative firmly in an updated performance as art space. Significant in a world where 'behaving' does not necessarily carry the same meaning as in the past.
55:04		Ali appears on the bar, close up on face, looking shocked. Having climbed across the bar, Ali lies back into the arms of 4 men who carry her back to the stage.	Lots of vocalised 'ooh' and 'ah' sounds, supposed to sound like pleasure	See how well suited she is to this performance, her expressions and actions fit the narrative. She is shown to be unapologetically sexual.		

Appendix B1: Burlesque: 'But I am a Good Girl' Cue Sheet

Time	Music	Shot/ Editing	Sound	Story	Other Details	Significance
58:42	'Guy What Takes His Time'	Shot switches between stage and life. Stage performance shows her scantily clad in a string pearl bikini, interacting closely with the members of the band. She slowly loses her costume, piece by piece, left standing covered only by feather fans. Although her front is covered, we regularly see the back of her- the shape of her body is highly emphasised and sexualised.	Brass introduction accompanied by percussion. Muted brass, sliding chromaticism. When Ali starts to sing, she sings in a low and husky style, akin to that of Mae West. Comical sounds accompany losing clothes, and other physical actions. Audience constantly heard whooping, cheering, jeering, clearly heard to be both men and women.	The 'real-life' shots introduce the idea of a romance between Ali and Jack, laughing in the living room, riding Jacks motorbike and losing her headscarf.  Directly after the performance, Ali is approached by Marcus who offers her a lift home, takes her bag so she has to go with him, then refuses to take her home. This performance has attracted unwanted attention.	'I Like a Guy What Takes His Time' originally written by Ralph Raigner and released by Mae West in 1933. West was a contralto with a husky voice and enjoyed her reputation as a controversial and sexually independent woman.	This performance particularly highlights Aguilera's unapologetic sexuality, as she is practically stripped naked during the course. The highlighting and celebration of the female body encapsulates the spirit of burlesque and the way in which it is now presented as art rather than merely the seedy entertainment of men.

Appendix B2: Burlesque: 'Guy What Takes His Time' Cue Sheet