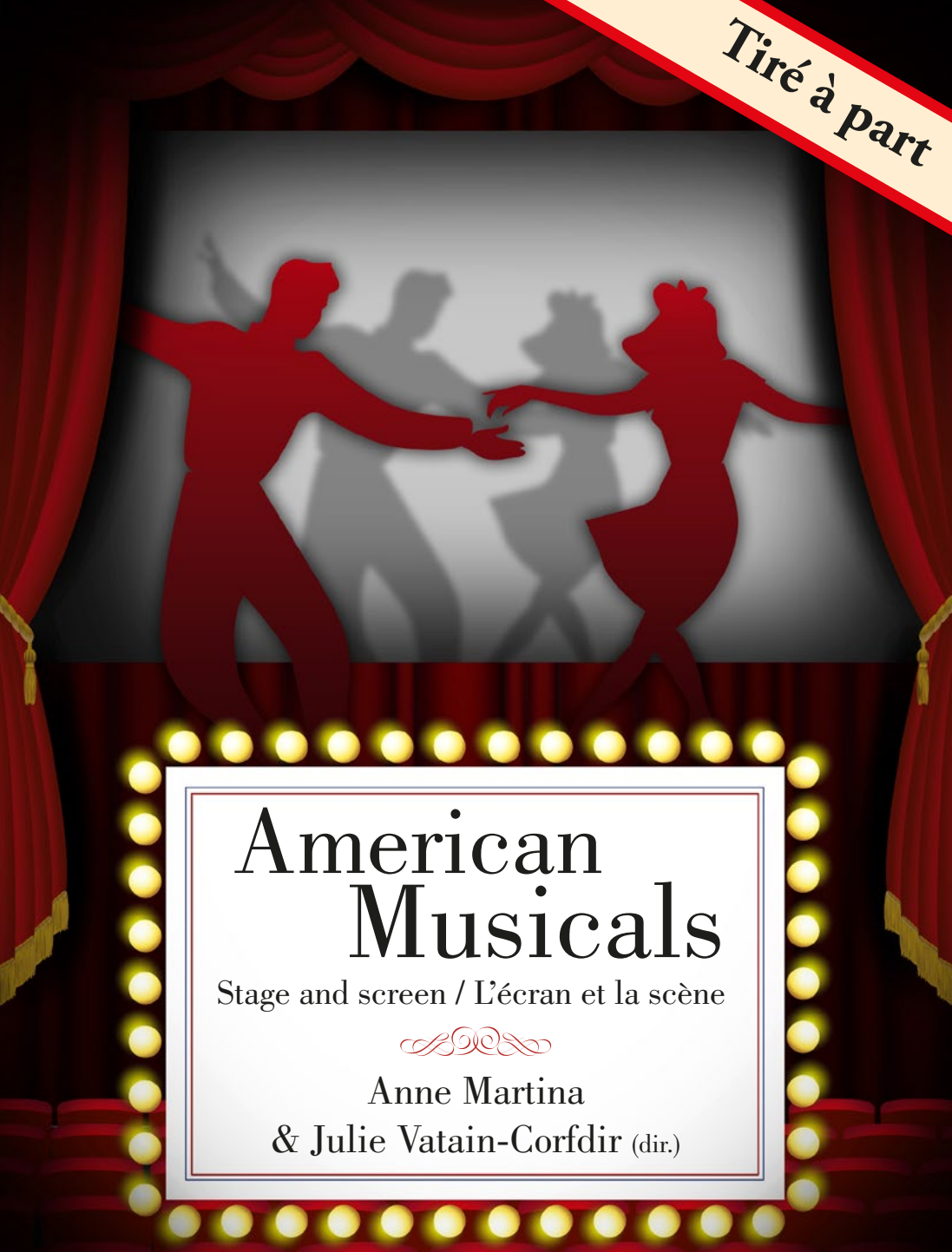

American Musicals

Stage and screen / L'écran et la scène

Anne Martina
& Julie Vatain-Corfdir (dir.)

SUP

What happens when American musicals travel from Broadway to Hollywood, from Hollywood to Broadway – or indeed to Paris? Taking its cue from the current partiality towards cross-media interaction, this collective volume aims at reassessing the role and impact of stage/screen transfers on the genre, by blending together academic and creative voices, both French and American. The bilingual chapters of the book carefully explore the musical, dramatic and choreographic repercussions of transposition techniques, evidencing the cinematographic rewriting of theatrical processes from Lubitsch's screen operettas to Fosse's *Cabaret*, or tracking movie-inspired effects on stage from *Hello, Dolly!* to *Hamilton.*

The focus being at once aesthetic and practical, equal attention has been paid to placing performances in a critical framework and to setting off their creative genesis. Musicals are approached from the varied angles of dance, theater, film and music scholarship, as well as from the artist's viewpoint, when Chita Rivera or Christopher Wheeldon share details about their craft. Taking full advantage of the multimedia opportunities afforded by this digital series, the chapters use an array of visual and sound illustrations as they investigate the workings of subversion, celebration or self-reflexivity, the adjustments required to "sound Broadway" in Paris, or the sheer possibility of re-inventing icons.

Que se passe-t-il quand une comédie musicale américaine voyage de Broadway à Hollywood, d'Hollywood à Broadway… ou à Paris ? Le penchant ambiant pour l'intermédialité et le succès grandissant du *musical* en France ont inspiré ce volume collectif qui, en croisant les voix universitaires et artistiques, françaises et américaines, entreprend de réévaluer l'impact des transferts scène-écran sur le genre. Les chapitres bilingues de cet ouvrage sondent les répercussions musicales, dramatiques et chorégraphiques des techniques de transposition, mettant au jour la réécriture filmique de procédés théâtraux depuis les opérettes cinématographiques de Lubitsch jusqu'au *Cabaret* de Fosse, ou pistant les effets de cinéma sur scène, de *Hello, Dolly!* à *Hamilton*. Dans une visée à la fois esthétique et pratique, la genèse créative des œuvres est envisagée aussi bien que leur cadre critique. Les *musicals* sont ici abordés sous l'angle de disciplines variées : danse, théâtre, cinéma, musique ; ainsi que du point de vue de la pratique, lorsque Chita Rivera ou Christopher Wheeldon témoignent de leur art. Au fil de chapitres enrichis d'un éventail d'illustrations visuelles et sonores grâce aux ressources de l'édition numérique, les auteurs interrogent les mécanismes de la subversion, de l'hommage et de l'auto-réflexivité, les ajustements nécessaires pour « chanter Broadway » à Paris, ou encore la possibilité de réinventer les icônes.

Anne Martina & Julie Vatain-Corfdir (dir.)

American Musicals

Stage and screen / L'écran et la scène

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FOREWORD

Anne Martina & Julie Vatain-Corfdir

The history of American musicals is that of constant, complex, and fruitful media interaction. And yet, media crossovers long escaped enquiry. Artists themselves were often to blame for a biased perception of their work, particularly in film. In the many interviews they gave, Busby Berkeley or Gene Kelly were keen to present their work, and the history of film musicals in general, as a growing emancipation from stage models. Following their lead, early film critics showed a tendency to analyze Hollywood musicals produced in the 1930s, '40s, and early '50s as *cinematographic* achievements, characterized by a refined use of the codes of classical Hollywood cinema. When increasing economic difficulties arose in the mid-fifties – due to the collapse of the old studio system, the rise of television, and gradual shifts in public tastes – Hollywood was compelled to devise a set of strategic responses, leading to the evolution of the film musical (some would say its decline). The first, and most conspicuous reaction was to limit financial risk by increasingly foregoing original works in favor of adapting successful Broadway shows as faithfully as possible. A second response was to use rock 'n' roll music, and later pop music, to cater to younger generations, thereby often altering the classical syntax of the genre through increased subservience to the record industry (examples abound from *Jailhouse Rock* to *Woodstock* and *Moulin Rouge*). A third, more creative reaction was to scatter the script with elements of *auto-critique*, at the risk of undermining the mythologizing process at the heart of the genre and alienating its traditional audiences (from *A Star is Born* and *It's Always Fair Weather* to *All That Jazz*, *Pennies from Heaven* or *La La Land*).[1] From these combined factors stemmed the common belief that artistic achievement in Hollywood musicals was synonymous with aesthetic autonomy and narrative originality, while decline was entailed by a growing subjection to other media forms.

Conspicuously enough, reciprocal trends have been pointed out – and found fault with – on and off-Broadway, where musical versions, sequels or prequels of profitable films and Disney movies are a staple cause for complaint or irony among critics and audiences alike. Scholars of the stage musical have in fact shown the recent evolution of the genre to respond to economic pressure in ways that mirror the choices made

1 See Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical*, Bloomington, Indiana UP, 1987, pp. 120-121.

earlier by the film industry – some, like Mark Grant and Ethan Mordden, explicitly lamenting the supposed collapse of musical shows. Grant's catchy (albeit reductive) book title, *The Rise and Fall of the Broadway Musical*, encapsulates a Spenglerian model, according to which the demise of the genre has been entailed, since the late 1960s, by radical economic and aesthetic shifts – the rise of entertainment conglomerates functioning as theatre producers, the popularity of spectacle-oriented "megamusicals," and the proliferation of adaptations. All of which testify to Broadway's increased dependence on mass media, in particular music videos and film.

Yet laments about the end of a so-called "Golden Age"[2] characterized by artistic integrity do not resist critical investigation. Not only are they imbued with nostalgic overtones, implying that musical works produced before and after the "Golden Age" have less artistic value and cultural depth than those from the pivotal period, but

they also ignore the complex, ceaseless interaction between Broadway and Hollywood *throughout* the history of the genre, which more recent research has brought to light. The rise of cultural and intermedial studies in the 1990s was critical in this respect. Opening new avenues for research on the American musical, it has led to a fruitful reassessment of the influence of Broadway stage forms and aesthetics on iconic Hollywood films. This has been exemplified by Martin Rubin's illuminating investigation of the way Busby Berkeley's art is indebted to 1910s and 1920s Broadway shows[3] or, more recently, by Todd Decker's insightful study of the many rewritings of *Show Boat*.[4]

However notable and influential such analyses have proven to be, much remains to be investigated. This reliance on recycling other media to spur creativity prompts enquiry into the nature, shape and influence of Broadway-to-Hollywood or Hollywood-to-Broadway transfers, as well as into the interactions and cross-fertilizing processes they generate. Current research indicates that such sustained investigation is under way. Theater-driven reference works on the American musical[5] have shown a growing interest in film, though chapters that truly focus on cross-media transaction are still rare. In France, a 2015 international conference – from which five of the essays in this

2 For a critical assessment of the term "Golden Age" in the field of musical comedy, see Jessica Sternfeld and Elizabeth L. Wollman, "After the 'Golden Age'", in Raymond Knapp, Mitchell Morris, Stacy Wolf (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2011, p. 111.

3 Martin Rubin, *Showstoppers: Busby Berkeley and the Tradition of Spectacle*, New York, Columbia UP, 1993.

4 Todd Decker, *Show Boat: Performing Race in an American Musical*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2013.

5 See Raymond Knapp, Mitchell Morris, and Stacy Wolf, *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2011; William Everett and Paul L. Laird, *The Cambridge Companion to the Musical*, 3rd ed., Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2017.

volume proceed – directly addressed those issues, while the three-year "Musical MC²" research project headed by Marguerite Chabrol and Pierre-Olivier Toulza has been comprehensively exploring the influence of cultural and media contexts over classical Hollywood musicals. Simultaneously, on the Paris stage, a reciprocal interest in the reinvention of classics has been displayed, for instance, in the Théâtre du Châtelet's widely-acclaimed productions of *An American in Paris* (2014), *Singin' in the Rain* (2015) and *42nd Street* (2016), all of which have been hailed as fully creative rather than derivative.

