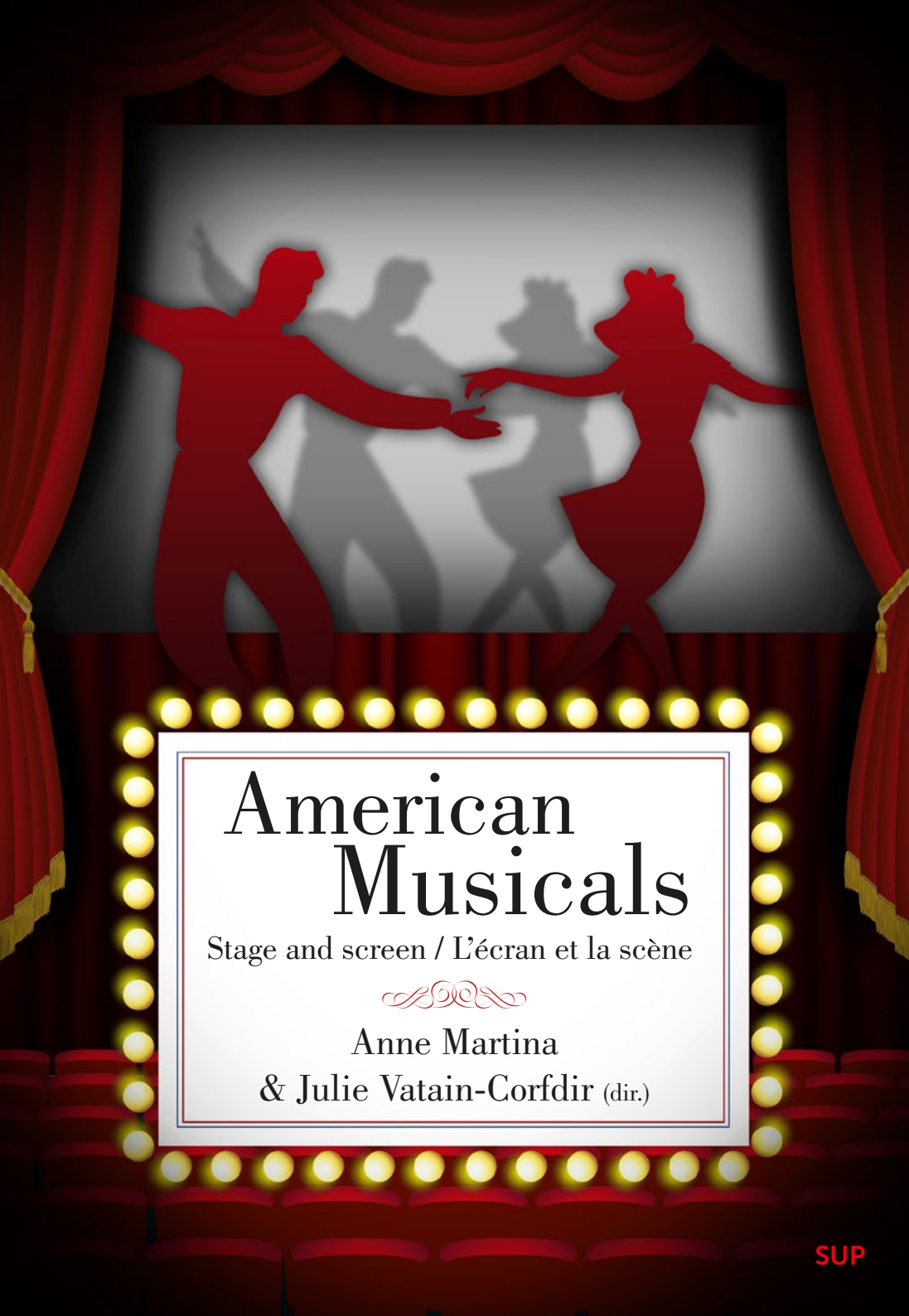

American Musicals

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.)

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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

Formal innovation & reinvention

INVENTER L'OPÉRETTE CINÉMATOGRAPHIQUE : LES PREMIERS *MUSICALS* DE LUBITSCH

Katalin Pór

Les travaux sur les premières années du cinéma sonore[1] ont largement souligné l'extrême instabilité du film musical, et même du média cinéma sonore dans son ensemble, durant cette période de transition. Cette instabilité, à la fois formelle et identitaire, se traduit par une hétérogénéité de sources, de styles, de formats ou encore de techniques : Rick Altman souligne en effet que durant cette période « l'amalgame de styles opposés, empruntés aux sources les plus diverses (muet, théâtre, vaudeville, phonographie, radio, sonorisation) est renforcé par l'usage intermittent de divers procédés techniques en plus du son lui-même : la teinte […], la couleur (surtout dans les numéros de comédie musicale), le grand écran […][2] ». Les trois films musicaux réalisés successivement par Ernst Lubitsch pour la Paramount, à savoir *The Love Parade* (*Parade d'Amour*) en 1929, *Monte Carlo* en 1930, puis *The Smiling Lieutenant* (*Le Lieutenant Souriant*) en 1931, doivent être compris, dans ce contexte, comme relevant d'une démarche expérimentale : il s'agit à cette période non seulement de trouver, comme l'illustre avec brio *Singin' in the Rain* (*Chantons sous la pluie*), des solutions aux nouvelles difficultés techniques, mais aussi de proposer des formes et des formats pour le nouveau média. Si la période est marquée par l'instabilité, la démarche de Lubitsch manifeste pourtant une véritable cohérence. En effet, les trois films peuvent être appréhendés comme participant d'un même mouvement de recherche, visant à concevoir une version cinématographique de l'opérette. Ils constituent ainsi le prolongement d'un intérêt constant de Lubitsch pour cette forme et pour ses possibilités cinématographiques : l'opérette constitue en effet un référent central pour une partie conséquente de sa production muette, aussi bien allemande qu'américaine[3],

1 On pourra se référer sur cette question aux travaux de Rick Altman, notamment « De l'intermédialité au multimédia : cinéma, médias, avènement du son », *Cinémas*, vol. 10, n° 1, 1999, p. 37-53.

2 « Penser l'histoire (du cinéma) autrement : un modèle de crise », *Vingtième Siècle*, vol. 46, n° 1, 1995, p. 65-74.

3 Rick Altman souligne ainsi les nombreux emprunts que fait Lubitsch à l'opérette dans ses réalisations muettes : voir *La Comédie musicale hollywoodienne. Les problèmes de genre au cinéma*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1992. Notons également que *The Student Prince of Heidelberg* est aussi l'adaptation d'une opérette, et qu'en outre la MGM prend soin d'acheter les droits de la musique, prévoyant la diffusion du film en *roadshow*.

ainsi que pour ses réalisations musicales suivantes – *The Merry Widow* (*La Veuve Joyeuse*) en 1935 à la MGM, et *That Lady in Ermine* (*La Dame au manteau d'hermine*) à la 20th Century Fox en 1948.

Ainsi, *The Love Parade* est l'adaptation et la mise en musique d'une pièce française de Léon Xanrof et Jules Chancel, *Le Prince Consort*[4]. Le film est pourtant explicitement annoncé par la Paramount comme étant le premier projet d'opérette cinématographique : on trouve ainsi par exemple dans le journal corporatif *Film Daily*, un article intitulé « Operetta to Be Written for Lubitsch Direction » annonçant « *The first original operetta written especially for the vocal picture screen will be filmed by Paramount, directed by Ernst Lubitsch, and is to have a libretto by Guy Bolton, author of Sally* »[5] ; Lubitsch revendique également lui même ce modèle de l'opérette, annonçant dans le magazine corporatif *Movie Makers* de septembre 1929 que le film sera un film musical, dans le style du *Soldat en Chocolat*[6], c'est à dire d'une opérette d'Oscar Strauss. La démarche est effectivement proche de celle de la création d'une opérette par plusieurs aspects. D'une part, par le choix de la source : en mettant en musique une pièce issue du théâtre populaire français, Lubitsch reproduit, dans le champ cinématographique, le geste créatif de l'opérette viennoise, qui utilise elle aussi de manière privilégiée ce répertoire comme source[7]. D'autre part, par la constitution de l'équipe créative, marquée par la présence d'artistes familiers de l'opérette. Lubitsch écrit en effet le scénario avec le dramaturge d'origine hongroise Ernst Vajda[8] : si celui-ci n'est pas directement spécialiste de l'opérette, il a cependant une familiarité manifeste avec cette forme, dont Thomas Elsaesser a souligné et analysé la centralité dans l'imaginaire centre-européen des années 1920[9]. De même, Lubitsch sollicite, pour l'écriture de la partition, les librettistes et compositeurs britanniques Guy Bolton et

4 Première représentation à Paris le 25 novembre 1903 (Théâtre de l'Athénée).

5 « La première opérette originale, écrite spécialement pour le cinéma sonore, sera tournée à la Paramount, réalisée par Ernst Lubitsch, et aura un livret de Guy Bolton, l'auteur de *Sally* » ; *Film Daily*, 16 avril 1929.

6 *Der tapfere Soldat*, première représentation le 14 novembre 1908 à Vienne.

7 Ajoutons à cela que Xanrof entretient également un rapport étroit avec la musique : d'une part parce qu'il est également chansonnier, d'autre part, parce qu'il adapte régulièrement en français des pièces musicales étrangères – il a écrit notamment l'adaptation française de *Walzertraum* (*Rêve de Valse*). On peut ainsi penser que cette proximité avec les formes musicales en général, et l'opérette en particulier, a pu également conduire Lubitsch et ses collaborateurs à voir dans cette pièce une source particulièrement adaptée.

8 Employé par la Paramount dès 1924, celui-ci mène une riche carrière hollywoodienne, participant à l'écriture d'une cinquantaine de projets. Il ne semble pas affecté à un genre particulier par les studios, malgré la présence logique dans sa filmographie de plusieurs adaptations de pièces populaires.

9 Voir notamment Thomas Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinéma and After: Germany's Historical Imaginary*, London, Routledge, 2000.

Clifford Grey. Si le nom de Guy Bolton est avant tout associé au renouveau du théâtre musical américain, il a cependant également collaboré avec Emmerich Kalman, un auteur d'opérettes hongrois qui a connu un succès exceptionnel, aussi bien à Vienne qu'à Budapest : comme pour Vajda, on peut ainsi considérer qu'il connaît la forme et qu'il la maîtrise.

Les documents de production de *Monte Carlo* indiquent que le scénario se fonde sur deux sources : d'une part, de manière plutôt marginale – il n'en reprend qu'un épisode – la pièce *Monsieur Beaucaire*[10] de Booth Tarkington et Evelyn Greenleaf Sutherland; d'autre part, de manière beaucoup plus centrale, *The Blue Coat*, du dramaturge autrichien Hans Müller[11]. Là encore, le projet est fermement ancré dans l'imaginaire centre-européen, à la fois par le choix de la source principale, et par la mobilisation de l'expertise d'Ernst Vajda, à nouveau sollicité. Comme pour *The Love Parade*, le geste consistant à mettre en musique ce répertoire est très proche de celui de l'écriture d'une opérette : non seulement Müller est également librettiste, mais l'une de ses nouvelles, *Nux, der Prinzgemahl* (*Le Prince consort*) a été à la source de l'opérette *Ein Walzertraum* (*Rêve de Valse*)[12]. Si la démarche diffère légèrement pour *The Smiling Lieutenant*, puisqu'il s'agit cette fois d'adapter une opérette déjà achevée, Lubitsch fait cependant appel aux mêmes collaborateurs : Ernst Vajda comme scénariste (auquel s'ajoute désormais Samson Raphaelson), ainsi que Clifford Grey et Guy Bolton pour la partition et le livret. Il sollicite enfin Oscar Strauss lui-même, qui travaille alors pour les studios hollywoodiens et que Lubitsch mobilise pour l'écriture de quelques chansons additionnelles.

Qu'ils créent de toutes pièces une opérette ou qu'ils en adaptent une préexistante, Lubitsch et ses collaborateurs cherchent dans les deux cas à concevoir, à travers cette série de films, une forme cinématographique d'opérette[13]. Cette ambition est revendiquée et thématisée: *The Love Parade* et *The Smiling Lieutenant* rendent ainsi

10 À l'origine un roman de Booth Tarkington, *Monsieur Beaucaire* est ensuite adapté en pièce par Evelyn Greenleaf Sutherland (première représentation le 25 octobre 1902 à Londres). Cette pièce est ensuite transformée en opérette par André Messager en 1919. Lubitsch et Vajda utilisent la version non musicale.

11 Les versions du scénario indiquent *The Blue Coat*, sans d'avantage de précision, et notamment sans indiquer s'il s'agit d'une pièce écrite en anglais, lors du séjour de Müller aux États-Unis, ou de la traduction d'une pièce écrite en allemand. Si certaines sources parlent d'une participation directe de Müller à l'écriture du scénario, il n'apparaît pourtant nulle part dans les budgets : ne sont en effet rémunérés pour le scénario qu'Ernst Vajda, ainsi que, de manière beaucoup moins importante, V. Lawrence.

12 Livret de Leopold Jacobson et Felix Dörmann, musique d'Oscar Strauss ; première représentation à Vienne le 2 mars 1907. Lubitsch l'adapte dans son projet musical suivant, *The Smiling Lieutenant*.

13 À l'instar de deux autres films produits durant la même période, *The Rogue Song* (Lionel Barrymore, MGM) et *Married in Hollywood* (Marcel Silver, Fox Films).

un hommage appuyé aux deux capitales de l'opérette, Paris et Vienne, à chaque fois sur le mode nostalgique de la perte, incarnée par l'exil contraint du personnage interprété par Maurice Chevalier. Sa mise en œuvre s'appuie avant tout sur deux principes fondamentaux: d'une part, l'instauration d'une rhétorique caractéristique de l'opérette, fondée sur le masque, l'imposture et la mise en abîme ; d'autre part, la transcription cinématographique d'une conception de la musique propre à l'opérette viennoise, selon laquelle celle-ci donne à la fois à l'environnement sa consistance, et aux personnages leur humanité.

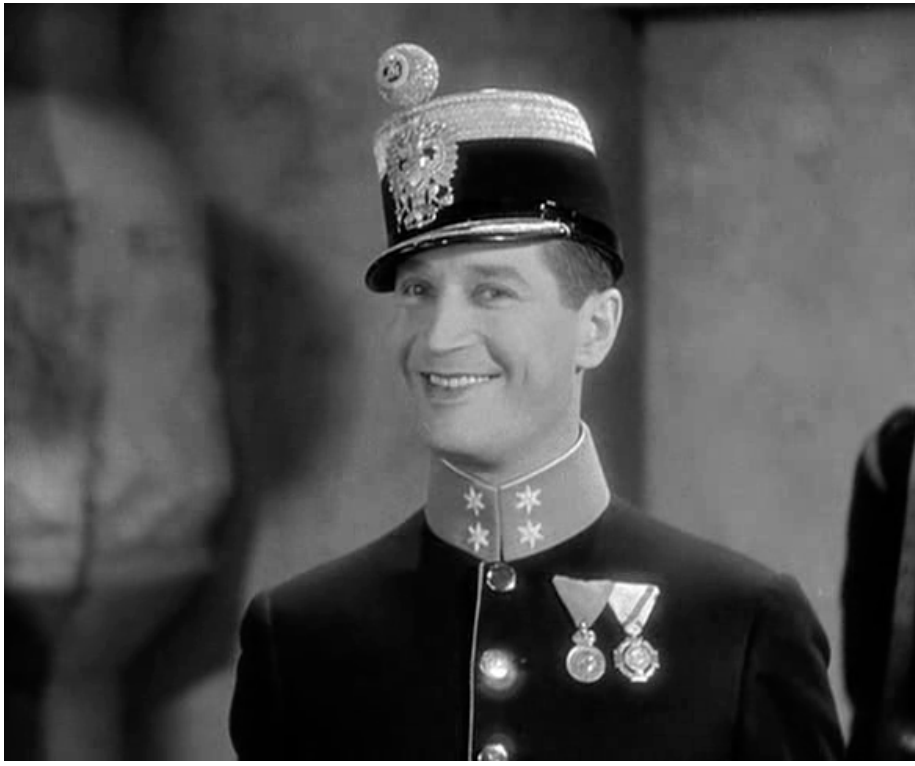
MASQUES, IMPOSTURES ET MISES EN ABÎME : LA RHÉTORIQUE DE L'OPÉRETTE

Le travail de scénarisation mené pour ces trois films obéit à la volonté manifeste de construire les récits conformément à la rhétorique propre à l'opérette[14]. Pour ce faire, les scénaristes ajoutent ou amplifient des éléments sémantiques caractéristiques du genre. C'est le cas notamment des petits royaumes européens – les « royaumes d'opérette » – dont le traitement comique se trouve fortement développé. Ainsi, si *Le Prince Consort* se déroule en Corconie, la pièce tire l'essentiel de ses ressorts comiques des intrigues amoureuses de palais ; pour *The Love Parade*, Vajda et Lubitsch ajoutent diverses scènes qui puisent l'essentiel de leur force comique dans la satire des protocoles royaux – les coups de canons tirés toute la nuit de noces, la codification du petit déjeuner, la soirée à l'opéra… De même, *Ein Walzertraum* se déroule dans le « grand Duché de Snobie », caractérisé comme un espace provincial et peu élégant. Là encore, les scénaristes déploient à la fois le potentiel comique du petit royaume – en modifiant le nom en *Flausenthurm* et en ajoutant de nombreuses plaisanteries sur sa sonorité et son orthographe – et celui de ses monarques. Ainsi, les scénaristes développent considérablement le personnage du Roi – présent dans la pièce originelle comme personnage très secondaire de jouisseur sympathique –afin de constituer avec la Princesse un véritable duo comique, porté par les performances comiques de George Barbier et Miriam Hopkins.

Les scénaristes s'emploient également à inscrire les récits dans les schémas syntaxiques caractéristiques de l'opérette. Ainsi, la volonté de mettre l'idée de mascarade au centre du récit commande à l'écriture du dénouement de *The Love Parade*. En effet, dans *Le Prince Consort*, l'enjeu est la présence ou non du Prince lors de l'ouverture de la Chambre des représentants ; pour l'adaptation filmique, c'est à l'opéra, sous le regard

14 On pourra se référer sur cette question aux développements de Rick Altman sur la « comédie conte de fées », dans *La Comédie musicale hollywoodienne, op. cit.*

des spectateurs, que le Prince doit non seulement être présent, mais surtout faire bonne figure, en souriant afin de prétendre être « *in the best of humor* ». De même, si pour *The Smiling Lieutenant*, les adaptateurs suppriment une longue séquence de mascarade – une large partie du second acte, durant lequel le lieutenant se cache dans le parc où il se trouve avec Franzi pour ne pas être surpris par la Princesse – ils développent et dramatisent en revanche le malentendu initial, qui sera le déclencheur du récit. En effet, dans l'opérette source, il s'agit d'un baiser donné par erreur durant un bal, l'incident étant simplement raconté par le Lieutenant, lorsqu'il fait part à son confident de ses réticences au mariage avec la Princesse. Pour la version filmique, non seulement les scénaristes dramatisent l'épisode, mais surtout transforment le baiser en un sourire, dont la spontanéité naïve vient contrarier le protocole du défilé officiel. Le récit avance ensuite via les changements de statut de ce sourire, qui d'expression sincère se transforme ensuite en marqueur de la mascarade amoureuse que le lieutenant est contraint de jouer auprès d'Anna.



La thématique de la réversibilité de la signification du sourire, marqueur à la fois de plaisir et de contrainte extérieure, conduit dans les deux films à un renversement constant entre apparences et réalité, au point que les deux deviennent quasiment impossibles à distinguer. Pour une part essentielle, cette dynamique repose sur la capacité de l'interprète du personnage principal, à savoir Maurice Chevalier, à sourire pleinement, tout en maintenant paradoxalement toujours une forme de distance ironique et réflexive.

À cette omniprésence de la mascarade s'ajoute enfin un usage récurrent de la mise en abîme. Ainsi, les scénaristes ajoutent, pour le dénouement de *The Love Parade* comme pour celui de *Monte Carlo*, une longue séquence montrant les personnages à l'opéra[15]. Dans *The Love Parade*, la scène se fonde sur un renversement, qui conduit les spectateurs que sont la Reine et Alfred à jouer la comédie, sous le regard de tous ; dans *Monte Carlo*, il s'agit d'une construction en miroir, dans laquelle la similitude

15 On peut sans doute y reconnaître la marque d'Ernst Vajda, qui affectionne particulièrement ce dispositif, et tend à l'utiliser dans chacun de ses scénarios musicaux.

des événements vécus entre les personnages sur scène et ceux du public permet à ces derniers de prendre conscience de la situation[16]. Les dénouements se conforment ainsi au dispositif traditionnel de l'opérette, postulant que c'est à travers une double mascarade qu'une forme d'authenticité peut être donnée à voir : dans les deux cas, c'est en effet via ce double dispositif que le personnage féminin reconnaît et admet la nature de ses sentiments. Mascarade et mise en abîme organisent ainsi la mise en avant de l'artificialité de la représentation, qui paradoxalement apparaît pourtant comme le seul mode d'existence authentique.

UN ENVIRONNEMENT MUSICAL

Cette exhibition de l'artificialité de la représentation conditionne la nature même de l'environnement fictionnel de l'opérette, qui tire paradoxalement à la fois sa matérialité et sa fragilité du fait que sa consistance soit avant tout musicale. En créer une version cinématographique n'a alors rien d'évident à une période, du moins lors du tournage de *Love Parade* et *Monte Carlo*, où il n'y a pas encore de méthode de postsynchronisation suffisamment efficace, et où l'enregistrement sonore se fait donc en prise directe, rendant une continuité musicale à l'échelle d'un long métrage extrêmement difficile. Afin de musicaliser non seulement des numéros ponctuels, mais aussi l'ensemble de l'environnement fictionnel, Lubitsch et ses collaborateurs introduisent tout d'abord une quantité importante de numéros musicaux : huit dans *The Love Parade* (auxquels s'ajoutent deux moments musicaux plus ponctuels), neuf dans *Monte Carlo*. Ces numéros sont ensuite déployés par des systèmes de résonances et d'échos, par lesquels la musique contamine l'ensemble de l'environnement. Ainsi dès le premier numéro musical de *The Love Parade*, durant lequel Alfred fait ses adieux à Paris avant d'être envoyé en Sylvanie, son chant est repris et relayé par son domestique Jacques, puis par leur chien. De même, le chant de la Reine est repris d'abord par ses dames de compagnie, puis, un peu plus loin dans le film, par son armée. La musique, loin d'être un attribut réservé à certains personnages ou à des moments circonscrits, est ainsi au contraire représentée comme quelque chose qui se déploie dans un environnement qui vibre en résonance. *Monte Carlo* reprend le même type de dispositif : ainsi, lorsque la Comtesse chante lors de sa fuite dans le train, d'une part son chant semble émerger du bruit du train, comme s'il en était le prolongement naturel, et d'autre part les paysans dans la campagne l'accompagnent progressivement en chœur. La nature musicale de

16 C'est cette séquence qui s'appuie sur la mobilisation d'une seconde source, à savoir *Monsieur Beaucaire*, on peut donc supposer qu'elle revêt une certaine importance.

l'environnement y est en outre affirmée dès l'ouverture du film, qui nous montre une population se préparant au mariage du duc en chantant. Plus fondamentalement, le monde fictionnel qui organise le film semble davantage structuré par la musique que par la simple topographie : en témoignent notamment les séquences construites autour de la capacité de la musique à passer les murs, qu'il s'agisse de la scène où la Comtesse et Rudolph chantent ensemble via le téléphone, ou de celle où Rudolph chante derrière la porte.

The Smiling Lieutenant obéit à une stratégie différente, marquant clairement le passage d'une logique de succession de numéros musicaux à une logique de partition. En effet, le nombre de numéros musicaux baisse clairement, passant de huit ou neuf pour *The Love Parade* et *Monte Carlo* à cinq seulement pour *The Smiling Lieutenant* ; en revanche, l'accompagnement musical est dorénavant omniprésent. Il s'agit d'un choix qui est explicite et mis en avant dans la promotion du film : Strauss présente ainsi le projet dans le *Film Daily* comme « *consisting almost entirely of music, all introduced in a perfectly logical manner*[17] ». Ce changement est évidemment rendu possible grâce à diverses innovations et améliorations techniques : d'une part, dès *Monte Carlo*, la possibilité d'ajout de musiques additionnelles ; d'autre part, le perfectionnement des techniques de doublage – il semblerait notamment que Miriam Hopkins ait été doublée –; enfin, une amélioration considérable des conditions de prise de son, notamment avec l'apparition des perches multidirectionnelles, permettant de faire jouer des acteurs qui ne sont pas des chanteurs à part entière, et en leur évitant surtout de devoir chanter très fort, favorisant ainsi l'instauration d'une véritable continuité entre le jeu et les prestations musicales. Cette évolution est également rendue possible par le choix de la Paramount de faire de ce film une production de prestige, engageant ainsi des moyens conséquents : le studio communique notamment sur les seize musiciens spécialement engagés pour la production, qui représenteraient « *the largest music staff of any studio in the country*[18] ».

Ainsi, s'il y a bien une évolution importante dans les moyens mis en œuvre par Lubitsch et ses collaborateurs, s'expliquant essentiellement par les nouvelles ressources techniques et financières à leur disposition, ceux-ci sont en revanche mis au service d'objectifs constants, qui sont poursuivis avec continuité et cohérence: il s'agit ainsi toujours de proposer une version filmique de l'environnement de l'opérette, c'est à dire d'un environnement trouvant sa consistance par sa nature musicale.

17 « Returns of musicals predicted by Strauss », *Film Daily*, 19 avril 1931.
18 « le plus grand nombre de musiciens de tous les studios du pays » *Film Daily*, 11 janvier 1931.

La question de la capacité de la musique à construire le monde se pose non seulement pour l'environnement, mais également pour les personnages s'y déployant. Là encore, Lubitsch et ses collaborateurs investissent la musique d'une capacité à dire l'intériorité des personnages, au point d'en faire leur mode d'existence essentiel. Ce faisant, ils s'inscrivent dans une tradition viennoise de l'opérette : ainsi, dans plusieurs de ses écrits, Lehar revient sur la rupture que constitue *La Veuve Joyeuse* dans l'histoire de l'opérette, et plus largement, sur les transformations que l'essor de l'opérette viennoise au tournant du XX^e^ siècle impulse sur la forme. Il insiste notamment sur l'idée qu'elle porte dorénavant sur scène des êtres vivants, mus par de véritables émotions, s'exprimant de manière musicale et artistique[19]. Lubitsch connaît évidemment très bien ce modèle, qui l'a bercé durant sa jeunesse berlinoise. Il en reprend l'idée cardinale, selon laquelle la performance musicale ne doit pas interrompre la construction du personnage, mais au contraire participer à plein de sa caractérisation. Ainsi, Lubitsch prend soin de maintenir une continuité chez ses personnages entre les moments chantés et le reste du récit. Il s'agit là d'un élément fondamental aux yeux du cinéaste, au point de conditionner son choix de parolier. Il semblerait en effet que ce soit pour cette raison qu'il sollicite aussi fréquemment Leo Robin : ce dernier raconte ainsi que lorsqu'il a interrogé Lubitsch sur les raisons pour lesquelles il travaillait avec lui, il aurait répondu « *I work with you because you do not make performers out of my characters* ». En effet, d'après Robin, ce qui plait à Lubitsch dans sa manière d'écrire, c'est qu'elle implique une unité des personnages, qu'ils soient en train de chanter ou de jouer: « *he felt, Robin said, that with my style of integrating the lyrics with the book and everything, the character remained the same, instead of suddenly becoming a performer and walking out of the picture* »[20].

Ce choix de ne pas dissocier caractérisation du personnage et performance musicale, mais de faire au contraire de l'expressivité musicale la modalité centrale de leur construction se trouve non seulement au fondement de ces films, mais va même être dramatisé comme une véritable conversion. En effet, les premières séquences

19 Citons par exemple : « Dans *La Veuve Joyeuse*, j'ai essayé de porter à la scène des êtres vivants. Il fallait que l'action naquît à l'intérieur. [...] L'opérette est un genre artistique qui a pour objet une expérience humaine, drapée dans une forme musicale et artistique. » ; cité dans Lehar Franz, *La Veuve Joyeuse*, Livret de l'Opéra de Lyon.

20 « Je travaille avec vous, parce que vous ne faites pas des interprètes de mes personnages » ; « il avait le sentiment, expliqua Robin, qu'avec ma manière d'intégrer le chant au livret, le personnage restait le même, au lieu de soudainement se transformer en interprète et quitter le film », cité par Scott Eyman, auteur d'une biographie de référence sur Lubitsch ; voir Eyman Scott, *Ernst Lubitsch, Laughter in Paradise*, Baltimore/London, John Hopkins UP, 2000, p. 167.

de *The Love Parade* comme de *The Smiling Lieutenant* peuvent être lues comme une dramatisation du renoncement à l'usage purement attractionnel de la musique au profit de la valorisation de sa puissance expressive. Ainsi, les deux films s'ouvrent sur une séquence visant à caractériser le personnage masculin comme un joyeux séducteur: dans *The Love Parade*, la saynète entre Alfred, sa maitresse Paulette, et le mari de celle-ci ; dans *The Smiling Lieutenant*, le départ furtif d'une femme de l'appartement de Nikki. Les deux séquences se concluent sur une prestation chantée par Maurice Chevalier. Ces numéros sont explicitement présentés comme des attractions : en témoigne leur forme, les deux numéros étant tournés frontalement et ponctués de regards caméra appuyés de Chevalier ; le type de prestation, avec un chant à pleine voix et de nombreux mimes ; ou encore l'usage explicite et revendiqué de stéréotypes, tels le joyeux soldat dans *The Smiling Lieutenant*, ou encore le *French lover* dans *The*

Love Parade, affublé de son canotier et de son accent parisien. Dans les deux cas, la distance ironique est soulignée : dans *The Smiling Lieutenant* par le costume, associant pyjama et chapeau militaire, dans *The Love Parade*, par le dédoublement dégradé de la performance, reprise d'abord par Jacques le domestique, puis par le chien. La séquence musicale suivante mobilise en revanche un autre usage de la musique et du chant, qui en fait au contraire une modalité privilégiée de l'expression de l'intériorité des personnages. Elles sont portées dans les deux cas par le personnage féminin: le chant de la Reine dans *The Love Parade*, ou le jeu au violon, puis le chant au piano de Frantzi dans *The Smiling Lieutenant*. Enfin, une troisième séquence musicale, à deux voix, qui acte la séduction et la formation du couple, marque également la transformation de la manière de chanter de Chevalier, qui sort de sa logique initiale d'exhibition pour intégrer progressivement le modèle promu par le personnage féminin, celui de l'expressivité sentimentale. Il s'agit là d'un choix conscient de Lubitsch, qui pour ce faire doit aller à l'encontre de la propension naturelle de Chevalier : ainsi d'après le témoignage du mixeur son[21], Chevalier a tendance à chanter très fort et parler plutôt bas, et Lubitsch doit le pousser à aller contre cette tendance. De même, la mise en avant dans *The Love Parade* des origines françaises de Maurice Chevalier, via l'insistance sur Paris ou sur l'accent français qu'il n'arrive pas à perdre, peut être comprise comme une manière de dramatiser le renoncement au modèle français de l'opérette, reposant sur un usage beaucoup plus central de la parodie et du stéréotype, au profit du modèle viennois.

21 Publié dans le *Photoplay* du 30 juillet 1930.

La musique joue un rôle prééminent dans l'ensemble de l'œuvre de Lubitsch, bien au-delà de ses seules productions musicales ; il n'y a donc rien de surprenant à ce qu'il investisse, dès son émergence, la question du cinéma musical et de ses possibilités expressives. Ses efforts se concentrent essentiellement, dans cette série musicale Paramount, sur la recherche d'équivalents cinématographiques à ce qui constitue un principe fondamental de l'opérette, à savoir la construction musicale d'un monde fictionnel. Ces trois films témoignent en effet de l'effort constant de Lubitsch pour rompre avec la logique de l'attraction et de la performance, afin de proposer une vision du cinéma musical qui ferait de la musique l'essence même des êtres et des choses, c'est à dire à la fois de l'environnement et de la nature humaine.

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NOTICE

Katalin Pór est maître de conférences en études cinématographiques à l'Université de Lorraine et membre du 2L2S. Spécialiste de l'histoire du cinéma hollywoodien classique, elle travaille plus particulièrement sur les relations entre les industries du théâtre et du cinéma, ainsi que sur les transferts entre cinémas européens et américain. Elle a notamment publié *De Budapest à Hollywood. Le théâtre hongrois et le cinéma hollywoodien 1930-1943* aux Presses Universitaires de Rennes en 2009. Ses travaux récents portent sur les usages des ressources scéniques dans le film musical des premiers temps, ainsi que sur les relations d'Ernst Lubitsch aux studios hollywoodiens. Elle prépare actuellement un ouvrage sur cette question, à paraître aux Éditions du CNRS en 2018.

RÉSUMÉ

Durant les premières années du cinéma sonore, à une période où ni les normes ni les formes du film musical ne sont encore fixées, Lubitsch réalise de manière quasi consécutive trois films musicaux à la Paramount : *The Love Parade*, *Monte Carlo* et *The Smiling Lieutenant*. Cet article s'efforce de démontrer que ces trois projets poursuivent un objectif commun, à savoir l'invention d'une version cinématographique de l'opérette. Puisant dans les sources traditionnelles de l'opérette et s'entourant de connaisseurs de cette forme, Lubitsch s'emploie à rechercher des équivalents cinématographiques de ce qui constitue un principe fondamental de l'opérette, à savoir la construction musicale d'un monde fictionnel. Ces trois films se caractérisent en effet par une volonté de rupture avec la logique de l'attraction et de la performance, au profit d'une vision du cinéma musical qui ferait de la musique l'essence même des êtres et des choses.

Mots-clés

Ernst Lubitsch ; cinéma sonore ; film musical ; opérette ; *The Love Parade* ; *Monte Carlo* ; *The Smiling Lieutenant*

ABSTRACT

During the first years of sound movies, at a period when neither the norms nor the form of the musical picture were yet established, Lubitsch directed three musicals for the Paramount studio, almost consecutively: *The Love Parade*, *Monte Carlo* and *The Smiling Lieutenant*. This article seeks to demonstrate how those three projects are aiming towards a common goal, which is the invention of a cinematographic version of the operetta. Drawing from the traditional sources of the operetta and surrounding himself with specialists of the form, Lubitsch seeks to invent cinematographic equivalents, from what constitutes a cardinal principal of the operetta, *i.e.* the musical construction of a fictional world. Indeed, these three movies can be characterized by a common estrangement from the dynamic of attraction and performance, and by their attempt to create a musical film in which music would constitute the essence of things and beings.

Keywords

Ernst Lubitsch; talking movies; musical film; operetta; *The Love Parade*; *Monte Carlo*; *The Smiling Lieutenant*

NARRATIVE REALISM AND THE MUSICAL. SUTURES OF SPACE, TIME AND PERSPECTIVE

Dan Blim

Musicals are rarely deemed "realistic." If anything, scholars have repeatedly invoked the concept of utopia when theorizing the musical. As Stacy Wolf suggests, golden-age musicals of the 1940s and 1950s "not only produced a utopian effect in song and dance, but they also conveyed a more direct utopian impulse, resolving social conflicts metaphorically in the (literal) marriage of a man and a woman."[1] The musical is thus positioned as a fantasy world, a world where bodies move in perfect choreographed unison, where speech blurs into song. And yet, the stage or screen of a musical is not without limits to its fantastic nature. Most achieve their power by presenting characters, settings, and conflicts that are relatable for audiences by being grounded in real (and sometimes non-fictional) human experiences.

Realism in theater and film, however, is an aesthetic as well as dramatic choice. A less-remarked upon aspect of realism within the musical is how conventions of staging and narration convey a realistic story to the audience. For example, stage productions lay bare the artifice of the mise-en-scène. Realistic sets can awe the spectator – the helicopter of *Miss Saigon* or the ship that thrusts into the audience at the opening of the 2015 Broadway revival of *The King and I*. But that awe belies an expectation that sets will not seem fully realistic, nor need to. Films, on the other hand, make much of location shooting – *West Side Story* and *The Sound of Music* offer two classic examples of films that open with grand opening shots that place us into the heart of Manhattan's skyscrapers or the Austrian Alps, while *Brigadoon* has been maligned for looking like it was filmed on a stage (as it was).

Film, as a medium, has been particularly circumscribed by expectations of realism. Graham Wood describes film as "the ultimate medium of documentary realism," while Rick Altman insists that film "overcomes the dichotomy between screen and spectator," allowing the spectator to lose oneself in a film (unlike a theater, where the audience is

1 Stacy Wolf, "'Something Better than This': *Sweet Charity* and the Feminist Utopia of Broadway Musicals," *Modern Drama* 47, no. 2 (Summer 2004), p. 314.

prompted to react as observers).[2] Yet film theorists have long grappled with the precise methods by which film achieves its realism. Hugo Munsterberg, an early film theorist, stressed the importance of methods like juxtaposing images through editing and close-up shots to achieve an independent language of cinema that was distinct from theater, a language that achieves an emotional realism: "In every respect the film play is further away from the physical reality than the drama and in every respect this greater distance from the physical world brings it nearer to the mental world."[3] André Bazin, however, contrasted film not with theater but with photography, and thus favored techniques of deep focus and long takes that minimized manipulation and mediation and allowed cinema to capture both time and space as a hallmark of realism.[4]

Theories of theatrical realism need not engage the mechanics of photographic representation, but tend to focus on the stage as a space for engaging a live audience.

Stanislavksi's foundational work on realism insists upon allowing the audience to imagine with the actors through the careful selection of specific and focused details that convey subtextual relationships, in contrast to a "naturalist" reproduction of superficial and irrelevant details.[5] We may observe a parallel between Stanislavski and Munsterberg's emphases on juxtaposing images and close-ups, as both use specifically chosen details to emphasize a psychological realism over surface and both afford audiences to construct meaning for themselves. Addressing musical theater specifically, Millie Taylor aligns realism with the liveness of theater, the fact that what audiences are witnessing is unmediated. She posits that "there is a cognitive communication in live musical theatre performances that… can produce an experience of co-presence at a unique moment, intimacy, cognitive empathy, and emotional contagion."[6] Again, we can observe a parallel between theater and film: both Taylor and Altman emphasize how these respective media create a powerful bond between art and audience, although each suggests a different mechanism for developing that bond based on either forgetting about distance or awareness of proximity.

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2 Graham Wood, "Why Do They Start to Sing and Dance All of a Sudden? Examining the Film Musical," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Musical*, ed. William A. Everett and Paul R. Laird, Cambridge/New York, Cambridge UP, 2008, 306 and Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical*, Bloomington, Indiana UP, 1987, p. 77. Wood continues to state: "theater audiences have learned over centuries to suspend their disbelief in the illusion of reality they observe," a claim I would qualify in that they suspend disbelief in some regards but not others. See Wood, p. 312.

3 *Hugo Munsterberg on Film: The Photoplay – A Psychological Study and Other Writings*, ed. Allan Langdale, New York, Routledge, 2002, p. 130.

4 André Bazin, "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema," in *What is Cinema? Volume 1*, Selected and Translated by Hugh Gray, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2004, pp. 23-40.

5 Jean Benedetti, *Stanislavski, An Introduction*, New York, Routledge, 2004, pp. 17-18.

6 Millie Taylor, *Musical Theatre, Realism, and Entertainment*, Burlington, VT, Ashgate, 2012, p. 131.

Efforts to theorize realism in both film and stage are thus complexly related. Both emphasize human emotions, a level of empathic connection between characters and audience, and an honest representation of the real world at some level – goals that most musicals would include within their own utopian fantasies. At the same time, each medium presents unique challenges to achieving these goals because they do so through different means. Such differences are, I argue, at the heart of adaptation.

While much work on adaptation has focused on issues such as text and performance, I focus here on the process of staging. In particular, strategies of staging diverge often in moments that challenge the realism inherent in narrative structures through what I call "sutures." Sutures are moments where the continuity of time, place, and perspective is temporarily broken for theatrical effect. These could be moments that alter a linear progression of time, such as a flashback or flashforward or an achronological plot, a unified presentation of space, such as characters appearing together but unaware of each other, or an objective/omniscient point of view, such as a hallucination or dream in a character's mind. Such moments stand in contrast to the plausibility and realism of a linear narrative, told in one space at a time, and from an omniscient or objective viewpoint for the audience. By "suture," I also emphasize not only that something has ripped in the realistic continuity at these moments, but also that the gap is then somehow stitched up and reconnected by the staging, so that the audience is still able to understand the moment clearly. A comparison of how stage and screen directors handle such moments of suture reveals much about the limits of what each medium can achieve for audiences.