Such contemporary partiality – and curiosity – towards intermediality provided the inspiration for the present volume, which aims at reassessing the role and impact of stage/screen transfers (in both directions) on American musicals, by blending together academic and creative voices, both French and American. The essays and interviews collected here carefully explore the musical, dramatic and choreographic repercussions of transposition processes, evidencing the wide range of rewriting and recoding practices encompassed in what is commonly referred to as "adaptation." How does re-creation for another medium affect the shape and impact of a musical, both aesthetically and practically? How can the "adapted" version assert its status and value with regards to the "original," striking a balance between due homage and legitimate creative claims? These questions are tied to issues of authorship and authority, as well as to the notion of self-reflexivity, which can prove equally conducive to celebration or to subversion. They also call into question the audience's reception of the work, in particular when it comes to iconic scenes, or to characters illustriously embodied by a famous performer. In fact, any study of the relations between Broadway and Hollywood would be incomplete without reflecting upon the impact of *human* transfers – not only in terms of stars, but also in terms of directors, composers and lyricists, choreographers or costume designers.

The chapters of this volume fall into three sections, the first of which focuses on formal innovation and re-invention. It opens with an investigation into Ernst Lubitsch's endeavors to invent a cinematographic equivalent to the operetta around 1930, when the norms and form of the musical picture were yet to be established, ultimately showing how music, in such early examples, becomes a way to create a fictional world on screen (Katalin Pór). While this study offers a chronological foundation stone to analyze subsequent transfers and influences, the second essay provides a more theoretical perspective on the question, by comparing directorial choices in adaptation over a wide range of periods and production types (Dan Blim). From *Damn Yankees!* to *Hamilton*, the chapter explores the ways in which stage and screen

media deal differently with breaks and "sutures" in a musical's narrative continuity, thereby shedding light on the specificities of each medium. These insightful inaugural essays then make way for the in-depth study of such canonical examples as the screen-to-stage transfers of *42nd Street* and *An American in Paris*. The two shows are carefully compared in terms of their "conservative," "innovative" or "reflective" approach to adaptation, and placed in the context of constantly refashioned Hollywood and Broadway motifs (Anne Martina). This is given further resonance by the following roundtable with the creators of *An American in Paris*, which provides a mirrored point of view on reinvention from the artists' and producers' perspective. The precision and generosity with which they discuss the show's genesis, musical construction and color palette offer a unique insight into the vision behind this contemporary (re-)creation (Brad Haak, Van Kaplan, Craig Lucas, Stuart Oken, Christopher Wheeldon).[6]

The second section delves into the political and cultural implications of adaptation, using several case studies of major musicals which have been rewritten, reinterpreted, and sometimes transferred back to their original medium. The first of these analyses offers a refreshing outlook on *My Fair Lady*, by suggesting that the musical's romanticized ending may not be as out of line with George Bernard Shaw's original feminist vision as is commonly assumed. This leads to a detailed exploration of romantic and feminist ramifications in the crafting and filming of the musical (Aloysia Rousseau), and is followed by a performer's perspective on the same work – and others – from the point of view of a professional singer of musicals in France today (Julien Neyer). The next two essays then continue with the study of famous adaptations from the 1960s, by focusing on shifts in the political and racial significance of *Finian's Rainbow* (James O'Leary) or the consequences of tone and scale alterations in *Hello, Dolly!* (Julie Vatain-Corfdir & Émilie Rault). Francis Ford Coppola's screen version of *Finian's Rainbow* is thus shown to revise the stage show's politically-oriented innovations in order to align the script with New Left conventions, while Gene Kelly's adaptation of *Hello, Dolly!* is analyzed as the somewhat maladroit aesthetic product of contrasting tendencies towards amplification on the one hand, and sentimentalization on the other. Moving on from the last of the optimistic "supermusicals" to one of the finest examples of a darker and more cynical trend, the last essay in this section focuses on the successive rewritings of *Cabaret* for the stage, screen – and stage again. Amid this circular pattern, Bob Fosse's version of the iconic musical emerges as a re-defining moment not only for the show, but also for the evolution of the genre itself (Anouk Bottero).

6 All of our interviews are transcribed and published with kind permission from the speakers.

The third section of the volume takes a closer look at the challenges facing the performers of musicals on stage and screen, in particular when it comes to singing and dancing – live or in a studio. A shrewd analysis of Gene Kelly's career – short-lived on Broadway but stellar in Hollywood – shows how his choreographic bent towards perfectionism evolved, from *Cover Girl* to *Singin' in the Rain*, and how his apparent doubts about his acting talents came to be expressed and answered through his screen dances (Jacqueline Nacache). This is followed by the direct testimony of a legendary dancer and Broadway performer, who talks at length about the expressivity of "character dancing," the different lessons in focus learned on stage or in front of the camera, or the joys of working with Leonard Berstein, Jerome Robbins or Bob Fosse (Chita Rivera). Building on this dancer's experience, the following chapter asks the question of how to re-choreograph a cult scene and dance it anew, using examples from Robbins' choregraphy for *West Side Story* (Patricia Dolambi). Finally, shifting from dance to song, the last interview of the volume turns to the evolution of singing practices and spectators' tastes, from opera to "Golden Age" musicals and on to contemporary musicals. Voice placement and voice recording are discussed, along with specific techniques such as "vocal twang" or "belting," by a singing coach with experience both in the US and in France (Mark Marian). This comparative perspective re-emphasizes the fundamental dynamic of the volume, which is that of transgressing borders – between media, disciplines or, occasionally, reception cultures – bringing together the voices of music, dance, film and theater scholars as well as performers and producers, in order to shed light on creative phenomena which, though they are as old as the advent of the talking picture, still prove multifaceted and prolific today.

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PREMIÈRE PARTIE

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HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH A CLASSIC? TRADITION AND INNOVATION IN *42ND STREET* AND *AN AMERICAN IN PARIS*

Anne Martina

In his 2004 study of the stage musical, Mark Grant nostalgically reflected upon the evolution of the genre on Broadway, lamenting the end of the so-called "Golden Age" and its expressive artworks:

> Musicals in the high-water period were generative forms of cultural imagery. […] Today's musicals are replicative, rather than generative. They reflect and cannibalize other areas of pop culture – television, movies, techno special effects, rock music, music videos – and with few exceptions do so without developing any independent life as dramatic literature. They fix their advertising logos in memory, not their capacity to provoke the imagination. The commerce of Broadway musicals goes on as ever. The literature of the form seems to have stopped. And newer musicals have ceased to have any stature as art objects in pop culture.[1]

At the root of such demise, according to Grant, was a series of shifts in writing, performing and designing practices, all testifying to the increased subservience of the Broadway musical to mass media forms. Sources, he insisted, were now mostly movie-based; acoustic and scenic design aped Hollywood and music-video styles; and the integration of drama, music and dance into a seamless whole had vanished with the rise of visual spectacle as the primary economic concern and aesthetic principle driving the show. In other words, creativity had been substituted by mere replication, so much so that Broadway musicals had become redundant and "irrelevant".

Jessica Sternfeld and Elizabeth L. Wollman have since offered readers a much more nuanced and objective overview of the transformative changes undergone by the Broadway musical since the 1970s.[2] Yet their assessment is partly similar to Grant's, in one respect at least. Insisting on the economic, social, and aesthetic mutations affecting the genre as a whole, they argue that inflation in production costs, which now average

1 Mark Grant, *The Rise and Fall of the Broadway Musical*, Boston, Northeastern UP, 2004, p. 6.
2 Jessica Sternfeld and Elizabeth L. Wollman, "After the 'Golden Age'", in Raymond Knapp, Mitchell Morris, Stacy Wolf (eds), *Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2011, pp. 111-124.

10 million dollars for a single show, has made theatre producers – entertainment conglomerates in particular – increasingly dependent on long runs for profit. This has led them to develop production and marketing strategies based on familiarity (well-known plots, songs, and formulas) and mass media appeal in order to attract a growingly international audience, thus partly accounting for the surge in revivals and movie-based musicals in the recent decades.[3]

A close look at the list of musicals produced on Broadway in the past seasons shows that the trend has not abated. In 2012-13, out of the fifteen new musicals on Broadway, five were revivals, six were adaptations of Hollywood films and one was a biopic of a famous movie star, Charlie Chaplin.[4] Figures have slightly decreased since, but revivals and movie-based musicals still constitute half of the new output every year, confirming Sternfeld and Wollman's statement six years ago.[5]

Yet cross-media transfers, one may argue, are not new on Broadway. Oscar Hammerstein II's best shows were musical transpositions of plays or novels, and a quick look at the 1944-45 Broadway season in the Internet Broadway Database shows that out of the twenty-two new musicals produced that year, only four were truly original book shows. The others either revived the old revue format, which hardly fits Grant's vision of the "integrated Golden Age musical," or adapted literary or performance sources, like *Carousel*, based on a play, and *On the Town*, Jerome Robbins's own rewriting of his ballet *Fancy Free*. In other words, Broadway, like Hollywood, has always relied on other forms and media for inspiration.

Equating original book writing with creativity and artistic achievement therefore rather misses the point. Not that Mark Grant makes such a reductive statement – he too acknowledges 1940s and '50s book writers' reliance on literary forms for source material. But his analysis relies on the assumption that mass-media sources and influences, film and music video in particular, as opposed to literary sources, are inherently alien to the Broadway show and detrimental to it. One of the many symptoms of cultural anxiety regarding the status of the "musical play,"[6] such a view

3 *Ibid*, p.113-114.

4 I rely on data made available on the Internet Broadway Database for my calculations. Like movie-based musicals, revivals have indeed become a fixture on Broadway, in sharp contrast with the "Golden Age" era. In 1944-1945, only five out of twenty-two new musicals were revivals, less than one fourth of the season's creative output, compared to one third in 2012-2013.

5 For a similar assessment, see Bud Coleman, "New Horizons: The Broadway Musical at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century", in William Everett and Paul Laird (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to the Musical*, 3rd ed., Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2017, pp. 370-372.

6 Though the term "musical play" had been occasionally used on Broadway bills in the early decades of the 20th century, it only disseminated after Hammerstein referred to his show *Oklahoma!* as a "well-made musical play" in a 1943 *New York Times* interview. See Geoffrey Block, "Integration",

long affected critics, as if the aura of live entertainment would somehow vanish with the rising influence of mass media.[7] This, I believe, partly explains why many critics today tend to ignore movie-based musicals, or dismiss them as some subcategory of replicative commercial enterprises trading in nostalgia and commodity culture.

The aim of this paper is to nuance such views by showing that movie-based musicals can be creative, generative and reflective – or not, depending on the production team's adaptive approach, and their adopted aesthetic and discursive strategies when choosing from a wide range of rewriting practices. Needless to say, turning *Rocky* or *Swing Time* into stage musicals, in other words transposing musical or non-musical, contemporary or classical[8] film sources, are very different endeavors. For methodological and critical reasons, I have chosen to focus on the stage adaptations of two iconic classical Hollywood films: *42nd Street* – David Merrick's 1980 production and its 2001 revival, both based on Lloyd Bacon's 1933 backstage musical – ; and *An American in Paris*, the 2014 rewriting of Vincente Minnelli's award-winning 1951 masterpiece, directed and choreographed for the stage by Christopher Wheeldon.[9] As acclaimed *icons* of the *movie* musical, I believe those two films offered the greatest temptation of and opportunity for nostalgic replication, while posing major adaptive challenges. The twin issues of legacy and cross-media transfer are indeed central to both adaptations, as the creative teams were confronted not only with the task of bringing landmark film musicals to the stage, but ones that have come to epitomize cinematic artistry – in the shape of Busby Berkeley's kaleidoscopic extravaganzas, or Minnelli's ode to the moving image, exemplified in the pictorial references and the symbiotic relationship between the camera and the dancing body in the seventeen-minute long final ballet of *An American in Paris*. Comparing those Broadway shows with their original Hollywood versions thus provides an ideal vista on stage and film idiosyncrasies, while shedding light on contemporary productions' complex and varied relations to the American musical tradition.

in R. Knapp, M. Morris, S. Wolf (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2011, p. 98, and Ann Sears, "The Coming of the Musical Play: Rodgers and Hammerstein", in W. Everett and P. Laird (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to the Musical*, *op. cit.*, pp. 189-194.