In my consideration, I examine not just Broadway stagings, but school and community stagings as well. My reasoning is two-fold. First, access to these live performances is easier to come by in the age of YouTube. And second, these small-scale productions have much to contribute to the logistics of staging: without state-of-the-art technology or elaborate sets, they rely more fully on the essence of staging to convey meaning to an audience.

SPACE

Spatial sutures are the most common to theater. Productions take place in the bounded space of the stage, but the stories they tell are rarely confined to a single room. Sets can impart an air of realism; indeed, elaborate revolving or platformed sets can realistically create several connected spaces for characters to move through on a single stage. Nevertheless, the stage almost always relies on artifice and imagination to convey the space that the characters inhabit. In such instances, space is more indirectly established through other means, such as staging and lighting, as well.

In his thematic study of the Broadway musical, Scott McMillin writes critically of the modern megamusical, or as he calls it, the "technological musical": "Let the orchestra play rhapsodically while the staging takes over the plot … in a truly unified effect between the orchestra and the stagehands."[7] McMillin goes on to align the technological musical, with its unification of technology and music, not with earlier stage musicals but with the film musical.[8] "The difference," McMillin writes, "between theater and film is that theatre occurs in a series of events in a single space, the stage, where the vulnerability of the performers is visible, and film occurs as a series of events photographed and screened, where the vulnerability of the performers is rendered irrelevant. …Gone is the concentration of all locations onto one stage. …The result is that *anywhere* can be projected by the film and the audience will be there to receive it, for the audience assumes it is anywhere, too. In the theater, the audience is *somewhere*."[9] I will return to McMillin's final point, the placement of the audience, later in this essay, but for now I want to focus on the manipulation of space and location in musicals.

The stage, as McMillin notes, can become any space while never ceasing to be a stage. It is, in short, a non-realistic presentation of its fictional world. Let us start by considering the opening of *Damn Yankees*. The show opens in the living room of a married couple, Joe and Meg Boyd. As Joe sings to the baseball game he watches on television, Meg sings to the audience about her husband's neglect. The song then becomes a chorus number – as other married couples join in the song. On stage, the husbands and wives move in choreographed numbers. In a promotional video put out by Seattle's Fifth Avenue Theater, we see the housewives parade through a series of living rooms and congregate to the side (**fig. 1**).[10] In her discussion of the theater as a medium for musicals, Tamsen Wolff suggests that the formation of community is a principle aim for community.[11] Wolff discusses choreographed singing and dancing together as "the most powerful expression of that community," and the opening scene of *Damn Yankees* demonstrates this by allowing both Joe and Meg to find camaraderie in fellow fans or ignored spouses. But this effect is furthered by the artifice of staging, the collapsing of space on stage to allow these characters to physically come together

7 Scott McMillin, *The Musical as Drama*, Princeton, Princeton UP, 2006, p. 169.

8 McMillin's criticism here is part of a wider critical condemnation of the megamusical. As Jessica Sternfeld observes, despite (or perhaps because of) their popularity, scholars and critics regularly "dismiss, disdain, and purposefully ignore the genre." See Sternfeld, *The Megamusical*, Bloomington, Indiana UP, 2006, p. 5.

9 Scott McMillin, *The Musical as Drama*, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

10 5th Avenue Theatre, "Six Months Out of Every Year". Accessed March 15, 2017.

11 Tamsen Wolff, "Theater," in *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, ed. Raymond Knapp, Mitchell Morris and Stacy Wolf, Oxford/New York, Oxford UP, 2013, p. 127.

(despite ostensibly being in separate houses). The stage permits such non-realistic boundary crossing, but the film does not – directors Stanley Donen and George Abbott use a split screen to bring the characters together, yet by dividing the screen they reinforce the isolation of each housewife rather than permit a community to form through song and choreography (**fig. 2**). Filmic space, unlike stage space, cannot be easily collapsed.

1. Twin choruses of housewives and fans congregate in *Damn Yankees*

2. Split screen in the film of *Damn Yankees*

There are multiple other examples of characters singing simultaneously on stage that must be adapted for screen. The filmed version of "The Telephone Hour" from *Bye Bye Birdie* uses the same split screen techniques at first, but later abandons its own sense of naturalistic space by putting telephones into diners and locker rooms (**fig. 3**). Yet these spaces, it should be noted, are where crowds would naturalistically gather but not naturalistically talk on the phone. In other words, audiences still read the chorus on screen as occupying a single space, even as belief is suspended that a locker room has a bank of telephones. Stage performances wrestle with the other side of this issue: how to show that the girls on stage at the beginning are in separate bedrooms without an elaborate set. A video of the Oconomowoc High School production demonstrates one solution: the girls are situated on different platforms, each adopting a different pose, and none looking at any other girl (**fig. 4**).[12]

3. Ensemble with non-naturalistic telephones in the film of *Bye Bye Birdie*

"Lida Rose/Will I Tell You" from *The Music Man* offers yet another example that illuminates the ambiguity inherent in spatial sutures. The 1962 film uses twin irises to move between the school board's performance and Marian's (**fig. 5**). The irises are effective in two ways. First, they hearken back to early cinema, which in turn enhances the nostalgic aspects of the musical. Second, they mimic a well-used stage convention: dual spotlights, which suggest a vastness of space in the darkness between them – a common way of staging this number. However, the nature of the duet in the show appears to be ambiguous, for several other stage performances of the show solve the problem of space

12 Appaloosas, "Bye Bye Birdie – Telephone Hour". Accessed March 15, 2017.

in a surprisingly straightforward manner: placing Marian and the school board in the same diegetic space and having them acknowledge each other (**fig. 6**).[13]

4. Staging several girls' bedrooms in *Bye Bye Birdie*

5. Twin irises with the school board and Marian in the film of *The Music Man*

13 For example, see the San Francisco School of the Arts 2015 production: Savannah Occhiogrosso, "Lida Rose/Will I Ever Tell You (The Music Man)," or Azusa Pacific University's 2008 Production: MS_ ScenicDesign, "Lida Rose-Will I Ever Tell You-Music Man, Azusa Pacific University 2008". Accessed March 15, 2017.

6. The school board and Marian meet on stage in *The Music Man*

The 2003 filmed television production similarly features Marian and the school board meeting – although the staging is more awkward here; whereas on stage the two actors can easily walk to meet each other, on film shots of Marian and the school board walking repeatedly dissolve into each other until they meet on the street, but while these dissolves do merge the characters together more than the earlier film's twin irises, they give no sense of them physically sharing the same space (**fig.** 7). Bringing the characters together again creates a strong effect of community within its small-town setting, and foreshadows the eventual union of Marian and Harold Hill (who, in fact, begins the song "Lida Rose").

7 a/b. (a) Dissolves between the school board and Marian before (b) they meet in the television film of *The Music Man*

Whereas splitting the screen attempts to treat the screen as a stage, simultaneously presenting the multiple characters, a more common solution on film is simply to cut

between the different locations. The climactic "Tonight (Quintet)" from *West Side Story* does this, as Tony and Maria prepare for their date, the Jets and Sharks prepare to rumble, and Anita prepares for a night with Bernardo after the rumble. The film cuts between the scenes, graphically matching shots of the Jets and Sharks walking to increase the tension between them. The cutting opens up space for the gangs to move, but it also limits the quintet's effectiveness as an ensemble number. To heighten the match between on-screen action and the soundtrack, the mix is altered so each time the shot cuts to a different character, that character appears louder in the mix. The preservation of naturalistic space also drastically shifts the dramatic development in the song. In stage productions, Riff walks over to Tony and prods Tony to agree to show up at the rumble (**fig. 8**).[14] Because continuity editing in the film implies cutting between simultaneous but spatially separate events, the film plays out in "real" time and space, meaning Riff cannot move from the Jets to appear suddenly in Tony's space without destroying the illusion of simultaneity; the moment is relegated to a separate non-musical scene.

Finally, cutting can also alter our spatial awareness of characters on film even in a scene that takes place in a single space. A clear example of this comes in "A Heart Full of Love" from *Les Misérables*. A classic love triangle, the scene plays out with Marius and Cosette falling in love as they speak for the first time, as Éponine, who secretly loves Marius, watches from a distance and pours out her feelings in a soliloquy to the audience. On stage, the placement of both the characters and the gate helps to convey the emotional arc of the scene. In the Broadway tour from 2000, a rotating set shifts the audience's perspective between inside and outside the gate of Cosette's house. When Marius climbs the wall to speak with Cosette, the set rotates to bring us inside the gate, while Éponine is left to watch upstage through the iron bars. When the trio begins, however, Éponine moves further upstage to stand next to the gate, inches away from Marius and Cosette (**fig. 9**). Doing so breaks the realism of space, yet by bringing Éponine closer to the audience, her emotional arc is rendered equally important.[15] In Tom Hooper's film adaptation, however, he settles on a series of close-ups of each character. While allowing for more subtle performances on film, the segmentation of the three characters into their own shots prevents any development in terms of their relationships. If the stage version defies realistic space by rotating and defying the barrier of the fence for emotional function, the film obliterates a sense of space altogether, bringing all three characters front and center. Their emotional proximity is to the audience, rather than to each other.

14 For example see StaplesPlayers, "Tonight Quintet – West Side Story – Staples Players". Accessed March 15, 2017.

15 bcputheatre, "Les Miserables – Part 7 (US Tour, February 7, 2000)" and bcputheatre, "Les Miserables – Part 8 (US Tour, February 7, 2000)". Accessed March 15, 2017.

8 a/b. Riff walks from the Jets (stage left) to meet Tony (center stage) in *West Side Story*

9 a/b. Eponine moves upstage from behind the gate
to be closer to the audience in *Les Misérables*

Theatrically speaking, time is the inverse of space. As the last section discussed, space can be altered and collapsed on stage, but remains realistic and continuous on film; time, on the other hand, can be altered more easily on film than on stage. Film regularly plays with our conception of time, whether through parallel editing, montage, or flashbacks and flashforwards. Stage dramas can certainly cover spans of time across acts, but typically individual scenes play out in real time. This discrepancy appears to guide directorial choices in both media.

One of the most famous narrative disruptions to realistic time in musical theater is Jason Robert Brown's *The Last Five Years*. *The Last Five Years* charts the course of a failed marriage from the perspectives of both protagonists, but while Jamie's songs tell their story forward from meeting to separation, Cathy's songs chronicle their marriage in reverse, beginning with their separation and moving back in time. The songs alternate between the characters and chronologies, and are typically sung by only one character – with two exceptions. "The Next Ten Minutes" is where the two chronologies intersect, as Jamie proposes, they wed, and then – from Cathy's perspective – Jamie proposes again. The song opens with just Jamie's half of a conversation; he is alone in a rowboat, speaking to an imaginary Cathy. As Jamie proposes, Cathy enters in her wedding dress, and soon after sings in response. As Cathy and Jamie sing together for the first time, Brown directs, "They are standing at the altar together, looking directly at each other for the first time in the play."[16] The song concludes with Cathy climbing into the rowboat alone, and singing her half of the conversation. In the film adaptation of *The Last Five Years*, this song opens the scene with a close up of their hands clasped loosely as they walk through Central Park. Whereas on stage we more easily accept the presence of a character we cannot see, on film we again place a greater emphasis on the realism of diegetic space. By not showing Jamie's face, however, we are left unclear whether the song is an internal monologue in voice-over or audible to Cathy. The film powerfully uses a cut to jump from their proposal to their wedding day, then, with a slow upward pan across the trees and sky of central park, the camera arcs back down on the same establishing shot of their hands as Cathy gives her side.

16 Jason Robert Brown, *The Last Five Years: The Complete Book and Lyrics of the Musical*, Montclair, Applause Theatre and Cinema Books, 2011, p. 34.

10 a/b. Jamie and Cathy on stage together, yet performing separately in *The Last Five Years*

The final number, "Goodbye Until Tomorrow/I Could Never Rescue You," uses more complex cinematic work. In this number, Cathy is saying goodbye after their first date, while Jamie is moving out after their divorce. In a stage production from Old Rochester Regional High School, the two actors often stand on opposite sides of the stage, delivering the song to the audience, before crossing each other on stage without noticing each other (**fig. 10**).[17] The film, however, provides a more cathartic conclusion by allowing for characters to occupy multiple and liminal spaces onscreen that would be impossible on stage. Cathy begins the song as the two walk down the stairs, Jamie one step below and walking backwards. We watch Jamie leave, but as Cathy finishes her verse, the camera pans up to reveal Jamie now in the house, writing a goodbye letter to Cathy. As the camera pans around, it reveals Cathy still standing on the steps. Jamie picks up his coat and suitcase and walks down the steps, then turns around and takes one last look at the house, which Cathy stands in front of. It's unclear if he sees her or not at this moment, but as the two launch into their duet, he climbs the stairs to stand face to face with her.

The opening moment is replayed now (perhaps in Jamie's mind) as the two descend the staircase together. After their final "Goodbye" is sung, we see Cathy over Jamie's shoulder, but after the camera pans behind his back, Cathy has vanished. In a final wide shot of street, Jamie turns and leaves, the light darkens to show the passage of time into evening, and Cathy (in a different outfit) arrives home to presumably find Jamie has left (**fig. 11**).

11a. In the film of *The Last Five Years*, (a) Cathy says goodbye to Jamie after their first date

17 Orrkid1234, "The Last Five Years". Accessed March 15, 2017.

11 b/c. Ther the camera reveals a future Jamie in the window writing his goodbye note

11 d. After Jamie leaves, the two momentarily seem to sing a duet

11 e/f. But as the camera pans around Jamie, Cathy disappears

11 g. Jamie leaves

11 h. The lighting shifts to evening, and Cathy arrives to find Jamie's note

The Last Five Years is not the only musical to disrupt chronological convention, nor the first. Stephen Sondheim's *Merrily We Roll Along* is perhaps the most infamous example, whose chronology runs in reverse as the characters age backwards from bitter and cynical adults to naïve, ambitious kids over the course of the show. *Merrily* closed after just nine performances, and among the reasons cited was the confusing chronology of the show.[18] Raymond Knapp has posited that Sondheim's musicals, taken as a whole, "have been centrally concerned with how musical numbers manage time."[19] *Follies*, for example, involves two married couples confronting their youthful ambitions during a theatrical reunion. In the show, present and past events play out simultaneously on the set of *Follies*. To make this simultaneity clear for the audience, the 2011 Broadway revival uses lighting to draw the audience's focus. When the younger Ben and Buddy appear and sing, they are lit by a blue spotlight to distinguish them from the white spotlights for the present-day characters. Action among present-day characters on stage freezes or grows darker, which helps the audience understand that these temporal spaces are distinct. Later in the show, musical numbers blend past and present more fluidly, but the temporal distinction in the initial scenes helps the audience to understand how past and present coexist.

Follies hints at Sondheim's interest in crafting a theatrical equivalent of a cinematic technique: the flashback. The flashback is one of the oldest and most common cinematic manipulations of time, dating back at least to the silent era.[20] Indeed, when *Carousel* and *Camelot* were adapted for the screen, their screenplays were altered to frame the entire musical as a flashback. Thomas Hischak notes that Lerner adopted this change to help audiences shift from comedy to darker drama in the second half of the show – a similar darkening of mood occurs in *Carousel* – but the choice to employ such a framing device was likely guided in part by flashbacks being a familiar cinematic device.[21] Conversely, the film *Sunset Boulevard* opens with Joe Gillis's narration as the police drive to Norma Desmond's mansion and discover Gillis's body in the pool; the ensuing film is thus framed as a flashback. When the film was adapted to a stage

18 Ethan Mordden, *The Happiest Corpse I've Ever Seen: The Last Twenty-Five Years of the Broadway Musical*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p. 39.

19 Raymond Knapp, "Marking Time in Pacific Overtures: Reconciling East, West, and History within the Theatrical Now of a Broadway Musical" in *Musicological Identities: Essays in Honor of Susan McClary*, ed. Steven Baur, Raymond Knapp, and Jacqueline Warwick, Burlington, Ashgate, 2008, p. 163.

20 Tom Gunning, *D. W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film: The Early Years at Biograph*, Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1991, pp. 117-118.

21 "Camelot" in *The Oxford Companion to the American Musical: Theatre, Film, and Television*, ed. Thomas Hischak, Oxford/New York, Oxford UP, 2008.

musical, the opening frame story was shortened and delivered as a monologue by Gillis before the curtain goes up, with no dramatization of the events.

A more elaborate example that offers a direct comparison of how stage and screen can treat the flashback is "Poor Thing" from *Sweeney Todd*. In this number, Mrs. Lovett recounts for Sweeney Todd the tragic tale of Benjamin Barker (in fact, Sweeney Todd's real identity), who had the room above her pie shop: Barker/Todd was framed for a crime and sent to Australia by a corrupt judge, who then attempted to seduce his wife, Lucy, and later raped her. In Tim Burton's adaptation for film, the number is filmed in a standard flashback manner.

Burton contrasts the two by giving the flashback sequence a brighter color palette, and allows Mrs. Lovett's song to serve as voice-over narration as the events described are depicted on screen. When Todd shouts in outrage over what has happened, we're thrust out of the flashback and into the present with a cut to Todd standing up, while Lucy's scream in the flashback smooths the transition as a sound bridge to Todd's scream.

On stage, however, such cuts are impossible – instead, Lovett's telling and the dramatization happen simultaneously. The logistics of staging the flashback are surprisingly consistent across productions I viewed: it takes place on the platform above the pie shop – a natural choice, as it was Barker's former shop and therefore the presumed site of this tale – and/or on the empty sides of the stage. Yet, by making Todd and Lovett visible throughout, directors can subtly shape the viewer's understanding of who is imagining the flashback we see.

In the original staging by Hal Prince, Mrs. Lovett appears to be controlling the flashback, as she points to the judge when he appears, although remains largely removed from the actions, yet Todd also seems to constrain the content of the flashback. The rape occurs out of sight, behind dancers – a sight perhaps too terrible for Todd to visualize. Todd concludes the number by screaming as he runs out of the pie shop, waving his hands as the dancers disappear as if he himself were wiping away this vision (**fig. 12**). A production by JJ Pearce High School gradually moves Mrs. Lovett to the side and allows the flashback to take center stage. At the climax, the Judge climbs up to the upper platform and mimes slapping Lucy repeatedly, who responds accordingly, lying on the floor below. When Sweeney screams, he runs over to Lucy and attempts to catch her as she runs off stage. This staging accentuates Todd's horror by giving the Judge more power over the flashback, and by having Lucy seem to react to Todd and run away, making her absence more palpable as Todd appears to lose her a second time (**fig. 13**).[22]

22 andrewcotten, "JJ Pearce Theater – Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street". Accessed March 15, 2017.

12 a/b. On stage, Mrs. Lovett points to the arrival of the Judge in a flashback in *Sweeney Todd*

12 c. Sweeney interrupts the flashback, waving the actors away

13 a. In this staging of *Sweeney Todd*, the Judge presides over the flashback

13 b/c. Sweeney tries to rescue Lucy, but loses her again

McMaster University's production sidelines Todd almost entirely. When Mrs. Lovett delivers the song, she does so almost tauntingly to Todd, who looks angrily downward. When the music strikes up a minuet at the masked ball, Mrs. Lovett dances along mockingly; Todd sits motionless. And when Todd cries out at the end, he stands but still does not move. Instead, the Judge calmly stands and, leaving Lucy unconscious on the ground, snaps his fingers to bring the lights down on the scene (**fig. 14**).[23] The Judge retains full power over the flashback, including how and when it ends, signaling Todd's utter defeat. Each of these stagings, with their implications of the power dynamics between Todd, Lovett, and the Judge, resonate throughout the revenge tale that follows.

Finally, even more cinematic than the flashback in its manipulation of time is the montage. Here, visuals and sound work to different ends, though. Rapid cutting of images conveys the rapid progression of time, whereas sound usually runs continuously underneath to bind the many images together in a single sequence. A classic example of this technique comes from *Singin' in the Rain*, when Don Lockwood narrates his life story for a crowd during "Fit as a Fiddle" – his voiceover narration provides continuity, while the images of various low-class establishments humorously contrast the lofty fictional tale he tells. Stage productions of this film musical reproduce this scene, but drastically shorten the sequence to just two or three scenes.[24] Perhaps the most successful evocation of montage on stage is Jerome Robbins' direction of *Gypsy*, where ten years elapse in the course of a single number, "Let Me Entertain You," sung by Baby June and Her Newsboys. Tellingly, Robbins used a strobe light, which effectively turns the stage into a flickering image not unlike a filmstrip. The 1962 film simplifies the montage into a single visual dissolve with voiceover narration, while the 1993 television movie retains Robbins's original direction, supplementing it awkwardly with white supertitles that give the names of towns they play (although these supertitles suggest a span of days or months, not years).

23 DanMegaf, "MMT Sweeney Todd 2015". Accessed March 15, 2017.
24 For example, see Big Grin Studios, "Singin' in the Rain (Act 1)," and andrewcotten, "JJ Pearce Theater – Singing in the Rain 2016". Accessed March 15, 2017.

14 a. In this staging of *Sweeney Todd*, Mrs. Lovett taunts a motionless Sweeney with the flashback

14 b/c. Sweeney stands at its climax, but remains immobile;
instead, the Judge controls the end of the flashback with a snap of his fingers

As the various stagings of the flashback sequence in *Sweeney Todd* suggest, what we witness on stage may be at times subjective rather than objective – a fantasy, dream, or other form of a heightened perspective from a character. Moreover, these perspectival shifts are sometimes ambiguous, or understood only in hindsight; at other times they are quite clearly demarcated. In *Company*, for example, when Joanne interrupts Harry and Sarah's playful fighting to sing "The Little Things You Do Together," the audience understands that the song is a commentary on the action, not actually part of the scene. Where the performance exists is perhaps nebulous, whether inside Bobby's mind or not, but the scene underscores the audience's omniscience, able to take in multiple spaces or times at once. When, on the other hand, we are to understand Mr. Bungee's appearance as a hallucination of Gordon's in the opening scene of *A New Brain*, the dialogue must make it explicit that only he (and the audience) sees him.

On film, however, it is easier to demonstrate a fantasy or single perspective because through cuts and juxtaposition of shots, cinema has an established language for establishing point-of-view shots. A terrific example is used in "All that Jazz" in the film of *Chicago* that would be impossible to do on stage. As Roxie watches Velma on stage, the camera intercuts shots of the two women. A close up on Roxie's eyes is followed by a flash as we see Roxie now on stage singing, "Jazz!" A subsequent cut shows us Roxie back in the audience, brought out of her reverie by Fred's interruption (**fig. 15**).[25]

A similar move occurs in the dream ballet from *Oklahoma!*, when Laurie enters in a wedding dress and meets Curly, who moves in to lift her veil. A cut to Laurie's face as her reaction changes to horror, followed by another cut to reveal Jud suddenly holding the veil (**fig. 16**).

25 Several scholars have commented upon Rob Marshall's alterations of *Chicago* for the film, making the musical numbers largely fantasy sequences. Jessica Sternfeld notes that some critics have praised how the decision "made the musical palatable for modern audiences not accustomed to musicals." See Sternfeld, "Revisiting Classic Musicals: Revivals, Film, Television and Recordings," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Musical*, p. 334. Scott McMillin emphasizes the difference in media as one of metaphors: "The theatre version makes the stage into a night club, with show business serving as a metaphor for the system of justice in Chicago" but "the film of *Chicago* opens in a 'real' nightclub… [then] moves to the 'real' prison… The nightclub now becomes a product of Roxie's imagination. This makes for brilliant film-making, but it is a far cry from the metaphorical use of the stage." See Scott McMillin, *op. cit.*, p. 177.


15 a/b. In the film of *Chicago*, Roxie watches Velma on stage


15 c/d/e. A close up of Roxie's eyes and a flashbulb reveals her fantasy:
she takes Velma's place on stage

15f. A second flashbulb returns us to reality, as we see Roxie still observing from a distance

16 a/b/c. In the film of *Oklahoma!*, (a) Curly lifts Laurie's veil, and
(b) Laurie reacts to her nightmare as
(c) Jud is suddenly revealed to be holding her veil

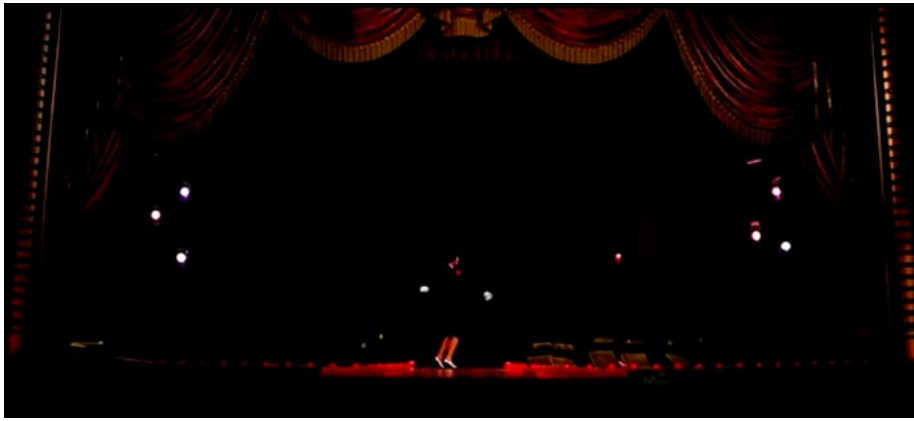
Yet this moment is also captured on stage, where the audience sees Jud approach as part of the wedding party. Laurie walks down the aisle toward Curly, but backs up slightly before turning, oblivious she is now facing Jud instead of Curly (**fig. 17**).

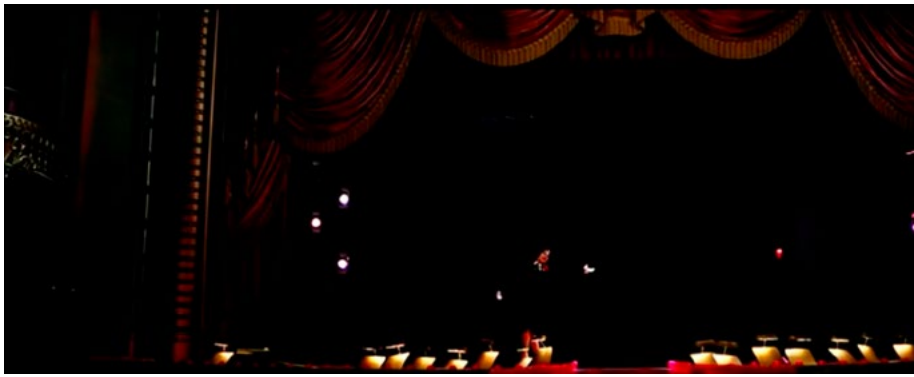
17 a. On stage in *Oklahoma!*, Laurie walks down the aisle to meet Curly (Jud can be seen second in the right-side column)

17 b. Laurie then backs up to stand next to Jud instead of Curly

Perhaps the most successful on-stage portrayal of a character's delusional perspective comes in the climactic "Rose's Turn" from *Gypsy*. Having been dismissed by her daughter, Rose wanders out onto the empty burlesque stage and imagines herself a star. To project that Rose is going crazy, however, it's not sufficient to simply have music materialize and Rose sing – this happens all the time in a musical. In the 1962 film, other visual cues emphasize the fantastic nature of the scene: we see the empty theater, we see the lights go up in the empty orchestra pit as music plays to highlight the physical absence of musicians, and finally we see the spotlight fade out as Rose takes her bow to an empty audience and "reality" returns with the entrance of Rose's daughter (**fig. 18**). On stage, however, the effect is different: the stage Rose imagines is the stage we see, the audience Rose imagines is us. To achieve the effect of fantasy, Styne uses a non-diegetic male chorus to answer "Yeah!" when Rose asks "You like it?" On film, the music emanating from an empty pit is enough to suggest a fantasy, and so the male chorus is omitted, but with a real pit in the theater, the addition of a non-existent chorus helps create this anti-realistic perspective. Finally, Sondheim explains how librettist Arthur Laurents enhanced the anti-realist effect: "He kept Rose bowing through the applause and continuing even after it died, indicating that the ovation was all in her mind."[26]

26 Stephen Sondheim, *Finishing the Hat: Collected Lyrics (1954-1981) with Attendant Comments, Principles, Heresies, Grudges, Whines, and Anecdotes*, New York, Knopf Press, 2010, p. 77.





18 a/b. Rose brings up the pit lights in the film of *Gypsy*

18 c/d. As Rose finishes, the lights fade out and we return to reality

As the range of examples discussed here reveal, directors of stage and screen productions make choices uniquely suited to their respective medium. These choices are based on long-standing conventions of narrative film and theater. In film, the basic unit of construction is the shot – the sequential editing of shots, given narrative context, can convey a complex range of temporality, from the simultaneity of parallel editing, to the collapsing of time through montage, to the disjunctures of flashbacks and flashforwards. Careful editing (or even the framing and movement of the camera, as *The Last Five Years* demonstrates) can also shift between objective and subjective points of view. But the internal consistency of the shot is frequently governed by realism, playing out almost always in a single space and in real time.

In place of the shot, on stage the basic unit of construction is the spot(light). Unlike film, where shots must be in sequence, multiple spots may occur simultaneously. Thus not only are simultaneous events experienced literally simultaneously, flashbacks take on a kind of simultaneity not found on screen, as memory and retelling are both dramatized side by side. Moreover, spots retain the artifice of the stage and are afforded more flexibility as realistic. Spots can accommodate a wider flexibility of space, by allowing characters to move easily from one to another (or not), and by allowing songs to condense time (as when Riff meets Tony in the middle of "Tonight (Quintet)" in *West Side Story*. Indeed, McMillin observes a difference between "book time" and "lyric time," observing that the "lyric time" of musical numbers allows for repetitions and the general suspension of time, but I would suggest that musical numbers allow for time to be compressed as well.[27]

As directors construct musical numbers, it must be acknowledged that there is also an ability for sound and image to be decoupled more easily in film. Certainly, this is easier because of the use of recording apparatuses in films is expected while stage productions derive their power from live performance – consider the acceptance of dubbing in classic film musicals, while the use of lip-synching on stage would presumably be met with derision and scandal, as has happened with "live" performances of popular music.[28] Filmed musicals thus have greater freedom: a flashback can allow a song to function as voiceover and need not be visible on screen, or allow a song to be heard in a character's head without being diegetically performed. Yet when a character is filmed singing, the sound must match the image – hence, the need to alter the

27 See Chapter Two of McMillin.

28 For a fuller treatment of this, see Chapter Three of Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, New York, Routledge, 2008.

mix of the audio during *West Side Story*'s "Tonight (Quintet)" with the cutting or the need to precisely match the editing of *Les Misérable*'s "A Heart Full of Love" to the interweaving of the three voices as best it can. Stage directors lose the ability to emphasize one voice or another in an ensemble, but gain the ability to create a more cohesive sonic effect for the ensemble.

Of course, while stage and film directors certainly take necessary liberties to adapt works to their particular medium, they are no doubt influenced by previous work in other media. Directors often strive to recreate iconic choreography, and indeed several notable choreographers like Bob Fosse, Jerome Robbins, Susan Stroman have directed film adaptations of their stage works. Stage directors are likewise moved to recreate cinematic effects. The conclusion of *Hamilton*, for example, features Aaron Burr's bullet flying in expressively choreographed slow motion, no doubt inspired by the special effects of *The Matrix* and similar modern films. *Hamilton* is certainly not the first stage musical to draw inspiration from the cinema; Stephen Sondheim, for instance, credits scenic designer Jo Mielziner with infusing *Allegro* and *South Pacific* with cinematic techniques like dissolves and cuts.[29] And although such efforts risk being dismissed as merely "derivative," some perhaps deservedly so, they require incredible creativity to pull off effectively in a new medium. And the breadth of the examples adduced here demonstrates a need to recognize how directors, choreographers, set designers, lighting and sound designers, and more all participate formatively in the successful adaptation across media.

29 Steve Swayne, *How Sondheim Found His Sound*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2005, p. 149-50. Swayne argues that Sondheim further cinematized the theater through his music. See Swayne, p. 165-166.

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NOTICE

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ABSTRACT

Although musicals are seldom deemed "realistic," they frequently rely on realistic narrative elements that produce continuity of time, space, and perspective for audiences. At certain moments, however, that continuity is challenged. A musical may feature multiple stories simultaneously, may disrupt the linear chronology of the story, or may portray the fantasy or subjective perspective of one of its characters. Such moments require what I term "sutures" – a method to ensure clarity and continuity to the staging or filming. A comparison of how stage and screen media suture these moments differently illuminates the unique abilities and limitations of each medium, and thereby helps scholars and audience to analyze directorial choices in adaptation.

Keywords

staging; cinematography; editing; time; space; perspective; realism

RÉSUMÉ

Quoique les *musicals* soient rarement jugés « réalistes », ils s'appuient fréquemment sur des éléments narratifs réalistes qui créent pour le public une continuité de temps, d'espace et de perspective. Il arrive cependant que cette continuité soit rompue, lorsqu'un *musical* présente plusieurs histoires simultanées, perturbe la chronologie linéaire de l'histoire, ou donne à voir la perspective mentale ou fantasmée de l'un des personnages. De tels moments exigent ce que j'appelle un travail de « suture », soit l'existence d'une méthode pour assurer la clarté et la continuité de la mise en scène ou du film. Une comparaison de la façon dont la scène et l'écran traitent ces moments de suture met en lumière les capacités et les limitations propres à chaque médium, permettant ainsi à la critique comme au public d'analyser les choix de mise en scène et de réalisation que suppose l'adaptation.

Mots-clés

mise en scène ; cinématographie ; montage ; temps ; espace ; perspective ; réalisme

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*

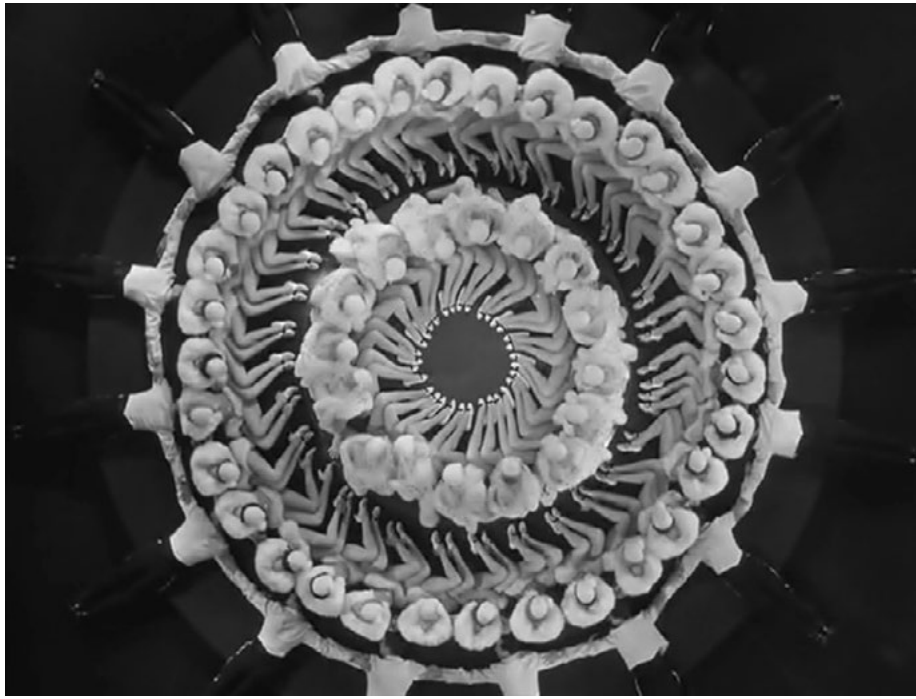
Standards of the 1930s Warner Brothers musicals like "We're in the Money" and "Shadow Waltz" (from *Gold Diggers of 1933*), "Dames" and "I Only Have Eyes for You" (*Dames*), or "Lullaby of Broadway" (*Gold Diggers of 1935*), all initially choreographed and directed by Busby Berkeley, are thus strung 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.

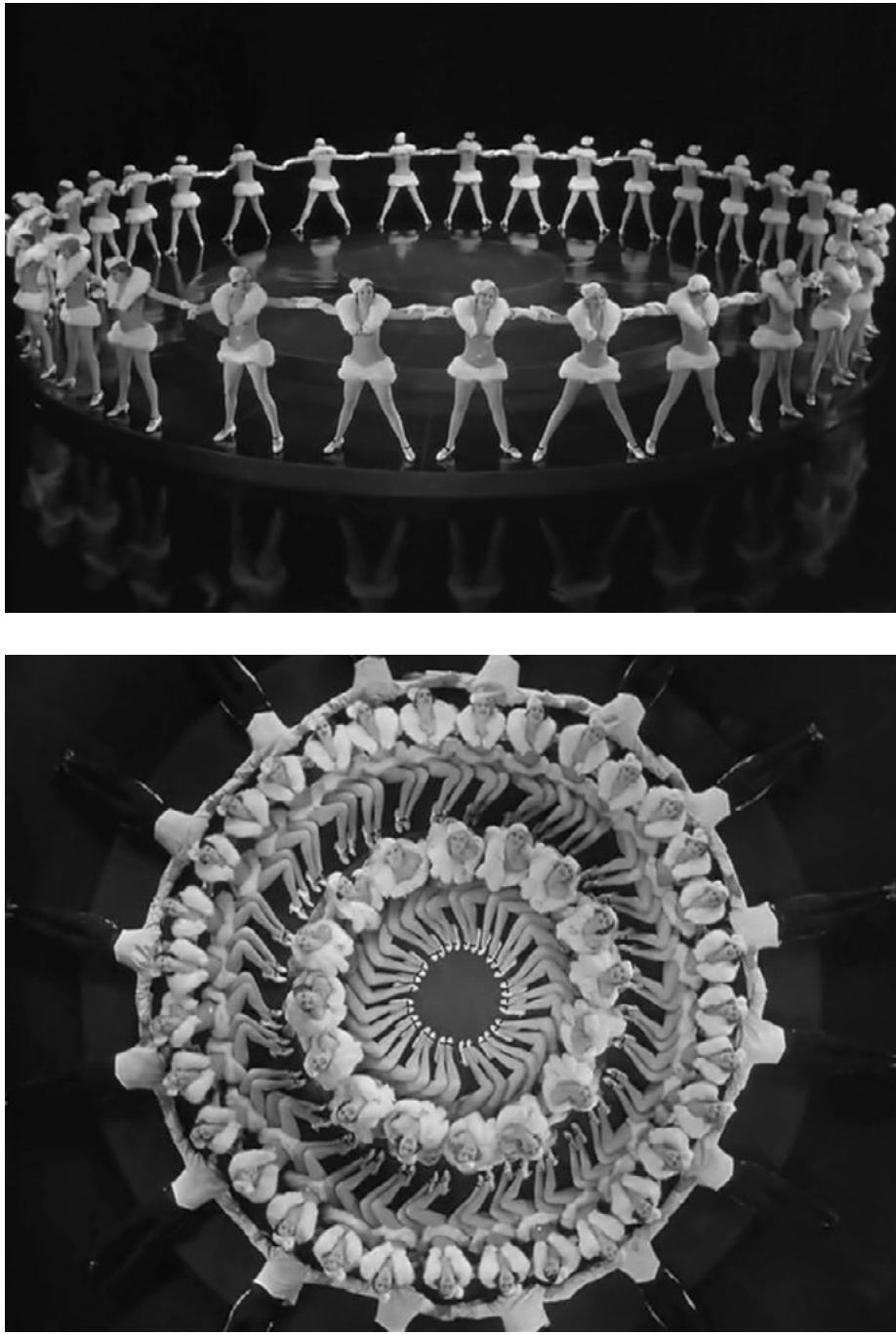
In New York reviews of the 1980 show, critics emphasized the large size of the cast,[31] unusual in 1980 Broadway fare, in particular the large number of chorus girls whom Gower Champion patterned in regimented and geometrical formations, as in the Busby Berkeley films, using raised platforms and onstage 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.

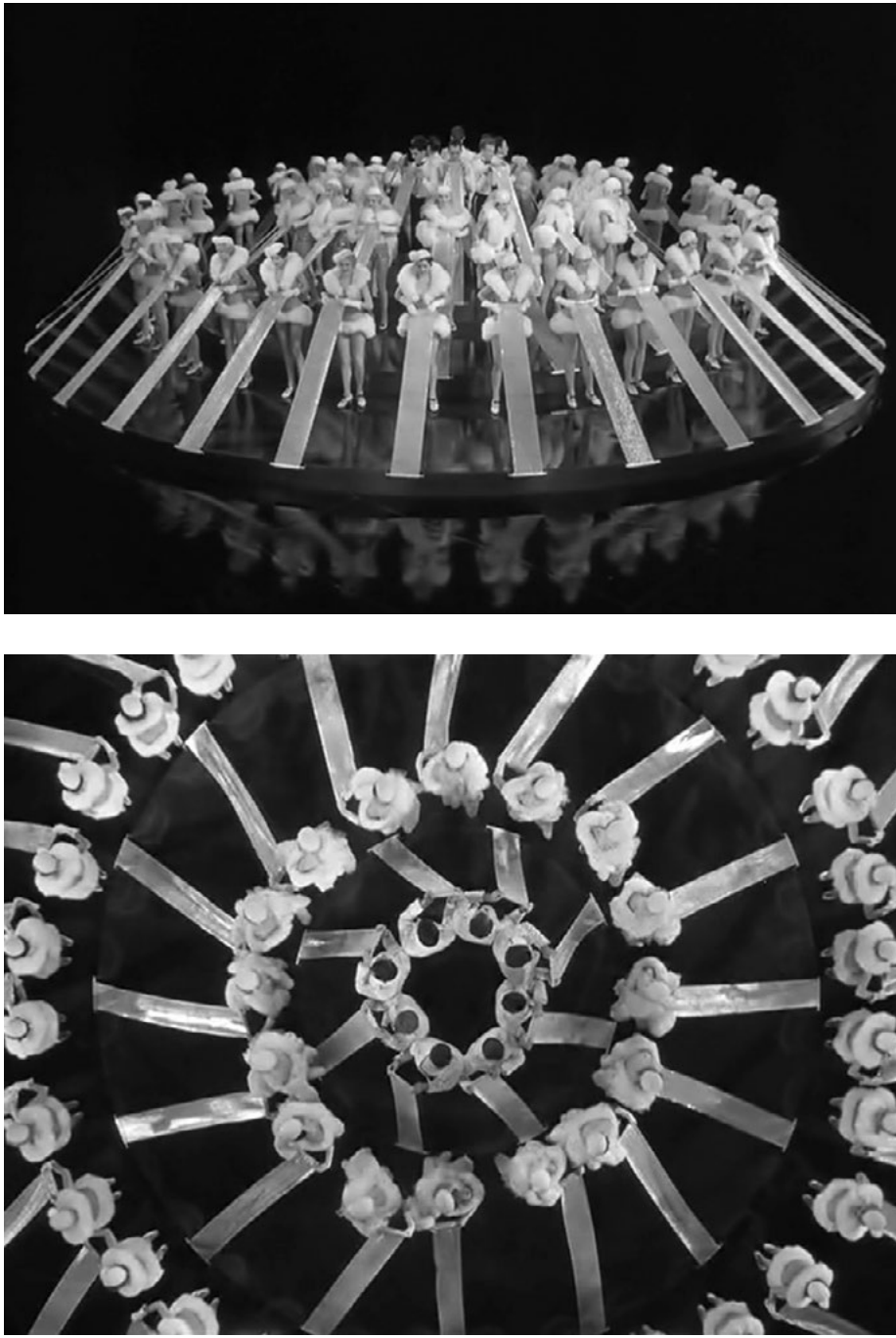
31 Frank Rich, "Theater: Musical '42nd Street; A Backstage Story", *New York Times*, 26 August 1980; Cliff Jahr, "*42nd Street* Log – The Making of a Hit", *New York Times*, 7 September 1980; Hobe Morrison, "*42nd Street*", *Variety*, 27 August 1980.

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

Anne Martina is a former student of the *École Normale Supérieure* in Paris. Now a Junior Lecturer in English at Paris-Sorbonne University, she teaches American literature and culture in the French and Comparative Literature Department. Her research focuses on American musicals and cross-media transfers. She has published several articles on those issues in French peer-reviewed journals (*Sillages Critiques, Bulletin du Ciclaho, Coup de Théâtre*) and co-organized an international one-day conference in Paris in 2015. For the past few years, she has also been carrying out educational projects around musicals produced by the Théâtre du Châtelet, leading her students to participate in the Châtelet's intergenerational musical project in 2013-2014.

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

MAKING OF *AN AMERICAN IN PARIS* BEYOND A RE-CREATION

Roundtable with the creative team of the award-winning stage production

The following is the transcription of a roundtable held at the Mona Bismarck American center in Paris, concerning the production of An American in Paris *which opened at the Théâtre du Châtelet in December 2014, before transferring to Broadway and, later, going on tour and opening in the West End. The participants were Van Kaplan and Stuart Oken (Broadway producers), Craig Lucas (writer), Christopher Wheeldon (stage director and choreographer), Brad Haak (musical director) and Anne Martina (moderator). We are extremely grateful to them for the opportunity to publish this.*

The roundtable was held on December 1st, 2014.

Anne Martina — Thank you for being here tonight to discuss this great show with us. Obviously, re-staging Minnelli's masterpiece and re-choreographing Gene Kelly's choreography is quite a challenge. So what I'm wondering is: how did it all start? Why *An American in Paris*?

Van Kaplan — Why *An American in Paris*? Because it's one of the best-loved films ever made! Let me just start by saying that, although we pay homage to the film in very endearing ways, this is an original work. So while we nod to the script, Craig [Lucas] has written an original book – which is quite exciting. And of course we thoroughly acknowledge the fantastic work of Gene Kelly, but Christopher [Wheeldon]'s work as a director and choreographer is all solely original. We took what we all love in this movie and looked at it through new eyes, from every standpoint. Even from the standpoint of the music: we have used a lot of the orchestral work of George Gershwin that wasn't in the film.

We got this idea because a member of the Gershwin family approached us and said that for almost twenty years people had been trying to get *An American in Paris* to the stage without succeeding. We had a meeting, discussed the possibilities, but at first we couldn't figure out what about this particular movie would resonate today. That's really what got us talking, and eventually what got us excited about the possibility of bringing this film to the stage.

Stuart Oken — When we first were approached, we actually were a bit reticent. We know that this "movie-to-theater" thing happens a lot. Musicals have often – always – been based on previously existing material, but movies turning into Broadway shows have sort of become the norm, and in a way you want to resist that – you want to have a real reason to do it, not just because it's a famous title and people will buy tickets; you need an authentic, central reason. When we sat down and watched the movie, we certainly admired what it was but we had very mixed feelings about how such a "Hollywood backlot" movie, written in 1950 and seemingly set in 1950 (though it dealt with a period that seemed to be very 1944-45), might work today. Really, what changed things was when we started talking with Craig, who was the first creative person to join Van and I. We discovered that just by telescoping the show back, all of a sudden every relationship, every emotion – all the stakes were raised so dramatically by placing them just after the end of the war. Immediately, we felt that this was a lens through which we could look at this show. While not trying to replicate the movie, we could make a new piece that faithfully borrowed the characters, story direction, ideas, style – and gave it all a new reason for existing. That was reason one.

Reason two had to do with dance. You don't run away from dance as the critical factor when you're doing *An American in Paris*; you can't pretend: "oh, we'll just fake the ballet". This is an Academy Award winning movie – how audacious is it to even think that you could go into the gut of that and come out on the other side? To be honest, we told the Gershwins yes only after Christopher agreed to direct and choreograph. Rob Fisher, our musical supervisor, was also a very important member of the team – he always said "my job is to represent George and Ira" – he did a lot of the vocal arrangements, incidental music, helped us build the book with the existing Gershwin music, adding, subtracting... We all participated in that, but he was our "author-representative" in terms of the music. That's the team that conceived this show, and now it's truly become Christopher's show. We're all doing it, in a sense, to help him fulfill his vision.

Anne Martina — From a practical point of view, how did you work on this production from both sides of the Atlantic?

Van Kaplan — We've all been collaborating together to make this new piece. Châtelet has done a fantastic job of building a beautiful and stunning physical production. They have an incredible team, there, and Jean-Luc [Choplin] has been a partner in that sense. We also look to beyond Paris, to New York and the life of this piece – hopefully this will become part of the canon of American musical theater and be performed twenty, fifty years from now.

Stuart Oken — Jean-Luc was part of the producing team. As Van said, they built the sets, they made the costumes, and gave the show its artistic home, its base. It's very common in America for independent producers to develop ideas and, when it gets to that magical place where the show wants to find a home, to open in what we call a regional theater. But this production was so unique, because nobody had ever come to Paris. We really couldn't have worked on this material in a foreign language because we wouldn't have been able to work on it ourselves with the necessary intricacies. But the fact that Châtelet had built an audience for English-language American musicals was extremely fortuitous; so really Châtelet has made history! The show is completely sold out; we're doing forty performances, so it's been a win-win for everybody. And for our company to be in Paris, in the real place – look at the authenticity that it helps to create!

Anne Martina — As you said, this show is a creation, striking a perfect balance between paying homage to the film and creating something totally new. It is set in 1945 (instead of 1950 in the movie), which makes for a much more somber atmosphere, especially at the beginning. Can you tell us where this idea came from?

Craig Lucas — When Stuart and Van called and told me they wanted to adapt this movie I watched it (I'd seen it as a child) and I had an intuition. Alan J. Lerner was, in the Forties, extremely experimental in his interests in musical theater (he'd written a show with Kurt Weil, *Love Life*, that was really a game-changer), and he was a savvy guy. I had a fantasy that he had written a movie about American soldiers in Paris at the end of the war, that he had given this movie to the studio and they had said: "the girl can't be Jewish, we can't see the swastikas all over town, there can be no mention of the war" – and that the studio agreed to make it under certain circumstances – which were probably appropriate to 1949 given that people were happy to put the war behind them. My father fought in the war, most of his friends too – I knew them and knew what had happened; my mother was a French Jew. And looking at *An American in Paris*, I realized that if you take all the characters, treat the circumstances seriously and move the movie up four or five years, *it's all there* – that's what made me think Lerner had actually written something that was not permitted to be made.

So they made a delightful entertainment, a kind of valentine that people loved (and which has about as much to do with France as my German car!) It was shot on a lot and it's a picture-postcard idea of Paris. One of the wonderful things about Jean-Luc was that he asked me to come here last summer and go to the archives to look at what had happened in the years of Occupation and in the years directly after the Liberation – and there was so much information that suited our story.

But it all began the day that Stuart and Van drove to my house, with all these questions about the movie: "Why is Lise in hiding? Why is Henri not the best husband for her? Why doesn't Jerry want to go home to New York? And how do we do a dance musical?" They said they were interested in Christopher Wheeldon and I practically burst into tears. I came to New York when Balanchine was still living and Jerry Robbins was still choreographing for the New York City Ballet. And when I saw Chris's ballets I thought: "This is the future of dance in America." I'm only interested in making musicals if you can do something that hasn't been done before. I don't understand taking a movie that is perfect for what it is and moving it directly to the stage – what's wrong with watching the movie? These wise gentlemen wanted to create a new musical loosely based on *An American in Paris*, and they wanted to do it for Chris Wheeldon, and I said: "Sign me up." And it turned out to be the best experience I've ever had.

Anne Martina — Art is an important theme in *An American in Paris*, both in the film and in your show. It also seems to be a major source of inspiration. But again, there are striking differences with the original movie. Minnelli drew upon the artwork of French impressionists, so his Paris has a late nineteenth-century feel. Yours, on the contrary, is modern. When seeing your show, I also thought that the reflection upon art was more fully developed, and the final ballet therefore more smoothly integrated than in Minnelli's movie.

Christopher Wheeldon — When you boil it down, the show is really about two things: it's about love, and it's about art. And it has these five young people, in Paris, at a time when they discover who they are. The idea was to incorporate the creation of the ballet's score in the story, but also to track the development of Jerry as an artist – track his influences and his being guided by Milo, who is much more of a Peggy Guggenheim-type character in our show than she was in the movie. When Bob Crowley and I sat down to talk about design, we looked at the great artists that were working in Paris during the war and decided that the design of the show should incorporate these artistic styles, and that the final ballet should be a sort of crashing together of these young people's talents – Lise as a dancer, Jerry as an artist and a designer, and of course Adam's score. The idea for Jerry to become the designer of the ballet came quite late in the process: we started to play around with it just before we went into rehearsal in New York. When we did the workshop a year earlier he was just simply an artist who decided to stay on in Paris and had nothing to do with the final ballet; so that was an exciting discovery. Even though the ballet itself is somewhat abstract, it also feels very much like a piece of narrative dance, because not only is it

the moment when we see Lise and Jerry coming together romantically in a satisfying way, but we can now also track all the different art forms coming together.

Anne Martina — It also allows for visual motifs to be scattered throughout the production. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I felt that perhaps it all originated with the Alexander Calder mobile hanging in Milo's apartment, and all those bright touches of color – red, yellow and blue – that are disseminated in different ways until finally Jerry finds a way to put all those pieces together?

Brad Haak — You were really paying attention!

Christopher Wheeldon — Yes. We looked at works by Delauney, Matisse, Calder, Picasso… We also used these artists as ways to define the interiors. Originally there was a very distinct painting that we used to define the Borel home, and the idea for the framed walls that you see throughout the show came from a very famous photograph of the Louvre with all the paintings removed – with just the frames hanging on the walls. All of those inspirations contributed to the overall look of the show. Color can be so emotional, and there's so much color in the music of Gershwin. There's so much story already, even though he didn't write *An American in Paris* with a specific story in mind – or the *Second Rhapsody*, or the *Rhapsody in Blue*. I can't help but think of characters and situations when I hear that music, so we talked about: "what colors do we hear in *An American in Paris*? How do we use the combinations of color to heighten the emotion in the story?"

Anne Martina — Minnelli was very interested in visual arts, especially paintings. But I thought you choosing to use a mobile – three dimensions instead of two, a moving and dancing sculpture – was a stroke of genius. And it summed up another aspect of the show, which is that this is very much a dance musical, in a long lineage of Jerome Robbins shows and others. Did you have that in mind – dancing all the time? Even in the transitions, which makes for such fluidity in your production?

Christopher Wheeldon — I think these guys hired me because they wanted some substantial dances in the show! And I was very excited, though I was nervous about saying yes to directing, because I'd never directed actors before, and it's a very different language, working with actors or working with dancers. Stuart and Van were insistent in such a wonderful way that they persuaded me to have a go and have been, since, incredibly supportive – as indeed everyone else has been. We really have operated as a

team. Some of the best days that we had were the days that Craig and Rob Fisher and I sat around Rob's kitchen on the Upper West Side, throwing ideas back and forth, first developing a basic synopsis, and then discussing how we would use various pieces of the Gershwin canon. We were very lucky in that the Gershwin estate allowed us the use of pretty much any of the music. We had the enormous task (it did feel enormous at the beginning) of finding the right song for the right situation, and making it feel like George and Ira had written this music specifically for our show.

Craig Lucas — (You're so easy to work with – they agreed to everything!)

Christopher Wheeldon — Dance on Broadway has been made a "distant cousin" in many of the new productions. Not many directors really favor dance as a narrative force. This was a great opportunity for me to take dance and make it a primary narrative force, creating a musical where all the elements – the music, the design, the book and the dance – all go hand in hand.

Van Kaplan — George Gershwin had been dead for twelve years before the movie was made, so it always was a sort of compilation "jukebox" musical, if you will. There never was a cohesive score to it. So it actually gave us a lot of artistic licence to be able to use any piece of music. Rob and the team here have done an incredible job selecting songs that advance the story along.

Anne Martina — Did you pick the songs first, or did you look for a certain topic in each song, in order to make it fit with the story?

Christopher Wheeldon — Craig started out by creating a narrative. He had some ideas about pre-existing songs from the movie and how they would fit in. And then we spent time with Rob with the giant songbook of George and Ira, flicking through it and finding songs that fit the situations. And then if we thought a song was right for the show but the situation wasn't right, Craig would go away and think about how we might make the story then fit around the piece of music.

Stuart Oken — For the film itself, they wanted lots of songs in it, so they kept building story opportunities to make room for more. Craig looked at this and said, for instance, that "By Strauss" had no place in this show, so we took it out. There was even a time when we wondered about "I Got Rhythm." I remember saying: "How can we do 'I Got Rhythm' so early on in the show? It's too happy, it's too upbeat, we're coming

out of this dark period." But they figured out a way to tell the story by reinterpreting "I Got Rhythm" quite brilliantly, so that it actually accomplished the very thing that we wanted to focus on. And after all the readings, workshops, putting the script apart and putting it back together – the songs that are in the show today are the same songs that were at our first reading two and a half years ago. They nailed the story and the structure from the first day.

Craig Lucas — The Gershwins wrote a lot of music, particularly for a man who died at 37. However, they were for a lot of very silly Broadway musicals in the 1920s. So there are about five hundred songs saying "I'm really happy I just fell in love," and then there's another four hundred that go "I'll never get the person I want – I'm sad." And then there are whole bunches of satires about psychoanalysis and all the silly things they were making fun of in these very light-hearted shows. Because, to our great misfortune, George Gershwin wrote a short opera at the age of 16 or 17 – and he was told that he was very talented and he was never to do that again! So he spent the next twenty-some years writing silly Broadway musicals and becoming the richest composer in the world. It was only in the last few years of his life that he set out to write his one full-length opera, which all the critics said was very bad. And that's *Porgy and Bess* – which is not so bad.

Anne Martina — All the songs in the show are fantastic and it's a real pleasure to discover them anew. I've also noticed some instrumental versions of well-known Gershwin songs, which make for very smooth transitions. Along with the beautifully fluid scenery, of course. I thought it was all very poetic.

Christopher Wheeldon — Bob Crowley, the show's designer, is an extraordinary man with a great deal of taste, style and knowledge about the history of fashion. But the thing I love most about Bob is his excitement at finding – particularly on this project – the poetry of the city. What color should Paris be, in our production? How do we make a space for all these moving pieces to live in? We came up with this beautiful, pale bluey grey box. So we started with the blue grey box, knowing that it was going to be a show that would dance in every aspect – the scenery as well as the dancers themselves. We started putting pieces inside our grey box and talking about the light of the city. We came here in the summer, we came here in the winter, we walked the streets, thinking about perspective – how do the banks of the Seine look from down here, looking up at the bridge, or from the bridge looking down? We were finding ways to have a light touch, to keep an open space, to allow the dancers to tell the story. That's

not to say it's not a huge show – if you could see what there is in the air you would be amazed. The bars are all within inches of each other, and as for that fabulous moment when Radio City Music Hall appears on the stage… it's a very technically complex show, but the look of it remains light and airy.

Anne Martina — I think that will be all. Thank you very much for coming and sharing your thoughts with us.

Stuart Oken — I just want to say this is the first time that, as a group, we've ever sat down together and talked to people this way.

Anne Martina — Thank you, thank you very much!

DEUXIÈME PARTIE

From subversion to self-reflexivity

"WHERE THE DEVIL ARE MY SLIPPERS?": *MY FAIR LADY*'S SUBVERSION OF *PYGMALION*'S FEMINIST ENDING?

Aloysia Rousseau

In 1916, George Bernard Shaw added a sequel to his 1912 play *Pygmalion* so as to clarify his play's ending, or rather how he wanted the ending to be interpreted. The playwright was indeed weary of the constant romanticizing of his protagonists' relationship. While he defined his play as the story of a young woman's emancipation from her "Pygmalion," it seemed that readers, members of the audience and even the actors themselves, had decided otherwise: the self-professed confirmed bachelor Henry Higgins and his creature Eliza Doolittle were obviously very much in love and had no other choice but to live happily ever after. Shaw opens his postscript, entitled "What Happened Afterwards," with an unequivocal indictment of the romantic happy ending, underlining that "the rest of the story need not be shown in action, and indeed, would hardly need telling if our imaginations were not so enfeebled by their lazy dependence on the ready-makes and reach-me-downs of the ragshop in which Romance keeps its stock of 'happy endings' to misfit all stories."[1] Through this sartorial metaphor, Shaw laments over our conditioned expectations of a happy ending, having all of us who have at some point wished for Higgins and Eliza to end up together bow our heads in shame. Should we then consider that Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe sabotaged Shaw's original intentions in their 1956 musical adaptation of the play? Although *My Fair Lady* offers no explicit happy ending, the modifications brought to the play as well as the two scenes added by Lerner at the end – or rather borrowed from the 1938 film version produced by Gabriel Pascal – strongly point to a romantic union between the phonetician and his pupil, as does Lerner's screenplay for George Cukor's 1964 film adaptation.[2] This article will focus on the changes

1 George Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion* (1912), New York, Garden City, 2015, p. 67.

2 A reminder of the chronology of the filmic and musical adaptations of *Pygmalion* might be useful here:
- 1935: German film version (director: Erich Engel).
- 1937: Dutch film version (director: Ludwig Berger).
- 1938: British *Pygmalion* (producer: Gabriel Pascal / directors: Antony Asquith and Leslie Howard).
- 1956: Alan Jay Lerner's musical *My Fair Lady*.
- 1964: George Cukor's *My Fair Lady* (with a screenplay by Alan Jay Lerner).

brought in Pascal's film[3] and Lerner's libretto as Cukor's film is, as indicated in the film's opening credits, "based on the musical play as produced on the stage by Herman Levin. Book and Lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner. Music by Frederick Loewe." In other words, Cukor's *My Fair Lady* is an extremely faithful – not to say rigid – adaptation of the stage version (the filmmaker in fact going so far as to keep the intermission before the ball scene…).

My aim here will be to try to qualify the common assumption according to which Lerner subverted Shaw's original intentions for commercial and cultural reasons. It is indeed often inferred that *My Fair Lady*, as a 1950s Hollywood musical, inevitably transformed the British play *Pygmalion* into an escapist, crowd-pleasing romance.[4] I would like to offer three counter-arguments, suggesting first of all that Lerner does not have a monopoly on the play's romanticizing but that he is in fact in the tradition of constant subversion of Shaw's original feminist ending. I will then shed light on the romantic subtext which is to be found in *Pygmalion*, casting doubt not only on Shaw's abhorrence of romance but also on Lerner's revisionist stance. A study of the 1938 film's added ending that Lerner retained for the musical and its film adaptation will finally lead me to question Lerner's supposed patriarchal revising of the play.

"THE DEATH OF THE AUTHOR"

When George Bernard Shaw chose *Pygmalion* as a title for his play, what he intended was to subvert the myth: he would tell the story of Galatea shaking off her shackles, thus perceiving Eliza Doolittle as a successor to Henrik Ibsen's Nora. Eliza's "disdainful" last words (telling Higgins that he can "buy [his gloves himself]") as well as her "sweep[ing] out"[5] of the apartment indeed retain some of Nora's intrepid slamming of the door in Ibsen's 1897 *A Doll's House*. Shaw wanted his play to end with his female protagonist's emancipation from patriarchal oppression thus asking Mrs. Patrick Campbell, the actress playing the part in the 1914 production at His Majesty's Theatre (as well as Shaw's love interest), to look neither "obedient" nor "affectionate." That he does so in the patronizing tone which he precisely condemns might be worth noticing:

3 I will from now on refer to the 1938 film version as Pascal's film since he – rather than Asquith or Howard – is the instigator of this adaptation.

4 See, among many other examples, Eric Bentley's disapproval of the musical: "One is drama; the other, musical comedy. That is to say, one is human reality in its richness; the other a facile daydream. Mr. Shaw presented the dynamics of real human conflict. Mr. Lerner cheats and presents pleasing illusions according to a well-established formula" ("*My Fair Lady*," *Modern Drama*, volume 1, number 2, September 1958, p. 135).

5 George Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion, op. cit.*, p. 66.

> At the end, when Higgins says 'oh, by the way, Eliza,' bridle your fatal propensity to run like Georgina to anyone who calls you, and to forget everything in an affectionate tête à tête with him. Imagine that he is the author, and be scornful. All that is necessary is to stop on the threshold. If you find it impossible not to come back, at least don't look obedient and affectionate.[6]

Shaw thus tried very hard to suppress any ambiguity concerning a possible romance between his two protagonists, be it in his instructions to his actors or in his 1916 sequel in which, as already mentioned, the playwright felt the need to remind his readers and audience that Eliza could not marry Higgins but was deemed to marry the younger and gentler Freddy. So resolute was Shaw to impose his interpretation of the relationship between Higgins and Eliza that he in fact kept trying to find a satisfying ending, constantly amending his 1912 text. Shaw's suggestion to Mrs Patrick Campbell that Higgins' last word be "Galatea" as an acknowledgment of his creature's emancipation does not appear in any published version of the play,[7] while Higgins' "*roar[ing] with laughter*" when learning that Eliza will marry Freddy which appears in the 1941 version of the play does not seem to be a favourite with stage directors.[8] Shaw's constant revising of the play as well as his need to write what looks very much like an explanatory note betrays – rather than a widespread misunderstanding on behalf of the audience – conflicting views between the playwright on the one hand… and the rest of humanity on the other hand. It indeed seems that the romantic revision of the play is a temptation almost no one has been able to resist, starting with the actors playing the parts in the first English production at Her Majesty's Theatre in 1914.

As such, *Pygmalion* could be said to epitomize Barthes' notion of the Author's death. Despite the playwright's desperate (and rather coercive) attempts at imposing a univocal meaning to his play's ending, generations of readers (among them audience members, critics or theatre practitioners) have offered their own versions of the

6 *Id.*, *Collected Letters, Volume III, 1911-1925*, ed. Dan H. Laurence, London/Sydney/Toronto, M. Reinhardt, 1985, p. 224.

7 George Bernard Shaw in a February letter to Mrs Patrick Campbell, quoted in *Bernard Shaw: Theatrics*, ed. Dan H. Laurence, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1995, p. 155: "He will go out on the balcony to watch your departure; come back triumphantly into the room; exclaim 'Galatea!' (meaning that the statue has come to life at last); and – curtain. Thus he gets the last word; and you get it too."

8 I am indebted to Leonard Conolly for coming up with a very useful appendix listing the various endings of *Pygmalion* in his Methuen edition.

denouement.[9] Refusing Shaw's user instructions, they have become the multiple playwrights of *Pygmalion*. Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree is the first of a long series of alternative authors whose interpretation of the ending differed from the playwright's. The actor and theatre manager indeed decided to overlook the final stage direction according to which Higgins "*left alone, rattles his cash in his pocket; chuckles; and disports himself in a highly self-satisfied manner*."[10] Rather than seeing Tree embody a proud and confident Higgins who has little doubt as to Eliza's compliantly ordering his ham and cheese, Shaw watched in dismay as Tree "shov[ed] his mother rudely out of his way and woo[ed] Eliza with appeals to buy a ham for his lonely home like a bereaved Romeo",[11] then throwing flowers at her as the curtain fell. As played by Beerbohm Tree, Higgins became the epitome of the suffering male lover fighting for the loved one's consideration, clearly not what Shaw had intended for his character.

Not only did producer George Tyler keep Tree's romantic ending when the play was performed at New York's Park Theatre that same year, but subsequent stage directors and film makers furthered the romanticizing of the play. In their 1938 film adaptation, the producer Gabriel Pascal and co-directors Anthony Asquith and Leslie Howard (who also played Higgins) took the romantic revising of the play to extremes when clandestinely adding a new ending to Shaw's screenplay.[12] Not only had the penniless Hungarian filmmaker succeeded in obtaining the playwright's permission to adapt his play into a movie through a mixture of personal charisma and flattery (Pascal considered himself as Shaw's disciple, addressing him as "Maestro" in all his letters), but he had also apparently convinced Shaw that commercial criteria were to be taken into account.[13] Shaw thus surprisingly decided that this new romantic ending was "too inconclusive to be worth making a fuss about."[14] Shaw had indeed adapted his own play with the help of the scenarist Cecil Lewis, ending the film with "a vision of the

9 Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author", in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, New York, Hill and Wang, 1977, p. 148: "a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author."

10 George Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion*, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

11 *Id.*, *Collected Letters, op. cit.*, p. 228.

12 Shaw ironically won an Academy Award for this screenplay even though the (very popular) ending was not his.

13 Gabriel Pascal to George Bernard Shaw, 17th September 1937, in *Bernard Shaw and Gabriel Pascal*, ed. Bernard F. Dukore, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1996, p. 13: "If I could make the picture only in your spirit, which I will do in any case, not thinking of this stupid box-office question which the distributors ask, I could have cast this picture a long time ago in a way which would please you, and would be worthy of the highest artistic expectations, and also please the genuine cinema audiences of the world. But the mentality of exhibitors and distributors is the mentality of necktie-sellers."

14 Interview given in the *Reynold News*, 22 January 1939, quoted in *Bernard Shaw on Cinema*, ed. Bernard F. Dukore, Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois UP, 1997, p. 142.

future" in which Eliza and Freddy are seen in their florist's shop in South Kensington. Shaw's ending was substituted for another unshavian ending in which Eliza returns to Higgins whose famous last words – "Eliza? Where the devil are my slippers?" – have been retained by Lerner and Cukor in their ensuing adaptations. Not only has Eliza returned to Higgins after a failed attempt from Freddy to whisk her away but it would seem that Higgins' words confirm his patronizing of Eliza (something that I will in fact qualify at the end of this paper). In other words, the 1938 film version offered the audience the supposedly patriarchal romantic ending that Lerner would keep eighteen years later. It would therefore be reductive to interpret *My Fair Lady*'s denouement as typical of the 1950s Hollywood musical. If the musical and its film adaptation do conform to "Hollywood's most reliable formula: boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl,"[15] so does the 1938 film adaptation as well as, to a certain extent, the first productions of the play and, as I will now try to demonstrate, perhaps even Shaw's text.

PYGMALION'S ROMANTIC SUBTEXT

I would like to point out a contradiction between Shaw's primary narrative and his paratext. Despite his recurring indictment of the romantic happy ending, the playwright sends rather ambiguous messages to his audience, starting with the very title of his play. Shaw has often insisted on his choosing *Pygmalion* as a title in order to throw light on his subverting of the myth and how he perceives Galatea as escaping her creator's clutches. But this subversion is never made clear to the members of the audience who, as underlined by Leonard Conolly in his introduction to the play, interpret *Pygmalion* as complying with, rather than destabilizing the myth:

> While Shaw wanted readers and audiences to make the obvious connection with the myth, his aim was then to *subvert* rather than to *fulfil* their expectations. What he discovered, however, is that they preferred fulfilment to subversion and interpreted the play accordingly – i.e., Higgins (Pygmalion) wins Galatea (Eliza).[16]

Shaw in fact only furthered the readers' romantic expectations by choosing the word "romance" as a subtitle for his play, a word that 20th and 21st century audiences readily associate with a romantic relationship, despite the playwright's wish that the word be understood as a literary genre in which sensational events are related. Shaw

15 Virginia Wright Wexman, *Creating the Couple. Love, Marriage, and Hollywood Performance*, Princeton, Princeton UP, 1993, pp. 3-4.

16 Leonard Conolly, ed., George Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion: a Romance in Five Acts*, London, Methuen Drama, 2008, p. xxxiii.

indeed justifies the use of the word in his sequel by describing Eliza's "transfiguration" as "exceedingly improbable,"[17] offering an interpretation of the word that is, in all likelihood, not shared by a majority of readers. The very fact that Shaw feels the need to justify the use of this subtitle hints at the playwright's acknowledgment of the ambiguous signals he sends his readers. We might even contend that there is a certain amount of bad faith in Shaw's *post-factum* definition of romance as an improbable story when having a look at a 1914 *Telegraph* interview in which Shaw summarizes the play as follows: "the romance of a flower girl changed into a lady by a gentleman whom she meets by accident on a wet night when they are both sheltering from the rain under the portico of St. Paul's Church, in Covent Garden."[18] Even though the so-called "transfiguration" is present in this quote ("a flower girl changed into a lady"), Shaw also depicts a setting obviously conducive to a romantic encounter: the "lady" and the "gentleman" "sheltering" from the rain in front of a church do not evidently appear to the reader of *The Telegraph* as a phonetician and his pupil.

In other words, rather than being deterred from expecting a love story, readers and members of the audience are in fact encouraged to do so. Once we've entered the world of the play, the intertextual references only confirm our romantic expectations. The play is indeed, as analyzed by J. Ellen Gainor, laden with references to the fairy-tale genre, prompting us to identify Higgins and Eliza as the prince charming and his princess.[19] Yet I would like to suggest that another essential intertext has been overlooked, an intertext that rather points to Higgins as anti-prince charming. This does not, however, preclude a romantic ending. *Pygmalion* has often been considered as strongly influenced by *The Taming of the Shrew* while another Shakespearean romantic comedy, *Much Ado About Nothing*, remains unnoticed as a possible source of inspiration. Despite Shaw's description of "Much Adoodle-do" as "a shockingly bad play,"[20] I would like to throw light on this romantic comedy if not as a direct influence for Shaw's play, at least as a means for us to understand the character of Higgins as a successor to Benedick, the witty bachelor who succeeds in wooing his Beatrice/Eliza. In other words, Higgins' anti-romantic stance could be interpreted, as Gabriel Pascal and Alan Jay Lerner did, as a façade hiding a romantic hero.

17 George Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion*, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

18 "George Bernard Shaw: Theatre-goers should not laugh out loud," *The Telegraph*, 8 April 1914.

19 J. Ellen Gainor, *Shaw's Daughters; Dramatic and Narrative Constructions of Gender*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan press, 1991. Apart from the obvious reference to the Cinderella rags-to-riches story, Gainor also identifies elements from *Snow White* such as the looking-glass over which the humble Eliza throws a towel rather than considering herself as the "fairest in the land."

20 *Shaw on Shakespeare*, ed. Edwin Wilson, New York, Applause, 1961, p. 139.

Both Benedick and Higgins proclaim their distaste for women – mothers aside of course[21] – early on in the plays. Benedick indeed tells his comrades that he will "live a bachelor" in act I scene 1 of *Much Ado About Nothing* while Higgins claims he is "a confirmed old bachelor, and likely to remain so" in the second act of *Pygmalion*. Both characters therefore make it very clear that they are satisfied with their celibacy, something that Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe have not erased in their adaptation but, rather, chosen to emphasize. They indeed throw light on Higgins' obstinate defense of celibacy and male comradeship in the songs of the musical. Among the four solos given to Higgins, two songs focus on the latter's rejection of a female partner. In the song "I'm an Ordinary Man," Higgins emphatically refuses to "let a woman in [his] life," listing a series of misogynist clichés so as to support his argument, among which women's domesticity and vanity:

> But let a woman in your life
> And your serenity is through!
> She'll redecorate your home
> From the cellar to the dome;
> […]
> You want to talk of Keats or Milton;
> She only wants to talk of love.
> You go to see a play or ballet,
> And spend it searching for her glove.[22]

Lerner however underscores Higgins' bad faith through the use of hyperbole and irony, making it clear that the phonetician's excessive indictment of women should be interpreted as disingenuous. Higgins' depiction of marriage as akin to torture ("I'd be equally as willing / For a dentist to be drilling"[23] or "I'd prefer a new edition / Of the Spanish Inquisition"[24]) as well as his self-portrait as a "very gentle man; / Even-tempered and good-natured,"[25] when we have in fact just witnessed his acting as a

21 William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing* (1598), Oxford, Oxford UP, 1993, I.1.230-235: "That a woman conceived me, I thank her. That she brought me up, I likewise give her most humble thanks. But that I will have a recheat winded in my forehead, or hang my bugle in an invisible baldric, all women shall pardon me. Because I will not do them the wrong to mistrust any, I will do myself the right to trust none" / George Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion*, *op. cit.*, p. 34: "I can't be bothered with young women. My idea of a loveable woman is something as like you as possible."

22 Alan Jay Lerner, Frederick Loewe, *My Fair Lady*, London, Penguin Books, 1956, p. 38.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 39.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

tyrannical ruler, have a double effect. Not only does Higgins' song arouse laughter but it evidently leads us to question his reliability as regards his self-professed anti-romanticism. In other words, Lerner does not mitigate Higgins' misogynist tendencies so as to transform him into a more suitable prince charming but rather furthers these tendencies so as to foreground them as excessive and unreliable, as evidenced by the phonetician's third solo. Higgins' hyperbolic indictment of womankind now comes with an unbounded celebration of men. The homophonic title "A Hymn to Him," sang in the second act of the musical, leaves little doubt as to the content of the song. After Eliza's escape from Wimpole Street, Higgins wonders "why can't a woman be more like a man?" since "Men are so pleasant, so easy to please".[26] Yet the fact that the whole scene verges on slapstick comedy with Pickering's and Higgins' shouting and slamming of doors ("*bellowing from his room*," "*knocks violently*," "*charges into his room*," "*yelling from his room*," "*bounding from his room*," etc.[27]) arouses laughter rather than outrage and invites us to identify Higgins' true preoccupation with Eliza's departure hiding under a veneer of male chauvinism. In the same way that we wait for Benedick's anti-romantic façade to crumble in *Much Ado About Nothing*, we want Higgins' self-assurance to be shattered. Rather than interpreting Higgins' "formidable powers of resistance to [Eliza's] charm" as proof that she will "never obtain a complete grip of him,"[28] as Shaw does in his sequel, we might suggest that this in fact heightens the audience's expectations of a reversal. Readers and audience members expect these powers of resistance to abate, simply because this is a typical romantic ingredient which consists in emphasizing the couple's reluctance to fall in love precisely to make their union at the end of the play even more rewarding.[29]

Lerner in fact adopts this strategy throughout the musical, offering for example a series of anti-romantic songs in the first act as evidenced not only by Higgins' "I'm An Ordinary Man" but also by Doolittle's "With a Little Bit of Luck" in which he claims that "With a little bit of luck, / You can have it all and not get hooked"[30] or with Eliza's wish to see Higgins executed by the King's men in "Just you Wait".[31] Rather than making Eliza's nascent love for Higgins explicit, Lerner requires the audience to

26 *Ibid*., p. 108.
27 *Ibid*., pp. 105-106.
28 George Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion*, *op. cit.*, p. 68.
29 This strategy has apparently not gone out of fashion as evidenced by Damien Chazelle's 2016 musical *La la land*. In their first duet entitled "A Lovely Night", the main protagonists, Sebastian and Mia, deplore this "waste of a lovely night:" "We've stumbled on a view / That's tailor-made for two / What a shame those two are you and me / Some other girl and guy / Would love this swirling sky / But there's only you and I / And we've got no shot."
30 Alan Jay Lerner, *My Fair Lady*, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
31 *Ibid*., pp. 49-50.

identify the intermingling of Eros and Thanatos, Eliza's desire hidden beneath her call for murder. The audience has to wait for Eliza's "I Could Have Danced All Night" for her love to be conveyed, yet again in an implicit manner since Higgins' name is not uttered, replaced by the use of the third person: "I only know when he / Began to dance with me, / I could have danced, danced, danced all night!".[32] George Cukor, rather than Lerner, is the one who succumbs to soppy romanticism in this scene by having Eliza embrace her pillow – obviously a makeshift Higgins – as she sings and dances. The filmmaker also makes Higgins' attraction to Eliza much more explicit than Lerner does when having Mrs Higgins suggest that her son is "potty about her" at the end of the Ascot race scene.

Our expecting a romantic ending does not however mean that we will obtain satisfaction. Neither does it preclude the possibility of a feminist ending. My last part will throw light on Pascal's and Lerner's strategies to offer an ambiguous ending which both departs from and pays homage to Shaw's original intentions.

GABRIEL PASCAL'S *PYGMALION* AND ALAN JAY LERNER'S *MY FAIR LADY*: FOREGROUNDING THE PLAY'S ROMANTICISM AND FEMINISM

My aim here will be to argue that Shaw's wish of a feminist ending is not sabotaged in Pascal's and Lerner's adaptations but that it is in fact foregrounded. In order to do so, I will focus on the play's ending and on the added scenes that are to be found in the 1938 film version of the play as well as in the musical and its film adaptation (keeping in mind that Lerner was largely inspired by the 1938 film script for his libretto). Act II, scene five of *My Fair Lady* (which is a modified version of *Pygmalion*'s ending), as well as scenes six and seven (which have been added to the play) will be subjected to scrutiny.

The balance of power is unstable in the final act of *Pygmalion*. Eliza utters a highly defiant speech in which she claims her independence ("I'll let you see whether I'm dependent on you")[33] but Higgins, although acknowledging her strength, also appropriates her victory so as to make it his, therefore still objectifying Eliza: "I said I'd made a woman of you; and I have. I like you like this. […] Five minutes ago you were like a millstone round my neck. Now you're a tower of strength: a consort battleship."[34] Eliza however gains final ascendency by "sweep[ing] out," after addressing her last

32 *Ibid*., pp. 58-61.
33 George Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion*, *op. cit.*, p. 65.
34 *Ibid*., pp. 65-66.

disdainful words to Higgins.[35] Her departure is, according to Shaw, the only possible ending since the suggestion of a romance between these two characters would be at odds with a feminist vision of the play. What Pascal and Lerner have perceived is that a romantic subtext does not preclude the portrayal of a powerful and independent Eliza. In other words romance and feminism can be perceived as complementary rather than antagonistic. The producer, filmmakers and librettist have found other devices – be it through the use of stage directions, camera angle, characterization or dialogue – to highlight Eliza's rebellious stance and her transition from submission to empowerment.