7 See Scott McMillin, *The Musical as Drama*, Princeton, Princeton UP, 2006, pp. 164-178.

8 I use "classical" in reference to what is commonly identified as the era of classical Hollywood cinema, a period from 1917 to 1960 or so, during which Hollywood filmmaking was "a unified mode of film practice" based on "a coherent system" of production codes and aesthetic norms, among which realistic representation, compositional unity, and "invisible" narration. See David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema. Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, New York, Columbia UP, 1985 (the quotes are from p. xiv and p. 24).

9 The show premiered at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris in December 2014, before moving to Broadway, where it opened on 12 April 2015.

To my knowledge, twenty-seven[10] movie musicals have been turned into Broadway shows since the adaptation of *Lili* in 1961.[11] Twelve of them were Hollywood classics, most of which turned out to be fairly unsuccessful on Broadway. *42nd Street* is undoubtedly the most conspicuous exception. After an initial ten-year run in the 1980s, the original show directed and choreographed by Gower Champion was revived in 2001 in a slightly updated production directed by Mark Bramble, who had co-written the original book with Michael Stewart. The much-acclaimed revival ran again for five years before extensively touring in the US and abroad.[12] The show's blockbuster status, and its successful translation of the berkeleyesque film aesthetic to the stage make *42nd Street* an ideal object of study. But comparing it with *An American in Paris* may prove even more fruitful. Beyond their obvious similarities (the tension between familiarity and novelty induced by the use of a landmark classical Hollywood film as source material, the slight nostalgia for the "Golden Age" of the genre it suggests, and the commentary on the Broadway and Hollywood traditions it allows for), I believe the shows exemplify two different takes on a similar heritage and two radically divergent adaptive processes, conservative revision on the one hand (*42nd Street*), and modern reinvention on the other (*An American in Paris*).

In *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents – From* Gone with the Wind *to* The Passion of the Christ, Thomas Leitch identifies ten categories of adaptation, each pointing to a different relation between a film, or a film sequence, and its source material.[13] The most reverential one, says Leitch, is the "celebration," or "curatorial adaptation," which primarily aims to pay homage to the original text, respecting the source to the letter while recoding it into a new semiotic system.[14] The staged version of *Singin' in the Rain*,

10 Sources include the Internet Broadway Database and Thomas S. Hischak, *Through the Screen Door. What happened to the Broadway Musical When It Went to Hollywood*, Lanham, MD, The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2004, in particular chapter 11, "Reverse Order", pp. 179-196, and section B of his "Musicals Directory", pp. 263-269. I have discarded shows that closed on the road, like *Calamity Jane*, as well as off-Broadway musical productions.

11 *Lili*, a 1953 MGM musical directed by Charles Walters, was the basis for *Carnival*, Gower Champion's second Broadway musical after *Bye Bye Birdie,* and the first in which he teamed up with producer David Merrick.

12 Mark Bramble also directed the 2017 West End revival, which was very close to his 2001 Broadway production. He made slight updates to the book and the staging, adding one song, but the berkeleyesque concept still drove the show, and most of the staging devices introduced in 2001 were kept.

13 Thomas Leitch, *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents: From* Gone with the Wind *to* The Passion of the Christ, Baltimore, John Hopkins UP, 2007, pp. 93-126. As Leitch convincingly argues in this chapter, a film is rarely defined by a single mode of adaptation, but rather combines several adaptive processes. This is also true of stage adaptations of movie musicals.

14 *Ibid.*, pp. 96-98.

based on a book by Betty Comden and Adolph Green, who translated their film script almost *verbatim*, can be considered, on the whole, a curatorial adaptation, despite minor additions to the original film.[15] Curatorial preservation remains a fairly rare approach both for text-based films and movie-based shows, and most adaptations tend to rely upon "adjustment," *i.e.* a set of strategies by which "a promising earlier text is rendered more suitable for filming," or rather here for staging.[16] Such is the case for *42nd Street* and *An American in Paris*. A wide range of adjustment strategies affecting all areas of theatrical production, from book composition to musical orchestration, scenic design, and stage direction, were indeed devised by the shows' creative teams to adjust the filmic sources to the requirements of the musical stage. Though often similar in appearance, they yet testified to radically different adaptive goals, and achieved radically diverging effects.

Merrick and Champion's aim in adapting *42nd Street* was first and foremost to recreate a Hollywood extravaganza, as Merrick himself claimed in a 1980 *Washington Post* interview:

> I'm thinking of how to create the sort of lively, lavish, frivolous musical I believe people have been missing. I think the musical public is fed up with these solemn ones and those tiny little ones of a half-dozen people, skimpy sets and squeaky orchestras. I think it wants what I call this – a song-and-dance extravaganza.[17]

Often achieved at the expense of reflection and depth, such a formal goal accounts for the show's curatorial inflexions. Yet what the show aimed at celebrating was not the movie itself, but the Hollywood tradition it had come to epitomize in the collective imagination; not *42nd Street,* but the Broadway mystique the film supposedly (yet only partly) glorified. Hence the show's paradoxical blend of tribute and revisionism.[18] However creative in its theatrical translation of old Hollywood Follies, *42nd Street* thus proves mostly conservative, nostalgic and backward-looking, much more so than its 1930s film sources, whose complex picture of Broadway ultimately vanishes from the show. Though translating *An American in Paris* to the stage involved a similar range

15 The show premiered in the West End in 1983. The Broadway production opened in 1985.

16 Thomas Leitch, *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents, op. cit.,* p. 89.

17 Quoted in John Anthony Gilvey, *Before the Parade Passes By: Gower Champion and the Glorious American Musical*, New York, St Martin's Press, 2005, p. 277.

18 I rely here on Leitch's definition of revisionism. Revisions, he says, radically rewrite the source text, altering its very spirit. "Unlike adaptations that aim to be faithful to the spirit rather than the letter of the text, however, revisions seek to alter the spirit as well." Thomas Leitch, *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents, op. cit.*, pp. 106-107. For another definition of revisionism, see Robert Stam, "Revisionist Adaptation. Transtextuality, Cross-Cultural Dialogism, and Performative Infidelities", in Thomas Leitch (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2017, pp. 239-250.

of adjustment strategies, the effects thereby achieved, and the adaptive approach it testified to, worked very much in the opposite direction, making the show a strikingly modern reinvention of the film classic. Always subtly filtered through irony, homage never overwhelms the show. For the goal, as American producers Van Kaplan and Stuart Oken insisted, was not to "replicate the movie" or glorify Hollywood, but to create "an original work," "a new piece that faithfully borrowed the characters, story direction, ideas, style – and gave it all a new reason for existing."[19] By blending tribute and commentary, Hollywood sources and Broadway references, and skillfully shifting focus, bookwriter Craig Lucas, director-choreographer Christopher Wheeldon, and musical score adapter and arranger Rob Fisher succeeded in investigating the past, and investing it with fresh meaning. *42nd Street* sought to bring it all back; *An American in Paris* chose to make it new.

BRING IT BACK

The writing, staging and performing choices adopted by David Merrick and Gower Champion, but also Mark Bramble, who co-wrote the original book with Michael Stewart and directed the 2001 revival, and Randy Skinner, who designed the new choreography for the 2001 revival, exemplify how creative in their adjustments and remediation processes, and yet conservative in their overall design, the 1980 and 2001 production teams were.

Like the film, *42nd Street* is set during the Great Depression and tells an "American dream" story, that of a young chorine's rise to stardom thanks to pluck, luck, and hard work. In the book musical, Peggy Sawyer, who has freshly arrived in New York from Allentown, Pennsylvania, is cast at the last minute as a chorus girl in a new show, "Pretty Lady", put on by the brilliant, highly demanding, yet sickly stage-director Julian Marsh. She gets her big break when Dorothy Brock, the leading lady, fractures her leg and Julian Marsh, with the help of the whole company, begs her to save the show – which she eventually does. The film's initial storyline thus mostly remains the same, despite occasional additions, adjustments, and revisions. A few characters are added, most conspicuously those of the show-within-the-show's co-authors, Maggie Jones and Bert Barry, which further deepens the self-reflexive nature of the musical. Some plot details are also adjusted, either for comic purposes, such as Peggy Sawyer being given

19 See the following chapter of the present volume, "Making of *An American in* Paris: Beyond a recreation", pp. 101-102.

"thirty-six hours" to learn "twenty-five pages, six songs, and ten dance routines,"[20] or for greater dramatizing effect, as with Dorothy Brock's accident. Occurring on opening night during a Philadelphia tryout rather than in her hotel room, the scene makes for a very witty anti-climax at the close of Act I. The metatheatrical flavor of the show itself is doubly enhanced by the change. As Julian Marsh steps downstage and directly addresses the audience, thus feigning to break the fourth wall, spectators are suddenly reminded of their dual status (as both real audience of the real musical *42nd Street*, and fictional audience of the embedded musical "Pretty Lady"), before "the house lights come sharply back on and the curtain falls."[21]

But the most conspicuous plot revision lies in the shifting love interest of Peggy Sawyer, from Billy Lawlor, the juvenile lead of "Pretty Lady", to Julian Marsh himself, a shift that seems to have rather puzzled the audience at the time.[22] Not initially planned by the writing team, the change was decided upon by Stewart, Bramble and Champion during rehearsals, and might have originated from the real offstage romance between the director and his leading lady, Wanda Richert.[23] Beyond the mere autobiographical reference, such a revision, I believe, partakes of the overall design of *42nd Street* as a glorious celebration of an idealized Broadway past. Contributing to the ceaselessly uplifting mood of the show, the suggested romance between Sawyer and Marsh leaves no one in the margins as the happy parade passes by, not even the weary, lonesome director who in romantic fashion should end up exhausted and forgotten once his work is done, as he does in the movie script.[24] The film's final bitter comment on the bourgeois audience's stark ignorance of the true nature of work in the show business industry and their superficial adulation of stars thus sharply contrasts with the show's double happy-ending. To some extent, and quite paradoxically, the Broadway production seems to adhere more strictly to the traditional backstage film musical syntax as defined by Rick Altman, the success of the protagonists' romance being "both symbolically and causally

20 "Sawyer, 'Pretty Lady' opens on this stage in exactly thirty-six hours. You've got twenty-five pages, six songs, and ten dance routines to learn by eight-thirty tomorrow night. Do you think you can do it?" (Michael Stewart and Mark Bramble, *42nd Street*, libretto manuscript available from Tams-Witmark Music Library, Inc., II-5-14.) In the film, the day-long rehearsal before the opening made it look more ludicrous than comic.

21 *Ibid.*, I-8-50.