In one of her last speeches in the play, Eliza defiantly claims her independence, leaving Higgins "*wondering at her*."[36] Eliza's ascendancy over Higgins is visually highlighted in both film versions through Eliza's physical superiority meant to convey her intellectual and moral superiority during her speech. Eliza (played by Wendy Hiller in the 1938 film and by Audrey Hepburn in Cukor's film) indeed literally towers

35 *Ibid*., p. 66.
36 *Ibid*., p. 65.

over Higgins, standing up while he is sitting down. In the *Pygmalion* film, a low-angle shot is used to highlight Eliza's advantage over Higgins.

In Cukor's film, the phonetician in fact disappears behind the armchair, drawing the viewer's attention to Eliza, the true heroine of the scene.

Lerner moreover foregrounds Eliza's speech by turning it into a song, aptly entitled "Without You," laden with witty allusions to Eliza's former self and Higgins' prejudiced vision of women.

Higgins' reaction to Eliza's departure moreover evolves from a sense of superiority in Shaw's text to vulnerability in the film and musical. While he "*chuckles; and disports himself in a highly self-satisfied manner*"[37] in Shaw's play, Higgins appears as panic-stricken in the 1938 film and the musical. The adverb "*sunnily*" confirms his confidence in *Pygmalion*, contrary to Leslie Howard's running after Eliza in the film and Lerner's stage directions which betray his grief and denial in the musical: "*Higgins is thunderstruck. He walks falteringly across the room and looks after her.*"[38] Lerner's intertextual references also point to a broken-hearted Higgins since the librettist used Shaw's own words to Mrs Patrick Campbell to express Higgins' amorous humiliation. "If the Higgins oxygen burns up her little lungs, let her seek some stuffiness that suits her. She's an owl sickened by a few days of my sunshine!"[39] clearly mirrors Shaw's August 1913 letter to his platonic paramour:

> You are an owl, sickened by two days of my sunshine: I have treated you far too well, idolized, thrown my heart and mind to you (as I throw them to all the world) to make

37 *Ibid.*, p. 66.
38 Alan Jay Lerner, *My Fair Lady*, *op. cit.*, p. 118.
39 *Ibid.*, p. 118.

> what you could of; and what you make is you run away. Go then: the Shavian oxygen burns up your little lungs: seek some stuffiness that suits you. […] You have wounded my vanity: an inconceivable audacity, an unpardonable crime. Farewell, wretch that I loved.[40]

The Shavian intertext not only throws light on Higgins' "wounded vanity" but also on his possibly "throw[ing his] heart and mind at" Eliza. Lerner in fact erases any possible ambiguity as regards our interpretation of Higgins' last act of bravado (or rather mock bravado as his diatribe against Eliza is delivered *in absentia*) through Mrs Higgins' applause directed not to her son, but to Eliza: "MRS HIGGINS [*applauding*]: Bravo, Eliza! [*She smiles*]." These are the last words of the scene, confirming Eliza's victory despite Higgins' claims that he "can do without her."[41]

Scenes six and seven of the musical have been added to the play and are largely inspired by the 1938 script. The filmmakers and librettist deviate from Shaw's original intentions, and yet could also be said to respect them. Higgins is not in any way what Shaw refers to in his letters (when describing Tree's acting) as a "bereaved Romeo". He does not artificially transform into a prince charming making passionate declarations of love to his beloved. That would be the conventional romantic ending commonly associated to the musical.[42] But Henry Higgins is no Don Lockwood or Jerry Mulligan. Both the 1938 film and *My Fair Lady*'s endings can be considered as atypical since they do not end on a passionate final embrace nor do they stage, contrary to common assumption, Eliza's final submission.

Scene six stages Higgins returning to his home alone, walking the streets of London and slowly acknowledging his love for Eliza. Yet the musical's final song is not in any case an overt declaration of love but relies on Higgins' customary use of euphemism. The readers and viewers now familiar with Higgins' character understand his "I've Grown Accustomed to Her Face" as the closest they will get to a passionate declaration of love in the same way that his "not bad at all"[43] when appraising Eliza's ball gown in act one should be considered as the "Higginsian" translation for "you look stunning." Higgins' solo alternates between highly romantic declarations ("Her joys, her woes, /

40 George Bernard Shaw, *Collected Letters*, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

41 Alan Jay Lerner, *My Fair Lady*, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

42 Stacy Wolf, *Changed for Good. A Feminist History of the Broadway Musical*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2011, p.31: "Two principals, one male and one female, are introduced early in the show by solos that convey through music how they are opposites who will eventually unite. Their divergent personalities, overdetermined by their differences in gender, symbolize larger cultural and social divisions […] which are resolved by the end of the show."

43 Alan Jay Lerner, *My Fair Lady*, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

Her highs, her lows / Are second nature to me now") and his usual chauvinist rhetoric ("I'm very grateful she's a woman / And so easy to forget") thus debunking the conventional final male solo.[44] A romantic male solo is in fact to be found earlier on in the musical when another man errs in Wimpole Street. Freddy, rather than Higgins, is the typical besotted young man praising his loved one in "On the Street Where You Live" (act I, scene 8). Lerner thus plays with the audience's expectations and the rules of the musical through a double transfer: not only does he move the male protagonist's romantic solo from the last act to the first one but he also surprises us as to the identity of the singer: the romantic lover is the one whose love will remain unrequited.

The last scene of the musical, once again borrowed from the 1938 film version, stages Eliza's infamous return to Higgins as supposed "slipper-carrier," often interpreted as the victory of domesticity over independence, as evidenced in the following excerpt from the *Telegraph*:

> This is a crowd-pleasing travesty of the original, which defies the story's own internal logic. Higgins has produced a woman with a soul to call her own. Initially, he deprived Eliza of her independence as a flower seller, and in effect enslaved her. But by the end, Eliza has the power to exist without Higgins. Why should we wish her to stay with him, as his perpetual slipper-carrier? Eliza, as Shaw never ceased trying to explain, should be well shot of him.[45]

I would like to argue that this ending rather celebrates Eliza's empowerment in her making her own choices. Eliza is indeed the one who decides to return to Higgins, having rejected Freddy, the younger and more eligible suitor. In fact, contrary to what Shaw asserts in his sequel, wouldn't Eliza marrying Freddy be the perfect fairy-tale ending which Shaw precisely abhors? Her choosing Higgins, the anti-prince charming, should then be perceived as a mark of independence rather than submission. Both film versions (Pascal's and Cukor's) in fact hint at Eliza's superiority over Higgins in this final scene through subtle yet identifiable cinematic devices.

Not only does Eliza once again tower over Higgins in Cukor's film but the viewer also has an ascendency over the phonetician, being made aware of Eliza's return even though the latter is off-camera and Higgins is supposedly alone in his apartment. An attentive viewer can indeed catch a fleeting glimpse of Eliza's shadow cast on the carpet near Higgins' chair before she enters the room, therefore informing us of her arrival before Higgins himself acknowledges her presence.

44 *Ibid*., p. 121.
45 Mark Bostridge, "Why *My Fair Lady* betrays *Pygmalion*," *The Telegraph*, 11 April 2014,

This also means our acknowledging Eliza's awareness of Higgins' despair. Thinking that he is alone, Higgins allows his vulnerable self to surface, something he would of course not have done had he been aware of being observed. He in fact quickly corrects his posture when hearing Eliza's voice. In both versions, the filmmakers once again rely on the viewers' close attention, requiring an active, rather than passive stance on their behalf. It is indeed our task to identify Higgins' flitting smile as the equivalent of the explicit declaration of love in the traditional musical.

In the same way that Benedick pretends to love Beatrice "no more than reason" in the final scene of *Much Ado About Nothing*, Higgins feigns indifference to Eliza's return, yet his turning away from her in the 1938 film or his hiding his face underneath his hat in Lerner's libretto do not fool the viewer. Higgins' nonchalance is unconvincing, as underlined by the use of anaphora in Lerner's stage direction: "HIGGINS *straightens up. If he could but let himself, his face would radiate unmistakable relief and joy. If he could but let himself, he would run to her. Instead, he leans back with a contented sigh pushing his hat forward till it almost covers his face*."[46]

Higgins' much commented on and deplored last words end both the 1938 film and the musical:

> HIGGINS (*softly*) – Eliza? Where the devil are my slippers?
> (*There are tears in* ELIZA*'s eyes. She understands.*)
> *The curtain falls slowly.*[47]

Rather than interpreting this ending as staging the victory of the chauvinist male, I would like to suggest that it stages the victory of the female character. Higgins does not break character. His suddenly transforming into a submissive spouse would lack credibility and offer the audience an artificial romantic denouement. This is probably what Eliza "*understands*." The latter does not acknowledge her fetching Higgins' slippers until death do them part but rather that this is Higgins' (subverted) declaration of love, which is not in any case "bark[ed] at her," as suggested by Stacy Wolf,[48] but spoken "*softly*," as though to underline the self-mockery in Higgins' words.

46 Alan Jay Lerner, *My Fair Lady*, *op. cit.*, p. 122.
47 *Ibid.*, p. 122.
48 Stacy Wolf, *Changed for Good*, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

The musical moreover ends with Higgins' question, not with Eliza's answer, leaving it to the audience to decide what her reaction will be. Why not, therefore, consider that she might once again fling Higgins' slippers in his face, as she has done before? Shaw himself hints at this possible denouement when having Higgins voice his admiration for a defiant Eliza in a passage that Lerner has surprisingly erased from the musical: "I think a woman fetching a man's slippers is a disgusting sight: did I ever fetch YOUR slippers? I think a good deal more of you for throwing them in my face."[49] The playwright even goes so far as to suggest that Eliza might be able to "tame" Higgins, as evidenced by Pickering asking Eliza to "be kinder to Higgins" in the sequel, so "ruthlessly" does she stand up to him.[50] What Shaw offers his readers in this postscript is a vision of a married Eliza, living happily (ever after…) with Freddy, but who "still manages to meddle in the housekeeping at Wimpole Street."[51] Shaw thus suggests that Eliza's domesticity is acceptable because she has not married Higgins. How this is a more satisfying denouement than Eliza indeed being Higgins' wife (or, why not, even "partner") and not meddling in the housekeeping, remains a mystery to the present author.

This paper mostly results from my being racked by guilt at the thought of lacking "feminine instinct." No matter what we think of Shaw's sequel, one has to credit him with a talent for putting his readers to shame. How can we not be mortified when reading that "the true sequel," that is to say Eliza leaving Higgins, "is patent to anyone with a sense of human nature in general, and of feminine instinct in particular?"[52]

As I have tried to demonstrate in this paper, Gabriel Pascal and Alan Jay Lerner have succeeded in offering an ending which can be perceived as both romantic and feminist. In other words, our desperately wanting Eliza and Higgins to end up together does not make us closet misogynists. But to be perfectly honest here would be to admit that it is much easier to perceive Eliza's return as a token of her independence today than it was in the 1950s, at a time when women's realm was the domestic one and when they were indeed often perceived as "slipper-carriers." Having underlined the flaws of Shaw's rigid indictment of the romantic ending, my purpose here is certainly not to impose yet another authoritarian reading of the text by saying that Pascal's and Lerner's interpretation is the only valid one. I am probably influenced by Leslie Howard and Rex Harrison's charisma and I have not seen the various stage productions

49 George Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion*, *op. cit.*, p. 62.
50 *Ibid*., p. 74.
51 *Ibid*., p. 74.
52 George Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion, op. cit.*, p. 67.

of *Pygmalion* (among which Howard Davies' 1992 National Theatre production or Peter Hall's 2007 Old Vic production[53]) which apparently pay tribute to Shaw's original intentions by refusing any possible romantic subtext. This paper's aim is not to demonstrate that the romantic ending is the only possible denouement, but rather that romance is not synonymous with patriarchy.

Alan Jay Lerner's foreword to the libretto reads as follows: "I have omitted the sequel because in it Shaw explains how Eliza ends not with Higgins but with Freddy and – Shaw and Heaven forgive me! – I am not certain he is right." While George Cukor adopts a reverential and conservative approach to Lerner's libretto, Pascal's and Lerner's approach can be deemed post-structuralist, reminding us that "the birth of the reader," and we would like to add of the viewer, "must be at the cost of the death of the Author."[54]

53 This article was moreover written before Bartlett Sher's 2018 revival at the Lincoln Center Theater in New York which reasserts the possibility of a feminist reading of *My Fair Lady* and would warrant extensive discussion elsewhere.

54 Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author", *op. cit.*, p. 148.

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NOTICE

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ABSTRACT

Despite the play being misleadingly subtitled "A Romance in Five Acts," George Bernard Shaw has always been adamant that *Pygmalion*'s denouement should not be interpreted as romantic. Yet from the first London production of the play in 1914 to producer Gabriel Pascal's 1938 film, Alan Jay Lerner's 1956 libretto and George Cukor's 1964 adaptation, it seems that no one has been able to resist the urge to romanticize the relationship between Henry Higgins and Eliza Doolittle. This paper focuses on what such romanticizing entails in terms of aesthetics and politics. I will qualify the common assumption according to which Alan Jay Lerner subverted Shaw's original intentions by trying to demonstrate that the revised ending foregrounds rather than subverts Shaw's feminist vision.

Keywords

George Cukor; Alan Jay Lerner; Gabriel Pascal; George Bernard Shaw; *My Fair Lady*; *Pygmalion*; adaptation; death of the Author; feminism; romantic denouement.

RÉSUMÉ

George Bernard Shaw a toujours refusé catégoriquement toute lecture romantique du dénouement de sa pièce *Pygmalion*. Or, depuis les premières représentations à Londres en 1914 jusqu'au film de George Cukor en 1964 en passant par le film du producteur Gabriel Pascal en 1938 et la comédie musicale écrite par Alan Jay Lerner en 1956… tous s'accordent à sentimentaliser la relation entre Henry Higgins et Eliza Doolittle. Cet article s'intéresse aux enjeux esthétiques et politiques de cette réécriture romantique et revient sur l'hypothèse selon laquelle Alan Jay Lerner aurait malmené les intentions premières de Shaw. Il s'agira de démontrer que les modifications apportées au dénouement consacrent plus qu'elles n'annulent la vision féministe du dramaturge.

Mots-clés

George Cukor ; Alan Jay Lerner ; Gabriel Pascal ; George Bernard Shaw ; *My Fair Lady* ; *Pygmalion* ; adaptation ; dénouement romantique ; féminisme ; mort de l'Auteur.

LES COULISSES DU *MUSICAL* : DE *CANDIDE* À *MY FAIR LADY*

Entretien avec Julien Neyer

Chanteur lyrique de formation classique, Julien Neyer se produit depuis quinze ans sur diverses scènes nationales, principalement en tant que choriste (Théâtre des Champs Elysées, Opéra de Paris, Théâtre du Châtelet). Artiste polyvalent, il possède un répertoire varié, de Bach à Richard Strauss, en passant par Haendel, Mozart et Poulenc. Entre 2006 et 2013, il a également chanté dans quatre comédies musicales produites par le Théâtre du Châtelet : Candide, On The Town, My Fair Lady *et* Sunday in the Park with George. *Il évoque avec nous cette expérience de choriste au Châtelet (le travail des répétitions, l'importance du chorégraphe et du metteur en scène, la complicité des équipes, ou encore l'impact du micro), nous dévoilant ainsi les coulisses du* musical.

Cet entretien s'est déroulé à Paris, le 6 novembre 2017.

Anne Martina — Bonjour Julien, et merci d'avoir bien voulu nous accorder cet entretien. Peux-tu nous décrire brièvement ta formation et nous dire comment tu en es venu au chant ?

Julien Neyer — Ma formation professionnelle s'est faite sur le tard, mais j'ai commencé à chanter très tôt. Petit, j'avais une voix d'enfant de chœur… et un souffle de colosse. J'adorais chanter à tue-tête ! Les premières révélations ont eu lieu à l'école : d'abord à la chorale du collège, puis surtout au lycée, où je découvre le théâtre grâce à l'un de mes professeurs. Nous jouons *Ruy Blas* et partons en tournée dans toute la France. C'est là aussi que je chante dans mes premières comédies musicales : d'abord une adaptation de *Roméo et Juliette*, puis une version musicale inédite des *Misérables*, écrite pour l'occasion. La version originale, je la connaissais par cœur, je l'ai chantée toute mon enfance.

Après cela, je cherche ma voie. Je passe une Licence, je fais mon service militaire, et ce n'est qu'à vingt-cinq ans que je finis par intégrer le Conservatoire. Pendant trois ans, je me forme, en travaillant à temps partiel. Mais vingt-cinq ans, c'est très tard pour commencer, je dois tout apprendre d'un coup : le solfège, le répertoire, la discipline vocale. Et comme j'ai une voix naturelle, ce n'est pas évident…

Anne Martina — Pourquoi ?

Julien Neyer — Parce qu'il faut se plier à une discipline, apprendre une technique qui n'a rien de naturel au début. Cette technique, dont on a besoin pour projeter à plus de cinquante mètres, on met du temps à l'acquérir.

Anne Martina — Au Conservatoire, vous travaillez exclusivement le chant lyrique, ou est-ce que vous abordez des répertoires plus variés ?

Julien Neyer — Il s'agit exclusivement d'une formation au chant lyrique. Au Conservatoire du 5ème arrondissement, où j'ai fini ma formation, le répertoire y est même plus réduit encore. Par exemple, nous ne travaillions jamais sur des opéras baroques. C'était peut-être dû à la spécialisation de mon professeur de chant. Michèle Command, qui est une très grande chanteuse, voulait faire de nous des Verdiens, des Mozartiens. Dans le 20ème arrondissement, où j'étais au début, c'était pareil. Le premier rôle d'opéra que mon professeur, un grand ténor français, a voulu me faire chanter, c'était Germont, dans *La Traviata*. Évidemment, je n'y arrivais pas, c'était beaucoup trop difficile. Ce qui m'a fait tenir à l'époque, c'était d'aller chercher un répertoire à ma portée. J'ai trouvé mon plaisir dans la mélodie française, en chantant du Fauré ou du Poulenc : ça m'a réconcilié avec la musique. J'avais failli tout arrêter ! Après ma formation, je suis allé frapper à la porte des théâtres. J'ai passé des auditions et j'ai été pris dans les chœurs, d'abord au Théâtre des Champs Elysées, sur *La Cenerentola*, de Rossini, puis à l'Opéra de Paris.

Anne Martina — Quand est-ce que tu es venu à la comédie musicale ?

Julien Neyer — Le tournant s'opère lorsque Jean-Luc Choplin devient directeur du Théâtre du Châtelet. J'avais déjà chanté au Châtelet dans un opéra contemporain, donc ils me connaissaient : je faisais partie de leur *shortlist*. Je passe les auditions pour *Candide*[1] et je suis pris dans les chœurs. C'est la première comédie musicale que monte Jean-Luc Choplin : un vrai succès. C'est la première grande comédie musicale pour moi

1 *Candide*, 1956, musique de Leonard Bernstein, livret originel de Lillian Hellman adapté du roman satirique de Voltaire. Un nouveau livret fut écrit en 1973 par Hugh Wheeler. Dans sa mise en scène de 2006, Robert Carsen a presque intégralement réécrit le livret, tout en gardant les paroles des chansons originelles.

aussi, et j'ai tout de suite adoré. Les années suivantes, j'ai chanté dans *On The Town*[2], *My Fair Lady*[3] et *Sunday in the Park with George*[4], toujours au Châtelet.

Anne Martina — Les scènes de chœur étaient souvent chorégraphiées dans *Candide*, je crois, et pourtant tu n'as pas de formation de danseur.

Julien Neyer — Non : aucun de mes camarades du chœur non plus, d'ailleurs. Nous venions tous du chant lyrique. J'avais tout de même, grâce à mon travail sur *La Cenerentola*, l'expérience de grandes scènes de chœur en mouvement. Cela m'a servi sur *Candide* où le chœur, en effet, dansait dans de nombreuses scènes. Et puis, à l'époque, il y avait plus de moyens, donc plus de temps de répétition. Pour *Candide* et *On The Town,* nous répétions, si je me souviens bien, pendant un mois, un mois et demi, dans une grande salle de banlieue, la Manufacture des Œillets, souvent avec la troupe presque au complet. Nous passions donc beaucoup de temps avec les chorégraphes. Parfois, ils avaient une idée, puis ils la modifiaient lorsqu'ils se rendaient compte que c'était trop compliqué pour nous.

Anne Martina — Est-ce qu'ils vérifiaient que vous saviez danser durant les auditions ?

Julien Neyer — Les équipes du Châtelet nous faisaient vraiment confiance. En fait, les auditions étaient surtout vocales ; un peu chorégraphiques (ils vérifiaient qu'on savait bouger) ; et linguistiques aussi. C'est principalement là que la difficulté résidait, compte tenu des exigences du Châtelet. On ne peut pas faire Broadway à Paris avec une troupe qui ne sait pas parler anglais !

Anne Martina — Est-ce cela qui explique que si peu de rôles soient tenus par des français ?

Julien Neyer — Oui, bien sûr. Même pour les petits rôles, ils préféraient des chanteurs anglophones. Surtout pour *My Fair Lady*, où la question linguistique est centrale. J'ai tout de même réussi à obtenir la doublure d'un *Cockney*, mais quel travail j'ai dû faire

2 *On The Town*, 1944, musique de Leonard Bernstein, paroles et livret de Betty Comden et Adolph Green, adapté d'un ballet de Jerome Robbins, qui signe la chorégraphie du spectacle. *On The Town* est monté au Théâtre du Châtelet en 2008.

3 *My Fair Lady*, 1956, musique de Frederick Loewe, paroles et livret de Alan Jay Lerner. Le spectacle est monté au Théâtre du Châtelet en 2010 et repris en 2013.

4 *Sunday in the Park with George,* 1984, musique et paroles de Stephen Sondheim, livret de James Lapine. La mise en scène du Châtelet date d'avril 2013.

pour seulement quelques phrases de texte ! Presque tous les membres du chœur, eux, étaient francophones. Sur *My Fair Lady,* le travail linguistique était particulièrement difficile, puisque nous devions faire le grand écart entre l'accent *cockney* et l'anglais très *posh* de la haute société anglaise. J'ai vraiment adoré ce travail au Châtelet : pour moi, c'est une fraîcheur formidable de faire de la comédie musicale, quand par ailleurs je chante de la musique sacrée de Bach ou de Haendel, ou de l'opéra classique.

Anne Martina — À quoi dirais-tu qu'elle tient, cette fraîcheur ?

Julien Neyer — Au répertoire, au fait de danser, de faire la fête sur scène ; mais toujours avec les exigences de l'opéra. Pour toutes les productions du Châtelet, il y avait un orchestre symphonique, un chef d'orchestre et un grand metteur en scène à carrure internationale qui prenait tout cela très à cœur et abordait l'œuvre aussi sérieusement qu'un opéra classique. C'est le cas de Robert Carsen, par exemple, qui a signé les mises en scène de *Candide* et de *My Fair Lady*, mais qui a aussi travaillé pour l'Opéra Bastille et monté des opéras baroques : j'ai d'ailleurs travaillé avec lui sur des productions des Arts Florissants. Il y a donc de nombreuses passerelles entre toutes ces formes musicales.

Anne Martina — Techniquement, dirais-tu qu'il y a une grande différence entre chanter dans une comédie musicale et chanter dans un chœur lyrique ?

Julien Neyer — Pour ce qui est du chœur, je ne pense pas que l'on chante différemment. Je parle de technique vocale. Les deux écritures musicales sont très différentes, donc bien sûr je ne chante pas de la même manière ; de même que je ne vais pas chanter « À la pêche aux moules » avec une voix de baryton ! Cela n'a pas de sens, ou alors ça fait rire tout le monde. C'est une question de dosage et d'interprétation. De la même façon, passer du registre chanté au registre parlé dans la comédie musicale et dans certaines opérettes peut s'avérer délicat.

Anne Martina — Elle est difficile, cette transition du parlé au chanté ?

Julien Neyer — Elle peut l'être. Sur *My Fair Lady*, il faut souvent siffler. Eh bien moi, qui suis un grand siffleur devant l'éternel, je ne pouvais plus passer de l'un à l'autre. Si je chantais, je ne pouvais plus siffler. La musculature des lèvres fait que tu n'as plus la détente, la décontraction suffisante pour siffler. Ça ne sort plus. Pourtant je siffle bien. Mais dans la scène où le chœur des *cockneys* sifflait, je ne parvenais pas à le faire.

Anne Martina — Tu penses que c'est lié à ta technique lyrique ?

Julien Neyer — Je pense que c'est lié à ma façon de chanter sur scène. J'ai une musculature de chanteur lyrique. Il faut faire attention, si tu passes du registre parlé au registre chanté, à ta façon de placer la voix, c'est vrai. Et puis, il y a une autre différence majeure, qui est liée au micro. Dans toutes les comédies musicales du Châtelet, comme à Broadway, nous sommes tous microtés.

Anne Martina — Tu peux nous en dire plus ?

Julien Neyer — On a un petit micro, généralement placé en haut du front, à la base des cheveux, ou parfois au niveau de l'oreille. Nous travaillons d'abord sans micro, puis lors des dernières répétitions, les techniciens viennent et nous font chanter un à un. L'ingénieur son peut alors faire tous ses réglages sur la table de mixage. Après, il n'y touche plus ; il a juste des boutons pour débrancher le micro lorsque nous ne sommes plus sur scène. Nous gardons toujours le micro sur nous. C'est une des premières choses qu'on nous pose, avant le costume. Nous avons une ceinture élastique autour des hanches avec une petite poche où on nous pose le boîtier, qui est connecté à la salle de mixage. Ce boîtier est relié à un petit casque en fil de fer, très discret, qui se pose sur les oreilles, au bout duquel est attaché un petit micro couleur chair (c'est tout petit, ça ressemble à un haricot). Pour les rôles de solistes, on en met parfois deux, pour avoir plus de précision. Il ne faut pas perdre de vue qu'au Châtelet, on est dans des circonstances d'opéra, avec un orchestre symphonique en fosse, et que le public doit nous entendre. Mais quand nous chantons, nous oublions le micro. Personnellement, je n'ai jamais changé quoi que ce soit à ma façon de chanter. Il fallait juste faire un peu attention…

Anne Martina — Pourquoi ?

Julien Neyer — D'une part, parce que tu es plus exposé. À l'opéra, dans un chœur de cent-cinquante personnes, si tu craques et que les aigus ne passent pas (c'est arrivé aux meilleurs), ça se remarque moins que si tu craques sur *My Fair Lady* avec un micro. D'autre part, ce que tu peux faire sur une scène d'opéra, par exemple une petite blague en *off* à ton voisin, tu ne peux pas le faire dans les comédies musicales, parce que ça s'entend ! Il y a donc une certaine prise de conscience à avoir ; mais rien de plus. Pour les rôles principaux, qui ne sont pas exclusivement lyriques, c'est sans doute un peu différent. Quand on joue Ozzie, Chip ou Gabey (*On The Town*), il faut savoir jouer,

chanter, danser. C'est très difficile : il faut garder son souffle parce qu'on ne s'arrête jamais. Le réglage de l'ingénieur son est donc très différent. Dans son mixage pour le chœur, il doit surtout veiller à ce qu'il n'y ait pas une seule voix qui ressorte.

Anne Martina — Le micro ne te gêne donc jamais ?

Julien Neyer — Non, jamais. Tu as juste une ceinture élastique posée contre ta peau, avec une petite poche dans ton dos. Si tu dois t'allonger par terre, tu la sens à peine, c'est juste de la taille d'un paquet de cigarettes. Et puis, c'est assez rigolo, ça devient vite un petit fétiche. Il y a comme une cérémonie du micro dans la comédie musicale. Tu te prépares, tu prends ton costume, tu sais qu'il ne faut pas mettre le haut avant que le technicien passe dans les coulisses poser les ceintures et les boîtiers. Ensuite, tu files t'habiller, et seulement cinq minutes avant le début de la représentation, tu descends faire poser le fil avec le casque. Après, il y a une dernière retouche, avec les habilleuses et les maquilleuses, qui vont te mettre un petit coup de maquillage sur le scotch blanc. Tous les corps de métier vont être confrontés à un moment donné au micro.

Anne Martina — Est-ce que les danseurs ont également un micro ?

Julien Neyer — L'alter ego du chœur, c'est le ballet. Nous nous mélangeons sur les scènes de chorale, mais non, ils n'ont pas de micros parce qu'ils ne chantent pas. Au début, pour *My Fair Lady*, ils devaient le faire, mais faute de temps (ou de moyens) pour travailler la partition, on leur a très vite demandé de tricher, c'est-à-dire de faire semblant et de simplement bouger les lèvres. Pour eux, c'était dur, parce qu'ils avaient très envie de chanter avec nous.

Anne Martina — Sais-tu si l'ingénieur son prenait cela en compte dans ses réglages, en intensifiant la puissance vocale du chœur pour donner l'illusion qu'il y avait plus de monde qui chantait ? J'ai l'impression que dans ces moments-là, lorsque le chœur et le ballet sont réunis, le chant a plus d'ampleur. Mais c'est peut-être psychologique, parce qu'il y a plus de monde sur scène.

Julien Neyer — Tout dépend où tu es placée dans la salle. Pour nous choristes, les micros sont simplement réglés en mode « soutien ». L'ingénieur son se contente d'ajouter le volume nécessaire pour que le chant porte jusqu'au fond de la salle, notamment lorsque l'orchestre est au plus fort, que nous sautons ou dansons, ou que nous ne sommes pas tous bien alignés face au public. Ce que tu entends dans la

salle, si tu es assise dans les vingt premiers rangs de l'orchestre, ce n'est pas le micro, ce sont les chanteurs. Tu sais, il y avait un réel enthousiasme. Quand on chantait, on envoyait !

Anne Martina — Combien étiez-vous dans les chœurs ?

Julien Neyer — Entre seize et vingt, selon les productions. Nous chantions tous également dans des chœurs lyriques, mais nous étions contents de nous retrouver autour de la comédie musicale : il y avait une réelle complicité. L'intelligence des directeurs artistiques du Châtelet a été de nous fidéliser. C'était un vrai pari au départ, parce que nous n'avions pas de formation en comédie musicale. Je pense qu'ils avaient confiance en nous, en notre capacité à nous adapter. C'est vrai que lors des toutes premières répétitions, sur *Candide* notamment, on pensait qu'on n'y arriverait jamais. Il fallait chanter, danser, tout en suivant le chef d'orchestre dans la fosse, ou sur les moniteurs placés de chaque côté de la scène. Ce n'est pas chose aisée. On a travaillé comme des forcenés et on a fini par y arriver ! On dansait souvent avec la même personne, d'une comédie musicale à une autre, ce qui donnait confiance pour les pas les plus difficiles. Dans *My Fair Lady*, par exemple, il y a une grande scène de bal à la fin de l'acte I. Le chœur ne chante pas, mais on nous avait quand même demandé de danser la valse avec les membres du ballet. Il fallait faire de longues diagonales sans se cogner les uns les autres, ni se retrouver vingt mètres plus loin… c'était extrêmement exigeant. Mais une fois les mouvements calés, avec les lumières et les costumes, le résultat était époustouflant ! On a pourtant douté longtemps…

Anne Martina — Avec qui travaillez-vous sur ces scènes-là ?

Julien Neyer — Surtout avec le chorégraphe. Nous avons eu la chance de travailler avec des gens formidables, pas trop ambitieux, et très patients. Les danseurs du ballet étaient également là pour nous aider. Ils faisaient toujours les choses les plus difficiles. Dans « Get Me to the Church on Time », certains danseurs avaient des solos de danse particulièrement virtuoses ; mais dans la scène de bal de l'ambassade, la difficulté était presque la même pour tous. Nous étions répartis en couples homogènes : les danseurs dansaient ensemble, les choristes aussi. L'exigence chorégraphique était bien réelle. Heureusement, il y avait une atmosphère de travail formidable, une ambiance de troupe que l'on ne trouve que dans la comédie musicale. Les solistes, les choristes, les danseurs, les chanteurs, tout le monde est mélangé et partage le même objectif. C'est très anglo-saxon. Il y a des tensions, mais jamais elles ne débordent. L'objectif, c'est

le meilleur résultat possible. Nous, nous sommes beaucoup plus latins, nous nous emportons rapidement ; eux, non, même s'ils n'en pensent pas moins.

Quand je dis anglo-saxon, je ne parle pas uniquement des Britanniques, bien sûr. Les membres de l'équipe venaient de tout le monde anglophone : États-Unis, Canada, Australie. Pour *My Fair Lady,* c'était un vrai cauchemar : le chef d'orchestre était américain, le chef de chœur anglais, le metteur en scène canadien…et ils avaient tous les trois un avis différent sur l'accent qu'on devait utiliser ! Heureusement que la coach d'anglais était là : elle avait une idée très précise de ce qu'elle voulait pour le *posh* et pour le *cockney*, et c'est elle qui réussissait à réunir tout le monde. Et elle était française ! Elle était formidable. Durant les séances de coaching, elle nous disait comment prononcer nos phrases, avec le bon accent. Je l'enregistrais pour pouvoir travailler à la maison. Pour le cockney, elle nous encourageait à avaler certaines consonnes. Lorsqu'il s'agissait

de chanter, j'y arrivais sans trop de difficulté, mais donner la réplique était bien plus difficile. J'ai doublé l'un des *Cockneys* sur plusieurs représentations, et malgré tout mon travail, jamais je n'ai réussi à obtenir un accent authentique. Cela nous a valu quelques beaux moments de rigolade lors des répétitions avec Alex Jennings[5], notamment pour la scène d'ouverture à Covent Garden. Il est pris à parti par des *Cockneys*, et à chacun d'entre eux, il réplique « toi, tu viens de tel quartier », « toi, de tel autre ». Quand vient mon tour, je dis ma petite phrase, et il me regarde d'un air de dire, « et toi, euh… »

Anne Martina — « … tu viens de Paris ? »

Julien Neyer — « … de la Goutte d'Or !! »

Anne Martina — Et pour l'anglais *posh* ?

Julien Neyer — Pour l'anglais *posh*, il fallait bien rouler les /r/. On nous a fait répéter cent fois « grrrrrripping » dans la scène d'Ascot. Nous chantions vraiment comme ça, en exagérant énormément. Bien sûr, il faut que cela reste musical, mais nous faisions beaucoup d'efforts sur les /r/ et les /h/ aspirés, comme dans « hhhhear ». Il fallait mettre le paquet. D'une part, parce que nous n'étions pas nombreux ; d'autre part, pour que le public comprenne. Si tu dis « hear » normalement, ça ne porte pas, et ça ne veut rien dire au-delà de trois mètres. C'est important de tout entendre ; or, le problème, avec l'anglais, c'est que rien ne sonne. C'est l'une des raisons pour laquelle, je crois, l'anglais est une des langues les plus difficiles à chanter pour un francophone : non

5 Alex Jennings jouait le professeur Higgins dans cette mise en scène de *My Fair Lady*.

seulement les consonnes sont très différentes du français, mais surtout elles sonnent peu. Chanter en anglais demande donc beaucoup de travail. C'est vrai pour la comédie musicale, comme pour les oratorios de Haendel. Le travail que je fais chez moi, puis avec le coach et le chef de chœur est d'ailleurs exactement le même. Une fois engagé sur une production, je reçois la partition et je travaille mes chœurs. Les toutes premières répétitions se font en formation de chœur : avec le chef de chœur, nous travaillons en piano-voix non pas les partitions, mais le chanter-ensemble et l'accentuation. C'est à ce moment-là que nous faisons ce que j'appellerais notre petite cuisine interne, c'est-à-dire que nous essayons de trouver des moyens pour que toutes les consonnes sortent et sonnent jusqu'au fond de la salle. Tous les chefs de chœur savent faire cela.

Anne Martina — En somme, ce que vous cherchez n'est pas nécessairement la justesse de la prononciation, mais la clarté de l'élocution ?

Julien Neyer — La clarté, d'abord, mais avec la plus grande justesse possible. Le chœur du Châtelet, aussi français soit-il, ne pouvait pas se permettre de chanter l'anglais comme un chœur amateur. Il y avait une exigence sur ce point-là qui était absolue. Comme à l'opéra.

Anne Martina — Je te fais revoir la scène des courses (« The Ascot Gavotte ») dans le film de Cukor : qu'est-ce que cela t'inspire ?

Julien Neyer — Ça me remue de revoir ça : ça me rappelle la technicité et la concentration qu'on nous demandait. Sur scène, nous étions face au public, mais toujours en mouvement. Tout était très rythmé, très minuté. Il fallait penser à plein de choses en même temps : notre prononciation, bien sûr, mais aussi nos gestes et nos mouvements. Il y avait des détails très importants. Dans la mise en scène de Robert Carsen, la scène se terminait notamment sur un lâcher de verres. Tout le monde était mobilisé : nous devions lâcher notre verre au bon moment ; les techniciens devaient couper la lumière eux aussi au bon moment, parce que bien évidemment les verres ne se cassaient pas, il y avait juste un faux son de verre brisé. Tout se faisait sur des temps. Eliza disait « Come on Dover, move your bloomin' arse ! ». Nous poussions tous un soupir d'effroi et, *top* : nous lâchions nos verres ; *top* : la lumière s'éteignait ; *top* : le son « cling » était lâché, en rythme sur la musique. Nous devions mémoriser tous les tops. Cela demande beaucoup d'investissement et de concentration. Comme je chantais dans tous les chœurs (les chœurs au complet et le petit chœur des serviteurs) et que je doublais le *Cockney* en cas de besoin, j'étais soixante-quinze pour cent du temps sur

scène, avec huit changements de costumes et deux postiches. Il me restait vingt-cinq pour cent du temps pour m'allonger par terre et me détendre un peu. Au début ça va, mais à la vingt-cinquième représentation, tu commences un peu à tirer la jambe.

Anne Martina — Qu'est-ce qui te frappe, sinon, en revoyant le film de Cukor ? La similitude, peut-être ? À ceci près que vos costumes étaient tous très colorés, je crois.

Julien Neyer — Oui, la similitude est frappante. Et pourtant, il y avait plein de petites touches différentes dans la production du Châtelet : la couleur, comme tu dis, mais également la gestuelle. Dans le film, le chœur est figé dans cette sorte d'immobilité qui est une caricature de la haute société anglaise. Je pense que l'immobilité ne fonctionnait pas aussi bien sur scène qu'au cinéma. Nous nous tenions nous aussi très droits, mais cette rigidité, cette artificialité sociale se traduisait également par de nombreux mouvements saccadés, parfaitement rythmés sur la musique. Et pourtant, cinq numéros plus tôt, nous étions tous des *Cockneys* !

Anne Martina — Que penses-tu de la séquence du chœur des serviteurs (« Poor Professor Higgins »), dans le film de Cukor ? Autant la scène d'Ascot est théâtrale et stylisée, autant celle-ci me semble naturalisée. Chaque serviteur est présenté dans son environnement quotidien : l'une est à la cuisine, l'autre discute sur le perron avec un policier qui fait sa ronde, *etc.* L'individualisation des membres du chœur passe donc par des procédés typiquement cinématographiques, le cadrage et le montage. Dans la mise en scène de Robert Carsen, l'individualisation des personnages demeure, mais elle passe davantage par des effets de stylisation.

Julien Neyer — Sur scène, bien sûr, tout se passait dans un lieu unique. On aurait pu isoler les gestes par des jeux de lumières, mais Carsen avait préféré la continuité, donc tout était également visible, et tout s'enchaînait. La scène elle-même reposait sur un effet de condensation : une journée entière réduite en quelques minutes de chanson. Eliza et Higgins travaillent du matin au soir, et ce travail incessant est ponctué par les lamentations du chœur des serviteurs plaignant le « pauvre professeur ». L'évolution temporelle était marquée par des changements de gestes et de placement sur scène pour les serviteurs. Nous travaillions dans la première section, mais plus vraiment dans les suivantes ; et nous passions du plateau aux galeries et de nouveau nous redescendions au plateau. C'est dans la première section, je crois, que nous étions le plus individualisés. Les serviteurs étaient tous des petits personnages. D'autant que nous étions six, pour six lignes de chant : nous avions donc chacun une voix. Dans le

premier couplet, nous avions tous une tâche spécifique. L'un passait le balai, une autre, je crois, époussetait une lampe avec un petit plumeau. Moi, j'astiquais des chaussures. Nos gestes étaient très stylisés, mais il y avait également un grand souci d'authenticité historique. Anthony Powell nous avait dessiné des costumes qui correspondaient très exactement à notre fonction à l'époque du récit, c'est-à-dire dans l'Angleterre du début du XX^e siècle. Comme je manipulais du cirage, j'étais le seul à porter un tablier, que je devais nouer d'une façon très particulière. Ce souci du détail, cette exigence-là, on les retrouvait sur tous les corps de métier au Châtelet.