22 Thomas Hischak, *Through the Screen Door, op. cit.*, p. 184.

23 John Anthony Gilvey, *Before the Parade Passes By*, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

24 Bob Fosse's 1979 movie musical *All That Jazz*, which abundantly quotes *42nd Street* and other Busby Berkeley musicals, goes even further than the 1933 film. In Fosse's disenchanted musical, the director of the embedded show literally works himself to death, and the film ends on a bleak close-up of Joe Gideon's face as he is being zipped up in a body bag, while Broadway's anthem "There's no business like show business" is ironically heard on the soundtrack. Champion had seen the movie, yet he strikingly chose to re-mystify rather than demystify the Broadway (and Hollywood) mystique.

related to the success of the [embedded] show."[25] In the Broadway production, the melancholy coda indeed proves deceptive, as Marsh follows Sawyer upstage right to the kids' party after his reprise of the title song, a hymn to Broadway soon picked up by the whole company as the curtain falls, traditional bows metamorphosing into a final, univocal rousing ensemble number. On the contrary, the delicate instrumental reprise of "You're Getting to Be a Habit With Me" over the film's final shots and end credits offered a multivalent epilogue: though apparently contrasting with Marsh's weary solitude, the tender familiarity of the unsung lyrics it suddenly brought to mind ("Oh I can't break away / I must have you everyday / As regularly as coffee or tea") yet discreetly metaphorized the character's theatrical addiction, and ours, while skillfully paving the way to our own reluctant return to more mundane concerns.

Lloyd Bacon, *42nd Street*, film's final shots

As evidenced by those contrasting endings, compositional revisions and musical adjustments pervasively altered the spirit of the original movie. So did the staging of most musical numbers in the show. The score, of course, was greatly augmented

25 Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical*, Bloomington, Indiana UP, 1987, p. 200.

to refashion the initial ninety-minute-long movie into a two-hour-and-a-half-long Broadway show. Four songs out of the original five were kept and nine others were added in the 1980 show (eleven in the 2001 revival),[26] all but one written by Harry Warren and Al Dubin,[27] and featured in other Busby Berkeley musicals from the 1930s. Most of the new numbers are dramatically justified by the embedded show structure.

1. "Shuffle Off to Buffalo", in Lloyd Bacon's *42nd Street*

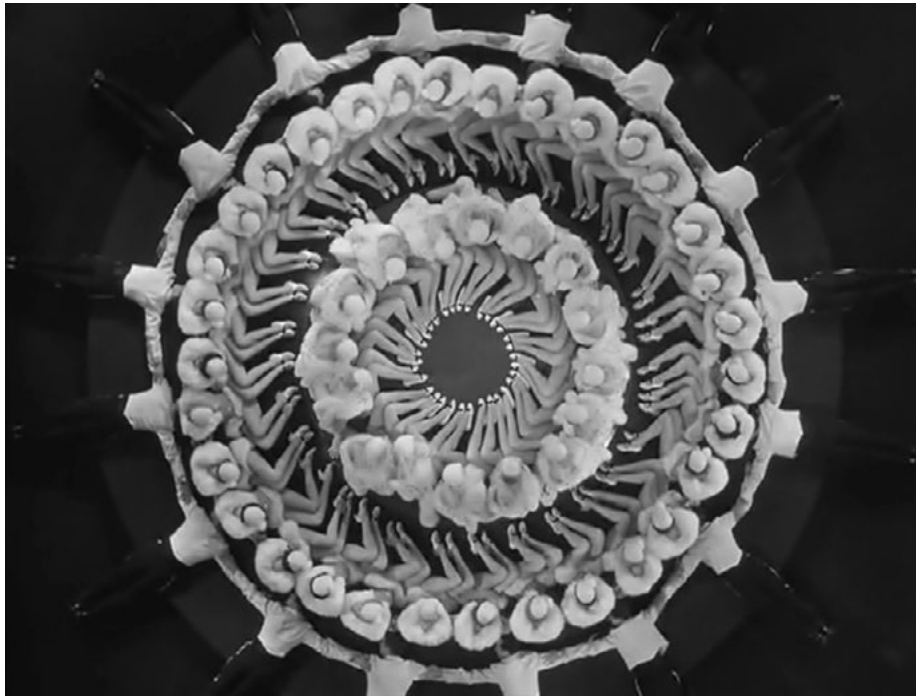
Standards of the 1930s Warner Brothers musicals like "We're in the Money" and "Shadow Waltz" (from *Gold Diggers of 1933*), "Dames" and "I Only Have Eyes for You" (*Dames*), or "Lullaby of Broadway" (*Gold Diggers of 1935*), all initially choreographed and directed by Busby Berkeley, are thus strung along the plot line in Hollywood fashion as rehearsal and show numbers,[28] a device that had been consistently and quite conveniently used on film ever since *The Jazz Singer*, here allowing for many rousing

26 In the 2001 revival, "I Know Now" was dropped from Act I and replaced by "Keep Young and Beautiful" and "I Only Have Eyes for You", while "With Plenty of Money and You" was added to Act II. Harry Warren, Al Dubin, Michael Stewart, Mark Gramble, *42nd Street. New Broadway Cast Recording*, Q Records, 92953-2, 2001.

27 Only "Getting Out of Town", was not a Warren/Dubin song.

28 Of those five songs, only "Lullaby of Broadway" is dramatically motivated.

group and ensemble tap-dancing numbers. Busby Berkeley's most theatrical musical sequences are easily translated to the stage. This is the case of "Shuffle Off to Buffalo", a show-within-the-show number featured in Act II in which Robert Wagner and Douglas W. Schmidt, the scenic designers of the 1980 show and its 2001 revival, replicated the small-scale cardboard simulacrum of a train wagon used in the 1933 film.



2. overhead shot for "Young and Healthy", in Lloyd Bacon's *42nd Street*

The traditional parade of girls, an iconic feature of Busby Berkeley's extravaganzas and Berkeley-style Hollywood fare, whose roots can be traced to 1910s and '20s *Ziegfeld Follies* and other early revues,[29] also features conspicuously in the two shows, testifying to the spectacular orientation given to the Broadway production.

The most interesting visual aspect of the show lies in the directors and choreographers' attempts at translating what Martin Rubin calls the berkeleyesque aesthetic, Busby Berkeley's idiosyncratic film style based on extravagance and excess, exemplified in his signature frame, the overhead shot that forms kaleidoscopic patterns.[30]

29 Martin Rubin, *Showstoppers: Busby Berkeley and the Tradition of Spectacle*, New York, Columbia UP, 1993, pp. 24-32 and 74-75.

30 *Ibid*, p. 6.

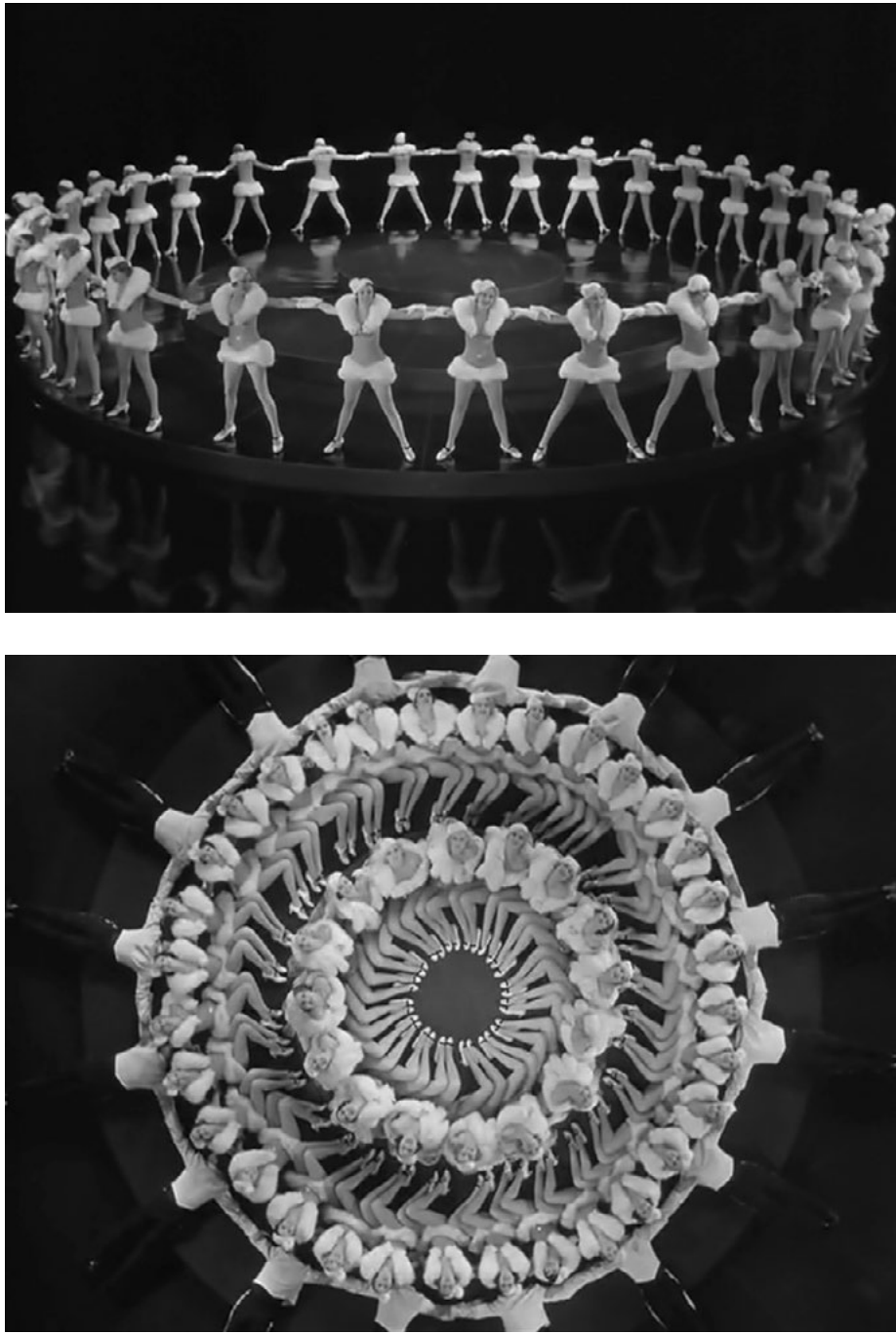
In New York reviews of the 1980 show, critics emphasized the large size of the cast,[31] unusual in 1980 Broadway fare, in particular the large number of chorus girls whom Gower Champion patterned in regimented and geometrical formations, as in the Busby Berkeley films, using raised platforms and onstage mirrors, as Busby Berkeley did both on Broadway and in Hollywood, to give audiences a heightened sense of spectacle while immersing them into the show (the orchestra audience could actually see themselves in the mirrors). This is most forcefully evidenced in the "Dames" production number, which deceptively starts in a low-key and ironic mode. The company needs to rehearse but the costumes have not arrived yet, so the chorus boys start tap-dancing in their everyday clothes. This initial section ends as the men dance off stage and the set flies out, "revealing a chrome Art Deco jungle gym full of chorines in short, pink, tunic-like outfits stretching their legs, bouncing beach balls, and hanging from poles and swings."[32] Then, as Gilvey further recounts, and as the NYPL archives show, "the entire structure revolves into a multilevel mirrored setting on which the girls continue to frolic like figures on a gigantic music box." Lighting effects contributed both to the kinetic impact of the production number and to the depersonalization of the chorines, a staple of Berkeleyesque film extravaganzas, by turning the show girls into silhouettes projected upon and reflected into the mirroring glass panels. This anonymizing process is duplicated and further heightened in the climactic final section of the number. The revolving multilevel structure is once more replaced by the initial set, the beauty house "Maison des Dames" drop, from whose open door flows a parade of over thirty glamorous "dames" in colorful evening gowns, soon "reflect[ed] into infinity" in "the massive mirrors" suddenly "curving the width of the stage."[33]

Even more ingenious was director Mark Bramble's new musical staging of the number in the 2001 and 2017 Broadway and West End revivals. The use of a tilting mirror provided audiences with a shifting, multifocal perspective on the patterned chorus girls combining the frontal orchestra viewpoint with a moving high-angle vista that both mimicked and enriched Busby Berkeley's kaleidoscopic images. While the multifocal perspective the film audience was given was inevitably diachronic – frontal and overhead shots alternated – that of the stage audience was synchronic – multiple perspectives were given simultaneously, turning the number into a three-dimensional kaleidoscopic spectacle.

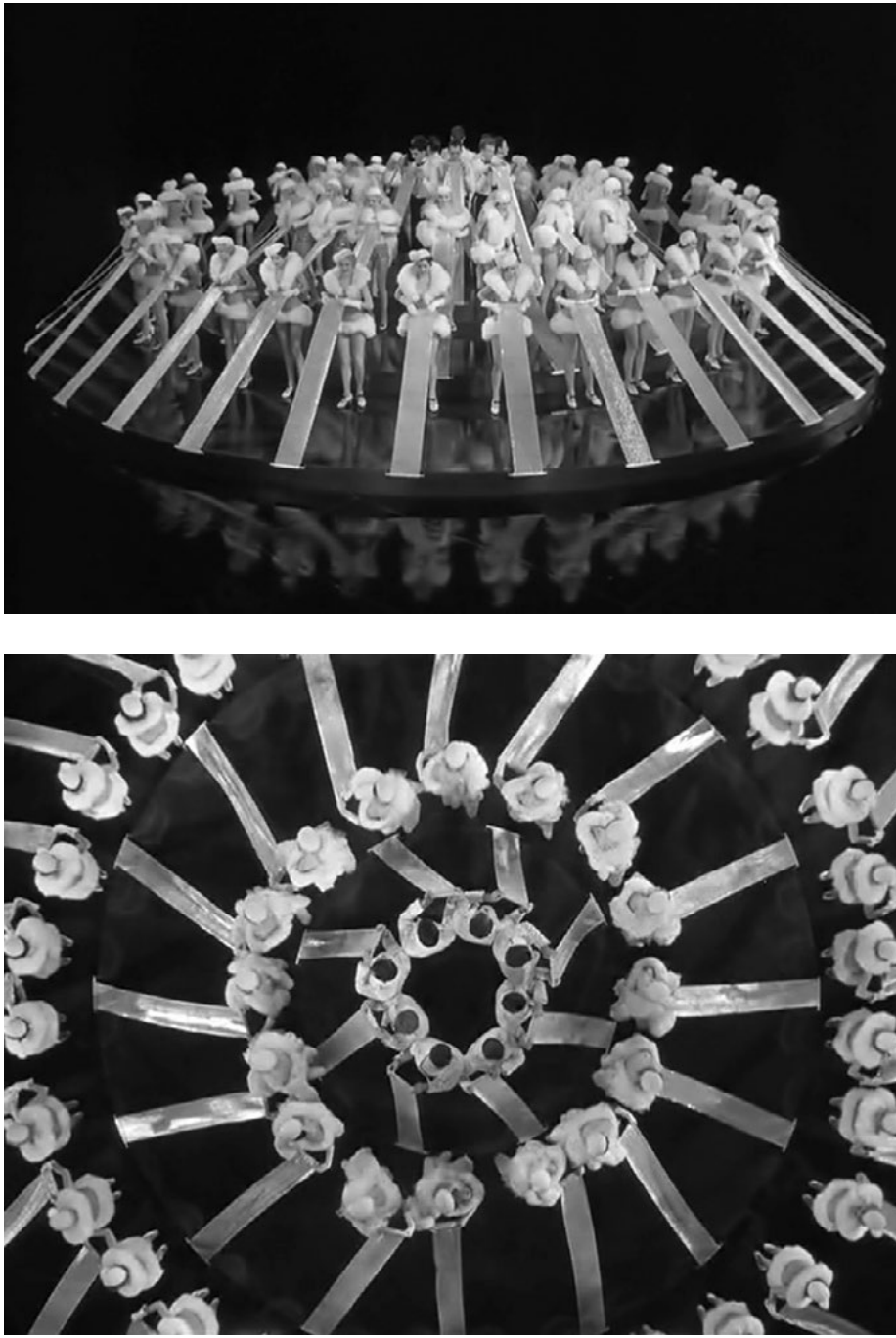
31 Frank Rich, "Theater: Musical '42nd Street; A Backstage Story", *New York Times*, 26 August 1980; Cliff Jahr, "*42nd Street* Log – The Making of a Hit", *New York Times*, 7 September 1980; Hobe Morrison, "*42nd Street*", *Variety*, 27 August 1980.

32 John Anthony Gilvey, *Before the Parade Passes By, op. cit.*, p. 283.

33 *Ibid.*



3-4. Lloyd Bacon's *42nd Street*



5-6. Lloyd Bacon's *42nd Street*

7. Mark Bramble, *42nd Street*, 2017 West End revival
(the device was first used in the director's 2001 production)

All those elements – the plot rearrangements, the interpolation of songs from 1930s Warner Brothers films, the overtly spectacular orientation of the show, and the systematic attempt at translating Busby Berkeley's extravagant aesthetic in theatrical terms[34] – testify to both the adaptive ingenuity and the curatorial intent of the artistic crew of the two shows, making *42nd Street* an exuberant, thrilling, but also deeply nostalgic and selective homage to a romanticized bygone era.

The Broadway musical has indeed none of the grit, none of the edge, and none of the ambiguous politics of its filmic sources. That 1930s Warner Brothers shows were clearly emptied out of most of their political content is made evident in the fairly arbitrary interpolation and musical staging of "We're in the money" at the end of Act I. The ironic opening sequence from *Gold Diggers of 1933*, in which the stage performance of chorus girls scantily clad in gold coins amidst gigantic replicas of gold pieces and dollar bills is brutally interrupted by the sheriff (the debt-ridden director has not paid his bills), a scene that humorously foregrounded the daily struggles of a

34 The berkeleyesque aesthetic of the show was deliberate. As choreographer Mark Skinner said about the 2001 revival: "Mark and I wanted to create a real movie feel to this production – true Busby Berkeley-style numbers." Quoted in Dan O'Leary, "Come and Meet Those Dancing Feet!", CD-liner of the *42nd Street New Broadway Cast Recording, op. cit.*, 2001.

community of artists in Depression America, turns, in the Broadway show, into the individual fantasy of a rags-to-riches story that mirrors, on a microcosmic level, the larger narrative. In the adaptation, the number is decontextualized as it is part of the show-within-the-show. Four chorus girls dressed as ragamuffins find a lost dime on the floor and immediately burst into song. The number of course starts ironically (to find a dime when one is starving is actually to feel rich), but it segues into a rousing production number. The girls exit and are replaced by a large chorus dressed in green money costumes reprising the song, soon joined by Billy and the full company in similarly glittering clothes, all tap-dancing on giant dimes. The ensemble performance gives way to a third section with an impressive male specialty act that further heightens the spectacular dimension of what is meant to be the true climax of Act I. The pattern of the stage number is therefore the exact opposite of the film's, for though it starts ironically, it winds up as a very literal piece of escapist fare: in the film on the contrary, the number began as fantasy but ended on social comment.

The studio's liberal social politics is not the only casualty of the show's many interpolations. The ambiguous gendered stance of the various film sources is similarly smoothed out. Women, it is true, are given more prominence in the Broadway show than in the Hollywood version; in particular they sing and speak more. Yet the female parts, though somewhat expanded, are hardly less stereotypical than their filmic counterparts, Peggy Sawyer remaining the naïve, not to say dumb ingénue of Lloyd Bacon's movie, now enamored with her Pygmalion director. But the most problematic revisionist element concerns Dorothy Brock. Until the very conventional ending, the film's experienced leading lady keeps exposing traditional, *i.e.* non-artistic male hegemony as a fraud: she is a strong-willed woman torn between two child-like men lacking either knowledge or power, not to say potency. In the show, Brock is turned into a crude parody of a temperamental ageing star, whose decaying looks and egotistical outbursts condemn her to the safe confines of the home. The show's regressive politics further transpires in a general polishing process testifying to the ambiguities of gender-blind practices. In the original 1933 film, the all-female cast of "We're in the Money" and their revealing costumes clearly associate women, sex, and money, providing viewers with a visual incarnation of the film's very title, *The Gold Diggers*. The association is clearly sexist. But sexism is first discreetly undermined through irony, when the sheriff strips the girls off their fake gold coins – a clear denial of the pleasure principle for the male, voyeuristic viewer. Then it becomes the very target of satire in a narrative entirely driven by women. More generally, as Patricia Mellencamp has argued, the film offers itself to a dual reading. "The film," she writes, "addresses itself differently to women and men. Choreographer Berkeley's spectacles

are addressed to the male spectator, literally a voyeur or fetishist."[35] The narrative sections directed by Mervin LeRoy, on the contrary, tend to empower women, by demonstrating their wit, resourcefulness, and the force and "pleasures of female friendship." Though Mellencamp concludes that female empowerment is ultimately contained, even repressed by the era's dominant ideology, the dual-focus still makes the film a site of tension (between spectacle and narrative, male containment and female self-expression), developing a reflection on gendered power relations in Depression America. By taking the song out of its dramatic and discursive context, thus dissolving the original tensions between narrative and spectacle, and by desexualizing the number with a conspicuously mixed ensemble, the Broadway show eventually empties the sequence of its deceptive and disruptive politics. The effect, in this very number and in many others, is indeed to gloss over the disturbing gendered politics of the Warner Brothers films to the point of negating the very issue it brought to the fore – the commodification of women into sexual objects made for male consumption and profit.[36] That the Broadway creative team did not quite know what to make of the film's kaleidoscopic portraits of manhood and womanhood, and how to deal with its most conspicuously sexist elements, transpires in the show's ambiguous, and evasive stand. Each "Pretty Lady" number is given an initial parodic or ironic twist, suggesting some form of critical distance, yet the twist always vanishes as the act unfolds and morphs into a straight performance univocally glorifying the Great White Way and its early girlie shows. In the end, irony and parody only serve the show's conservative goal, and the berkeleyesque, both in its aesthetic and discursive dimensions, contaminates the whole piece.

With its exhilarating, yet invasive translation of Busby Berkeley's film style, *42nd Street* proved aesthetically creative but discursively regressive, so much so that one wishes, quite paradoxically, that it had been more replicative in the end. Nor was the show reflective, fantasizing as it did the Hollywood tradition and the Broadway roots it drew upon, rather than investigating them. The show was generative, though. The tremendous success of *42nd Street* launched a new craze for '20s- and '30s-style tap dancing, which could still be felt years later in the hit production *Thoroughly Modern Millie*. Yet what it generated was a glittering vision of Broadway as tension-free, best exemplified in the revisionist refashioning of "Lullaby of Broadway". In *Gold Diggers of 1935*, "Lullaby" stood out as a darkly ironic ode to New York's urban fever and an

35 Patricia Mellencamp, "Sexual Economics: *Gold Diggers of 1933*" (1995), in Steven Cohan, *Hollywood Musicals: the Film Reader*, London, Routledge, 2002, p. 67.