Sur le deuxième ou le troisième refrain, nous rentrions tous un livre à la main. La séquence était très minutée. On le feuilletait sur la musique, et on le claquait quand on finissait de chanter. Cela nous a demandé beaucoup de travail, notamment pour les tops d'entrée : c'était une véritable chorégraphie. Et contrairement au cinéma, nous n'avions pas plusieurs prises. Il fallait tout connaître par cœur et tout enchaîner. Ce qui n'est pas toujours évident, surtout lorsqu'à la dernière représentation, les petits camarades en coulisses nous font des blagues et glissent des petits papiers dans les livres, qui se mettent à voler quand on les ouvre sur scène ; il y en avait partout ! Quand on a repris le spectacle trois ans plus tard, on en a même retrouvé entre les pages !

Anne Martina — Tous ces gestes-là, c'est le metteur en scène qui vous les indique, ou est-ce que vous contribuez en suggérant des idées ?

Julien Neyer — Robert Carsen avait l'art de nous mettre en confiance. Sur scène, il accompagne ses chanteurs et ses comédiens. Il connaît notre prénom tout de suite. Si bien que l'on n'hésite pas à faire des suggestions quand on en a. S'il aime, il garde. Par contre, il sait aussi très bien dire « ah non, je ne veux pas ça, tu ne le refais pas ». Il nous a montré beaucoup de choses, bien sûr. C'est un grand homme de théâtre et un grand directeur d'acteurs. Ce qui m'a toujours frappé, c'est le temps qu'il prend à soigner ces scènes de chœur qui lui paraissent très importantes. Carsen fait partie de ces metteurs en scène qui savent qu'il faut créer une dynamique de travail en incluant tout le monde. Il n'est jamais embarrassé avec un chœur, il sait quoi faire. Ceux qui ne nous connaissent pas, ou qui ne nous adressent pas vraiment la parole, c'est qu'ils ne savent pas quoi faire. Ils nous disent, « vous entrez, là vous chantez, puis vous sortez ». Carsen, au contraire, nous fait auditionner, il nous choisit.

Anne Martina — Une autre scène de chœur marquante est la scène du mariage de Doolittle, « Get Me to the Church on Time ». Celle-là, me semble-t-il, était beaucoup

plus chorégraphique et spectaculaire dans la mise en scène de Robert Carsen, non ? Il y avait notamment un numéro de danse très virtuose.

Julien Neyer — Dans le film, tout est très minuté. La caméra suit Doolittle, mais il se passe plein de choses derrière, même si ce n'est pas de la danse pure. C'est une chorégraphie de mise en place, de composition des corps dans l'espace ; comme nous le faisons souvent nous aussi. Il arrive que nous soyons sollicités pour de la danse pure, mais même quand ce n'est pas le cas, la chorégraphe est toujours là, pour nous faire entrer, sortir, bouger, pour que ce soit vivant. Carsen a monté cette pièce comme il aurait mis en scène des séquences de film. Il n'y a pas un temps mort. Cette fluidité, on la retrouve sur tous ses spectacles, y compris dans ses mises en scène d'opéras baroques. Tout est toujours en mouvement : même les accessoires ne cessent d'entrer et de sortir.

C'est pour cela qu'il y a souvent beaucoup de figurants : il faut des bras pour les bouger ! Mais ce que font les figurants est toujours parfaitement minuté. Ce sont les régisseurs jardin et cour qui donnent les tops. Comme les figurants, ils sont tout le temps avec nous. Ils sont d'ailleurs là dès le tout début. Le chœur arrive un peu plus tard, comme à l'opéra. De manière générale, les quinze premiers jours sont consacrés à un travail avec les solistes pour leurs scènes les plus intimes. Nous arrivons pour les quinze jours suivants, puis nous avons une semaine au théâtre pour répéter tous ensemble, dans les décors et en costumes.

Anne Martina — Huit jours, c'est court !

Julien Neyer — C'est court et long à la fois. Nous n'avons pas tant besoin des décors pour répéter. La régie peut tout minuter en amont, avant notre arrivée. Ils ont les plans du décorateur et au sol ils marquent tout au scotch de couleur, chaque couleur correspondant à une scène. Pendant les répétitions hors théâtre, nous avons donc tout en 2-D, quelques éléments de décor en 3-D, les portes notamment. Et le jour où nous arrivons dans les décors, nous sommes comme des enfants ! C'est comme enfiler ton costume pour la première fois, ça ajoute à ton personnage. Quand arrivent les décors et que nous devons monter des escaliers, chose que nous n'avions pas faite jusque-là, oui, les repères ne sont pas les mêmes. Il faut donc vraiment des metteurs en scène d'expérience. Dans *Candide*, on nous a fait rentrer sur scène en maillot de bain, palmes, masque et tuba ; on ne pouvait rien voir. (Là nous ne chantions pas, Dieu merci !)

Anne Martina — Cela arrive-t-il que les metteurs-en-scène vous demandent des choses impossibles ? Est-ce que tu peux vraiment chanter dans toutes les positions ?

Julien Neyer — Certains grands chanteurs le font, mais ils sont incroyables. C'est le cas dans *La Voix Humaine* de Francis Poulenc, en ce moment à l'opéra de Paris. Barbara Hannigan y a un grand solo très difficile, et elle chante la moitié du temps allongée, presque à se rouler par terre. C'est presque impossible à faire ! Oui, nous sommes parfois amenés à chanter dans de drôles de positions et sous de drôles de costumes. Je me souviens que dans la scène de l'autodafé de *Candide*, nous portions tous des costumes du Ku Klux Klan : il fallait chanter « *What a day, what a day, for an auto-da-fé* » sous de grandes capuches pointues, avec des trous grands comme ça, et des torches réellement allumées à la main ! Comme tu peux l'imaginer, il y a un service sécurité et hygiène qui encadre ce genre de scènes.

Anne Martina — Pour conclure, tu dirais donc qu'il n'y a finalement aucune différence entre l'opéra et la comédie musicale en termes d'exigences artistiques ?

Julien Neyer — Pour les comédies musicales montées au Châtelet, non, aucune : ce sont les mêmes exigences, les mêmes metteurs en scène, parfois les mêmes chanteurs (Natalie Dessay dans *Passion* de Sondheim).

Anne Martina — Cela te manque de ne plus faire de comédies musicales ?

Julien Neyer — Non, parce que le travail que je fais reste très intéressant. Aux Arts Florissants, l'exigence est la même qu'au Châtelet, et je retrouve les mêmes méthodes de travail, très inclusives, très à l'écoute. Est-ce culturel ou formel ? Est-ce dû aux équipes anglophones avec lesquelles je travaille ? Ou y aurait-il des affinités entre la comédie musicale et la musique baroque ? Je ne saurais dire. Toujours est-il que les comédies musicales m'ont procuré des expériences très fortes. J'ai été entouré de gens dévoués corps et âme à la réussite du spectacle, et ça, ça ne s'oublie pas.

"THEY BEGAT THE MISBEGOTTEN GOP" *FINIAN'S RAINBOW* AND THE US CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

James O'Leary

Years later, librettist E.Y. Harburg recalled how difficult it had been to find backers for his 1947 musical *Finian's Rainbow*. "We had a hard job getting it on Broadway, I'll tell you that," he said. "Nobody would touch it. We knew the reason. The problem in the show was the black man's problem, the white man's problem, the racist problem, the gold problem, the Fort Knox problem. Our system was reduced a little bit to absurdity."[1] On the surface the show seemed to be merely a bizarre fable: an Irishman named Finian is on the lam from a leprechaun whose gold he has stolen. But these fairytale characters wander America's deep south, and their supposedly innocent story unravels against a politically charged backdrop: Finian's daughter falls in love with a union organizer, who has returned to Missitucky to save a mixed-race group of sharecroppers from a racist white senator who is trying to foreclose on their land. The script ran the gamut from comic to Communist, which, according to Harburg, made *Finian's Rainbow* subversive, even politically dangerous.

When Francis Ford Coppola adapted the show for film in 1968, however, he said that whatever had once seemed trenchant in the original production had become "dated." According to him, *Finian's Rainbow* was nothing more than "a real relic from an earlier time in the mid '40s and certainly something that predated what was then happening in the '60s related to Civil Rights." He said that he found himself "with the very difficult job [of] reconciling the old book from the theater show with what was then a new feeling about film, and also, in our country, the advancing Civil Rights movement which was so different from the type of story that *Finian's Rainbow* was."[2]

How did *Finian's Rainbow*, which once seemed so radical, come to seem tame by 1968? To answer this question, this essay will compare the Broadway musical of 1947 to the film version of 1968. I argue that the stage version of *Finian's Rainbow* had been radical both in its politics and its style – a testing ground for a kind of protest-music idiom that became widespread for a brief time in the 1940s. However, by the 1960s

1 Harriet Hyman Alonso, *Yip Harburg: Legendary Lyricist and Human Rights Activist*, Middletown, Wesleyan UP, 2012, p. 146.

2 Francis Ford Coppola, "New Introduction and Commentary," *Finian's Rainbow*, DVD, dir. Francis Ford Coppola, Burbank, Warner Home Video, 2005.

Civil Rights movement, both political and aesthetic values had shifted so drastically that the show's original radical connotations became obscure – so obscure, in fact, that Coppola did not even recognize them.

By the time he wrote *Finian's Rainbow*, Harburg had long been engaged in New York's political theater scene, which included both commercial Broadway ventures, and experimental, avant-garde, agitprop productions that appeared either Off-Broadway or in non-traditional venues. Although he had connections to both, Harburg primarily wrote for the former. His earliest hit was "Brother Can You Spare a Dime," which he wrote for the 1932 revue *Americana*, and which became an anthem for progressive politicians of the Depression. *Americana* joined company with a number of popular, political Broadway shows at the time, including George and Ira Gershwin's *Strike Up The Band* (1927, revised 1930), *Of Thee I Sing* (1931) and *Let 'Em Eat Cake* (1933); Harburg and Harold Arlen's *Hooray for What!* (1937); Richard Rodgers's *I'd Rather Be Right* (1937); Kurt Weill's *Knickerbocker Holiday* (1938); Harold Rome's revue *Pins and Needles* (1937); and so on.

Starting in the mid 1930s, however, as composers in New York began to collaborate with émigré musicians such as Hanns Eisler, many writers began to argue that, in order to be truly political, Broadway musicals could not simply feature commercial, popular music with populist words. Familiar styles would merely produce habitual emotional reactions, manipulating listeners instead of challenging them. These émigrés argued that popular music was a double-edged sword: if popular music could sway listeners into adopting a particular political belief by tapping into their emotional reactions, such music would probably have the same effect with words of any political stripe whatsoever. Therefore, these composers sought to create music that would not provoke an immediate emotional response, but rather a critical, thoughtful contemplation.

They argued that to do this, musicians had to compose in an "oppositional" idiom, so to speak, one that undermined received modes of listening, composing, and performing. Charles Seeger, for example, maintained that Eisler's aesthetic

> [used] ordinary fragments of technique in an unusual way, because we thought *that* was revolutionary and therefore suitable for the workers to use. We didn't give them those same patterns in the usual way, which was what Broadway did. Broadway just handed out a certain number of formulas in the usual way; but we took those same formulas, simply used them differently, and hoped that we were doing something revolutionary. Lots of compositions were in that type. They had unusual harmonic

progressions in them, but usual chords. Or if there were some unusual chords, they put them in conventional patterns.[3]

This kind of music appeared on Broadway in Marc Blitzstein's *The Cradle Will Rock* (1937) and in the Roosevelt Administration's Living Newspapers (1936-1939), a series of shows that cobbled together statistical research, historical documents, and reportage to create experimental, multi-media performances that advocated strong political positions on current events of the day.[4] The goal was to create a style that was popular-but-not-too-popular, experimental-but-not-too-experimental, a style that would combine avant-garde and popular styles into an idiom that would be at once critical of capitalist, commercial culture, yet also familiar and direct enough to allow for the musically untrained to take part.[5]

By the early 1940s, the oppositional aesthetic had moved off Broadway once again, giving way to a group of composers and critics who expressed their political views in a different way. They tended to promote a politics that was not based on divisive, oppositional messages, but upon ideas that would affirm humanity's common goodness – what one might call an "affirmative aesthetic." Its major proponents included critics such as Van Wyck Brooks, Olin Downes, and Brooks Atkinson (the latter two were respectively the head music and theater critics of the *New York Times*). As Atkinson wrote during World War II:

> In a year or two we shall know whether a sense of humor can survive the crack, thrust and destruction of fanaticism. The screaming Hitler, the bellicose Mussolini, the crafty Stalin impose systems of living on nations by force. If they had a sense of humor they could not tolerate their own company. A sense of humor left unmolested inside their armed camps would ultimately destroy the systems they have founded on the myth of the superman […] Even a sense of humor has social significance when you come

3 David K. Dunaway, "Charles Seeger and Carl Sands: The Composers' Collective Years," *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 24 / 2 (May, 1980), p. 164.

4 The Roosevelt administration's Federal Theater Project produced a series of Living Newspapers between 1936 and 1939 on subjects ranging from the Italian invasion of Ethiopia (*Ethiopia*, 1936), to electricity policy and the controversial Tennessee Valley Authority (*Power*, 1937), to poverty and slum housing (*One-Third of a Nation*, 1938), to syphilis testing (*Spirochete*, 1937). By 1939, these and other Federal Theater Project productions became increasingly controversial, and Congress shuttered the Federal Theater Project (and, thereby, the Living Newspapers) that year.

5 A complete discussion of the oppositional and affirmative aesthetics lies beyond the scope of this article. For more information, see chapter 1 and chapter 5 of James O'Leary, *Exit Right: Broadway and America's Hidden Avant-Garde*, Oxford/New York, Oxford UP, forthcoming.

to think about it. And this gentleman who wants to laugh after office hours has this column's full permission.[6]

Musically, such affirmative shows tended to draw upon emblems of a shared, common, national culture. The prime example of this was Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II's *Oklahoma!* (1943). The politics of *Oklahoma!* were not overtly partisan or divisive, but instead asserted a general enthusiasm for heartland America and its homey values – a sentimental show that would no doubt have had political resonances during World War II, even if it did not have an explicit political agenda. In terms of its form – the aspect of the show that became most famous in the decades following its premiere – it was self-consciously smooth, unified, and "integrated," a far cry from the disjointed style of the oppositional aesthetic. While the claim of the musical's revolutionary form may have been overblown at the time (such integrated forms existed as long as there had been musicals), it certainly seemed new in light of the experimental shows of the late 1930s.

In this climate, with the rhetoric of integration at full tilt in the press and among Broadway composers, Harburg began to pitch his political script for *Finian's Rainbow* in late 1945. Postwar producers balked – but not because they disagreed with Harburg's political positions, as Harburg would later claim. William Liebling, for example, wrote to Harburg that he and his partner Audrey Wood were "with you one hundred percent as usual," but continued that they "had to speak our minds from a commercial standpoint […] In this type of musical one doesn't have to actually have message lines in order to get the authors' message across. In other words, all the things that you both believe so strongly will be felt just as keenly without pounding away at end with actual lines and situations."[7] Neither producer objected to Harburg's left-wing politics, nor did they think left-wing politics needed to be entirely absent from the show. Rather, they objected only to the blatant style in which Harburg expressed them. Harburg faced a predicament: he had to find a way of stating political ideas at a time when Broadway had grown largely averse to them. Even his collaborator, composer Burton Lane, later noted Harburg's intensity on this subject. "I liked [*Finian's Rainbow*] because it had something to say, but I might have liked it if it didn't have something to say – if the idea was a good one. In other words I was not primarily interested in only doing a socially significant show. Yip was… unless you could get social significance into it, he didn't want to do it."[8]

6 Brooks Atkinson, "Early Summer Settles on the Broadway Theatre," *New York Times*, June 15, 1941.
7 Letter from William Liebling to E. Y. Harburg dated December 26, 1945, E. Y. Harburg Collection, Irving S. Gilmore Library, Yale University, Box 21, Folder 163, "Finian's Rainbow Correspondence."
8 Harriet Hyman Alonso, *Yip Harburg*, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

To situate Harburg's progressive proclivities amid the largely apolitical atmosphere of postwar Broadway, the creative team had to devise a new way of expressing political ideas when writing *Finian's Rainbow*. The resulting show included hot-button partisan issues, but did so in a style that did not seem overtly oppositional or avant-garde. Rather, the goal was to make the controversial topics seem agreeable, even cheery – or, as Harburg claimed, its warm-hearted comedy blunted the edgy commentary and "gilded the philosophical pill."[9] To achieve this, Harburg and Lane created a score that was almost entirely pastiche, evoking recognizable styles that seemed alien to the Broadway stage in order to create ironic or satirical commentary. There were folk-style songs ("Look to the Rainbow"), religious-revival songs ("The Great Come and Get It Day"), a madrigal ("When the Idle Poor Become the Idle Rich"), a gavotte ("Something Sort of Grandish"), and the blues music of the real-life southern blind harmonica player Sonny Terry. As if to underscore these unusual generic juxtapositions, the final words of the published vocal score all but wink at the player: it says, "End of Opera," not "End of Show."[10] All of these relied on familiar musical styles to put an ironic spin on social or economic positions of the day.

Consider, for example, "The Begat," sung near the end of Act II. At this point in the plot, Sharon has inadvertently used the leprechaun's gold to turn the racist senator black, and he wanders the South singing with an all-black male quartet. The song, a parody of Bible Belt evangelism, was accompanied by a walking bass, cup-muted trumpets, and growling trombones – a style reminiscent of Duke Ellington's Cotton Club "jungle style."

The Whites begat,
The Reds begat
The folks who shoulda stood in bed begat.
The Greeks begat,
The Swedes begat,
Why even Britishers in Tweeds begat.

The political implications of this song are oblique. The lyrics list groups that are often considered prudish or morally conservative (the D.A.R, the bourgeoisie, the League of Women Shoppers, movie censors, the "misbegotten GOP," and so on), and the song seems to deflate these organizations' pretensions by reminding the listener that they, too, "begat." Risqué, yes, but also risky: because this song featured four black

9 *Ibid*., p. 166.
10 Burton Lane, E. Y. Harburg, *Finian's Rainbow*, New York, Chappell Music Company, 1968, p. 137.

men singing about the sexual proclivities of predominantly white groups, it raised the specter of miscegenation. On the one hand, such provocation might seem in line with the divisive politics of the 1930s avant-garde musical. But on the other hand, the irony here was by no means detached, distant, or oppositional. Rather, "the Begat" drew on shared stereotypes of so-called "jazz" music (that it was lowbrow, low down, low class, low morals – and eminently popular) in order to make its commentary. The result was the alienating gesture of avant-garde theater delivered in purely popular, familiar styles – as satire, not critique.

In addition to incorporating pastiche for ironic effect, Harburg and Lane also picked up on the popular-but-not-too-popular aesthetic of the 1930s, taking traditional song forms and defamiliarizing them. But they did so in a way that did not create a critical, oppositional distance between the audience and the action onstage. Instead, they sought to inspire an even more intense emotional investment. For example, the song "How Are Things in Glocca Morra?" seems at first to be cast in a typical verse-chorus form, with a refrain that, in general outline, follows many of the patterns of an AABA, thirty-two bar piece. For the first two phrases of the refrain, Lane repeats a nostalgic eight-measure phrase in D-flat major. Things change in the B section – the character seems hopeful that she will hear news from Ireland – and accordingly the song moves away from the tonic. In most songs, this sets up the final, culminating A section, in which these problems are resolved. Instead of returning back to the A section, however, Lane ends the song abruptly, as if the final A section's presence is merely suggested by the contour of the final phrase and the repetition of the opening words. Thus the central question of the song – "How Are Things in Glocca Morra?" – hovers in the air for the rest of the play. In the final scene of the show, the character Finian realizes that the gold he has pinned his hopes on has turned to dross. Suddenly, he perks up, and opens his suitcase:

> Finian – Do you know what's in this bag? A pair of socks – and the fate of Wall Street. A toothbrush – and the wealth of empires.
> Rawkins – Why, that's just an ordinary piece of moonstone.
> Finian – Ah, you're blind. You can only see what you're lookin' at. Inside this piece of stone is a whole multitude of gnomes, elves and fairy folk, like Neutron the Latent and Proton the Potent, ready to go to work for you and bring you all happiness... Aye, lass. I've outlived Fort Knox... To Oak Ridge, Tennessee![11]

11 Laurence Maslon, *American Musicals 1927-1949: The Complete Book and Lyrics of Eight Broadway Classics*, New York, The Library of America, 2014, pp. 433-434.

After this speech, Sharon finally reveals where Glocca Morra is: "It's only in Father's head," upon which the cast once again picks up this final section of the opening song, with a slight change in words, singing "May we meet in Glocca Morra" instead of "How are things in Glocca Morra?" On the one hand, the reappearance of this song rounds off the evening. Yet the sudden appearance of a hot-button political issue (Oak Ridge was the site where the Manhattan Project developed the atomic bomb), the reappearance of the open-ended A section of Sharon's first song, and lines that reference a future meeting in an imaginary place, all suggest that the creators may have been trying to avoid reaching any pat conclusion, leaving the audience with a provocative musical and symbolic gesture to contemplate as they left the theater – tactics that had been common in the oppositional-style musicals of the 1930s.

Even though politics remained in the final version of *Finian's Rainbow*, the press nonetheless sensed that there was also another mode of critique at work in this musical. Cyrus Dugin exclaimed that writers of *Finian's Rainbow* "have done that rare thing in the theater: concocted a book that makes sense and nonsense, and really hangs together."[12] What could it mean to make both "sense and nonsense"? Yet this paradox reappeared often in the press. *The Christian Science Monitor*, for example, maintained that the show "is compounded of wit and wily *nonsense*, social *significance*, magic, songs and dances."[13] Nonsense and significance, sense and nonsense: the aesthetic hinged on obliqueness, on the signifying power of those aspects of theater that, in the strictest sense, do not signify: style and form. Essentially Lane and Harburg managed to convey controversial political ideas in a manner that seemed agreeable to all, giving them the patina of nonsense through the madcap antics, but using stylistic elements in a way that made them seem like common, shared ideas.

Finian's Rainbow melded a 1930s aesthetic of avant-garde, popular, and populist art, but it did so within a commercial, postwar context. More specifically, it couched politics in the kind of engrossing love story that was typical of the integrated postwar Broadway musical. In *Finian's Rainbow*, Harburg relied on familiar musical styles to convey the divisive politics in an "affirmative" manner. Atkinson recognized this and wrote in the *New York Times*, "If the American musical stage continues to improve, it will no longer be necessary for anyone to speak dialogue on stage. Everything essential can be said in song and dancing."[14] *Finian's Rainbow* seemed to him, not just a love

12 Cyrus Durgin, "*Finian's Rainbow*, a Wonderful Musical, Comes to the Shubert," *Boston Daily Globe*, 19 October 1948.
13 No author, "Of Men and Leprechauns," *Christian Science Monitor Boston*, 18 January 1947.
14 Brooks Atkinson, "The New Play," *New York Times*, 11 January 1947.

story, not just propaganda, but also an experiment in expression, a new kind of protest music that attempted oppositional political discourse through affirmative speech.

In the mid 1960s, Coppola made no secret of the fact that he did not like the original script of *Finian's Rainbow*. He could not understand why the serious story (about racism and resistance) would be wrapped up in a "cockamamie" fairy tale (about the leprechaun and his magical gold).

> If I did it faithfully it was going to look like a twenty-two-year-old show. So I tried to make it faithful and yet make it acceptable for contemporary audiences. I think I always knew that the show, critically, was going to be received ungenerously. A lot of liberal people were going to feel it was old pap, because of its dated civil rights stance. And they were going to say, "Oh, the real *Finian's Rainbow* we remember was wonderful." If they were to look at the material today, they might not love it so much.[15]

To Coppola, the show's politics and its style were problematic and outdated. He faced a conundrum: on the one hand, he was tasked with reviving an old chestnut for audiences who cherished the original show, but on the other hand, he felt impelled to revise the parts of the musical he felt had become passé in order to make a biting commentary for the 1960s.

Politically, Harburg had written *Finian's Rainbow* from the point of view of the socialist left, focusing on workers (the sharecroppers and their labor on the tobacco farm) and unions (one of the main characters, Woody, was an organizer). Starting around 1960, however, a younger generation of liberal, progressive writers began to push back against the socialist left. This group, which has come to be known loosely as the New Left, boasted C. Wright Mills and Tom Hayden among its most visible spokesmen, and counted the Students for a Democratic Society as its most recognizable group. The foundational ideas of the New Left rejected some of the socialists' core principles. Mills, for example, did not understand why liberal politicians "cling so mightily to 'the working class' of the advanced capitalist societies as *the* historic agency, or even as the most important agency."[16] Focusing on categories of labor, the argument went, was dehumanizing. As the infamous *Port Huron Statement* declared: "Personal links between man and man are needed, especially to go beyond the partial and fragmented bonds of function that bind

15 Joel Gelmis, *The Film Director as Superstar*, Garden City, Doubleday, 1970, p. 9.
16 C. Wright Mills, "Letter to the New Left," excerpted in *"Takin' It to the Streets": A Sixties Reader*, ed. Alexander Bloom and Wini Breines, Oxford/New York, Oxford UP, 1995, p. 78.

men only as worker to work, employer to employee, teacher to students, American to Russian."[17] Put crudely (but not altogether inaccurately), rather than create an economic revolution to solve social problems, the New Left sought to create a social revolution to solve economic problems.

Broadly speaking, the former Socialist left tended to argue that economic relationships formed the foundation of all social interactions (the base), and out of this arose ideology and culture (the superstructure). The New Left, however, turned this model (which Mills called "a legacy from Victorian Marxism that is now quite unrealistic"[18]) upside down. They argued that social factors such as race, creed, and identity (which, in this model, is the base) determined the shape of the country's economic climate (which, in this model, becomes the superstructure). Therefore, to affect society on its most fundamental level, many on the New Left sought to empower individuals in a "participatory democracy," the catchphrase coined by Tom Hayden and the Students for a Democratic Society: "We would replace power rooted in possession, privilege, or circumstance by power rooted in love, reflectiveness, reasons, and creativity."[19] This was the era, for example, of the infamous 1965 Moynihan Report, which attempted to raise African Americans out of poverty, not simply by addressing labor and wealth, but by addressing social issues, such as broken homes.[20] Despite the ensuing controversy, the logic was entirely New Left: by focusing on repairing the social situation (in this case, families), the economic situation, they thought, would naturally improve.

When Coppola revised *Finian's Rainbow*, he brought the plot more in line with these New Left ideas. To do this, he drew on imagery that would have immediately suggested contemporary politics to its audiences. For example, the opening sequence of the film, in which the racist sheriff comes to foreclose on the sharecroppers' land, begins as rally-style chanting and gradually becomes a full-cast musical number. Musically it was more or less the same as the 1947 Broadway musical. But Coppola's visual language incorporated explicit references to the 1960s Civil Rights movement.

17 [Student for a Democratic Society], "Port Huron Statement," excerpted in *ibid*., p. 74.
18 Mills, *ibid*., p. 78.
19 Students for a Democratic Society, *ibid*., p. 67.
20 United States Department of Labor Office of Policy Planning and Research, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, Washington, D. C., U. S. Government Print Office, 1965.

In this sequence, an African American sharecropper (costumed to look like the real-life activist Stokley Charmichael pictured here, lower right corner of the frame) leads the farmers in a "sit in," a famous Civil-Rights tactic that protestors used to desegregate restaurants in the South during the 1950s and 1960s.[21] At the end of the song, the sharecroppers tip the policeman's car, another image that would have carried political overtones during the riots of the 1960s.

Just as important as what Coppola added, however, was what Coppola omitted from the Broadway version. Most conspicuously, Coppola cut the song "Necessity." This song, performed in the stage version by workers in a tobacco field, describes the economic conditions that force them to toil.[22]

21 Jeff Menne, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
22 The song is heard briefly, as background music, near the opening of the film, without words.

My feet want to dance in the sun
My head wants to rest in the shade
The Lord says go out and have fun
But the landlord says, "Your rent ain't paid."

Necessity, it's plain to see
What a lovely world this old world can be
But no, it's all a mess, account of necessity.

Because of this cut, the movie features very little discussion of what the sharecroppers actually do on the farm, nor is there any footage of the sharecroppers working – labor, in its most concrete sense, is entirely absent from the film. Whenever the workers do appear onscreen, they typically are seen running through fields, weaving garlands, hugging one another, or protesting the government, and otherwise enjoying communal life on the farm – but they never harvest tobacco. The song "If This Isn't Love," for example, portrays the farmers singing as they chase a greased pig and skip around a maypole. How such vignettes relate to the plot is unclear, but they do give the overall impression of an idyllic, hippie lifestyle. The result is a film that suppresses issues of labor, promoting instead a multi-racial society built on mutual appreciation and affection – Rainbow Valley became a New Left Eden.

Updating the show's politics did not just entail rewriting the script. The camerawork also seems atypical for Hollywood musicals. In the opening sequence the sharecroppers' protest gives way to a series of jarring jump cuts, which portray a restless Woody approaching by train to interrupt the foreclosure.

Francis Ford Coppola, *Finian's Rainbow*, opening sequence

In most movie musicals, the camera tends to be as carefully choreographed as the dancers. But as the opening song of *Finian's Rainbow* reaches its conclusion, Coppola instructed the operator to hurl the camera down the length of the car.[23] This lends the final moments of the sequence a helter-skelter look, far removed from the gliding, graceful tracking shots typical of Hollywood musicals.

Even beyond the actual images and words in the film, Coppola famously distanced himself from the typical Hollywood studio-system of production, resulting in a new, avant-garde style. Stereotypical "old Hollywood" musicals tended to feature armies of dancers traipsing over gigantic studio sets in lavish costumes constructed by battalions of unionized workers. Film critic Pauline Kael described this system as essentially Socialist, in which "almost everyone worked beneath his capacity" in order to "liberate and utilize the talents of his co-workers."[24] For film scholar Jeff Menne, Coppola's most important work as a producer was to unsettle entrenched Hollywood studios by streamlining capital and labor in the film industry. If the New Left believed economic Socialism resulted in bloat, duplication, and wasted talent, Coppola's solution was to allow his actors greater input into the film's production, thereby using their talents in multiple ways, not just as performers, but also as collaborators in the film's blocking.

Nowhere is this clearer than in Coppola's approach to choreography. The dancing that does appear in the film tends to be brief, rough, and barely coordinated – far removed from the typical slick, synchronized, clockwork steps of most other Hollywood musicals at the time. In fact, the original choreographer for the film had been Hermes Pan, who had spent his career collaborating with Fred Astaire on his stunningly intricate dances for the screen. But from the beginning of the collaboration, the relationship between Coppola and Pan was strained. Pan himself described it as a clash of generations: he represented the experienced, studio-system stalwart, and Coppola represented the young, brash, avant-garde. "You see, these schoolboys who studied at UCLA think they're geniuses," Pan quipped, "but there is a lot they don't understand."[25] Coppola fired Pan only a few weeks into rehearsals, and from that point on the choreography began to drift away from familiar studio-system steps and sequences. In what little remains of Pan's choreography in the final version of the film, Coppola tends to cut away and insert small vignettes, shots that interrupt the overall design of each number.[26] For the rest of the dancing, in place of traditional

23 Renata Adler, "Screen: Finian's Rainbow," *New York Times*, October 10, 1968.
24 Quoted in Jeff Menne, *Francis Ford Coppola*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2014, p. 9.
25 Quoted in John Franceschina, *Hermes Pan: The Man Who Danced With Fred Astaire*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2012, p. 248.
26 *Ibid.*, p. 249.

film-musical steps, Coppola himself devised a kind of communal choreography that allowed individual actors to improvise their own steps and suggest routines for the entire ensemble.[27] In other words, the dancers took part in a kind of "participatory democracy" to stage and choreograph the film.

Astaire, who played Finian, also represented the older studio musicals to Coppola. He remained in the production even after Pan left, but the director tried to remove any hint of studio slickness from his star. "Try not to make Astaire be like Astaire," Coppola supposedly told Pan early in the process.[28] After seeing the film, reviewer Renata Adler described Astaire as "looking ancient, far beyond his years, collapsed and red-eyed."[29] In the final cut, not only did Coppola deprive Astaire of any memorable dancing, but he also created a look for Astaire that was far removed from his previous top hat-and-tails glamor.

Ultimately the film version of *Finian's Rainbow* was not just an adaptation, but rather a wholesale rethinking of the show, its politics, and its style. From camerawork, to costuming, to choreography, Coppola fashioned each element to invoke a political message that was, to a great degree, sympathetic with the New Left. Although Coppola and his compatriots' New Hollywood techniques and productions would eventually shift (and shock) the entire film industry, when *Finian's Rainbow* opened, it tended to strike contemporary reviewers as exaggerated, dated, and tired. One reviewer called it the "Rip Van Winkle of this season's regressive musicals," another called it a "classic antique," and still another called it, simply, "quaint."[30] Ultimately, instead of the edgy film Coppola had hoped to produce, his *Finian's Rainbow* struck reviewers as either mocking or sloppy (and not entirely without reason; when the studio requested that they blow up the 35mm film to make a 70mm roadshow, they ended up cutting the top and bottom of each frame-often including the dancers' feet).[31]

The feeling of "quaintness" does not simply describe Coppola's aesthetic, but it also attests to a watershed in the history of experimental, political art. By the late 1960s, the New Hollywood aesthetic essentially eclipsed the avant-garde styles of 1940s Broadway. Today *Finian's Rainbow*, if discussed at all in histories of the musical

27 James M. Welsh, Gene D. Phillips, Rodney F. Hill, *The Francis Ford Coppola Encyclopedia*, Lanham, MD, Scarecrow Press, 2010, pp. 88-89.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 248.

29 Renata Adler, "Screen: Finian's Rainbow," *New York Times*, October 10, 1968.

30 A. Sarris, "Finian's Rainbow," *V. V.*, November 7, 1968; Barbara Falconer, "Movie Report: Finian's Rainbow," no paper, December 1968; John Mahoney, "W7's 'Finian's Rainbow' Breezy Musical Blend Fantasy, Comment," *The Hollywood Reporter*, October 9, 1968. All three reviews can be found in New York Public Library, MFL+ *Finian's Rainbow*, Newspaper Clippings.

31 Michael Schumacher, *Francis Ford Coppola: A Filmmaker's Life*, New York, Crown Publishers, 1999, p. 60.

theater, tends to be grouped with other post-*Oklahoma!* integrated musicals, perhaps only exceptional for its exuberant choreography and bluntly left-wing book, but not for any experimental style. Historian Gerald Bordman's assessment is typical: "The propaganda was blatantly left-wing (has anyone ever heard of a right-wing musical on Broadway?), but it was so sunny, so warm-hearted, and so witty that only the most archly conservative curmudgeon could object."[32] But even though *Finian's Rainbow* may seem rosy today, in 1947 Harburg faced real political consequences, both for his lyrics and his style. In the years after the show opened, the House Committee on Un-American Activities and Joseph McCarthy would begin to interrogate artists, supposedly for inserting subliminal messages into their work in an effort to revive prewar socialism, and for creating, not just politically minded works, but also a subversive style of music that would make Communist messages appealing to regular citizens around the country. The paranoia about a specifically far-left aesthetic reached a point where actor Adolphe Menjou would testify before the government, "I believe that under certain circumstances a Communistic director, a Communistic writer, or a Communistic actor, even if he were under orders from the head of the studio not to inject Communism or un-Americanism or subversion into pictures, could easily subvert that order, under the proper circumstances, by a look, by an inflection, by a change in the voice."[33] Style, not just substance, had become dangerous. Within a year of the *Finian's Rainbow* premiere, Harburg himself would be blacklisted from working in Hollywood for a decade. And like so many others in this era, it was not only for the political opinions he stated outright. It was also because of his Communist style.

32 Gerald Bordman, *American Musical Comedy*, Oxford/New York, Oxford UP, 1982, p. 170.
33 Eric Bentley, ed., *Thirty Years of Treason*, New York, The Vicking Press, 1911, p. 122.

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ABSTRACT

Between the 1930s and the 1960s, as political discourse and race relations in the United States experienced dramatic upheavals, the conventions of political theater and music changed as well. This essay explores these changes by describing how the 1947 Broadway show *Finian's Rainbow* changed when it was adapted into the 1968 film version, directed by Francis Ford Coppola. The original stage production adopted avant-garde styles of 1930s New York theater to make political points in an experimental vein. By the 1960s, however, Coppola no longer recognized the show's stylistic innovations, and revised the script to be more in line with New Left mores and conventions.

Keywords

New Left; socialism; Broadway; Burton Lane; E. Y. Harburg; Francis Ford Coppola; *Finian's Rainbow*; Hermes Pan; film music

RÉSUMÉ

Entre les années 1930 et 1960, alors même que le discours politique et les relations raciales aux États-Unis connaissent des bouleversements considérables, les conventions du théâtre et de la musique politiques évoluent elles aussi. Cet article interroge ces changements en explorant la façon dont la comédie musicale *Finian's Rainbow*, créée en 1947 à Broadway, se voit modifiée pour son adaptation cinématographique en 1968, sous la direction de Francis Ford Coppola (titre français : *La Vallée du bonheur*). La version scénique d'origine adoptait, à des fins politiques, le style avant-gardiste du théâtre new-yorkais des années 1930, dans une veine expérimentale. Dans les années 1960, en revanche, Coppola ne reconnaît plus les innovations stylistiques du spectacle, et révise le scénario pour l'aligner davantage avec les mœurs et les conventions de la Nouvelle Gauche.

Mots-clés

Nouvelle Gauche ; socialisme ; Broadway ; Burton Lane ; E. Y. Harburg ; Francis Ford Coppola ; *Finian's Rainbow* / *La Vallée du bonheur* ; Hermes Pan ; musique de film

HARMONY AT HARMONIA?
GLAMOR AND FARCE IN *HELLO, DOLLY!*, FROM WILDER TO KELLY

Julie Vatain-Corfdir & Émilie Rault

When *Hello, Dolly!* opened on Broadway in January 1964, immediately to be hailed as "a musical shot through with enchantment,"[1] New York audiences were by no means greeting Dolly for the first time. Through a process of recycling which probably owed as much to the potential of the original story as it did to a logic of commercial security, the story of Mrs. Dolly Levi – the meddling matchmaker who sorts out everyone's love lives and contrives to marry her biggest client herself – had been prosperous on stage and screen for the previous ten years, and would continue to attract audiences to this day.[2] Not unlike *My Fair Lady*, which previously held the record for longest-running Broadway musical, *Hello, Dolly!* trod on the "surer road to success,"[3] with a book based on a popular play by an acclaimed playwright – Thornton Wilder's *The Matchmaker* –, and one which had already been famously adapted to the screen with a cast starring, among others, Shirley Booth and Shirley MacLane. The final consecration, in this back-and-forth journey of Dolly's story between Broadway and Hollywood, would be that of a big-budget, star-led musical film in 1969 – "a humdinger of a show"[4] directed by a legend of the silver screen, Gene Kelly, in a production so lavish it has more than once invoked the adjective "elephantine".[5]

1 Howard Taubman, "Review of *Hello, Dolly !*", *The New York Times*, January 16th, 1964.

2 As Thornton Wilder's literary executor attests, *The Matchmaker* is still widely performed in the 20th century: "In 2011, a representative year, *The Matchmaker* was produced on the amateur stage in this country and Canada once every ten days", and among the productions based on Wilder's work, "None can rival *Hello, Dolly!*" (Tappan Wilder, "Thornton Wilder for the Twenty-First Century, in *Thornton Wilder: New Perspectives*, Evanston, Northwestern UP, 2013, p. 7). We might add that, in the Fall of 2016, the advance sale of tickets to the 2017 revival with Bette Midler hit an all-time Broadway high.

3 "Beginning with someone else's play, poem, short story or biography seems to be the surer road to success." (Thomas L. Riis and Ann Sears, "The successors of Rodgers and Hammerstein from the 1940s to the 1960s," in William A. Everett and Paul Laird (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to the American Musical*, 2nd ed., 2009, p. 189).

4 Clive Hirschhorn, *The Hollywood Musical*, New York, Crown, 1981.

5 The adjective recurs in various reviews and commentaries. See Vincent Canby's review for *The New York Times*, December 18th, 1969; or Tom Santopietro, *The Importance of Being Barbra*, New York, St. Martin's, 2006, p. 68.