36 *Ibid.*, pp. 70-75. See also Lucy Fischer, "The Image of Women as Image: The Optical Politics of *Dames*", *Film Quarterly* 30, 1 (fall 1976), p. 5.

ambiguous acknowledgment of the deadly violence lurking in the shadows. The gentle "sleep" the speaker initially seemed to wish the "Broadway baby" turned into a brutal metaphor for death in the number's climactic ending, unique in Busby Berkeley's and Hollywood's musical works, showing a woman's mortal fall after being pushed from a nightclub balcony by a herd of tap-dancing people. Decades later, Wini Shaw's poignant rendition of the Warren-Dubin song, in perfect harmony with the somber overtones of the film's production number which opened and closed on a woman's face emerging from and then engulfed back again into darkness, was unabashedly turned into a sunny, rousing ode to entertainment performed by all the cast in a brilliantly lit train station.

8. "Lullaby of Broadway", in Busby Berkeley, *Gold Diggers of 1935*, WB, 1935

9. "Lullaby of Broadway", in Mark Bramble's revival
(the staging was the same in the 2001 production)

The Broadway mystique, at a low point in the early 1980s, could hardly have been more forcefully, and univocally regenerated.

"MAKE IT NEW!"

The adaptive approach to *An American in Paris* was sharply different.[37] If *42nd Street* aimed at bringing audiences back to a fantasized golden age of entertainment, the creative team that adapted *An American in Paris* to the stage, on the contrary, have endeavored to "make it new," to quote a famous American poet.[38] The writing, choreographing, and staging choices underpinning the show indeed all developed defamiliarizing strategies, which turned Minnelli's landmark 1951 picture into something radically novel, and deeply insightful.

37 The following analysis is based on the initial, longer version performed at the Théâtre du Châtelet in 2014. The Broadway production, which I have not been able to see, slightly differed from the Paris version. One number in particular was cut – "Soon", a song performed by Milo and Jerry before Act One's final ballet – and script revisions may have also been made.

38 Retrospectively identified as a battle cry of American modernism, Ezra Pound's injunction to "make it new" was a call to tap into multiple sources of inspiration, traditional and untraditional, not slavishly, but creatively. The phrase was most conspicuously used as the title of a collection of essays he published in 1934, at a time when the first modernist movement had long been under way.

From the original movie script by Alan Jay Lerner, only the basis of the plot line has been retained, the producers giving writer Craig Lucas free rein to devise an entirely new book. Like Van Kaplan and Stuart Oken, Craig Lucas aimed at creating something different, insisting in a 2015 interview that "[he] was only interested in doing this if it would be an opportunity to do something theatrically innovative or to play with the narrative in a way that brought something new."[39] On the surface, the film's plot is easily recognizable, though some names have been slightly altered. The show still tells the story of a former American GI and aspiring artist, Jerry Mulligan, who falls in love with a French girl, Lise, in post-World War II Paris, not knowing that Lise is actually engaged to Henri Baurel, whom he has just befriended. Are also featured in both the film and the show a wealthy American socialite, Milo, eager to show Jerry the path to success and her silky bed, and another struggling artist, Adam, a composer friend of both Henri and Jerry.[40]

But while Minnelli's film reflected a nostalgic, fantasized vision of Paris as seen through the filter of late 19th-century and early 20th-century Impressionist painters, the aim of the stage show's creators has clearly been to shift focus, first by anchoring the production in the complex reality of 1945 Paris. This is evidenced in the beautiful balletic overture.[41] The bleak historical context is evoked yet subtly mitigated by the fluidity of Christopher Wheeldon's choreography and the poetic realism of Bob Crowley's scenic design blending black and white film projection, blurred sepia pictures of an impressionistic Paris skyline, and stylized representations of iconic sites and features. Perfectly fitting the grim reality of Liberation Paris, the somber palette with an unusual dominance of greys and browns, and the balletic evocation of bread lines, women's head shaving, and fleeting corner romances, all create a fertile ground for the power of love and art later to emerge.

39 Zachary Stewart, "Craig Lucas on *An American in Paris*, New York Audiences, and Why Book Writers Get No Respect", Theatremania.com, 30 May 2015.

40 In the film, Lise Bouvier sells perfume in a shop. In the show, she becomes Lise Dassin, a ballerina, though she also works as a salesperson at the Galeries Lafayettes to earn a living. Milo and Adam's names have similarly been altered, from Milo Roberts and Adam Cook to Milo Davenport and Adam Hochberg, respectively more upper-class and Jewish sounding. Finally, though in the film Henri Baurel is a French music-hall star, in the show he is merely an aspiring French entertainer; the son of wealthy French industrialists, he hides his passion for show business and dreams of performing in New York.

41 Parts of the danced prologue can be seen in this Broadway show preview.

10. Christopher Wheeldon, *An American in Paris*, Châtelet production, 2014

11. Christopher Wheeldon, *An American in Paris*, Châtelet production, 2014

What the many script changes brilliantly achieve, in my opinion, is offering us an oblique perspective on the film and its many blind spots, the traumatic experience of war, swiftly evoked in the overture and the opening dialogue between Jerry and Adam, or the specter of death and the Holocaust, discreetly conjured up in Lise's letter to her dead Jewish mother. The taboos of sex, sexual desire, and to a lesser extent prostitution, are similarly unveiled, in a revitalized story that brings to the fore all that was contained or repressed in the film, by social, moral, and institutional codes.[42] In this 21st-century version, Lise reaches self-awareness by accepting and embracing her desire for Jerry. The evolution of Lise's feelings is made skillfully palpable through dance. Her initial reluctance, expressed in the playful duet by the Seine ("Liza"),[43] gives way to increasingly sensual embraces which climax in the sexually charged fusion of the dancers' bodies during the final ballet's erotic *pas de deux*.[44] Like Lise, Jerry is both romantic and passionate, yet he can also yield to temptation and sell himself for art, albeit briefly and to a wealthy patron with true artistic flair. Considerably fleshed out, and more skillfully integrated in the drama, the character of the American philanthropist Milo Davenport has none of the off-putting patronizing assurance of her filmic counterpart. Also torn between her inner romantic longings and a real desire for emancipation, Milo nurtures Jerry's talent, helping him give shape to his artistic intuitions: she is the one rearranging her lover's colored shapes into his definitive modern design at the end of Act I – an apt metaphor for the complex intercourse of commerce and art on Broadway, also an element of cultural anxiety for legitimate playwrights working in the field of musicals.

But the most far-reaching change in the re-creation of *An American in Paris* lies in the shift in focus. Adam, the composer friend of Jerry Mulligan, a manifest *alter ego* of Gershwin himself, is considerably fleshed out in Craig Lucas's book. Not only is he given greater stage presence, and a romantic interest in Lise equal to that of Henri and Jerry (he even sings "'S Wonderful" with the other two characters, turning the

42 The creators' desire to unveil a wide range of classical musical taboos also led to less fortunate plot details, such as the not-so-subtle suggestion of Henri's homosexuality, or Milo's obvious father issues, as exemplified in the awkward transatlantic phone call scene. The latter may not have made the cut in the final Broadway version.

43 Robert Fairchild and Leanne Cope performed the number again for the Broadway Television "Live with Kelly and Michael" show, which aired on 7 July 2015. The number can be watched here (from 1'40 to 4'20).

44 Robert Fairchild and Leanne Cope performed it again for an episode of The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, which aired twice on CBS, on 18 September 2015 and 23 October 2015. In the film, Kelly and Caron's dance duet was also very sensual, but it was Jerry's dream, and thus expressed Jerry's longing. In the show, on the contrary, it is Lise's erotic fantasy – an acknowledgement of female desire which, I believe, makes all the difference.

duet into a trio), he is also the narrator of the story, who leads the audience into the show. The curtain rises and closes on Adam at his piano, after the premiere of the embedded ballet. Such a narrative framework makes the spectacle we watch a vision born from Adam's reminiscences, in a mode evocative of memory plays. The shift in the source of focalization, from Jerry the painter to Adam the composer, from Jerry the happy-go-lucky American to Adam the skeptic has generic and discursive implications. The romantic plot between Lise and Jerry, itself made more complex by the added rivalry of Adam and the expanded role of Milo, is doubled by a show-within-the-show subplot. Milo Davenport, the American heiress turned patron of the arts in Paris, is backing the creation of a new ballet starring Lise, with a musical score by Adam, and a scenic design by Jerry. Alan Jay Lerner's original fairy-tale musical is thus turned into a classical show musical.[45] As in *The Band Wagon* (Minnelli, 1953),

another subtext skillfully interwoven into the stage production, the aim is to reflect upon and celebrate the creative process. Yet the backstage plot never becomes a mere pretext for stringing together a series of loosely connected numbers. This is why out of the ten Gershwin musical pieces from Minnelli's movie, only five were retained, while twelve more were added for dramatic, atmospheric, or characterization purposes.[46] As producer Van Kaplan explained, "in creating a musical, you have to pick music that advances story and that is character-driven. Some worked for our characters and moving our story forward and others we felt we couldn't use."[47] The central artistic concern of the show in particular binds Gershwin's symphonic pieces to the drama even more tightly than in the original film. In the movie, the final "American in Paris" ballet was aesthetically motivated by Jerry's artistic dreams, but dramatically alien to the plot: it was a dream ballet based upon the Broadway formula initiated by Balanchine and Agnes de Mille. In the 2014 show, the final ballet is dramatically *and* aesthetically motivated: not only is it the natural outcome of the show-within-the-show subplot, it is also the final product of a work-in-progress that slowly coalesced throughout the performance. The creation of Adam's symphonic piece is given to hear

45 For a definition of the three musical film subgenres, the "fairy-tale musical", the "show musical", and the "folk musical", see Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical, op. cit.*, chap. 6-8, pp. 129-327.

46 The five that made the cut in the Broadway show are three songs, "I Got Rhythm", "'S Wonderful", and "I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise", and two symphonic pieces, "Concerto in F" and "An American in Paris". Nine songs were added, "I've Got Beginner's Luck", "The Man I Love", "Liza", "Shall We Dance", "Fidgety Feet", "Who Cares?", "For You, For Me, For Evermore", "But Not for Me", and "They Can't Take That Away from Me" (as well as "Soon" in the Paris production), and three concert pieces, the "Second Prelude", the "Second Rhapsody" and the "Cuban Overture", all composed by George Gershwin.

47 Quoted in Suzy Evans, "'An American in Paris': From '50s Technicolor Movie to Modern Stage Musical", *The Hollywood Reporter*, 15 April 2015.

in the skillfully adapted and arranged musical score, particularly in the instrumental scene transitions, which progressively collate the musical themes and motifs of the title piece.[48] In the film, those themes were mostly used in an impressionistic way. The "walking theme" of the first section of Gershwin's ballet, for example, was used as a characterizing motif for Jerry.[49] We hear it in the prologue as background music to Kelly's voice-over, again when he walks up the streets in Montmartre, and once more after his meeting with Lise.

Vincente Minelli, *An American in Paris*, "walking theme"

Evidencing the shift from romantic to artistic concerns, the initial walking theme, in the show, is no longer used to characterize the protagonist, but as a step in the creative process, mirrorring Adam's sensations in the French capital, and making him (and George Gershwin through him), rather than Jerry, the eponymous American. The progressive creation of Jerry's scenic design is similarly given to see along the show,

48 Frank Médioni, "Une Adaptation musicale inédite pour la scène. Entretien avec Rob Fisher", in Théâtre du Châtelet, *An American in Paris,* Programme, Paris, 2014, p. 39.

49 Gianfranco Vinay, "Deux Américains à Paris (1928 et 1951), in Théâtre du Châtelet, *An American in Paris, op. cit.*, p. 78.

from the inspirational Calder mobile in Milo's apartment, whose collage of red, blue and yellow touches is rearranged on paper and projected upon a stage backdrop at the end of Act I, before it is given final shape in the architectural design and initial costumes of the "American in Paris" ballet. That director-choreographer Christopher Wheeldon should have chosen a sculpture, a three-dimensional artwork, instead of a painting as Jerry's symbolic source of inspiration – a sculpture, moreover, that moves (Calder's *mobile*) – is quite telling in a consciously or unconsciously reflexive way. The aim of the film and its final ballet was to give movement to a static art form, namely impressionistic painting. By doing so, it implicitly reflected upon cinema as essentially an art of *movement*. The aim of Wheeldon's show is to give *depth* to two-dimensional art forms: Jerry's painting – literally *em-bodied* in the ballet dancers – and Minnelli's film, a moving *picture* now turned into an exhilarating three-dimensional performance.

Far from merely adjusting to the requirements of the new medium, or translating an idiosyncratic aesthetic in theatrical terms, such rewriting strategies aim at further developing the general reflection upon art and entertainment. Like Jeffrey Cordova and Tony Hunter (*The Band Wagon*, Minnelli, 1953), though on a more serious mode, Adam, Jerry, and Henri debate upon the nature and function of art at the beginning of the show. Should music and dance entertain? Should they be escapist, uplifting and utopian, or should they reflect life's bleak realities in a darkly coded sensibility? This implicit reflection upon the musical's role in the construction of personal and national selfhood, along with the desire to give unexpected twists to already familiar material, underpins the witty rewriting strategies at work in "I Got Rhythm" and "I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise". Introduced early in the show, the former is first performed at a low, almost funereal pace, before Henri and Adam shift to an upbeat 4/4 tempo that immediately proves contagious. Such an ironic twist yet never alters the spirit of the source material, quite the contrary. The communal values carried out by the original sequence, famously performed by Gene Kelly and a group of children, are further heightened in the process, as music comes to encapsulate the very antidote to post-war deprivation, and childish complicity is substituted by collective rejoicing, an apt metaphor for national resilience. Likewise, Henri Baurel's song is given an ironic tweak in the show. Performed in a gloomy Montmartre cabaret by a small group of awkward performers dressed in drab outfits – the very antithesis of George Guétary's lavish music-hall act in the film – the number thwarts all expectations. The setup ultimately proves deceptive and the audience is treated with a breathtaking production number, as the club magically morphs into an Art Deco Radio City Music Hall setting, and clumsy Henri into a Fred Astaire *alter ego* in top hat, white tie, and tails, with chorus girls in glittering feathered dresses suddenly pouring onto the stage.

12. Christopher Wheeldon, *An American in Paris*, Châtelet production, 2014

13. Christopher Wheeldon, *An American in Paris*, Châtelet production, 2014

Brilliantly executed thanks to Bob Crowley's shape-shifting scenic design,[50] this unexpected showstopper fantasy is yet integral to the drama, participating both in the characterization of Henri and the larger reflection upon the musical genre. Like all the other characters in the show, Henri dreams of artistic self-expression ; he wants to achieve it on Broadway, a fantasy here materializing in the 1930s tap-dance act. The number thus proves very consciously true to the spirit of classical Hollywood musicals, though it may have twisted the letter of the original film sequence. By equating dance and musical comedy with self-fulfillment – the lyrics, given to hear in full in the show, hinge upon a pun on "steps" as a dance idiom one has to learn and rehearse every day in order to climb the "stairway to paradise," a clear metaphor for the rise to stardom – and by explicitly presenting it as an *American dream*, one whose materialization both the character and the spectators actually wished for, the number foregrounds the utopianism[51] at the very heart of the genre, while forcing us to acknowledge our role in the construction and consumption of utopia. Such is the modern, reflective twist given to the number. Not only are the spectators invited to share the character's dream of happiness by and through 1930s-style extravaganza, thus enjoying the spectacle while recognizing it as fantasy, they are also confronted with the mechanisms of desire upon which the genre hinges and their own involvement in the production of musical myths. Based on a twin process of differing (the initially drab cabaret show) and deferral (the postponed fulfillment of our expectations), the number metaphorizes the power of spectatorial investment: metaphorically, we too originate the spectacular vision that we wish to see. Despite the modern twist, the deconstruction of fantasy-making and fantasy-consuming does not amount to full-fledged revision. In this respect, the number works very much like 1950s reflexive musicals, which demystified the dream factory better to remystify musical entertainment with a celebration of the very values it purported to hold (authenticity and transparence, in particular).[52] Similarly, the complex system underlying the production and consumption of Broadway fantasies is foregrounded, yet the sequence still celebrates the genre's utopian thrust and, literally, its capacity for wish fulfillment. Remystification, one may argue, still remains partial in the show – another token of the creators' modern take on classical material. Paris is no utopia; the success of the show does not necessarily bring a successful romance,

50 Bob Crowley won his seventh Tony Award for best scenic design for his work on *An American in Paris*. More practical details on how Crowley achieved this and other effects in the show can be found in Suzy Evans, "Anatomy of a Scene: Tony-Winning Designer Bob Crowley on 'An American in Paris'", *The Hollywood Reporter*, 27 June 2015.

51 Richard Dyer, "Entertainment and Utopia" (1977), in Steven (ed.), *Hollywood Musicals*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

52 See Jane Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, 2nd ed., Bloomington, Indiana UP, 1993, pp. 42-47.

for Adam at least; and we never see Henri actually fulfilling his theatrical dream. The use of multifocality, instead of the traditional dual-focus on the romantic couple,[53] thus renews the syntax of the genre by combining the romantic vision of the artist as a lone figure, and the musical's traditional belief in the force of emotions. Despite the recognition of prosaic impediments and realistic concerns, the show indeed brilliantly reasserts the power of love and art. In this respect, it is very true to the spirit of the film, though it may not respect the letter of it. It may prove even more unequivocal in its celebration of both. The expanded ending gives more realistic foundation to Jerry and Lise's reunion than in the film, where the quick, arbitrary denouement seems to belie the very happy ending, as if recognizing the impossibility of truly reconciling one's dreams to reality, a failure figured in the torn drawing which opens and closes the dreamed ballet. The drawing in the show, on the contrary, is not torn but cherished, and like the "American in Paris" ballet, which is both real and unreal (Jerry suddenly appears in it, making most part of the ballet Lise's dream), it exemplifies Craig Lucas and Christopher Wheeldon's belief in the overwhelming power of love and art: as Lucas says, there is hope in the ashes.

What ultimately makes the show a modern reinvention lies in its unique fusion of Hollywood and Broadway influences. *42nd Street* was a *neo-classical* musical that rewrote a Hollywood classic in classical Hollywood terms (proving more berkeleyesque than Berkeley's films in the process); *An American in Paris* is a *neo-modern* musical that rewrites a Hollywood classic in modern Broadway terms. The word "modern" has often been loosely used in histories of the American musical, referring either to late 1910s and 1920s shows, or the post-*Oklahoma!* integrated musicals from the 1940s to the 1960s.[54] *An American in Paris* combines and revives those two forms of modernity, the jazz-inflected modern urbanity of Gershwin's music, particularly his concert pieces among which the "rhapsodic ballet" "An American in Paris",[55] and the integrated approach exemplified in 1950s Broadway shows. Mostly, *An American in Paris* strikes one as a 1950s Broadway take on a classical Hollywood tradition. This dual perspective, both literal and oblique, filmic and theatrical, is encapsulated in Bob Crowley's subtle scenic design for "Liza", one of the tenderly moving embankment

53 Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical, op. cit.,* pp. 16-27.

54 See Gerald Bordman, *American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle,* 3rd edition, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2001, p.343; Andrea Most, *Making Americans: Jews and the Broadway Musical*, Boston, Harvard UP, 2004, p. 32; Thomas Riis and Ann Sears, "The Successors of Rodgers and Hammerstein, from the 1940s to the 1960s", in Everett and Laird, *The Cambridge Companion to the Musical, op. cit.,* pp. 203-229.

55 Gershwin described it as such: "This new piece, really a rhapsodic ballet, is written freely, and is the most modern music I've yet attempted." Howard Pollack, *George Gershwin, His Life and Work*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2007, p. 433.

scenes where Lise and Jerry learn to tune their bodies to each other's rhythm. The stage is bare but for a bench, a few trees, and a lamppost, a wink at Kelly's iconic move in *Singin' in the Rain*'s title number, and as they glide over and above the bench, the fluidity of their movements echo that of the Seine which, painted on a backdrop in impressionistic style (a displaced hint at Minnelli's pictorial influences) and lit from the back, gives the impression of moving in tune with the dancers. Through Bob Crowley's collage of perspectives, the audience is magically given both a frontal and a panoramic view upon the whole scene. Bob Crowley explains:

> My obligation was to try and put the river and the bridge on stage. And so I had this idea of skewing the perspective so the audience has a bird's eye view as if you're floating on the river. The projection allows the water to move, so you have a sense of movement, and they're dancing on the edge of the river. You're seeing things from two perspectives. It's a bit like cubism. It gives the audience a thrill. You're not just being literal about something. You're making something poetic and painterly.[56]

As shown in the above-mentioned musical number, the creators of the film do not vanish from view – quite the contrary. From the beginning to the end, the show pays discreet homage to Minnelli, Kelly, and the film tradition they and others before them have come to epitomize, yet doing so through a 1950s Broadway lens. A subtle tribute to Hollywood figures reverberates through *An American in Paris* in a displaced, fragmented, and disseminated manner that not only makes the film new, but makes us *experience* Hollywood film musicals *anew*. The mesmerizing performance of the male lead carries out much of the show's magic. Blessed with an impeccable dance technique and a matinee-idol physique, Robert Fairchild blends Kelly's loveable charms – his exuberant childishness and understated American masculinity – with Astaire's ethereal grace, here heightened in the airy balletic moves that make Fairchild's performance truly unique. Under the direction of Christopher Wheeldon, Robert Fairchild achieves the feat of conjuring up visions of both Hollywood dancers without ever making us regret their absence on stage, as in the "I've Got Beginner's Luck" showstopper. Used early in the show to characterize Jerry as a loving, happy-go-lucky, yet slightly boorish and childishly irresponsible character (a staple of Kelly's screen persona), but based on a Gershwin song written for a 1937 Astaire-Rogers vehicle, the number brings a host of reminiscences. Jerry has followed Lise to the Galeries Lafayettes where she works, and tries to convince her to go out with him. In a way that evokes Kelly and O'Connor in "Moses Supposes", though amplified to hilarious proportions, Jerry then brings

56 Suzy Evans, "Anatomy of a Scene", *op. cit.*

mayhem to the whole clothes section, as the anarchic – though always controlled – energy of love, music, and comedy turns the posh department store into a carnival. Kelly's spirit indeed suffuses the scene, as Jerry jumps over counters, hides behind mannequins, women's shawls and women's hats, and the whole number climaxes on a whirl of swirling colored dresses. Astaire's presence is similarly conjured up, through the song, which he sung in *Shall We Dance* (Mark Sandrich, 1937), another major filmic subtext of the show, and in the staging of the number, Lise's initial reluctance progressively yielding to Jerry's contagious enthusiasm in much the same way as Ginger Rogers did in *Swing Time* and *Top Hat*.