As Anne Davis Basting writes, "*Hello, Dolly!* has always been a show that knows it is a show."[6] Indeed, the optimistic musical does not hold back on cheeriness, nor does it deny its farcical roots. The inspiration for *Hello, Dolly!* dates back to a 19th-century one-act farce by John Oxenford (*A Day Well Spent*, 1835), promptly rewritten into a full-length Viennese comedy by Johann Nestroy (*Einen Jux will er sich Machen*, 1842), which Thornton Wilder later reinvented for a New York setting with added characters; first, unsuccessfully, as *The Merchant of Yonkers* (1938) and then, after extensive revision, as *The Matchmaker* (1954), a West End and Broadway hit starring Ruth Gordon. The changing focus of the successive titles reveals a telling shift from the general setting, "a day", to the comedy, "*einen jux*" (a joke), then on to the male lead, the "merchant", and finally to the female lead, the "matchmaker". The play only seems to find its ideal balance, its pace and its greater success once it has placed Mrs. Levi squarely at the dramatic and emotional center of its construction. The title of the musical takes this one step further, switching from a statement of her social role as matchmaker to a breezy salute to her nickname, thus placing the audience on a footing of intimacy with her from the word go. This easy informality proves efficient in terms of characterization, foregrounding the idea that Dolly knows everyone, and simultaneously harbors meta-theatrical echoes. When, in the most iconic scene of the show, the chorus sings "it's so nice to have you back where you belong," their hospitality could be construed as the spectators', literally welcoming the character back to Broadway in musical form.

Paradoxically enough, this most emblematic scene of the musical – the one which brought down the house on opening night and routinely features on publicity material – is nowhere to be found in the original play. If *Hello, Dolly!* was riding on the success of *The Matchmaker,* it instantly became famous for the precise point at which it diverged from the play, blowing up the proportions of Wilder's intimate story to the glittering dimensions of the musical stage, translating private monologue into public song, and physical comedy into choreography. This article will therefore focus on the unfolding and rewriting of those glamorous restaurant scenes, taking into account the three diverging versions presented by Wilder's original dialogue, the musical composed by Jerry Herman and historically embodied on stage by Carol Channing, and the 20th Century Fox film starring Barbra Streisand. This will allow us to examine the shifts in scale, tone and rhythm involved in turning a musical of thirteen actors and an ensemble into a twenty-four-million-dollar movie featuring thousands of extras,

6 Anne Davis Basting, "Dolly Descending a Staircase", in Kathleen Woodward (ed.), *Figuring Age*, Bloomington, Indiana UP, 1999, p. 251.

while keeping in mind the relationship of both the stage and the screen musicals to the original play. We will try to outline the ways in which the tone of the piece is gradually altered, and the relationship between the audience and the show redefined, through the analysis of a few key elements. Beginning with the overall arrangement of the sequence and progressively narrowing our focus around the "showstopper," we will look at the representative shifts revealed by the handling of the scenes in terms of scale, virtuosity, and the balance between comedy and sentiment.

VEERING TOWARDS ROMANCE

Exploring a popular format for the comic genre, and one which had previously proved its worth on Broadway with such successes as *A Trip to Chinatown* or *On the Town*, *Hello Dolly!* revolves around the intersecting stories of a series of ordinary characters who all spend an adventure-filled day in New York City, and end up having dinner at the same upscale restaurant, musically named "The Harmonia Gardens". The restaurant scenes constitute the climax of the plot, crystallizing young love, showing the matchmaker openly embarking on her plans to marry the wealthy Mr. Vandergelder, and whipping the misunderstandings into a frenzy of loud voices and physical comedy that ends the sequence on an enjoyably catastrophic note, set to rousing polka music. Though all the versions of the sequence – spoken or sung, on stage or on screen – aim to stress the rising tension and sense of impending farcical chaos, the ways in which structure and tone combine to build up anticipation vary quite tellingly.

When placed opposite the more experimental and philosophical bulk of Wilder's work for the stage, *The Matchmaker* may well seem out of character for the Pulitzer-winning author of *Our Town* and *The Skin of Our Teeth*, who, in the words of Marc Robinson, "seeks Puritan clarity with eyes wide open to modernist ambiguity, and asserts the simplicities of presence against a culture of increasing illegibility."[7] One way to solve this apparent contradiction is to point to the fact that, for all its levity, *The Matchmaker* proves consistent with Wilder's other plays as defending, above all else, the worth of the here and now. Another is to underline the fact that Wilder's foray into conventional comedy was entirely deliberate: "One way to shake off the nonsense of nineteenth-century staging is to make fun of it," he wrote. "This play parodies the stock-company plays that I used to see at Ye Liberty Theatre, Oakland,

7 Marc Robinson, *The American Play*, New Haven, Yale UP, 2009, p. 203.

California, when I was a boy."[8] In this case, parodic intentions provide an excuse to celebrate the staples of the genre, and the third act of the play accordingly opens with a generous display of coincidences, overheard conversations, lost objects and characters pulling each other by their coats as they order food and lay traps for the upcoming dinner. Expectations are raised through the weaving of intricate plot trends, while the audience's laughter is sustained through abundant comedy of character, supplied by a memorably superior "tall 'snob' waiter [with a] German accent" and a moralizing "enormous cabman in a high hat."[9]

By contrast, Michael Stewart and Jerry Herman's book for the musical foregoes all knockabout stage business for the time being, choosing instead to open the act with a single, lightly satirical number, "Elegance," sung by two of the younger couples on their way to dinner. Shifting from inside the restaurant to the street outside, the scene paradoxically becomes more intimate, as the lyrics and choreography offer an amusing way to delve into the characters' aspirations and misgivings. Lacking the money for a cab, the young people are singing as they *walk* to the restaurant, thus giving the lie to the very words they sing:

Cornelius and Barnaby —	Silver spoons were used for feeding us
	We got elegance
	If you ain't got elegance
All —	You can never ever carry it off!
	Middle class… don't speak of it
	Savoir faire… we reek of it
	Some were born with rags and patches but
	We use dollar bills for matches and
	[…][10]

The vernacular syntax of the lyrics, with its elisions and missing verbs, further undermines the copious antiphrastic allusions to aristocracy, dandyism – or indeed colossal fortunes, since the singers go on to mention Diamond Jim, J.P. Morgan and Vanderbilt. The humor of this contrast between wealthy aspirations and small-time reality is heightened by the music which, instead of echoing the high life through the rhythms of a waltz or society dance, develops as a march, punctuated

8 Thornton Wilder, "Preface to three plays" [1957], in *Collected Plays and Writings on Theater*, New York, Library of America, 2007, pp. 686-687.

9 Thornton Wilder, *The Matchmaker*, in *Ibid.*, pp. 330, 333.

10 Jerry Herman and Michael Stewart, *Hello, Dolly!* libretto, manuscript available from Tams-Witmark Music Library, Inc., p. 212.

with a heavy, brassy trombone glissando. Gower Champion, original director and choreographer of the show, used the glissando as a comical opportunity for the actors to take exaggeratedly long and exhausted steps and, more generally, choreographed the piece around a series of off-center steps, in a "charmingly mannered routine" complete with a prancing horse, as Eileen Brennan recalls: "We all walked with our hands out as the horse danced behind us."[11] And when Michael Kidd choreographed the movie, he followed suit by arranging "Elegance" as a parody of refined attitudes, with such unlikely accessories as pretzels used for opera glasses. We may note that even in the film, with the more sophisticated possibilities for orchestration opened up by a Hollywood symphonic orchestra, the comical trombone glissando recurs, infusing the choreography with screwball elements. The physical comedy that animates Wilder's dialogue is thus translated into dance on the musical stage and screen, blending humor with gracefulness as the characters prepare for the evening' festivities.

The following transition, however, displays a major aesthetic divergence between the Broadway show and the film. In Champion's staging, once the young people reached the end of their song and the entrance to the restaurant, the set revolved to reveal the inside of the splendiferous Harmonia Gardens. But in the movie, Jerry Herman and Gene Kelly inserted an extra song for Barbra Streisand – a romantic one which considerably alters our conception of her character. Entitled "Love is Only Love," this ballad had originally been written for *Mame* (1966), another one of Herman's hit shows, and was adapted to *Hello Dolly!* through the expedient means of adding some introductory lyrics. The whole sequence is shot as a moment of stolen intimacy. As the young couples reach the restaurant door, the camera travels over the rooftops of New York to Dolly's window and enters her bedroom. The framing is close and the room dark, creating a chiaroscuro effect through which Dolly is discovered brushing her hair, in the pictorial tradition of the woman at her dressing-table.

11 Both quotes are from John Anthony Gilvey, *Before the Parade Passes By*, New York, St Martin's, 2005, p. 142.

The sensuality of her low-cut négligé, flowing hair and abandoned, dreamy attitude provides a stark contrast to her previous scenes, in which she appeared highly corseted and fully in control. Here she is not playing a part, as is made clear by the very personal nature of the singing, so free in its rhythm it almost takes on a spoken quality, and so pure in its tones that the orchestra strings grow barely audible in order to let the voice resonate.

This image of a womanly, lovelorn Dolly corresponds to a strong shift towards sentimentality in the screen adaptation. On stage, Dolly squarely declared "I am marrying Horace Vandergelder for his money"[12] and hugged the cash register,[13] while on screen, she says nothing so direct, but is revealed as a beautiful young widow looking for a second chance at love. This tendency is mirrored in the casting of the supporting roles. To accompany his leading couple composed of Carol Channing and David Burns, "a Gilded Age version of Harlequin and Pantelone,"[14] Gower Champion had broken with tradition in his choices for the younger couples and cast comedians rather than romantic types: as John Anthony Gilvey writes, "Champion was content to have farceurs who would complement the leading players rather than the colorless lovers common to farce."[15] Gene Kelly's actors, by contrast, are decidedly more on the tender side. This is especially true of Michael Crawford and Marianne McAndrew – a gangly, affectionate Cornelius to his fair, gentle Irene – whose acting emphasizes the awkward adorableness of budding romance. To underline the innocence of their love affair, Irene who was a widow in the play and in the stage musical, is simply turned by

12 The sentence is straight out of Wilder's script, *The Matchmaker, op. cit.*, p. 363.
13 The cover of *Life* magazine, April 3rd, 1964, famously advertises the show by featuring Channing squeezing the cash register tight, with a huge smile on her face.
14 John Anthony Gilvey, *op. cit.*, p. 151.
15 *Ibid.*, p. 121.

the movie script into an unmarried young woman. And while Dolly herself remains a widow, she is suddenly portrayed in a reverie, and in the full bloom of youth, unlike her previous incarnations, since Gordon played Dolly at fifty-eight and Channing from the age of forty-two to her seventies,[16] while Streisand was barely twenty-seven by the time the movie was released. Thus, what was comical and even cynical on Broadway strives to become romantic in Hollywood, moving further away from Wilder's money-driven farce in an effort to create a more conventional love story for the screen. While this intention is clear, its success is, by all accounts, marred by the unsatisfactory chemistry between Barbra Streisand and Walter Matthau – one of the points of criticism most commonly leveled at the movie.

STAGING AND FILMING VIRTUOSO CHOREOGRAPHY

Once the threshold of the Harmonia Gardens is crossed, we enter the realm of the spectacular. It is easy to see how the fashionable restaurant imagined by Wilder readily captured the imagination of the musical's creators as a pretext for glamorous sets and sensational performances. The *New York Times* reviewer of the *Hello, Dolly!* stage premiere pointed out that the liveliness of the musical originated in the play's exuberance: "As a play Thornton Wilder's *The Matchmaker* vibrated with unheard melodies and unseen dances. Michael Stewart, Jerry Herman and Gower Champion apparently heard and saw them, and they have conspired ingeniously to bring them to shining life."[17] In the case of the waiters, as we mentioned earlier, Wilder's scenes mostly give occasion for slapstick comedy – with tables repeatedly laid and knocked over – and character acting, since the first waiter is written as patronizingly pretentious, and the second as young and insecure to the point of constantly bursting into tears. Blown up to the proportions of the musical stage, these two characters turn into an army of waiters, whose comic potential is translated into dance through sensational acrobatics, as they embark on a "wild, vertiginous rout"[18] known as the "Waiter's

16 On this subject, a thought-provoking analysis of Channing's performance at seventy-four can be found in Basting's account of her impressions as a member of the audience : "I had expected a courageous display of wrinkles. I had expected sentimentality. What I had not expected was the audience's frenzied approval of Channing's morphed body in what seemed a confusing display of yesterday and today – a face fallen and lifted, a body revealed, time frozen and flowing. I had made a pilgrimage to – and was participating in – a theatricalized display of Channing's simultaneously aged and un-aged body." Anne Davis Basting, "Dolly Descending a Staircase", *op. cit.*, p. 250.

17 Howard Taubman, "Review of *Hello, Dolly !*", art. cit.

18 *Ibid.*

Gallop," intended by Champion as an extravagant moment of pure entertainment, and a cornerstone of the show:

> The first two weeks of the five-week rehearsal period covering October 6 to November 10, 1963, were devoted to "The Waiter's Gallop" and "Hello, Dolly!" – two major second act production numbers that together would form the foundation of the show. This musical diptych would be created and connected by means of the principle of the topper, "the climax no one believes can be surpassed ('The Waiters' Gallop') until the next wonder – the next topper ('Hello, Dolly!') – leaves the audience cheering and the performers gasping for breath."[19]

A dazzling dance in its own right, the "Waiter's Gallop" can be seen as a preparation for the "Hello, Dolly!" number both in terms of composition and from a thematic point of view, since it answers an order from the maître d' to make "our usual lightning service […] twice as lightning,"[20] in honor of Dolly's return. Thus the ensemble of waiters leaps and bounds across the stage, occasionally interrupting their antics to let us hear snatches of conversations between the various diners. In the original staging, the protagonists ordered their dinners from the privacy of two curtain-enclosed booths on either side of the stage, so that whenever the actors opened the curtains to speak, the waiters disappeared or froze. "Held" or "frozen" attitudes were, in fact, an integral part of Champion's dance vocabulary for *Hello, Dolly!*, meant to evoke old rotogravures of turn-of-the-century New York through a series of "dance snapshots" – used to particularly striking effect in the opening number, "Call on Dolly". On film, however, the use of cross-cutting and camera movements enables Gene Kelly to create a more seamless alternation between the intimate spaces of the characters' dinners and the waitressing frenzy in the open spaces of the restaurant.

On stage, the music chosen to support the gallop is an original circus-like tune, accentuating the impression of a show within the show, whereas the movie uses an instrumental reprise of "Just leave everything to me," a melody written for Barbra Streisand to replace the stage opening number. The screen version therefore links the gallop to Dolly in a deeper manner, building up on the frenetic impression given by this "catalogue song" which seems to be going in breathless circles – previously *listing* all the things Dolly can do in a complex string of text, and now *showing* all the things the waiters can do in an intricate series of steps. The music keeps playing throughout

19 John Anthony Gilvey, *op. cit.*, p. 130. The inserted quote is from Glenn Litton, *Musical Comedy in America*, New York, Theatre Arts Books, p. 272.

20 *Hello Dolly* libretto, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

the entire film sequence, including during the dialogue, which reinforces the feeling of a fast-paced narration as even the young men, Cornelius and Barnaby, find themselves momentarily caught up in the waiter's dance in an attempt to escape paying their bill. This intention to tie the gallop to the storyline is further illustrated in the chain of miniature stories which makes up the screen version, with waiters facing challenges and accidents, such as a dropped dish or a client's impatience: Michael Kidd seems to make it a point of honor to make his choreography narrative. We may note that this tendency to further integrate music and dance to the plot could also explain, elsewhere in the film, the disappearance of elements which had been successful on stage such as the Act I "Motherhood March," essentially a vaudeville number whose interest lay in its clockwork comedy and enjoyable nods to a time-honored art form rather than in the advancement of the plot.

The stage gallop, by contrast, displays no keen concern to become narrative and remains more playful as well as more demonstrative of the dancers' talents. They fence with skewers, discarding the meat and vegetables as scabbards, create facetious visions by wiggling their legs from behind large round trays, turn bewildering four-legged cartwheels, and repeatedly jump up and down on the spot in perfect synchronization, in an astonishing display of endurance. The sheer virtuosity required by these steps fosters a sense of tension in the theatre, as the spectators witness the risks taken by the performers. Champion's staging called for a specific feature to be added to the stage: "a 'pasarelle,' a ramp built out from the apron of the stage around the orchestra pit, ringed with footlights to give a turn-of-the-century feel to the scenery."[21] This ramp gave the setting a new sense of depth and opened up spectacular possibilities in terms of movement. While it made for breathtaking acrobatics as the waiters leapt over the musicians, it also meant that a net, visible to the audience, had to be placed over the pit in case the dancers fell in. Even though the set of the movie included a ringed red carpet around the restaurant's floor to echo Champion's ramp, such tension and risk-taking are *de facto* gone from the movie, where everything is pre-recorded, and perhaps this provides an explanation as to why Kidd's choreography insists on showing us the waiters avoiding impending catastrophes – in order to be recreated on screen, the sense of danger and intensity had to be transferred from the performers to the performance.

21 David Payne-Carter, *Gower Champion*, Westport, CT, Greenwood, 1999, p. 93.

The TOFT archive video recording of the *Hello, Dolly!* revival at the Lunt-Fontanne theater proves that, by 1996, the title number of the show was famous enough for applause to break out as soon as the set of the staircase was revealed, and long before Channing even set foot on it. Dolly's celebrated entrance down the stairs – so well-known that it went "round the world" with Mary Martin[22] – is a typical case of ever-growing amplification, from play to musical and from stage to screen. Wilder's stage direction for the Harmonia Gardens' veranda calls for an "informal and rustic" room on the Battery, whose right-side entrance is "perhaps up a few steps and flanked by potted palms."[23] In the hands of Broadway and Hollywood set designers, these hypothetical steps were magnified into spectacular red-carpeted staircases lined with railings of wrought iron (on stage) or marble (on screen). Both the original stage production and the film won awards for set design,[24] proving that *Hello, Dolly!* fully conformed to a purpose identified by Raymond Knapp as central to the American musical – that is, "to achieve great effects from mechanical spectacle."[25] The costume design took a similar direction, and actresses playing Dolly on stage, from Ginger Rogers to Bette Midler, have followed Channing's lead in sporting dazzling feather headpieces and striking red full-length dresses, though none so extravagant as Barbra Streisand's shimmering golden gown, one of the most expensive garments ever made for a film, designed by Irene Sharaff using solid gold thread and beadwork as well as countless gemstones and crystals. Although the stage direction that introduces Thornton Wilder's Dolly defines her style as a case of "impoverished elegance,"[26] the technical realities of the lighting on a movie set apparently required the use of pure gold material as the only way to achieve the desired iridescent effect. This provides rather a compelling symbol of Hollywood megalomania – when real gold must be used to create the illusion of a gilded dress. It also brings to mind Susan Sontag's definition of camp sensibility as the love of artifice and exaggeration – "Camp is

22 Mary Martin, who had originally turned down the role, played Dolly in the West End premiere of the show, as well as in a US and foreign tour which went to Japan, Korea and Vietnam. The NBC documentary "*Hello Dolly*: Round the World" shows her altering the well-known lyrics to "Hello, Tokyo!"

23 Thornton Wilder, *The Matchmaker, op. cit.*, p. 330.

24 Oliver Smith won a Tony award for scenic design in 1964, while Walter M. Scott, George James Hopkins and Raphael Bretton won an Oscar for set decoration in 1970.

25 Raymond Knapp, *The American Musical and the Formation of National Identity*, Princeton, Princeton UP, 2006, p. 16.

26 Thornton Wilder, *The Matchmaker, op. cit.*, p. 296.

a woman walking around in a dress made of three million feathers"[27] – and could certainly warrant looking at the film as unwittingly conforming to camp aesthetics in more than one way.

Dolly's entrance is striking melodically as well as visually, thanks to the optimistic song of welcome she shares with the waiters, celebrating her decision to reintegrate the world after years of isolated widowhood[28]. It begins with a burlesque-like introduction, a brassy march whose binary rhythm mimics Dolly's descent down the stairs. While such racy music adds a humorous dimension to her appearance, it also thematically echoes the parade march of the Act I number "Before the Parade Passes By"; only this time, instead of watching it go by, Dolly is taking the parade's lead. Accordingly, Champion's choreography for the rest of the number is arranged laterally, with the chorus marching and kicking in intertwining lines, always providing tableaux in which Dolly is framed by the waiters, or using them as counterpoint as she walks in a direction opposite to theirs. The logic of the movie adaptation, for this most iconic of scenes, tends towards preservation rather than innovation, substantiating the *New York Times* reviewer's claim according to which: "Gene Kelly […] acts like a caretaker of a big, valuable property."[29] Thus, in an explicit homage to the Broadway show, Kidd's

27 Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp" [1964], in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967, p. 283.

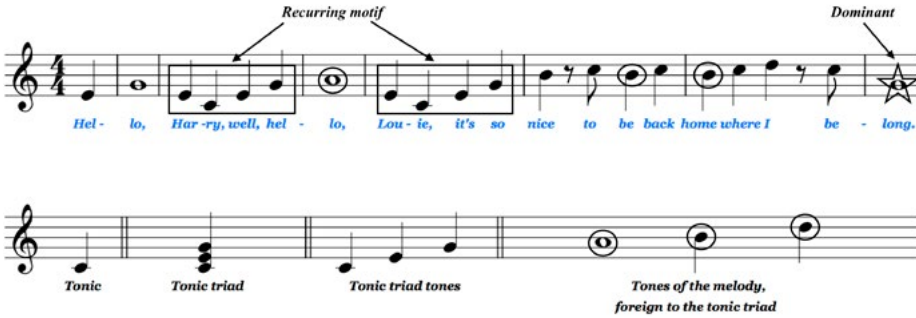
28 In *The Matchmaker*, this idea is brought forward through a monologue, just before Mr. Vandergelder's proposal in act IV. This long exposé of Dolly's past and current situation and feelings, addressed to her late husband and to the audience, has given trouble to directors and screenwriters, who have tended to move it – as is the case in the Joseph Anthony movie – or rewrite it. In the stage version of *Hello, Dolly!*, the monologue is cut up in three parts scattered through the first and second acts. In the movie version, only a short monologue leading to "Before the Parade Passes By" remains.

29 Vincent Canby, review for *The New York Times*, December 18th, 1969.

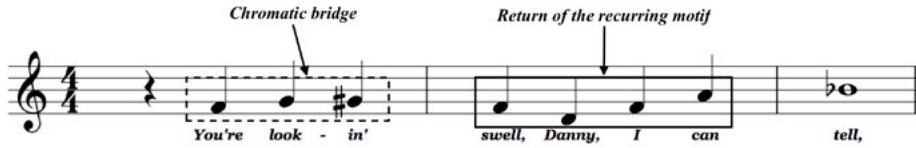
choreography is built around sideways movements, in unison or with counterpoint. Any novelty in the film is to be found in the media itself rather than in the originality of the steps: the widescreen, Todd-AO frame enhances the sense of an endless stream of waiters following Dolly from side to side, while the camera moves which follow the march increase the impression of swiftness and fluidity. Champion's work has a cinematographic quality which, in many ways, probably facilitated the transition of his vision into film; this is also true of his use of "close-up" effects to create moments of intimacy. When, midway through "Hello, Dolly," Dolly breaks into a more personal verse section to allude to her years in the shadows, Champion highlighted this by placing Channing alone in the middle of the ramp, and focusing the intensity on her by dimming the lights and slowing down the movements all around. This was easily transposed on screen thanks to a close framing of Streisand's face and arms in a beam of light against a blurry background. While Champion recreated a cinematographic close-up on stage, Kelly returned the allusion by placing a theater spotlight in front of his camera.

Both on stage and screen, the relative simplicity of the "Hello, Dolly" choreography echoes that of Herman's popular melody. As the show first went into rehearsal, the creators of the musical were struck by how easy the tune was to memorize, even by Champion's young son: "We all felt that if a two-year-old could sing it, it was a sure sign of a hit."[30] Indeed, when Dolly begins to sing the first words of the song, she does so with a mere vocal arpeggio of a tonic triad. The tonic triad, or tonic chord, of a musical piece is one of the most elementary and vital chords one might think of, as it is based on the first (some say principal) tone of the scale – the tonic: most songs begin and end with a tonic chord, and when Dolly utters her first "Hello, Harry," she is merely singing the tones of the tonic triad one after the other. In fact, out of the first twenty written notes of the melody, which constitute the first sentence of the song, only five are not part of the tonic triad – five notes that are actually the repetition of only three tones, as is highlighted in the example below:

30 Jess Greg interview, in John Anthony Gilvey, *op. cit.*, 128.



These three "foreign tones" to the tonic triad are gradually introduced in the melody in an ascending pattern, making for growing excitement as the melody unfolds. The first sentence ends on the dominant of the key, a common manner to keep the tension going. Indeed, the dominant is next in importance to the tonic in a scale: composers infallibly use it to bring the necessary sense of suspense to a musical piece, before resolving the created tension by returning to the tonic or a tonic substitute of the key. This is, rather unadventurously, exactly what Herman does in this instance, when he begins the second sentence of the song:



The second sentence recreates the same musical pattern as the first, only one tone higher. Indeed, Herman leads us to the next sentence with a slight twist: he introduces yet another short ascension thanks to a chromatic bridge, which also carries its load of musical excitement, as it contains several tones foreign to the original key the melody was set in. He then proceeds to reiterate, one tone higher, a recurring motif emphasized in the first sentence (see both examples above), creating a pattern which will be found throughout the song. It consists in an arpeggio of a simple fifth chord, rocking the melody downwards and upwards from third interval to third interval (one of the most basic intervals in musical composition, a tonic triad being composed of two thirds) in an easily remembered motion. When composing the "Hello Dolly" melody, Herman seems to have found that delicate balance between familiarity and excitement, which might explain that, generations later, children are still humming the "Hello Dolly" tune.

Another feature that makes this song one of the catchiest in the Broadway repertoire is the use of "Dolly" as a refrain-like punctuation. This may well have been inspired by Wilder's dialogue, where names can be repeated a dozen times a scene, as forms of address or as exclamations, lending the text an emphatic sense of rhythm. As the melody of "Hello, Dolly" unfolds, its protagonist's name practically becomes the exclamation point we can read in the title of the show. The straightforwardness of the song enables improvisation and gives space to the performer. It had originally been written for Ethel Merman, known for her immense voice and straightforward personality, miles away from the "cartoon-like quality"[31] of Carol Channing, who had previously captured the attention of New York as a radiant Lorelei Lee, "looking out on a confused world through big, wide, starry eyes."[32] Herman was hesitant when Merman turned down the part and Channing was suggested in her stead, since "Channing's contra-bass was no replacement for Merman's baroque trumpet."[33] Yet Channing managed to make the song all her own and put her stamp on it for decades to come. Befitting her contralto voice, she sings the melody in a lower key than later performers such as Streisand, giving it a sense of weight and gravity. Channing's Dolly pushes the notes longer than the writing calls for, takes rhythmical risks, and is often on the verge of skipping a beat, sometimes forcing the orchestra to slow down and wait for the woman whom they have no choice but to "leave everything to". By comparison, the voice of Streisand's Dolly strikes us as lighter in pitch and consistency, using her agile tones to create a versatile counterpoint to her co-performers as well as the orchestra. This lends an improvised quality to her rendering, and enables her to embody a more intimate Dolly, embroidering upon the well-known melody to reinvent a song that had apparently been set in stone by Channing's version.

This divergence in singing styles finds an echo in the individual treatment of comic timing and line-delivery. While the quiet lyricism of Wilder's monologues has often been pointed out as an inspiration for musical adaptations,[34] the ironic rhythms and humorous repetitions of *The Matchmaker*'s dialogue also support a fruitful dynamic between text and song – and call for skilled verbal acting from the performers. This is notably true of the long-winded final exchange of Act III, the scene "of Dolly fast-talking Vandergelder, steamrolling him toward betrothal with double-talk and

31 David Payne-Carter, *op. cit.*, p. 89.
32 Brooks Atkinson, review of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, New York Times, December 8th, 1949.
33 David Payne-Carter, *op. cit.*, p. 89.
34 Gilvey quotes Herman saying "Thornton Wilder was so filled with lyric ideas for me" (John Anthony Gilvey, *op. cit.*, p. 134). We may also note that other Wilder plays have given rise to musical adaptations, most recently the *Long Christmas Dinner* and *Our Town* operas.

misdirection,"[35] while pretending to refuse his non-existent proposal of marriage. This comical climax of the sequence undergoes very little change from Wilder's play to Stewart's book or to Lehman's screenplay, perhaps because its very wordiness lends it a melodic quality, with Dolly's hypocritical catchphrase acting as a tantalizingly antiphrastic chorus – "You go your way, and I'll go mine."[36] The delivery of the lines, however, differs according to the version and on this point, it seems safe to say that Streisand's choices of pace and intonation are as close to Wilder's writing as possible. While Channing's delivery is slower and more articulate, Streisand, building up on her previous success as Fanny Brice, applies to the dialogue all the standard features of the "New York Jewish conversational style" as defined by linguist Deborah Tannen; that is, a persistence on reintroducing the same topic, a faster rate of speech with a tendency to overlapping, and an abundant use of "expressive paralinguistics" such as pitch and amplitude shifts.[37] The medium shots and close-ups as well as the precision of the sound recording enable Barbra Streisand to maintain a dizzying pace which could not be achieved on stage without rendering half the lines incomprehensible. This does perfect justice to Wilder's text, which is intended as a sweeping monologue with occasional interruptions rather than as dialogue. Surprisingly enough, this is one aspect in which the film, rather than moving further away from the source text, offers a thoroughly authentic interpretation of it, thanks to technical means and to marked choices in the actress' delivery.

HELLO, DOLLY, HELLO, LOUIS: SELF-REFLEXIVITY

While the insertion of the "Hello Dolly" number in the structure of Thornton Wilder's plot answers a romantic necessity by turning Dolly into a desirable woman in the eyes of Mr. Vandergelder, it also modifies the relationship between spectator and spectacle. As Raymond Knapp notes, musical numbers, through their conventional artificiality as well as through the virtuosity they display, call attention to "the performer behind the persona:"

> […] music notoriously does not unfold in "real time", but rather imposes a kind of suspended animation so as to intensify selected emotional moments, and through

35 Gary Konas, "A Walk on the Wilder Side with Dolly Levi," in *Thornton Wilder: New Essays*, ed. Martin Blank, Dalma Hunyadi Brunauer, David Garrett Izzo, West Cornwall, CT, Locust Hill Press, 1999, p. 467.

36 Thornton Wilder, *The Matchaker*, *op. cit.*, p. 347 sq.

37 Deborah Tannen, "New York Jewish Conversational Style", in *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 30 (1981), pp. 133-149.

> this dramatic hiatus directs us all the more urgently to see behind the mask/makeup/costume of the performer – even as he or she embodies the role being played even more fully through the enactment of song.[38]

Recordings of the musical's revivals, which show Channing practically waving to the audience, attest to this metatheatrical heightening of the performance during the "showstopper" – a process through which the open artificiality of the spectacle, rather than break the suspension of disbelief, invites an even more deliberate and enthusiastic adhesion from the admiring spectator. On screen, the absence of the live performer lessens the potential for collective and demonstrative approval from the audience, and seems to call for a different approach to self-reflexive celebration. The directors of 20th Century Fox opted in favor of added star-power – and publicity – through the presence of Louis Armstrong, whose world-famous interpretation of "Hello Dolly," released as the musical first opened, had contributed to the show's original popularity. Thus, after dancing with the waiters, Streisand stops and curtseys behind the conductor of the Harmonia Gardens' band, who turns round and is revealed to be Armstrong. As she greets him openly and humorously – "Look who's here!" "Hello, Louis," "I am so glad to be back!" – and they launch into a duet, we are presented with a picture of the entertainment industry congratulating itself on its success. Rather than Dolly and the bandleader, what we are clearly given to see is a legendary jazz singer welcoming a young star poised to replace Julie Andrews as the darling of musicals, and of whom the *New Yorker* was already writing: "There's no telling what she *can't* do."[39] Two icons from very different musical worlds meet in front of Gene Kelly's camera, and although Streisand does not alter her light and impeccable technique to merge into Armstrong's unpolished and throaty style, she pays due homage by winking at his musical idiosyncrasies such as scat, using spoken words in the middle of a song, or his famous "yeeeees." Meanwhile, *his* mere presence reads as an effort to legitimate Streisand's casting in the film – rather than Channing's, for instance. Armstrong had been singing about Dolly since the musical's genesis – therefore his addressing Streisand as "Dolly" becomes a way to consecrate her as the ultimate incarnation of the role.

38 Raymond Knapp, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

39 Pauline Kale, review of the *Hello, dolly!* film for *The New Yorker*, quoted in James Spada, *Barbra: the First Decade*, New York, Carol, 1974, p. 173.

Inferring from the emblematic restaurant sequence, we can therefore say that the transfer of *Hello Dolly!* from stage to screen seems to be pulling in two opposite directions. In terms of scale, the logic of the movie is that of amplification, as is made clear by the hyperbolic label "the supermusical" plastered over the poster. Rather than reinventing the show for a new medium, the screen adaptation mostly makes everything bigger, earning itself a reputation as "a case of too much,"[40] or as a film which "added nothing to the heritage of the musical screen except statistics."[41] The downside of this ambition is nowhere more evident than in the parade scene, where the scale is so grand that, in strict contradiction to the lyrics, we actually do seem to lose Dolly in the gigantic parade of endless extras. By contrast, in terms of characterization, the tendency of the screen transfer is to foreground intimacy. The plot is made more sentimental, more compliant to Hollywood love stories thanks to deeper glimpses into the protagonist's emotions. This emerges as completely at odds with the first ambition – that of amplification –, resulting in an overall impression of imbalance. It also detracts from what was arguably the core of the stage musical's success, rooted in Wilder's skillful farce: an ensemble dynamic of festive behavior which, as Gary Konas points out, illustrates the Bakhtinian spirit of carnival as a celebration of life. "[T]he essence of adventure is to jump into the unknown with an impractical vision, and the essence of carnival is to participate fully, heedless of expense, laws or inhibitions,"[42] Konas writes of Wilder and Herman's work. Such qualities of freedom and experimentation are no longer vibrant in a film which, perhaps, tries to comply

40 Torn Santopietro, *op. cit.*, p. 68.
41 Vincent Canby, art. cit.
42 Gary Konas, *op. cit.*, p. 462.

to too many demands – such as preserving Champion's legacy while attempting to outshine it, or honoring the comic mechanisms of the plot while making Dolly younger and toning down her mercenary zeal. It is therefore no surprise that the most recent revival of *Hello, Dolly!* – the one directed by Jerry Zaks at the Schubert theater in 2017 – should decidedly side with Champion's original vision, not using any of the songs written for Barbra Streisand but choosing, instead, to reinstate Vandergelder's comic number "Penny in My Pocket," in line with a performance that unequivocally revels in physical and verbal comedy – Bette Midler, latest in a long and distinguished line of Dollys, excelling in both.

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NOTICE

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the stage-to-screen reinventions of style, comedy and spectacular effects in *Hello, Dolly!*, taking into account three diverging versions of the same narrative: Thornton Wilder's play *The Matchmaker* (1954), the Broadway show *Hello, Dolly!* created by Jerry Herman, Michael Stuart and Gower Champion (1964), and its Hollywood adaptation directed by Gene Kelly (1969). As may be expected, the transfer to the musical stage implies shifts in scale and structure, translating physical comedy into choreography; but the screen transposition further introduces alterations in tone, sentimentality and narrative intention which create a greater distance with Wilder's original farce. Hesitating between a spirit of preservation, a logic of amplification and a "Hollywoodized" romantic intent, Kelly's film creates an impression of imbalance – without, however, diminishing the value of Barbra Streisand's vocal and verbal contribution to the role of Dolly.

Keywords

Hello, Dolly!; *The Matchmaker*; Thornton Wilder; Jerry Herman; Gower Champion; Michael Kidd; Carol Channing; Barbra Streisand; farce; choreography

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article explore les réinventions stylistiques, comiques et spectaculaires qu'implique le passage de la scène à l'écran dans *Hello, Dolly !*, à partir de trois versions divergentes d'une même séquence : la pièce de Thornton Wilder *The Matchmaker* (1954), la comédie musicale *Hello, Dolly !* créée à Broadway par Jerry Herman, Michael Stuart et Gower Champion (1964), et son adaptation hollywoodienne réalisée par Gene Kelly (1969). Si le passage à la scène musicale occasionne des modifications attendues en termes d'échelle et de structure, traduisant en chorégraphie la physicalité du comique, la transposition à l'écran introduit des modifications de ton, de sentiment et d'intention narrative qui éloignent l'œuvre de la farce originelle de Wilder. Hésitant entre préservation, amplification et visée romantique hollywoodienne, le film de Kelly donne une impression de déséquilibre – sans diminuer pour autant la contribution verbale et vocale de Barbra Streisand au rôle de Dolly.

Mots-clés

Hello, Dolly! ; *The Matchmaker* ; Thornton Wilder ; Jerry Herman ; Gower Champion ; Michael Kidd ; Carol Channing ; Barbra Streisand ; farce ; chorégraphie

RE-DEFINING THE MUSICAL
ADAPTING *CABARET* FOR THE SCREEN

Anouk Bottero

When Stephen Harnick, the lyricist of many successful musicals such as *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964), was first presented with the idea of adapting Christopher Isherwood's *Berlin Stories* (1945), he quickly dismissed it: "It can't be done. Maybe you could make a play out of it, but not a musical".[1] Harnick did not seem to have heard of John Van Druten's 1951 stage adaptation *I Am a Camera*, but "[i]t seemed as if nobody seriously believed that Christopher Isherwood's semiautobiographical Berlin stories or John Van Druten's stage adaptation of the 'Sally Bowles' story could be made into a Broadway musical".[2] To see that what was to become one of America's best-known musicals was initially regarded as unfit for the Broadway stage and "inadaptable" to the musical genre may now seem quite striking. More precisely, the multiplicity of sources presiding over the conception of *Cabaret* points to the musical's adaptability and its malleable dimension. The critical and popular acclaim garnered by stage director and producer Harold "Hal" Prince's original staging of *Cabaret* (libretto by Joe Masteroff, music and lyrics by John Kander and Fred Ebb) in 1966,[3] as well as director-choreographer Robert Louis "Bob" Fosse's 1972 film adaptation (starring Liza Minnelli and Joel Grey),[4] also questions the implicit criticism that the subject did not fit in the happy-go-lucky world of musical theatre and film, or did not answer the genre's commercial and mainstream obligations. Indeed, a musical taking place in a seedy and decadent 1930s Berlin cabaret, against the backdrop of the Nazis' gradual ascent to power, might not have seemed a very likely subject for Broadway and Hollywood, even at the beginning of the 1960s. In that perspective, *Cabaret* remains a pivotal musical, insofar as both Prince's and Fosse's versions challenged the conception of what could be considered good material for a musical – and what a musical was supposed to be and look like.

1 Quoted in Keith Garebian, *The Making of Cabaret*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2011, p. 15.
2 *Ibid.*, p. 3.
3 The original production of *Cabaret* ran for 1,166 performances when it first opened on Broadway, and won 8 awards out of 11 nominations at the 1967 Tony Awards, among which Best Musical, and Best Direction in a Musical.
4 Fosse's *Cabaret* also won 8 Oscars, out of 10 nominations at the 1973 Academy Awards, among which Best Director.

This initial paradox seems to concur with a moment of crisis that was faced by the genre of the musical, both in the theatre and film industries, during the 1960s. The second half of the 1960s marked the end of the "Golden Age" of musicals, a period usually comprised by most researchers between 1943 and 1964.[5] The reasons for this decline in popularity were mostly due to the economic fallout faced by Broadway and the musical film industry – a crisis which challenged the musical's establishment as a paragon of popular culture[6] – but also to the revolutionary socio-cultural changes that shaped most of the 1960s, and which made it even more difficult for musicals to "sustain [their] habitual veneer of happiness."[7] In that context, Hal Prince's original production of *Cabaret* seemed to bring to the stage musical the breath of fresh air it needed, by making it darker, more political, and more cynical, and moving away from the musical's "integrated form" – in which all elements of the musical concur to the advancement of the plot[8] – towards a new, director-driven "concept musical".[9]

If the conception of *Cabaret* on stage was marked by a conscious move to transform the musical as a genre, its film adaptation gave way to the possibility for a musical to transform itself, especially if transferred onto the screen. For Geoffrey Block, Fosse's *Cabaret* signs "the end of an era that generally features more faithful adaptations, an era significantly framed, as with the "Golden Age" musical, by the films of *Oklahoma!* (1955) and *Fiddler on the Roof* (1971)."[10] After Fosse's *Cabaret*, there were simply two very distinct *Cabaret*s. Such distinctiveness of the film adaptation compared to its stage counterpart is also linked to the emerging prominence of the director's role in the conception of musicals. Hal Prince's production demonstrated the paramount importance a director of musicals could have on a

5 1943 marks the year of the first "fully" integrated musical, Rodgers & Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!*, whereas 1964 was the year of high-rated productions such as *Funny Girl, Hello, Dolly!* or *Fiddler on the Roof*.

6 To learn more about the economic aspect of Broadway's fading popularity, see John Kenrick, "History of the Musical Stage – 1960s III: The World Turned Upside Down", *Musicals 101*, visited on April 3rd, 2017; Jack Poggi, *Theater in America: The Impact of Economic Forces*, Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell UP, 1968.

7 Stacy Wolf, "Something Better Than This: *Sweet Charity* and the Feminist Utopia of Broadway Musicals", *Modern Drama*, vol. 47, no. 2, 2004, p. 315.

8 See Geoffrey Block, "Integration", in Raymond Knapp, Mitchell Morris and Stacy Wolf (dir.), *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, Oxford/New York, Oxford UP, 2011, pp. 97-110.

9 The general definition of the "concept musical" is that a "concept," i.e. the vision and/or the subject, governs and drives all the elements of the production, rather than the narrative. *Ibid.*, pp. 104-105.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 105. We can notice that the film musical's transformation follows the transformation of the stage musical pretty closely.

stage production.[11] Fosse, by moving away from constraints of fidelity to the original point of reference (the stage production), also followed Prince's redefinition of the role of the director[12] and more specifically, of the director-choreographer – despite a lack of classical ballet training and a relative ignorance of filmic vocabulary.

In many ways, *Cabaret* thus embodies a correlation between questions of adaptation, the subsequent transformations such translation from one medium (the stage) to another (the screen) entails, and a moment of redefinition of the genre. If most commentators shed light upon *Cabaret*'s disruptive dimension and how it set a precedent for the genre of the musical, I will try to shift this perspective onto the adaptations of *Cabaret*, from stage to screen and back again, so as to show how they too might have enriched the genre's mutations across the decades. In order to do this, I will take Fosse's *Cabaret* as the focal point of my analysis. This choice is not out of contempt for Hal Prince's highly innovative original production, but because Fosse's film remains the most democratic way to access this musical. To study the film's departure from the original production is a way of analyzing the transfers that have been made from Broadway to Hollywood, and of understanding how Fosse himself managed to create a specifically cinematographic *Cabaret*. This will also enable me to consider the extent to which the film has, in an amusing reversal, become a point of reference for audiences of subsequent stage revivals. Therefore, this article will follow the diachronic evolution of *Cabaret*, from its conception to its cinematographic reinvention, and to its reversed impact on stage performances of the musical.

ADAPTING *CABARET*: LEAVING THE THEATRE BEHIND?

For audiences who saw Fosse's 1972 film while having Prince's 1966 production in mind, *Cabaret* might have seemed like a completely different musical. The subplot was considerably altered: the amusing storyline of the older couple composed of Fraulein Schneider and Herr Schultz was replaced by the dramatic infatuation of gold-digger (and Jew in disguise) Fritz Wendel with wealthy Jewish heiress Natalia Landauer.

11 Usually, the paternity of musicals tends to be attributed to composers ("a Rodgers and Hammerstein musical," "a Stephen Sondheim musical"), a habit which does not always reflect the paramount influence of the choreographer, the lyricist or the director. See Jim Lovensheimer, "Texts and Authors", in Raymond Knapp, Mitchell Morris and Stacy Wolf (dir.), *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-32.

12 About the directors' vision's role in transforming *Cabaret*: "[...] the film was directed by Bob Fosse, not Harold Prince, and was accordingly informed by a different sensibility." (Keith Garebian, *The Making of Cabaret*, *op. cit.*, p. 133.)

Quite an important number of songs were replaced by newly-created ones: "Mein Herr" replaced "Don't Tell Mama" as Sally Bowles's introductory song, whereas the song "Maybe This Time" has "no direct counterpart in the stage version."[13] Only Joel Grey reprised his role as the Emcee; the controversial British Sally played by Jill Haworth[14] was replaced by a stunning and buoyant American Sally Bowles portrayed by Liza Minnelli. Cliff, an aspiring American writer, became a British Cambridge graduate named Brian. So many changes might seem vertiginous and quite daring as they touch upon the very storyline and draw a radically different vision of the characters. In classic screen adaptations of stage musicals, there was a commercial logic at work that would prompt the creation of new and flashy musical numbers to compensate for the film's lack of live performance.[15] Contrary to this logic, Fosse did not try to compensate and removed a lot of songs – every song that would not take place within the Kit Kat Klub (the notable exception being "Tomorrow Belongs to Me"). Somehow, he had understood the necessity to make musical film a genre that responded to the medium's naturalistic and realistic dimension, without forgetting the theatrical roots of the genre of the musical, as Garebian puts it: "Fosse made realism the rule of his film. No song or dance was ever an affront to realism."[16]

Indeed, filmed adaptations of "Golden Age" musicals tended to oscillate between "two poles,"[17] which went from a filmed version of a theatrical production to a version without any theatrical apparatus. By keeping musical numbers within a diegetic theatrical space, Fosse tried to position *Cabaret* outside of these two poles: after this film, all numbers taking place in naturalistic settings, in an apparently natural way, would seem incongruous. As Fosse himself said in an interview with Fabienne Pascaud for French TV and cinema magazine *Télérama*, "*On ne peut plus croire aux héroïnes qui chantent en faisant la vaisselle, ou tournoyent en faisant leurs courses. C'est pour cela que* Cabaret […] *se* [*situe*] *dans le milieu du music-hall.*"[18] And indeed, when Sally Bowles and the Emcee sing, it is because it is their job. And whenever people burst into song

13 Randy Clark, "Bending the Genre: The Stage and Screen Versions of *Cabaret*", *Literature Film Quarterly*, vol. 19, n°1, 1991, p. 55.

14 Most critics were less than charmed by Haworth's performance, especially because of her lack of singing capabilities (even though this was the reason why Prince chose her, out of realism, for the role of a second-rate nightclub singer such as Sally Bowles). See Keith Garebian, *The Making of Cabaret*, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

15 Raymond Knapp and Mitchell Morris, "The Filmed Musical," in Raymond Knapp, Mitchell Morris and Stacy Wolf (dir.), *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, *op. cit.*, pp. 140-141.

16 Keith Garebian, *The Making of Cabaret*, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

17 Raymond Knapp and Mitchell Morris, "The Filmed Musical", art. cit., pp. 141-142.

18 "No one believes in those actresses who start singing or twirling as they wash the dishes or run errands anymore. This is why *Cabaret* [...] takes place in the world of music hall." In Fabienne Pascaud, "Entretien avec Bob Fosse", *Télérama*, no. 1585, May 28th, 1980, p. 95.

outside of a theatrical space, it does not go unnoticed, as in "Tomorrow Belongs to Me": "As the band dies down, a young man who could be the poster boy for Aryan good looks begins to sing. Again, *Cabaret* is not a musical in which people break into song unremarked, so the crowd takes notice."[19]

Performances therefore hold a signifying, metaphorical, ironic value: theatricality is being pointed out, in a Brechtian gesture of alienation (*Verfremdungseffekt*), but the interpretative weight is slightly displaced compared to the stage version. Indeed, in the stage version, Hal Prince insisted on the play's political content by directly addressing the audience watching the musical. His stage designer, Boris Aronson, created a tilted mirror which was held over the audience in order to reflect it. This breach of the fourth wall, highly reminiscent of Brechtian techniques, was a way of pointing out the illusion-making process, but also of urging the audience to compare the political situation depicted in *Cabaret* to the United States' own political turmoil.[20] This rather blunt move could not be equally direct in the film, because of the diegetic audience present during the cabaret numbers, and because of the very border created by the screen and the camera lens. As Garebian notes, the atmosphere of cabarets was particularly fertile for the development of Brecht's alienation effect, precisely because of the immediacy and intimacy between performers and audience.[21] Therefore, "a sense of theatre"[22] needed to be maintained within the film, especially when it came to the metaphor encapsulated by the tilted mirror (most visible in the first and last numbers, "Willkommen" and "Auf Wiedersen" sung by the Emcee), in order to obtain the same effect of alienation that the stage production provided.

Focusing on the musical's alienation effect proves important when considering questions of adaptation, because such distantiation mostly played on subtle references to the original production (Prince's 1966 staging). In the film, the first notes of the opening number "Willkommen" accompany a close-up on the Emcee's reflection in a distorted mirror. As the camera rolls back, this distorted mirror reflects the Emcee's back and the audience facing him. As he struts out on stage, the mirror is quickly lifted up, in a clear reference to Aronson's ingenious setup. During this number, there are also several shots of the audience: immobile, these Grösz-like figures also echo Prince and

19 Steven Belletto, "Cabaret and Antifascist Aesthetics", *Criticism*, vol. 50, no. 4, Fall 2008, p. 612.

20 Aronson and Prince mostly had the Civil Rights movement in mind. See Keith Garebian, *The Making of Cabaret*, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-49.

21 "Cabaret also helped Brecht formulate his theater practice and theory of *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect). The small cabaret stage and smoky, sexy atmosphere produced an intimacy and immediacy for performers and audience." *Ibid.*, p. 52.

22 "[...] every time we return to the girls and their leering master [...] we return, as it were, to a sense of theater." Roger Greenspun, "Movie Review – Cabaret", *The New York Times*, February 14th, 1972.

Aronson's staging, as well as Patricia Zipprodt's costumes, which were directly inspired by German expressionism.[23] These spectators are uncanny and strange, but their brief appearance manages to establish a continuum between the diegetic audience and the heterodiegetic one. These painting-like shots interrupt the dynamic of the film, and entice the film's spectators to identify with their onscreen counterparts. There's a definite blurring of audiences in order for this "sense of theatre" to pervade the film. The very presence of Joel Grey as the actor who already played the Emcee on stage (and whom spectators might recognize) also participates to the construction of this sense of theatre. His presence functions as a whimsical reference to Prince's staging, which sets the audience back in the atmosphere of the original production, and somehow "contributes to the blurring of distinction between the three audiences: Broadway, diegetic, and film."[24]

The many transformations at the roots of *Cabaret*'s screen reinvention all point to a conscious move to re-create "a sense of theater" on the screen that could bear as much signifying weight as its real stage counterpart. Thus, Brechtian cross-media references to Prince's original stage production contributed to the recreation of the cabaret's atmosphere on screen. But this "sense of theatre" was also informed by stark filmic and cinematographic aesthetics at work in Fosse's redefinition of *Cabaret*.

FOSSE'S *CAMERA OBSCURA*

While theatre is a structuring element of Fosse's adaptation, *Cabaret* was not meant to resemble either the original stage production, or traditional film adaptations. Through very specific means such as montage and choreography, *Cabaret* emphasized the transformations of the film musical genre. Not only did it become darker, but Fosse's own cinematographic aesthetics also transformed the genre's structuring concepts, and added an extra layer of ambiguity to Prince's original stage production.

Choreography proves an interesting point of entry within Fosse's cinematographic vision, as it exemplifies the disruptive dimension of his work as a director-choreographer. Throughout *Cabaret*, Fosse distorts the musical film's traditional use of choreography. The number "Mein Herr" is very interesting insofar as it is at odds with the classic filming of a number, and shows that Fosse's own choreographic aesthetics presented cinematic qualities. Instead of insisting on the virtuosity of the performer among the ensemble through a full-length shot, Fosse's camera is very mobile and

23 Keith Garebian, *The Making of Cabaret*, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-62.
24 Randy Clark, "Bending the Genre", art. cit., p. 57.

focuses on details and odd angles of the chorus girls' bodies. Shots of crotches, armpits and knees frame Liza Minnelli's performance. The eye of the spectator is directed to these oddities and small details, which are at the basis of Fosse's choreographic style.[25] This very close attention to detail, especially vulgar and prosaic ones, is already far from the virtuosic and dreamy quality of traditional dance numbers. As Roxane Hamery points out, there is no lyricism of any sort in Fosse's choreography, just a concentration on the gesture.[26] In that perspective, Fosse tries to move away from the glitz and glamour of traditional musical numbers, and this is especially fitting with film since the camera allows for zoom-ins on details which direct the audience's gaze towards the more prosaic dimensions of a number.

In keeping with their dreamlike and virtuosic tradition, "Golden Age" film musicals would normally use dance and choreography, like songs, to draw parallels between the male and female protagonists to create privileged moments of interlude where those characters can "[express] desire without having to take full responsibility for them."[27] In "Mein Herr", Sally is alone. There is no parallel dancing on Brian's part – he will actually never perform throughout the entire film. Such imbalance shows that the pairing of lovers in parallel scenes, defined by Rick Altman as a constitutive element of the film musical's "overall duality," is no longer viable in *Cabaret*.[28] Fosse's stance highly contrasts with that of a Robbins in *Fiddler on the Roof*, which was released just one year before *Cabaret*, and in which dance still allows characters like Hodel and Perchik to fall in love and express it. But like *Cabaret*, more and more musicals, on stage *and* on screen were starting to upset this principle (amidst the sexual revolution and its challenging representations of the male and female pairing) such as Stephen Sondheim's *Company* (1970), as well as Fosse's own stage and screen versions of *Sweet Charity* (1966 and 1969). In *Cabaret,* instead of giving the couple a fictional refuge in

25 "[...] his choreography draws the viewer's eye to the smallest and subtlest nuances of the body through precise gestures, a movement of the ribs, the shrug of the shoulder, a tilt of the pelvis, or a facial expression." In Cathy Young, "Hand on the Pulse: Dancing with Bob Fosse," *Dance Chronicle*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2009, p. 176. See also Martin Gottfried, *All His Jazz: The Life and Death of Bob Fosse*, New York, Bantam Books, 1990.

26 "*Dans ces films, la syncope est partout, le rythme est saccadé, empêchant tout élan lyrique, poétique, ramenant toute l'attention au geste et à son exécution.*" ("In these films, syncopation is everywhere: the rhythm is twitchy, which cancels every possible flight of lyricism or poetical attempt, and the spectator's attention is constantly drawn back to the gesture and its execution.") (Roxane Hamery, "Bob Fosse : les passions despotiques", in Sylvie Chalaye and Gilles Mouëllic (dir.), *Comédie musicale, les jeux du désir : de l'âge d'or aux réminiscences*, Rennes, PUR, 2008, p. 116.)

27 Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical*, Bloomington, Indiana UP, 1987, p. 82.

28 For Altman, more than the plot, "the oppositions developed in the seemingly gratuitous song-and-dance number, [...] are instrumental in establishing the structure and meaning of the film. Only when we identify the film's constitutive dualities can we discover the film's function." *Ibid.*, p. 27.

which they can express their mutual affection, dance merely enables Sally (and only her) not to take responsibility for her inconsistencies, as she playfully sings about her sexual prowess and multiple affairs. The traditional union of the male and female leads is never fulfilled through dance in *Cabaret*. Much to the contrary, dancing either creates odd and uncanny pairings (such as the Emcee and Sally in "Money, Money"), or upsets the balance of the traditional couple. When Maximilian invites Sally and Brian to his country house, the three of them drunkenly engage into a waltz of sorts during one evening. This dance foreshadows (and somehow leads to) the triangular relationship, which will eventually tear apart Sally and Brian's couple. To some extent, the impossibility for Brian and Sally to exist as a couple is demonstrated through the choreography of music-and-dance numbers. I can go even further and say that the traditional roles given to musical and non-musical sequences seem to be reversed in the film. The union between Natalia and Fritz, which is a very traditional stance on the genre's compulsory secondary love story, belongs to the non-musical realm, and is completed without the help of dance. On the other hand, Sally dances and sings, but Brian and her are not able to fulfil the required pairing of the male and female leads, despite her capacity to perform. Fosse's limitation of choreography and dance to their realistic boundaries endows the film with a darker, more cynical and decidedly different vision of the musical's myths of duality and love.

Montage, as a specifically cinematographic element, also plays an important role in the darker and more ambiguous dimension of Fosse's *Cabaret*: "[s]ince everything has to do with everything else and the Cabaret is always commenting on the life outside it, the film sometimes looks like an essay in significant crosscutting, or associative montage."[29] Crosscutting is probably the most powerful and visible metaphorical device of the whole film, as it maintains a continuum of interpretation between reality outside of the Kit Kat Klub and the cabaret. Nearly all numbers taking place in the Kit Kat Klub are interspersed with shots of other scenes happening outside of the Cabaret. As early as "Willkommen", the Emcee's opening number is crosscut with shots of Brian arriving in Berlin, "[establishing] the cabaret as a symbol of the metropolis itself."[30] In the original staging, Prince tried to establish such a parallel by dividing the stage into two parts – one representing the real world, and the other one (called the "limbo"), the mind.[31] But in Fosse's *Cabaret*, montage allows for a form of pervasiveness which blurs the metaphorical lines between reality (Berlin) and the realm of the Kit Kat Klub. This

29 Roger Greenspun, "Movie Review – Cabaret", art. cit.
30 Terri J. Gordon, "Film in the Second Degree: 'Cabaret' and the Dark Side of Laughter," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 152, no. 4, 2008, p. 444.
31 Keith Garebian, *The Making of Cabaret*, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

is especially visible in "Tiller Girls", in which the chorus girls and the Emcee perform a can-can number. As the number nears the end and the Emcee engages in more bawdy gestures, the camera cuts to another scene where Nazis manage to penetrate the Landauer property, yelling "*Juden! Juden!*"[32] under Natalia's window. Audience and performers are still raving in another cut to the cabaret, and yet another shot shows Natalia opening her front door, seeing the yellow graffiti spelling "Juden" and the corpse of her dog on the threshold. As she is about to scream, the camera cuts back to the Kit Kat Klub, where the can-can theme is replaced by military music: the chorus girls and the Emcee suddenly turn around their cloche hats, and the high kicks of the Tiller Girls transform into Nazi goose-steps in a very menacing fashion. Suddenly, the scene is no longer funny for the heterodiegetic audience, despite the chilling laughter of the diegetic spectators. We feel confused about the number's message: is the cabaret mocking the Nazis? Or is the number conflating the cabaret with them?[33]

Crosscutting therefore emphasizes the ambiguity of the film's politics, especially in numbers such as "Tiller Girls", in which violence and entertainment are superimposed and almost fused in a much harsher and direct way. This montage technique has a confrontational value, because it clashes scenes of persecution with light entertainment, but it also shows how easy it is to fuse them together in order to dupe the audience. The final laughter of the audience is chilling, because suddenly, laughter is not a collective means of resistance towards oppression, but rather the symbol of "collective unawareness".[34] Contrary to Prince's *1966* production, there is no manifest disavowal of the political situation:[35] the film only widens the discrepancy between the diegetic audience and the heterodiegetic one. To some extent, the politics of the film seem to echo America's inner turmoil towards the end of the Vietnam War: it had brought to light contradictions and fractures within the American society, and perhaps it is possible to interpret Fosse's ambiguities as a parable of this difficulty to "take sides." This "split spectatorship," although present in Prince's production, "is greatly exploited in the film version, with the camera's powerful ability to enunciate and interpolate the spectator in processes of identification and disavowal."[36] Specific cinematographic

32 German for "Jew! Jew!"

33 Steven Belletto, "*Cabaret* and Antifascist Aesthetics", art. cit., p. 617. Similarly to the "Tiller Girls" number, the mud-wrestling scene during which the Kit Kat Klub's owner is beaten to death results in the same chilling and confusing dimension.

34 Terri J. Gordon, "Film in the Second Degree," art. cit., p. 454.

35 Cliff tells Sally: "If you're not against all this, you're for it – or you might as well be," a line which was not used in the film.

36 Linda Mizejewski, *Divine Decadence. Fascism, Female Spectacle, and the Makings of Sally Bowles*, Princeton, Princeton UP, 1992, p. 204.

means therefore add a layer of ambiguity, the same way Fosse's use of dancing in the film contributes to a darker and more cynical vision of love than is usually displayed in film musicals: the film adaptation adds many layers of interpretation to the original stage production.

"*WILLKOMMEN*, *BIENVENUE*, WELCOME": BACK IN THE THEATRE

Stephen Harnick's assertion seems once again quite wrong: Fosse's screen adaptation of *Cabaret* does prove the adaptability of the play and moreover, its malleability, its capacity to evolve and transform according to a director's vision, the medium itself, and the era it is inscribed in. In a letter addressed to Keith Garebian in 2010, Hal Prince mentioned that "*Cabaret* [had] a life of its own."[37] In this statement, Prince not only referred to the initial stage production and its legacy, but also to the subsequent adaptations – on screen and on stage. Indeed, after Fosse's film, several stage revivals were launched, among which British director Sam Mendes's highly-acclaimed 1998 and 2014 Broadway stagings starring Alan Cumming as the Emcee.

It is important to bear in mind that the malleability of *Cabaret* is also linked to the subject it tackles (the rise of Nazism), and the fact that the themes it addresses resonate with social evolutions throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. The character of Sally Bowles embodies these changes particularly well, as she "has been rewritten to represent each decade's version of a historical dilemma, a haunting of conscience in the years since World War Two."[38] This specific moment in the history of the 20th century remains an important point of reference for the analysis of current political phenomena, but also for the analysis of human response to the course of History and terrifying events. However, the musical's themes' openness to interpretation inherently contradicts the forcefulness of the director's vision. And this contradiction is once again embodied in the character of Sally Bowles, "whose figure acquired a definitive iconography with Bob Fosse's 1972 film *Cabaret*"[39] despite her many roles and many portrayals. Because of the mass appeal of cinema and the permanence of film on videotape and DVD, Fosse's version and his choices in representing the characters became the new frame of reference for audiences who had not seen Prince's original staging – or who had forgotten it. Therefore, similarly to Prince's stage production in 1966, Fosse's film became the new point of reference from which reinterpretations

37 Quoted in Keith Garebian, *The Making of Cabaret*, *op. cit.*, p. 193.
38 Linda Mizejewski, *Divine Decadence*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
39 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

and reinventions of *Cabaret* could emerge. Despite his strong directorial authority, Fosse's liberties with the original version and his inventive use of Prince's staging swept away the impression that the libretto and score were untouchable and immovable monoliths. Subsequent innovative stage recreations such as Sam Mendes's took the same liberties with the source material, "seeing them as living texts to be explored and reinterpreted […]."[40]

Sam Mendes's 1998 Broadway recreation of *Cabaret*, and those that followed, perpetuate *Cabaret*'s resonance with contemporary issues and aesthetics. The protean aspect of the musical is undoubtedly linked with the redefinition and acknowledgment of "the authorial role of the director" in these "rewrightings".[41] Mendes also imprinted his own vision as a director, and in that perspective, his staging was very much in keeping with the tendencies and aesthetics of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, reflecting "the more rebellious, nihilistic, and violent tone of British popular culture 30 years later" that was exemplified on stage by the provocative dimension of in-yer-face theatre and the works of British playwrights such as Anthony Neilson or Sarah Kane, in order to "[reinvent] Prince's idea of the show as a mirror of contemporary developments."[42] The transformation of the characters of Sally Bowles and the Emcee were among the most blatant changes Sam Mendes brought to *Cabaret*: Sally and the Emcee were interpreted in the 1998 revival by Natasha Richardson, who won a Tony Award for Best Actress, and by Alan Cumming, who also won a Tony Award for Best Actor. Both actors brought forward a "heroin chic" aesthetic, especially Alan Cumming's exhibitionist, vulgar, drug-using Emcee who revealed bruises on his arms when he removed his leather coat, and who was "more androgynous than Grey's demonic doll."[43] Natasha Richardson's Sally was much less glamorous than Minnelli's and much less of a singer; yet she performed one of the most convincing interpretations of Isherwood's Sally Bowles.[44]

However, even if Mendes endowed *Cabaret* with his own directorial vision, he acknowledged the aesthetic and popular appeal of Fosse's version. Mendes's stage re-adaptation of *Cabaret* enhances the referential authority of Fosse's film, but also proves a case study for transfers between Hollywood and Broadway. This illustrates the porosity between film and theatre, and perhaps the gradual introduction of cinematic

40 Miranda Lundskaer-Nielsen, *Directors and the New Musical Drama: British and American musical theatre in the 1980s and 1990s*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p. 109.
41 *Ibid.*, p. 110.
42 *Ibid.*, p. 129.
43 Keith Garebian, *The Making of Cabaret*, *op. cit.*, p. 173.
44 *Ibid.*, p. 169.

staging and/or film aesthetics within the theatre – similarly to Fosse's "sense of theatre" on film. Indeed, even in terms of personal trajectories, Mendes's revivals of *Cabaret* are replete with transfers from the film world to the stage world. Mendes himself, as a director, oscillated from the start between stage and film throughout his career.[45] His choreographer and co-director for the 1998 and 2014 Broadway revivals, Rob Marshall, also directed films, even winning an Oscar for Best Picture in 2002 for *Chicago* (yet another adaptation of a much-loved Fosse musical). Looking beyond these personal histories, the very "flesh" of *Cabaret* (the book, the score, the characters and even the primary sources) becomes a point of "passage" from one pole (the film) to the other (the stage) in Mendes's revival. For instance, the score played upon viewers' expectations, by replacing some of the songs that were present in the libretto by songs specifically created for the film ("Mein Herr" and "Maybe This Time"). This element highlights "the importance of film adaptations in building audiences for the [revivals]",[46] but also the circularity of musicals like *Cabaret*, which create points of connexion from one version to another by soliciting the audience's knowledge of the songs. Once again, the character of Sally Bowles proves a peculiar point of passage between Hollywood and Broadway, as some of the actresses who reprised the role in Mendes's most recent revivals on stage were Hollywood actresses, such as Michelle Williams and Emma Stone, who both starred in the 2014 Broadway revival. Cinematography and the filmic treatment of *Cabaret* by Fosse would be a definite inspiration to Mendes and Marshall's staging: the luminous frame overlooking the stage, and within which the Kit Kat Klub's orchestra performed, framed the viewer's eyes, similarly to the frame of a screen. This desire to direct the spectator's eyes, as a camera would, also became visible in the choreography. Rob Marshall took up Fosse's gestural and dance vocabulary, insisting on small gestures and details (undulating fingers and pelvic thrusts) that were highlighted by lighting effects. For instance, as the first notes of "Willkommen" started to play, a light would circle the Emcee's hand emerging from behind a door, its fingers beckoning the audience to come in. And in the 1993 original Mendes London production (which prompted the very successful first Broadway revival), Mendes gave Fosse a humorous nudge during the number "Mein Herr", starring Jane Horrocks as Sally. Sally would sing "Mein Herr", holding

45 Sam Mendes is not the first director to alternate between film and theatre. Julie Taymor, an American film and stage director (best known for her films *Frida*, 2002, *Across the Universe*, 2007, and *The Tempest*, 2010, as well as her dazzling 1997 Broadway production of the musical *The Lion King*) is another good example of the circulation between film and theatre, all the more so as her stage productions display a manifest cinematic quality.

46 Raymond Knapp and Mitchell Morris, "The Filmed Musical," art. cit., p. 142.

a heart-shaped lollipop and sitting on a gigantic chair, as a playful reference to Fosse's own source of inspiration for the choreography of the number in the film (Marlene Dietrich in *The Blue Angel*).

As Fosse's version offered a gradual darkening of the tone of the musical and a more ambiguous moral stance, Mendes accelerated this move towards darkness, ambivalence and shocking sexuality, notably by removing any trace of glitz and glamour that was left and replacing it with a certain harshness. The ambiguous role of the audience was reinforced by Mendes's introduction of *Cabaret*'s audience *as* the Kit Kat Klub's audience, sitting at café tables just as in a regular cabaret (even renaming the theatre that would host its 1998 revival "The Kit Kat Klub"): the confusion and blurring of boundaries between the two worlds became even more visible than with Fosse's systematic intercutting. Mendes pushed forward the complexities of the subject (the rise of the Nazis conflated with a moral decadence and indifference to the political situation), shocking and provoking his contemporary audiences by ending the musical with the Emcee wearing a concentration camp uniform (with a pink triangle), before throwing himself on an imaginary electric fence. Even if Prince and Fosse's versions entailed no such thing as a happy ending, Mendes's stance is implacable. This harsh and shocking ending finishes off the musical's no-longer-canonical happy ending by leaving no room for escape and/or survival. But Mendes's radical choice also highlighted issues that had been avoided by Fosse's film, such as the representation of homosexuality and queerness: this "finale" takes advantage of the libretto's blanks in interpretation[47] and weighs on the audience's reaction to this stretch of interpretation. Mendes's gesture also re-placed *Cabaret* within the frame of contemporary issues tackled by other musicals, such as *Rent* (1996), for instance, with its open discussion of homosexuality and AIDS. Amidst the crisis and controversies stirred by the media frenzy surrounding the epidemic, it is highly probable that Mendes's production aimed to add this extra political layer in order to inscribe *Cabaret*'s politics within an immediate moment. Mendes's shocking and harsh production is one example of *Cabaret*'s gradual destruction of the genre's "myth of entertainment," but also of its shifting politics, adaptation after adaptation.

47 About a staging of *Lorenzaccio* in which Lorenzo and the Duke are presented as gay, Florence Naugrette writes: *"[…] le metteur en scène pousse le texte dans ses retranchements. On ne saurait dire qu'il le force ou qu'il le trahit, puisque précisément le texte ne dit rien de la gestuelle et de la proxémique des deux personnages, qui reste à inventer."* ("… the stage director pushes the text to its limits. But neither does he force or betray it, precisely because the text bears no mention of the gestural or proxemic code between the two characters, which has yet to be invented.") (Florence Naugrette, *Le Plaisir du spectateur de théâtre,* Rosny-sous-Bois, Bréal, 2002, p. 168.)

The many lives of *Cabaret* on screen and on stage have precipitated the musical's redefinition of the genre. This re-definition was perhaps inherent to the story and its lacklustre yet intriguing characters. By pushing its sombre politics further and further and by gradually un-polishing the performances, film *and* stage adaptations of *Cabaret* shed light upon this musical's disruptive capacity. Moreover, each adaptation, first on screen, and then back on the stage, was already a disruption of a preceding version, deeply marked by contemporary sensibilities, but also by the director's vision. Indeed, Fosse's film as well as Sam Mendes's stage revivals confirmed what Hal Prince's original 1966 production had enunciated—that the director's role was of paramount importance in order to create innovative musicals.

Fosse's *Cabaret* endowed the musical with a darker and more ambiguous interpretation than Prince's, disrupting most of the film musical's conventions. By allowing the realm of cinema to pervade and invade what used to be a theatrical space, making it more realistic, Fosse's screen adaptation made the musical acknowledge its theatrical dimension. His cinematic aesthetics, such as choreography and montage, surely inspired later stage revivals, especially those directed by Sam Mendes. The film's accessibility for audiences also emphasized a "co-dependency" between film adaptations and stage revivals—the latter being often made to "resemble more closely the film versions".[48] If Mendes went further than Fosse on many levels, it is because the screen adaptation itself allowed for a complete transformation of the material, but also because of shifting context and audience, thus proving that *Cabaret* could generate new meaning.

The circularity of *Cabaret*, from stage to screen and back on the stage again, shows how fertile these circulations between mediums are. The assumed inadaptability of *Cabaret* proves even more amusing if we consider its contemporary meaning, which transcends 1930s Germany and still addresses 20th- and 21st-century issues, following the evolutions of the 1970s, 1990s and 2000s. Therefore, more than circularity, perhaps one could read *Cabaret* as a musical of circulation, whose numerous adaptations throughout the years have had the capacity to echo other musicals which also challenged the traditional formulas of the genre. The disruptive dimension of *Cabaret*'s shifting politics is the one element that allows these adaptations to exit the constraints of the musical and to transform the genre, by playing on audience expectations and reactions. *Cabaret*'s many adaptations, none of them quite resembling one another, emphasize the unfixed dimension of this musical, constantly redefined, and constantly redefining.

48 Raymond Knapp and Mitchell Morris, "The Filmed Musical," art. cit., p. 142.

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NOTICE

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ABSTRACT

Cabaret's iconic position in the Pantheon of musical theatre tends to obliterate its tumultuous genesis. Amidst a crisis of the genre, which drove audiences outside of theatres and cinemas, the original 1966 stage production of *Cabaret* directed by Harold Prince redefined musical theatre as a whole. This article aims at showing that the film adaptation of a musical as uncanny and striking as *Cabaret* is central to the history and evolution of the genre itself. Bob Fosse's 1972 film adaptation was a reinvention which asserted the director's important role and redefined many structuring principles of the musical film. By doing so, this adaptation paved the way for multiple reinventions and revivals, which enhance a continuity and circularity of sorts between film and theatre.

Keywords

musical theatre ; musical film; *Cabaret*; adaptation; revival; Harold Prince; Bob Fosse; Sam Mendes; stage director; film director

RÉSUMÉ

Il paraissait presque logique qu'une comédie musicale aussi populaire que le fut *Cabaret* en 1966 (mise en scène par Harold Prince) soit portée à l'écran. Et pourtant, la comédie musicale faisait face à un moment de désaveu et d'essoufflement du genre, au cinéma comme au théâtre. Dans cet article, la question de l'adaptation à l'écran d'une comédie musicale aussi intrigante que *Cabaret* est placée au cœur d'un moment de redéfinition du genre de la comédie musicale. Il s'agira de montrer que l'adaptation de *Cabaret* à l'écran par Bob Fosse en 1972 redéfinit les codes structurels du genre, ainsi que le rôle du réalisateur, qui gagne en importance et ouvre la porte à de multiples réinventions. Ceci m'amène à questionner les circulations entre théâtre et cinéma, notamment à travers ces réinventions scéniques que sont les *revivals*.

Mots-clés

comédie musicale ; film musical ; *Cabaret* ; adaptation ; Harold Prince ; Bob Fosse ; Sam Mendes ; metteur/se en scène ; réalisateur/trice

TROISIÈME PARTIE

Challenges to the performers

"ANY DANCE YOU CAN DO I CAN DO BETTER" GENE KELLY ET LA QUÊTE DE LA PERFECTION

Jacqueline Nacache

Que la question des rapports entre Broadway et Hollywood soit un point majeur dans l'étude de la comédie musicale hollywoodienne, cela est désormais reconnu et suscite une importante activité des chercheurs actuels, que leurs travaux se situent dans le champ de la culture nord-américaine ou dans celui des études cinématographiques. Mais tel n'a pas toujours été le cas. Dans les années 1970-1980, lorsque l'intérêt tant cinéphilique qu'universitaire pour le genre du *musical* est devenu en France un phénomène établi, accompagné par la publication de plusieurs livres, articles et revues, les problématiques liées au passage de la scène à l'écran n'étaient pas essentielles. Certes les passionnés du genre étaient conscients de tous les effets qui liaient le genre cinématographique à sa forme scénique (la théâtralité, le rythme, le spectacle, le traitement du temps, de la couleur, du décor...) mais il ne se menait pas encore, en France en tout cas, de recherches approfondies dans les archives théâtrales et autres fonds de production. Une revue cinéphile classique comme celle où j'écrivais à l'époque, *Cinéma*, était une des rares à publier un hors-série qui articulait le spectacle musical américain et le musical cinématographique[1]. J'interviens donc ici comme témoin d'une période où l'on pouvait encore parler du rapport entre Broadway et Hollywood tel qu'il se formulait non dans le passage de la scène à l'écran, mais dans les films eux-mêmes, en particulier dans ceux qui n'étaient pas des adaptations de spectacles scéniques.

Tel est le cas, on le sait, de *Chantons sous la pluie*. Pourtant le film contient, plus que beaucoup d'autres *musicals*, d'importants éléments susceptibles d'éclairer les rapports Broadway/Hollywood : c'est le paradoxe que je voudrais étudier ici, en concentrant mon propos sur l'interprète principal de ce film légendaire, Gene Kelly. J'emprunte pour l'occasion au champ des *star studies* la notion désormais courante en études cinématographiques de *persona* d'un acteur, à savoir la personnalité qui se forge à travers la multiplicité des personnages incarnés, des discours journalistiques et publicitaires,

1 Voir Alain Lacombe, Claude Rocle, *Cinéma* Hors-série, décembre 1980, « De Broadway à Hollywood. L'Amérique et sa comédie musicale ».

des images qui circulent dans le champ social[2]. Le phénomène existait déjà au théâtre avant l'ère du *star system* cinématographique, mais le cinéma hollywoodien de l'âge d'or (ses vastes publics, sa pratique du *typecasting* et de la publicité, ses scénarios formulaires) lui a donné toute son ampleur.

La question de la *persona*, cependant, n'est guère examinée dans le cadre du *musical* tant elle y est centrale et évidente, les personnages et les numéros musicaux étant construits justement autour de la personnalité filmique de leurs protagonistes[3]. Les éléments de la *persona* de Gene Kelly en l'occurrence sont bien connus. Sur le plan des rôles, elle repose sur des figures de la culture populaire fortement stylisées – soldat, marin en permission, sportif, mousquetaire, saltimbanque, artiste… – et son « naturel » est si soigneusement codé qu'il atteint parfois à un usage des conventions proches de la *commedia dell'arte* (par exemple dans *Le Pirate*/*The Pirate*, Vincente Minnelli, 1948). Sur le plan de l'image publique, dans ses propos et dans ceux qu'il suscite, dans son apparence, dans l'esprit de ses numéros, dans sa propre contribution à l'éternelle comparaison qui l'oppose à Fred Astaire, Kelly met en valeur l'image d'un Américain moyen, proche du public, un homme du peuple ancré dans la culture nationale[4]. La simplicité avec laquelle il aborde son art le conduit à le défendre dans sa dimension sportive ; « *Dancing, a Man's Game* », est une formule que nous pouvons trouver aujourd'hui provocatrice, mais qui consistait à défendre une pratique masculine longtemps mal perçue parce que considérée comme un domaine réservé aux femmes[5]. Enfin, un aspect important de sa personnalité telle qu'elle se déploie à l'écran comme à la ville est une quête de la perfection dont il est sans cesse question dans les entretiens, articles et biographies, une recherche discrète de l'excellence qu'admirent encore aujourd'hui sur le mode nostalgique tous les internautes qui commentent les vidéos disponibles en ligne. C'est sur ce perfectionnisme que j'insisterai ici, parce qu'il intervient de façon remarquable, me semble-t-il, dans l'étude des relations entre spectacle musical et film.

2 Voir l'entrée « Persona » dans le *Dictionnaire critique de l'acteur, théâtre et cinéma*, Rennes, PUR, collection « Le Spectaculaire », 2012, p. 173.

3 Voir l'introduction de Steven Cohan au recueil *Hollywood Musicals, the Film Reader*, Routledge, London/New York, 2002, p. 12. S'agissant de l'acteur en général, il est à noter que James Naremore, dans *Acting in the Cinema*, exclut de son analyse les acteurs de la comédie musicale (J. Naremore, *Acteurs. Le jeu de l'acteur de cinéma* [1988], trad. Christian Viviani, Rennes, PUR, 2014).

4 « J'appartiens à la génération du tee-shirt, et je me sens mal dans un smoking. Je n'aurais pas pu être un second Fred Astaire et *Le Lac des Cygnes* me laissait plutôt froid. Je suis arrivé à New York au moment où le théâtre américain prenait son essor, et je voulais danser sur la musique américaine, trouver un style américain. » (Tony Thomas, *Gene Kelly*, Paris, Henri Veyrier, 1976, p. 34).

5 « Dancing, a Man's Game », programme NBC du 21 décembre 1958, édité en DVD par The Historic Omnibus Production (2013). Pour un extrait, voir le numéro exécuté par Kelly et le boxeur Sugar Ray Robinson, consulté le 25 septembre 2017.

De manière générale, à la scène comme à l'écran, la recherche de la perfection dans le genre musical a pour premier objectif de rendre invisibles les immenses efforts que supposent un geste, un pas de danse, un grand numéro d'ensemble. Mais à Hollywood l'enjeu est encore plus important parce que le numéro exécuté à l'écran le sera une fois pour toutes. Il n'est donc pas question qu'apparaisse la moindre trace d'effort dans le spectacle, et c'est à cet effacement que sont consacrées en priorité les ressources du filmage, des plus simples (la lumière qui baigne les visages, le maquillage qui les garde impeccables, le montage qui permet de tourner en plusieurs plans un numéro qui essoufflerait les acteurs à la scène) aux plus complexes (le doublage des voix et des claquettes, les effets spéciaux en tous genres, et plus généralement, dans la plupart des studios et en particulier à la Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, la recherche de la qualité artistique par la mise au service du spectacle de moyens exceptionnels).

Que peut nous apprendre sur Gene Kelly le motif du perfectionnisme ? A priori, c'est un thème convenu du genre musical, quasiment un cliché. Danser est difficile, d'autant plus difficile qu'il s'agit de faire apparaître l'exécution finale comme facile, fluide et légère. C'est pourquoi l'acharnement au travail est l'un des motifs dramatiques et éthiques du genre, où est mis en valeur le fait que le spectacle n'est pas contrairement aux apparences un amusement pour ceux qui le font, mais le résultat d'un labeur épuisant. C'est « l'idéologie du *hard work* », selon les termes employés par Fanny Beuré, qui rappelle les analyses de Max Weber sur la difficulté de concilier l'éthique protestante, caractérisée par une conception religieuse du travail, avec la consommation du spectacle, perçu comme une perte de temps et d'attention vis-à-vis du religieux. « La comédie musicale doit donc réussir le tour de force de présenter la sphère du loisir comme désirable, sans pour autant se dérober à l'ascétisme protestant. Elle le fait en mettant en scène des artistes pour lesquels le spectacle est à la fois un travail éprouvant et leur source d'épanouissement »[6].