Yet all is expressed in a fusion of ballet and tap much in the vein of Jerome Robbins musicals – the Broadway influence that seems to have driven the show through and through. Christopher Wheeldon, though making his debut in the field of musical comedy, belongs to a long lineage of director-choreographers on Broadway, one that originated in ballet with Agnes de Mille and Jerome Robbins.[57] Like them, Wheeldon comes from ballet and suffuses his show with classical ballet moves, mixing them, as Robbins did, with jazz and tap dance. More importantly, *An American in Paris*, clearly a dance-driven musical, exhibits the fluidity characteristic of *West Side Story*, often credited with having initiated a form of "continuous choreographed staging," a device that "allowed for a seamless flow from scene to scene," which has remained a staple on Broadway ever since.[58] In *An American in Paris*, scene changes indeed never disrupt the flow of the show, thanks to both Crowley's shape-shifting sets (in "'S Wonderful" in particular) and Wheeldon's choreographed transitions: set pieces seem to drift in and out, gliding along with extra dancers who roll them on and off the stage in tune with Rob Fisher's musical arrangement of Gershwin's score. As Bob Crowley indicated, such choreographed scene changes also stemmed from technical

57 Jerome Robbins is often credited with having launched the era of the director-choreographer in the mid-fifties with *Peter Pan* (1954) and *West Side Story* (1957), an era that flourished with Gower Champion and Bob Fosse (who did not come from ballet, unlike Robbins) in the '60s and '70s. Liza Gennaro thus calls Robbins "the first in the modern line of director-choreographers" (Gennaro, "Evolution of Dance in the Golden Age of the American 'Book Musical'", in Knapp, Morris, Wolf (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical, op. cit.* p. 52). Yet Robbins's work also crystallized what George Balanchine, who introduced Broadway audiences to classical ballet in the mid-thirties, and Agnes de Mille had done before. De Mille actually broke ground twice, first with her choreography for *Oklahoma!* in 1943, then by being the first to both choreograph and direct an entire show – *Allegro*, in 1947. But the musical, based on an abstract concept, closed after 315 performances only, which may have been why de Mille kept choreographing, but never directed a show again, unlike Robbins, Champion and Fosse later on.

58 Liza Gennaro, "Evolution of Dance in the Golden Age of the American 'Book Musical'", *op. cit.*, p. 58. The expression is derived from Anthony Gilvey, *Before the Parade Passes By, op. cit.,* p. 89. See also Deborah Jowitt, *Jerome Robbins. His Life, His Theater, His Dance,* New York, Simon & Schuster, 2004, p. 280.

requirements: "since it's a heavy dance show, the scenic pieces are moved by ensemble members instead of on automated tracks so the ballerinas won't trip on grooves in the floor."[59] Still, those choreographed transitions, in tune with Crowley's artistic sensibility,[60] give a cinematic fluidity to the whole piece evocative of *West Side Story* and other Robbins musicals.

Even Robbins's sense of humor permeates the show, as in the gentle satire of a high modernist ballet, a performance that Jerry cannot refrain from disturbing with his uncontrollable "Fidgety Feet". The number itself, strangely frowned upon by some New York critics,[61] is a case study in Broadway-Hollywood cross-fertilization. As in *Shall We Dance* (1937), *White Christmas* (Michael Curtiz, 1954), and *Funny Face* (Stanley Donen, 1957), the pompous pretentiousness of elitist high art is made fun of through a clever handling of parody, better to celebrate tap, the vernacular, popular dance idiom of America. Unlike what happens in film satires, though, self-irony suffuses the number, the pantomimic, angular body figures – upper arms outstretched left and right, elbows vertically bent – reappearing later on in the final ballet, though in a less comically exaggerated manner. Wheeldon thus playfully uses parodic and straight modern dance moves successively, not unlike Balanchine almost eighty years earlier, when he introduced Broadway audiences to classical ballet in a similarly paradoxical manner (*On Your Toes*, 1936).[62] Juxtaposing satirical pieces that parodied Russian ballet (as in "Princess Zenobia"), and numbers that relied on a straight use of classical dance (as in the more famous "Slaughter on Tenth Avenue" number), in a show whose plot eventually celebrated popular culture, probably made ballet more palatable to 1930s Broadway audiences. Yet it also testified to Balanchine's refreshing embrace of the comic roots of the genre: spoofs of high art, be it drama, opera, ballet, or modern dance, were as old as musicals themselves. Hailed by dance critics at the

59 Suzy Evans, "Anatomy of a Scene", *op. cit.*

60 In an interview with Michael Lassell about his design for the 2004 Disney musical *Aida*, Bob Crowley said: "I love the fluidity that the camera gives you in film. I'm constantly trying to do that in the theater. I don't want to be filmic about it, because it's a contradiction in terms; I'm trying to be theatrical." Michael Lassell, *Elton John and Tim Rice's Aida: The Making of a Broadway Musical,* New York, Disney Enterprises, Inc., 2000, pp. 68-69.

61 See for example Marilyn Stasio, "Broadway Review: 'An American in Paris'", *Variety*, 12 April 2015.

62 Other ballet choreographers, most famously Albertina Rasch and Fokine, had worked on Broadway before, but mostly in lavish 1920s revues, and the dances they devised were then considered as specialty numbers like any other. It was only with Balanchine's sustained choreographic work on Broadway that classical ballet started to be conceived of as an artistic, expressive form with narrative potential. See George Amberg, *Ballet in America: The Emergence of an American Art*, New York, Duell, Sloane and Pearce, 1949, pp. 174-176.

time,[63] *On Your Toes* may well have influenced RKO studios into devising a classical-*vs*-tap dance musical script for Astaire and Rogers one year later – a film, *Shall We Dance*, whose subterranean traces can be found in Wheeldon's whole production. If the satirical bend of "Fidgety Feet" points towards Balanchine, its staging rather recalls Robbins's most funny ballet piece, his 1956 parody of a piano concert.[64] As in "The Concert (or; The Perils of Everybody)", attention in the musical number progressively shifts from the parodic embedded performance to the likewise exaggerated reactions of the onstage audience, in this case, Jerry's intempestive tap-dancing, which disrupts the reverential atmosphere and progressively contaminates the entire audience. In "Fidgety Feet", Jerry thus becomes the focus of the piece, rather than a host of carefully individualized spectatorial types. This slight departure from Robbins's initial concept allows Wheeldon to blend Hollywood and Broadway references, the parodic balletic frame giving a new twist to a well-known Astaire trademark, "the involuntary dancing motif," here conjured up through Jerry's, and the audience's uncontrollable feet.[65] As Jane Feuer and Todd Decker have skillfully shown, Astaire's persona was built around "his trademark 'reflex' dancing in which his feet respond to the rhythm of the music independently of his conscious control," that music being "syncopated popular music," or jazz.[66] In "Fidgety Feet", Jerry, like Astaire in *Shall We Dance*,[67] tries to energize an elitist art form through syncopated tapping, a contagious rhythm the onstage audience compulsively responds to. As in Mark Sandrich's film, or Minnelli's *The Band Wagon* later, *An American in Paris* thus strikes a compromise between seemingly antithetic dance forms, reclaiming the legacy of a long tradition of artistic synthesis best exemplified in the music of Gershwin and Bernstein, the choreography of Robbins, or the works of Astaire, Kelly, and Minnelli.

63 Edith J. R. Isaacs called the "successful burlesquing of the Russian ballet in 'La Princesse Zenobia'" a true "innovation", "because *On Your Toes* is a dancer's show, with as much satire and as much skill in the 'Princess Zenobia' ballet and 'Slaughter on Tenth avenue' as there usually is in half a dozen skits." Isaacs, "Spring Dances In. Broadway in Review", *Theatre Arts Monthly*, vol. 20, n°6, June 1936, p. 421, p. 415.

64 For more details on Robbins's 1956 ballet "The Concert (or; The Perils of Everybody)", see Deborah Jowitt, *Jerome Robbins, op. cit.,* pp. 252-254.

65 Jane Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical, op. cit.,* p. 115.

66 *Ibid.,* p. 114; Todd Decker, *Music Makes Me. Fred Astaire and Jazz*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2011, p. 6.

67 At the beginning of the film, Pete Peters (Fred Astaire), who masquerades as a famous Russian ballet dancer called Petrov, while secretly nursing a passion for tap-dancing, is caught by his producer, Jeffrey Baird, rehearsing tap steps rather than "*grand jetés*". Pete then tells him, "Oh, Jeffrey, I wish we'd combine the technique of the ballet with the warmth and passion of this other mood...," to which the producer answers: "What other mood? You mean this jazz business?".

An American in Paris is not a movie-based musical that slavishly apes its sources, though it quotes them abundantly; nor is it a simple imitation of a Robbins show, though it does regenerate, and to some extent expand Robbins's conceptual framework. In a slight departure from the Broadway tradition, the romantic leads indeed are dancers first, not singers (though Fairchild and Cope do sing, and act, very well). This is both an asset, and the show's major pitfall, as one may wonder whether the production can be successfully revived without its extraordinary leads. Neither a duplication nor an imitation, the show is very much Wheeldon's reinvention. By borrowing, quoting, collating, and refashioning a wide range of Broadway and Hollywood motifs, the creative team led us to watch the American musical anew, thereby fulfilling their initial goal. "We wanted people that had seen the film to come in and see something completely different that honors the film," explained Van Kaplan. "And we wanted people that haven't seen the film to come see our show and perhaps go see the movie and do the same thing."[68] But Wheeldon, Lucas, Fisher, and the producers of the show did more than honor the film; they paid tribute to the American musical tradition by investigating its Hollywood and Broadway roots, and reviving its figures. Was the show, therefore, replicative? Hardly. Is it reflective? Absolutely. Will it be generative? One can only hope so.

68 Suzy Evans, "'An American in Paris': From '50s Technicolor Movie to Modern Stage Musical", *op. cit.*

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NOTICE

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ABSTRACT

Movie-based shows have surged in recent decades; yet they have often been dismissed as mere commercial enterprises trading in nostalgia and commodity culture. The aim of this paper is to nuance such views by showing that movie-based musicals can be creative, generative and reflective – or not, depending on the production team's adaptive approach and their adopted aesthetic. To do so, this essay focuses on the stage adaptations of two iconic classical Hollywood films, *42nd Street* and *An American in Paris*. Beyond their obvious similarities (tension between familiarity and novelty induced by the use of a landmark film as source material, "Golden Age" nostalgia, commentary on the Broadway and Hollywood traditions it allows for), I argue that the shows exemplify two different takes on a similar heritage and two radically divergent adaptive processes, conservative revision on the one hand (*42nd Street*), and modern reinvention on the other (*An American in Paris*).

Keywords

musicals; *42nd Street*; *An American in Paris*; adaptation; revisionism; nostalgia; berkeleyesque; Gower Champion; Christopher Wheeldon

RÉSUMÉ

Si les spectacles tirés de films se sont récemment multipliés, ils se voient souvent catégorisés comme de purs produits commerciaux qui font de la nostalgie le moteur de leurs recettes. Cet article vise à nuancer ce point de vue, en montrant que les comédies musicales inspirées de films peuvent s'avérer créatives, génératives et réflexives – ou non, selon les choix d'adaptation et l'esthétique de la production. Les adaptations scéniques de deux exemples iconiques du cinéma classique hollywoodien sont étudiées ici : *42e rue* et *Un américain à Paris*. Au-delà des similarités évidentes (tension entre familiarité et nouveauté dans la reprise de grands classiques, nostalgie de l'«Âge d'or », commentaire des traditions de Broadway et d'Hollywood), je suggère que ces spectacles incarnent deux approches divergentes de répertoires comparables, et deux processus d'adaptation radicalement différents, opposant la révision conservatrice (*42e rue*) à la réinvention moderne (*Un américain à Paris*).

Mots-clés

comédie musicale ; *42e rue* ; *Un américain à Paris* ; adaptation ; révisionnisme ; nostalgie ; berkeleyesque ; Gower Champion ; Christopher Wheeldon

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E-THEATRUM MUNDI

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DÉJÀ PARUS

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Julie Vatain-Corfdir (dir.)

La Haine de Shakespeare
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