Les premières formes qu'a prises ce tour de force se sont manifestées dans les *musicals* Warner des années 1930, en des temps de crise où même les spectacles d'évasion divertissants se devaient de célébrer des valeurs d'effort et de dépassement de soi. Il n'est pas étonnant que la préparation du show dans la douleur y soit un thème récurrent, comme le montre une scène célèbre de *42e rue* (Lloyd Bacon, 1933) dans laquelle le metteur en scène Julian Marsh (Warren Baxter) tente, sans

6 Voir Fanny Beuré, *That's Entertainment. Musique, danse et représentations dans la comédie musicale hollywoodienne classique*, Paris Sorbonne Université Presses, 2019.

beaucoup de psychologie ni d'égards pour ses *girls*, d'obtenir le meilleur d'un *chorus* exténué.

Le *hard work*, cependant, ne concerne pas que les danseuses du chorus. Mis en scène de façon plus élégante, le perfectionnisme reste un élément fondateur de l'image des plus grands, ostensiblement exploité par la légende hollywoodienne. Plus question alors de souligner la fatigue des répétitions. Au contraire, celles-ci deviennent la garantie du contrôle absolu exercé sur le numéro : on pense, exemple connu, au documentaire de montage *Il était une fois Hollywood*, qui revisite l'âge d'or du genre en célébrant les valeurs typiques du classicisme. Ainsi trouve-t-on dans la troisième partie du documentaire (*That's Entertainment ! III*, 1994) une comparaison de deux versions du numéro « *I Wanna Be a Dancing Man* » par Fred Astaire dans *La Belle de New York* (*The Belle of New York*, Charles Walters, 1952), la nouvelle version ayant été demandée par le studio en raison d'un problème de costumes. Le commentaire insiste sur la perfection des répétitions qui a permis la reproduction du numéro à l'identique, et aboutit, *de facto*, à un duo Astaire/Astaire, où l'effet d'illusion est renforcé par la différence des costumes.

Le thème du danseur si parfait qu'il ne peut avoir d'autre rival que lui-même est tellement lié à l'esprit du *musical* qu'il permet à Gene Kelly de se dédoubler, sur le mode humoristique, dans une émission de télévision où il détourne une chanson d'Irving Berlin interprétée par Betty Hutton et Howard Keel dans *Annie, la reine du cirque* (*Annie Get Your Gun*, George Sidney, 1950). Il y est plaisamment affirmé qu'une femme peut faire tout ce que fait un homme, et le fait mieux (« *Anything You Can Do I Can Do Better* »), ce que Gene Kelly transpose sur le thème de la danse (« *Any Dance You Can Do I Can Do Better* », émission probablement réalisée dans la deuxième moitié de la décennie 1950), à ceci près qu'il ne s'adresse pas à une ou un partenaire, mais à lui-même.

Pour faire son métier de danseur, commence-t-il par déclarer à la caméra sur le ton docte du grand artiste qui expose ses secrets, rester en bonne forme physique ne suffit pas. Il faut sans cesse trouver de nouvelles idées, des pas et enchaînements inédits… Surgit alors de l'arrière-plan, comme un diablotin malicieux, un autre Gene Kelly : c'est l'*alter ego* de Danny McGuire, le personnage interprété par Kelly qui dansait avec son double dans *Cover Girl* (*La Reine de Broadway*, Charles Vidor, 1944). L'*alter ego* rappelle toutes les idées et les nouveautés qu'il a suggérées au fil des ans sans être toujours écouté. Le premier Kelly proteste et montre qu'il maîtrise toutes les inventions de son double, puis se lance avec lui dans un numéro d'un parfait synchronisme. Singulière et joyeuse compétition, dont ne peut sortir qu'un vainqueur dont on devine le nom : de là à penser que Kelly estime ne pas avoir d'autre partenaire à sa hauteur que lui-même, il n'y a qu'un pas dont nous verrons ici qu'il est aisément franchi.

Émission non datée mais probablement réalisée dans la seconde moitié de la décennie 1950.
Consultée le 27 août 2017

Au-delà de l'anecdote, l'image de Gene Kelly est celle d'un travailleur acharné, ne renonçant jamais à obtenir la forme la plus achevée d'un numéro musical, exigeant de ses partenaires les mêmes efforts que ceux qu'il s'impose à lui-même, le tout au prix d'une certaine brutalité dont ses *leading ladies* se souviennent de façon plus ou moins souriante. La plus récente biographie de Kelly insiste sur la « face sombre » souvent évoquée à son propos, l'acteur étant réputé difficile et doté d'un caractère peu compatible avec la façon dont il était censé symboliser « l'optimisme de l'après-guerre[7] ». Laissons de côté ce qui ne concerne que l'homme. Les personnages, eux, ont certes en commun un caractère bouillant, emporté, cynique parfois, en accord avec le style de Kelly dans son jeu et ses danses ; mais tous ces petits défauts, loin d'assombrir son image, sont reversés au compte de l'exigence, non seulement dans le goût du travail bien fait, mais dans la recherche d'une forme de « perfectionnisme

7 Voir Peter Sheridan, « The Dark Side of *Singin' In The Rain* star Gene Kelly », *The Sunday Express*, May 2, 2017, consulté le 17 septembre 2017 ; Cynthia & Sara Brideson, *He's Got Rhythm: The Life And Career Of Gene Kelly*, Lexington, University Press of Kentucky, 2017.

moral » tel que le perçoit Stanley Cavell dans le cinéma hollywoodien[8]. Il s'agit en effet pour Kelly, par-delà la démonstration de sa virtuosité, de mettre en scène son désir de se dépasser, d'augmenter la difficulté des réponses apportées à des défis artistiques. Ainsi peut-on interpréter les numéros dans lesquels il réduit ses accessoires à des éléments dérisoires (une latte de parquet qui grince et un vieux journal dans une scène célèbre de *Summer Stock/ La Jolie Fermière*, Charles Walters, 1950), dans une sorte d'éthique de la pauvreté a priori très éloignée de la comédie musicale, et qui équilibre l'opulence luxueuse des grands numéros d'ensemble[9]. On trouve là un élément propre au perfectionnisme de Kelly, l'insatisfaction de soi dont parle Emerson et que souligne Sandra Laugier[10] : c'est ce sentiment qui conduit son personnage à aller toujours plus loin dans ce dépouillement.

Si cette insatisfaction est somme toute bien compréhensible lorsqu'il s'agit de mettre

au point une danse difficile, la question, dans *Chantons sous la pluie*, ne se résout pas simplement par un numéro sobre et brillant. Elle est intégrée dans la diégèse, et se formule explicitement dans le cadre d'une comparaison entre théâtre et cinéma. Don Lockwood exprime en effet ses doutes sur ses talents d'acteur au sens théâtral du terme. Sa rencontre avec Kathy Selden (Debbie Reynolds), qui feint de mépriser le cinéma et de ne respecter que le théâtre, a instillé en lui l'idée qu'il ne serait pas un acteur mais un « faiseur de grimaces » au service de scénarios indigents et répétitifs. Le thème prend toute son ampleur après le fiasco de la projection du film fictif *The Duelling Cavalier*. Don Lockwood, resté seul avec Kathy et Cosmo, déclare que la catastrophe est due à son manque de talent. « *I'm a museum piece… I'm no actor. I never was. A lot of dumb show*[11] ».

Ses amis protestent, mais il ne veut rien entendre, s'attribuant la principale responsabilité de l'échec. Cette humilité presque excessive (le jeu de Don est un facteur d'échec somme toute mineur en comparaison de l'impréparation technique, de la niaiserie des dialogues et des faiblesses de Lina Lamont) nous éclaire cependant sur un point important. On sait en effet à quel point il est fréquent que le spectacle et le cinéma parlent d'eux-mêmes dans ce genre très réflexif qu'est la comédie musicale, réflexivité dont *Chantons sous la pluie* est

8 Voir Stanley Cavell, *Le cinéma nous rend-il meilleurs ?*, textes rassemblés par Élise Domenach et traduits par Élise Domenach et Christian Fournier, Paris, Bayard, 2003 ; Sandra Laugier (dir.), *La Voix et la vertu. Variétés du perfectionnisme moral*, collection Ethique et philosophie morale, Paris, PUF, 2010.

9 Le procédé est repris de façon parodique dans *What a Way to Go !* (*Madame Croque-Maris*, Jack Lee Thompson, 1963), où Pinky Benson (Gene Kelly) fait des claquettes sur un peu de sel répandu à terre.

10 Voir Sandra Laugier (dir.), *La voix et la vertu. Variétés du perfectionnisme moral*, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

11 « Je suis une pièce de musée… Je ne suis pas un acteur, je ne l'ai jamais été. Rien qu'un tas de grimaces. »

l'exemple canonique. L'acte de contrition de Lockwood peut donc être perçu comme concernant le genre musical tout entier : en se moquant de films muets médiocres et ridicules, le film vise de façon assez claire la médiocrité et la répétitivité des *musicals* du passé[12]. De plus, alors que nous sommes en 1952 et que la comédie musicale, genre qui a beaucoup évolué depuis les années 1930, repose désormais sur des formules bien rôdées, il est tentant de penser que le regret de ne pas être un véritable acteur concerne non seulement Don Lockwood, mais Gene Kelly lui-même, conscient d'avoir enchaîné des films aux scénarios inconsistants, et d'avoir atteint un moment où la formule du *musical* tend à s'épuiser et demande, pour durer, à être revitalisée.

Un rapide retour aux débuts à Broadway devrait nous permettre d'y voir plus clair. Gene Kelly n'y a fait qu'une courte carrière, son premier succès en tant qu'interprète principal dans *Pal Joey* l'ayant presque directement mené à Hollywood[13], avec le rôle de Joey Evans, le charmant voyou dont je parlais pour commencer, que reprendra plus tard Frank Sinatra dans *La Blonde ou la Rousse* (*Pal Joey*, George Sidney, 1957). Le spectacle le fait repérer par David Selznick mais celui-ci, ne trouvant pas de projet approprié, vend à la MGM la moitié du contrat de Kelly, qui tourne alors *For Me and My Gal* (Busby Berkeley, 1942) avec Judy Garland, et se dit surpris du succès que remporte le film (« Je suis encore persuadé que j'étais bien meilleur sur scène[14] »). Une partie de la critique partage ce point de vue ; le jeu de Kelly, par exemple, ne fait pas grande impression sur Bosley Crowther, le critique du *New York Times* :

> Mr. Kelly, who has a dancer's talents, has been pressed a bit too far in his first film role. He has been forced to act brassy like Pal Joey during the early part of the film, and then turn about and play a modest imitation of Sergeant York at the end. The transition is both written and played badly. Mr. Kelly gets embarrassingly balled up[15].

12 Comme le suggère Peter N. Chumo II, il est vraisemblable en tout cas que c'est au *musical* en général que pense Cosmo Brown lorsqu'il dit « *Hey, why bother to shoot this picture? Why don't you release the old one under a new title? If you've seen one, you've seen 'em all* » [« Eh, pourquoi s'embêter à tourner ce film ? Pourquoi ne pas simplement ressortir l'ancien sous un nouveau titre ? Quand on en a vu un, on les a vus tous. »] (Peter N. Chumo II, « Dance, Flexibility, and the Renewal of Genre in *Singin' in the Rain* », *Cinema Journal*, vol. 36, n° 1 (Autumn, 1996), p. 39-54).

13 Auparavant Kelly a été acteur et chorégraphe dans *Leave It to Me* (1938-1939) et dans *One for the Money* (1939), puis dans *The Time of Your Life* (1940) et en 1941-1942 dans *Best Foot Forward*.

14 Tony Thomas, *Gene Kelly*, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

15 « M. Kelly, qui a des talents de danseur, a été poussé un peu trop loin dans son premier rôle à l'écran. On l'a obligé à jouer sur un mode tapageur, comme Pal Joey, pendant la première partie du film, puis à se transformer en une modeste imitation du Sergent York à la fin. La transition étant à la fois mal écrite et mal jouée, M. Kelly se prend les pieds dans le tapis d'une façon assez embarrassante. » (« "For Me and My Gal", a Musical Moving Picture Concerned With Vaudeville, Makes Its Appearance at the Astor, » Bosley Crowther, *The New York Times,* 22 octobre 1942.)

Kelly a dit en de nombreuses occasions que – même s'il se voyait avant tout comme danseur et chorégraphe, et acteur parce qu'il ne pouvait pas faire autrement – il se trouvait meilleur acteur à la scène qu'à l'écran, où il n'avait pas la possibilité d'affiner son jeu. Il est difficile pour autant d'en conclure qu'il était frustré de ne pas avoir fait carrière à Broadway : le prestige lié à la scène, la maturité de spectacles s'adressant à des publics plus sophistiqués, enfin la liberté offerte aux comédiens de déployer leurs qualités dramatiques, ne sont visiblement pas des valeurs que Kelly a privilégiées. Il est certain en revanche au vu de sa carrière qu'il n'a jamais voulu rester un exécutant, si brillant soit-il, et a rapidement pris en charge les aspects qui lui assuraient le plus grand contrôle sur ses films : la chorégraphie, la production et la réalisation. En termes de maîtrise, en effet, le cinéma sert mieux ses ambitions, d'abord parce qu'il lui offre la possibilité d'être l'homme-orchestre qu'il n'aurait pas pu être au théâtre, ensuite parce que, si lui-même était sûr de ne pas briller par son jeu à l'écran, il appréciait les ressources techniques du cinéma et tout ce qu'elles lui permettaient.

En témoigne *Cover Girl*, le film qui fait de lui une star, dans lequel est remise sur le métier l'idéologie du *hard work*. Dans le rôle de Danny McGuire, patron d'un petit cabaret de Brooklyn dont les danseuses rêvent toutes de Broadway, Kelly défend son idée de la perfection et recommande à ses *girls* en quête de succès de compter sur le travail plus que sur leurs charmes. L'intrigue oppose le dynamisme du spectacle à la pose des couvertures de papier glacé, pour lesquels les éditeurs de magazines cherchent des modèles certes rayonnants, mais figés par la photographie qui met en valeur leur beauté plus que leur talent. Le film n'offre que peu d'occasions d'exploits chorégraphiques à Gene Kelly ; de ce fait, le numéro qui a le plus marqué les mémoires est l'« Alter Ego » déjà cité, dans lequel il est seul avec lui-même, et dont il a raconté à quel point il avait été techniquement difficile à réaliser[16].

Compte tenu des progrès accomplis en matière d'effets spéciaux, cette technicité est certes difficile à apprécier pleinement de nos jours. Ce qui est repris ici est pourtant un motif visuel typique de certains films des années 1940, les films de fantômes servis notamment par des surimpressions et autres techniques sur lesquelles s'émerveillait en son temps André Bazin[17]. Mais l'intérêt est ailleurs, et surtout dans le fait que ce numéro consacre la solitude de l'acteur-danseur, qui devient dès lors un aspect majeur

16 La séquence « Alter Ego » est visible sur You Tube (consultée le 27 septembre 2017).

17 André Bazin, « Vie et mort de la surimpression », *L'Écran français*, 8, 22 août 1945, repris dans certaines éditions de *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma ?*

de l'identité artistique de Kelly. Cela a été également souvent remarqué : parallèlement aux duos, trios et autres numéros de groupe euphoriques, il n'est pas rare que le personnage interprété par Gene Kelly se retrouve seul, rêveur et mélancolique, souvent pour un prétexte sentimental. Ce préambule ouvre les grands ballets de Broadway : « Un Américain à Paris » dans le film du même nom, ou plus clairement encore « *A Day in New York* » dans *Un jour à New York*, numéro qui semble littéralement l'entraîner sur la scène de Broadway, sinon tout à fait seul, du moins loin de ses acolytes, puisque leurs interprètes, les acteurs Frank Sinatra et Jules Munshin, disparaissent pendant le ballet pour laisser place à des danseurs. Dans *Beau Fixe sur New York* (*It's Always Fair Weather*, Stanley Donen et Gene Kelly, 1955), il est seul dans la foule des passants, célébrant sur un mode plaisamment narcissique la joie d'être amoureux (« *She likes me, so I like myself* »). Le désir de rompre avec les structures traditionnelles de la danse de couple ou de groupe se manifeste encore par la recherche de partenaires non humains, notamment la danse avec la souris Jerry dans *Escale à Hollywood* (*Anchors Aweigh*, George Sidney, 1945), procédé qui ira plus loin encore dans *Invitation à la danse* (*Invitation to The Dance*, Gene Kelly, 1956) dont un des segments mêle animation et prise de vues réelles.

On voit bien dans ces occasions que le perfectionnisme de Kelly ne s'accommode pas d'un partage de la vedette. Si Kelly apprécie à leur juste valeur les numéros de groupe et y apporte tout le soin possible, il apprécie encore plus le fait qu'un film lui offre un ou une partenaire à sa hauteur : Donald O'Connor bien sûr dans *Chantons sous la pluie*, et, pour les « alter ego » féminins, fût-ce aux dépens de la qualité du jeu, Vera Ellen dont Kelly a souvent dit que c'était sa meilleure partenaire (voir par exemple le ballet « *Slaughter on Tenth Avenue* » de *Ma vie est une chanson/Words and Music*, Norman Taurog, 1948). Mais de toute évidence, c'est lorsque Kelly est seul en scène, maître de lui et de sa danse, que s'exprime le mieux son désir de perfection.

En somme il n'y a pas, ni avant ni après *Chantons sous la pluie*, que du *dumb show* : en déployant une parfaite maîtrise de son art, en se donnant des partenaires inédits, Kelly a amplement prouvé la supériorité de son talent pendant toute sa grande période dans le *musical*. Pourtant c'est dans ce film qu'émerge explicitement à son sujet, et pour la première fois, l'opposition entre jeu de scène et jeu d'écran. Mais nous sommes à Hollywood : cette opposition n'aboutit donc pas à un rejet du cinéma, bien au contraire. Dans le scénario, l'échec du premier film sonore est surmonté par le recours au *musical*. Dans le film terminé, la question d'une possible usure du genre musical est balayée par une célébration du genre dépassant en splendeur tout ce qui l'avait précédé, scandée à tous les niveaux par la recherche de la perfection.

Tentons, pour conclure, de comprendre les moyens mis au service de cette célébration.

Elle tient d'abord à la reprise d'un cadre bien connu, celui du « musical de coulisses ». Le *backstage musical*, en effet, ne s'est jamais interrompu depuis les années 1930[18]. Mais sa forme a évolué pour s'ancrer dans des contextes plus réalistes et s'est renouvelée au fil des ans. Ici, ce à quoi tendent les efforts de la troupe n'est plus la préparation d'un show mais d'un film de cinéma : cela suppose des ajustements importants, puisque le film, dans cette nouvelle configuration, n'est plus l'objet du spectacle. Au contraire, le film-dans-le-film est le plus souvent tourné en dérision, et les images fictives en noir et blanc, réussies ou ratées, ne sont pour le public source d'aucune satisfaction, comme l'était dans le *backstage musical* traditionnel l'harmonie enfin atteinte du spectacle final. Ici, le vrai film second est ailleurs. Il est, par exemple, dans la densité des effets visuels et narratifs qui composent l'ample ouverture de *Chantons sous la pluie*, laquelle se réfère à tous les genres hollywoodiens, du burlesque muet au *cartoon* et au western. Il est dans les procédés qui convoquent frénétiquement non seulement des motifs de la légende hollywoodienne (soir de première au *Grauman's Chinese Theatre*, arrivée de stars aux costumes extravagants, commentaires des potineuses), mais les ressources du récit cinématographique : l'empilement des flashbacks, la tension entre les images et la voix *off* de Kelly/Lockwood qui construit un *biopic* mensonger, les *montage sequences* suggérant à pulsations rapides l'évolution d'une vie. Le film second est enfin dans l'éblouissante diversité du spectacle qui se superpose au déroulement de l'intrigue, ensemble formé de numéros si clairement identifiés (vaudeville, *fashion show*, danse acrobatique, burlesque, numéro à grand spectacle, romance sentimentale…) qu'ils pourraient remplir les pages d'un programme de théâtre.

Second élément majeur dans la célébration du genre : le style et le jeu de Donald O'Connor dans le rôle du fidèle Cosmo Brown. Cosmo est désigné dès le début du film comme invisible, et la foule hurlante en attente de célébrités ne reconnaît pas ce visage anonyme, se taisant brusquement quand il apparaît. Cette entrée crée les conditions nécessaires à son fonctionnement tout au long du film en tant que double de Don. Double en partie ridicule puisqu'il tourne en dérision les valeurs de charme et de séduction attachées à Lockwood, mais parfaitement sérieux sur le plan du talent chorégraphique – le rôle devait être confié à Oscar Levant, mais Kelly et toute la troupe ont insisté pour qu'il soit tenu par un comédien-danseur. Le plus impressionnant

18 Voir Rick Altman, *La Comédie musicale hollywoodienne* [1987], trad. Jacques Lévy, Paris, Armand Colin, 1992 ; Martin Rubin, « Busby Berkeley and the Backstage Musical », in Steven Cohan (ed.), *Hollywood Musicals, the Film Reader*, *op. cit.*, p.53-61.

dans la prestation de Donald O'Connor, plus encore peut-être que son ébouriffante virtuosité dans « *Make 'Em Laugh* » où il est seul, est le synchronisme parfait qui marque notamment « *Fit as a Fiddle* » et « *Moses* ». Jamais Kelly n'a eu un complice aussi proche. Même tonus, même élan, même précision de frappe, O'Connor est son *alter ego* de façon plus convaincante encore que dans *Cover Girl*, car il est à la fois son ombre et son frère en termes sportifs. En témoigne de façon particulièrement vive le numéro « Moses » parce que la danse s'y substitue littéralement au langage : c'est lorsqu'un professeur à la pédagogie ridicule prétend former les acteurs du muet aux subtilités de l'élocution que les deux amis donnent la démonstration de danse la plus éblouissante et la plus parfaitement synchronisée. Or le synchronisme accroit l'impression de perfection, parce qu'il multiplie un corps de façon magique, parce qu'il rappelle à la fois le travail de répétition et son dépassement, parce que le dédoublement parfait de gestes identiques, si opposé aux mouvements aléatoires de la vie, semble relever du surnaturel. Pour Gene Kelly, danser avec O'Connor, c'est concrétiser la séquence onirique de *Cover Girl* : danser avec son double, certes, mais un double qui n'est pas un rival, qui lui prête la docilité et la souplesse d'un corps virtuose, et lui permet de consacrer le style athlétique qu'il a imposé en dix ans dans le genre du *musical*.

Le troisième élément, et probablement le plus important même s'il n'est pas le plus visible, se situe au plan du jeu d'acteur. Dans ce domaine aussi, dix ans sont passés. Depuis la critique de *For Me and My Gal* parue dans le *New York Times*, Gene Kelly a atteint son but. Non qu'il se soit transformé en acteur de cinéma, ce qui au fond ne l'aura jamais beaucoup intéressé ; il s'est transformé, plus subtilement, en un acteur de Broadway à l'écran. Comme à la scène, la psychologie et les émotions de son personnage passent par la danse plus que par tout autre forme d'expressivité. Mais dans *Chantons sous la pluie*, le problème n'est plus de savoir s'il est ou non bon comédien. Si Don Lockwood peut mettre ses doutes en scène, c'est justement parce que Kelly, lui, n'éprouve plus aucun de ces doutes. Il sait qu'il danse ses personnages avant de les jouer, et le thème du film (l'épopée comique que constitue la transition du muet au parlant) lui permet de déployer comme un langage accompli sa capacité d'expression chorégraphique. « Quand je danse, je danse », disait Montaigne, dans une formule célèbre qui montrait qu'il était tout entier dans ses actions. Kelly pourrait en dire autant, et dans un sens qui ne serait au fond pas si lointain. C'est dans la performativité de la danse que réside l'ultime perfection.

En somme, si Gene Kelly n'a fait qu'une courte carrière à Broadway, c'est au cinéma qu'il fait sa carrière de théâtre. Ce qu'Hollywood a vu à la scène, c'est son potentiel de

cinéma[19] ; ce que les films déploieront ensuite, c'est son potentiel théâtral, sa capacité à faire une scène d'un décor de cinéma. Le résultat est qu'il estompe symboliquement la frontière entre Broadway et Hollywood. Tous les moyens de cet effacement convergent dans *Chantons sous la pluie*, de façon à la fois plus simple et plus spectaculaire que dans d'autres films, parce que ce n'est plus un film sur « *let's do a show* », mais sur « *let's do a movie* ». Enfin et surtout, Kelly rompt avec son exigeante solitude. Il a certes acquis une indépendance parfaite dans sa supervision de toutes les chorégraphies, et dans sa collaboration avec Donen, si mouvementée qu'elle fût[20]. Mais il matérialise son double dans la personne de Donald O'Connor, et inscrit son talent d'exception au sein d'une troupe. Le sentiment d'euphorie qu'inspire le film vient en effet notamment du dynamisme constant qu'y insuffle la recomposition des groupes : d'un couple à l'autre, du chorus au duo, au trio, au grand ensemble. Certes, cela n'exclut pas la danse solitaire désormais inséparable du personnage, à savoir la séquence pluvieuse qui donne son titre au film, et qui n'est pas sans évoquer l'« Alter Ego » de *Cover Girl*. Mais Gene Kelly n'a plus besoin d'effets spéciaux sophistiqués, seulement d'un bon système de canalisations qui permet de contrôler l'averse artificielle. La perfection est ici dans la parfaite simplicité et la joie enfantine de l'ensemble, le costume sans recherche, la correspondance entre les sentiments éprouvés et l'euphorie chorégraphique, et le motif de la *street dance* qui, loin de la fantasmagorie de *Cover Girl*, renoue un lien de confiance avec la ville[21].

Chantons sous la pluie n'est pas pour autant une fin. Gene Kelly tournera encore plusieurs films, dont certains projets qui lui tiennent à cœur comme *Invitation à la danse*, sans renoncer au style qui a fait son image de marque. Une fois terminé son contrat de 16 ans avec la MGM, alors qu'on lui propose des rôles dramatiques, il dit selon ses biographes ne plus avoir envie d'être une star de cinéma ; peut-être en effet ne lui est-il plus possible de l'être sans le chant et surtout la danse qui le portaient au plus

19 Notons cependant que la révélation ne fut pas immédiate, si l'on pense aux commentaires peu flatteurs qui accompagnèrent son premier *screen test* pour Louis B. Mayer, qui l'aurait déclaré « trop petit, trop sexy, peu sympathique, pas du tout pour nous » (« *Too short, too sexy, not sympathetic, not for us* »). Voir Peter Sheridan, « The Dark Side of *Singin' In The Rain* Star Gene Kelly », art. cit. Mais c'est un élément de la légende hollywoodienne que le supposé aveuglement des grands producteurs face aux nouveaux talents ; une anecdote similaire concerne d'ailleurs Fred Astaire.

20 Les relations entre les deux hommes se sont dégradées durablement, au point que Donen a refusé d'être interviewé dans le cadre du documentaire consacré à Kelly, *Anatomy of a Dancer*, au motif que n'ayant rien d'agréable à dire, il préférait ne rien dire du tout. Voir « Filmmaker interview : Robert Trachtenberg », entretien en ligne avec le réalisateur du film, consulté le 27 août 2017.

21 À moins (hypothèse moins optimiste mais qu'il faut rappeler) qu'on ne la voie comme un vol ou un détournement de la culture noire des *hoofers* : voir Carol Clover, « Dancin' in the Rain », *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 21, n° 4 (Summer, 1995) p. 738.

haut. Non que sa carrière soit terminée, mais ce qui est bel et bien clos est une époque de la comédie musicale organisée autour de personnalités que l'organisation même du système hollywoodien encourageait à exalter l'exploitation fascinée de leur propre talent. Dans l'« Alter Ego » de *Cover Girl*, Gene Kelly affirmait que, tout en faisant les concessions nécessaires aux règles communautaires de la comédie musicale, il n'avait pas de meilleur partenaire que lui-même. Dans *Chantons sous la pluie*, le message est tout autre, au-delà de tout narcissisme : nous savons désormais que le cinéma a mené Gene Kelly vers une perfection que Broadway, sa carrière eût-elle pris un autre cours, ne lui aurait sans doute jamais permis d'atteindre.

Avec mes remerciements à Fanny Beuré.

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Jacqueline Nacache enseigne l'histoire et l'esthétique du cinéma à l'université Paris Diderot, dans le cadre du CERILAC (Centre d'études et de recherches interdisciplinaires en lettres, arts, cinéma). Ses travaux ont d'abord porté sur le cinéma hollywoodien classique, envisagé sur le plan des styles, de l'histoire, des genres, du récit (*Le Film hollywoodien classique*, 1995 ; *Hollywood, l'ellipse et l'infilmé*, 2001). Ils se sont étendus ensuite aux théories de l'acteur (*L'acteur de cinéma*, 2003), aux rapports entre littérature et cinéma, à l'analyse des discours sur le cinéma (*L'Expérience du cinéma*, co-dir., 2015), ainsi qu'au cinéma français contemporain (*Analyse d'une œuvre : La Reine Margot*, avec Alain Kleinberger, 2015).

RÉSUMÉ

Une des qualités rituellement évoquées au sujet de Gene Kelly est son perfectionnisme en matière chorégraphique. C'est par ce biais qu'on approche ici à son propos la relation entre la scène et l'écran, telle qu'elle se matérialise dans l'espace du film. En effet, alors que Kelly n'a fait qu'une courte carrière à Broadway, son exigence venue de la scène le conduit à considérer parfois qu'il n'a pas de meilleur partenaire que lui-même, par exemple dans le numéro « Alter Ego » de *Cover Girl* (1944). Dans la décennie qui suit, il porte au plus haut point la maîtrise de son art, mais, à travers Don Lockwood, semble douter dans *Singin' in the Rain* de son talent de comédien. Ses doutes sont cependant démentis par la perfection du film, où son jeu dansé comme ses danses jouées montrent qu'il a pleinement réalisé à Hollywood la carrière qui aurait pu être la sienne à Broadway.

Mots-clés

Gene Kelly ; perfectionnisme ; persona ; *Cover Girl/La Reine de Broadway* ; *Singin' in the Rain/Chantons sous la pluie* ; *backstage musical*

ABSTRACT

One of the qualities ritually mentioned when it comes to Gene Kelly is his choreographic perfectionism. This essay broaches the relationship between stage and screen through the angle of this particular trait. While Kelly's Broadway career was short-lived, the demanding habits he derived from his stage practice sometimes led him to consider he could have no more fitting partner than himself, as suggested in the "Alter Ego" number from *Cover Girl* (1944). Over the following decade, he carried the mastery of his art to the very highest but, through the character of Don Lockwood in *Singin' in the Rain*, appeared to doubt his talents as an actor. Such doubts are, however, given the lie by the perfection of the film, where his dancer's acting and his actor's dances show how thoroughly the career Kelly might have had on Broadway came to be realized in Hollywood.

Keywords

Gene Kelly; perfectionism; actor's persona; *Cover Girl*; *Singin' in the Rain*; backstage musical

"JUST GO FOR IT, AND PUT THE WORK IN"

Chita Rivera on her career in musicals

A former student of the School of American Ballet, Chita Rivera has gone on to have a stellar career on Broadway, originating such memorable parts as Anita in West Side Story*, Rosie in* Bye Bye Birdie*, Velma Kelly in* Chicago *– or more recently,* Aurora *in Kiss of the Spider-Woman. She is the recipient of two Tony Awards, a Kennedy Center Honors Award, and the Presidential Medal of Freedom. We are honored and grateful that she took the time to talk to us about the combined talents of performers in musicals, the rewards of dedicated training, and the joys of singing for Bernstein or dancing for Fosse.*

This interview was conducted over the phone on May 8th, 2017.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — I'd like to start by asking about your training as a performer. If I'm not mistaken, your original calling was the ballet: how did you then train as an actress, and a singer? I'm particularly curious about this since combining all three talents is fairly rare in France, where we have much less of a tradition for musicals (though they've been becoming more and more popular).

Chita Rivera — I started out in a little dance school in Washington, D.C., run by an African-American ballet teacher from Boston who was an extraordinary dancer. My mother put me in this school when I was about ten years old because I had a lot of energy, and she wanted to focus it. Mother was a beautiful, graceful woman who I'm sure would have liked to dance herself. I studied and studied, and one day the New York City Ballet sent some scouts down for the School of American Ballet, because they had heard that our school had some very good students. My dance partner in D.C. was Louis Johnson, who later became the first Black male dancer to join the New York City Ballet. The scouts observed our classes and chose the two of us to go up and audition for Mr. Balanchine.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — George Balanchine himself!

Chita Rivera — Yes, we didn't know it was Mr. Balanchine, thankfully – we would have died, I think. We auditioned individually and it was a very sweet story – a blister broke on my foot and this sweet grandfather-like gentleman insisted that somebody get a band-aid; I had my foot on his lap and straightened my tights and everything; then I went back to my *fouettés* or whatever it is I was doing. And, lo and behold, I found out later, after I had gotten the scholarship, that it was Mr. Balanchine who had been so graceful!

I was quite nervous, coming from another state altogether, and everybody being so totally different – all those long-legged ballerinas! So I studied at the School of American Ballet diligently, and one day went with a friend of mine to audition for a show called *Call me Madam*.[1] The audition was on Broadway, but it was for the road – the national company – and Elaine Stritch was to star in it [taking over from Ethel Merman]. This girlfriend of mine asked me to keep her company because she was very nervous; she needed a job since she was not on scholarship. I'm afraid I just didn't understand and I was a little bit of a snob, so I felt very bad for my friend that she had to lower her standards and do a Broadway show! But I was brave and I went down front. The audition was conducted by the show's choreographer, Jerome Robbins; it was both ballet and folk. I got the job and my friend didn't. So I suddenly found myself faced with a dilemma – I'd never earned any money before and, all of sudden, another door was open for me. They offered me one of the four principal dancers, and that's how my life changed.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — With, presumably, a different style of dancing from ballet school?

Chita Rivera — Well, Jerome Robbins was from the ballet, so his style was balletic as well as original. It also included character dancing. Obviously, he thought that I had something that could be worked with, and that's how it all changed.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — So you learned to work on character and acting *through* dance?

Chita Rivera — Absolutely. At the School of American Ballet, there was a wonderful teacher of character dancing, so we had both classical and character lessons. Character dancing is a bit more free – that's why it goes by the name of "character", doesn't it?

1 *Call Me Madam*, music and lyrics by Irving Berlin, book by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, original staging by George Abbott, choreography by Jerome Robbins, 1950.

There's more personality in that. In classical ballet, the *prima ballerina* has whatever changes there are to her particular character, but other than her, generally the *corps de ballet* are all identical in emotions, in technique, step-wise – everything. But character dancing has more individuality.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — Including, perhaps, more facial expressions?

Chita Rivera — Oh yes, necessarily. I always figured that, should I have joined the company (which is what I originally wanted to do), I would probably have ended up doing more character dancing. I certainly was capable of being one of the girls in the *corps de ballet* – but I like to laugh too much, I like to be myself too much.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — Which is why we get such a great sense of fun and enjoyment from your performances.

Chita Rivera — I just love it! And if you radiate that, the audience gets it and, possibly, enjoys the show even more. But I never go beyond what's written in the script – when a character has a comical side, for instance: it's got to be in that particular part for me to do it.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — And how did you learn to sing?

Chita Rivera — By auditioning, and listening, and being courageous. You just go for it, you know; don't run away from it! Once you're in rehearsals, if they feel you have what it takes, they *work with you*, and that's how you learn. I think that's true about life, period: you learn as you go along, and you find out more about yourself as you live. I can honestly say that Leonard Bernstein taught me to sing – that Cy Coleman taught me to sing, that Kander and Ebb taught me to sing!

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — So you learned from the best.

Chita Rivera — Yes! I have to admit that without the particular period around which I came along, without the genius of these amazing people, I don't know what I would be doing or even what kind of person I would be. It was quite remarkable to work with them. I would love to be thirty years old again, you know, but then I would have missed out on all of that!

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — When you're given a new part, how do you go about working on it? Do you usually start with the spoken lines, the dance steps, the through-line of the character…?

Chita Rivera — It depends, but I usually get the script first and learn the lines. I will even ask for the music and go to a voice person to rehearse it, so that when I go in to the first day of rehearsal I am prepared to some degree.

I must say I was very fortunate with *West Side Story*[2] because Leonard Bernstein taught me the music to it. We had *no idea* that we could sing this music. You said that today, in France, dancers, singers and actors were usually different people – that is exactly the world we were in back then. Dancers danced, singers sang, actors acted, and that was it. I'll never forget what Lee Becker Theodore said to me once. She was a brilliant dancer, the original Anybodys in *West Side*, and later went on to have a company of her own. There was an audition for something and I said "Let's go!," but she said "Are you crazy? You have to sing for that!," so I said "I know, but we can fake it, give it what we've got," and I remember this coming out of her mouth: "Dancers dance, we don't sing". It's all changed now, and sometimes when people try to do all three, they give up one of them. It's harder work of course, but you learn, you get stronger – your lungs get stronger. I can thank Steven Sondheim, Leonard Bernstein and Jerome Robbins as well as Peter Gennaro, who was his assistant – I can thank all of them for teaching me and for giving me the stamina to be able to do this. You've just got to keep working. Today people go the gym, but in those days we simply went to classes! And in rehearsals you do it every single day, and everything gets stronger.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — In short, you never stop working on yourself.

Chita Rivera — Exactly. And it doesn't stop the older you get. I'm sitting here looking at that exercise ball and that bicycle that I don't really want to get on, but I know I'm going to have to do those exercises sometime today!

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — Since one of the focuses of this collection of essays is the way musicals can be transferred and adapted from stage to screen or from screen to stage, I wanted to ask how different it feels, as a performer and a dancer in particular, when

2 *West Side Story*, music by Leonard Bernstein, lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, book by Arthur Laurents, original staging and choreography by Jerome Robbins, 1957.

you're dancing in front of the camera rather than on stage. Is it a thoroughly different experience, because it's all fragmented on film?

Chita Rivera — Filming is a different experience as far as putting the number (or the story) together is concerned, because sometimes they have you do the end before the beginning and they piece it together later, and you stop and start a lot – so your head has to go *there*, to that particular point in your role. When you're joining certain things together, you have to remember how you felt the first time you did it, because you have to duplicate it, so it's another lesson in focus. But still – if you're doing a dancing role, you have to dance to the fullest and best of your ability, that doesn't change. And if you have someone like Fosse or Robbins – a theater choreographer – you can almost feel as though you're in the theater. Except that if they tell you to not sing so loud, you don't; or if they tell you not to travel as far as you normally would on the stage, you don't either.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — To a viewer, the choreography of the "Big Spender" number from *Sweet Charity*[3] feels fairly similar in the movie version and in recorded staged versions: did it feel that way as a performer too?

Chita Rivera — That one, yes – because in the movie we did it from top to bottom, without stopping.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — What was it like to work with such a legend of American dance as Bob Fosse?

Chita Rivera — He was amazing; his style was like no one else's style. And for somebody who loved to fly as much as I did – I used to love to dance with the boys in ballet class because they usually had more energetic and dynamic combinations – for somebody that liked that kind of energy so much; I had to learn to pull it way back. And I found that to be as valuable and as exciting a movement as anything else. Dance is the possibility of everything, isn't it? You fly, you crawl, you spring… you take tiny little steps and each small movement is as important as a huge one. If I had to go back and do it all over again, I think I'd still like to be a dancer.

3 *Sweet Charity*, music by Cy Coleman, lyrics by Dorothy Fields, book by Neil Simon, original staging and choreography by Bob Fosse, 1966.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — I wonder if you could tell me about the workshopping process of musicals since, if I'm not mistaken, they're partly developed through rehearsals, with numbers going in and out – does the choreography tend to change from day to day as well?

Chita Rivera — It does. We didn't use to call it workshop though, it was simply rehearsals. You didn't suggest anything unless you were asked. We would rehearse in New York, and then go out of town for a few weeks – to Philadelphia or New Haven for instance. And that was were the show would totally do a 360, because you'd be trying it out on an audience for the first time, and the director and choreographer would go by the way the audience received it out of town. Then you went back to New York.

Nowadays they don't do that as much; now they call it workshops. Because of the cost of things, I suppose, sometimes they also make the productions much smaller. Take *Chicago*,[4] for instance. It's a good thing that the score and the choreography are wonderful, because today the set and the company are nothing like the original production with Gwen Vernon, myself and Jerry Orbach. Tony Walton had designed an extraordinary set for it – huge and magnificent, with the orchestra sitting on stage, up these spiral staircases on either side; it was absolutely unbelievable. And Velma's entrance was phenomenal, with drums playing as these doors opened and she was revealed on an elevator. Today they've stripped it to something much smaller – but if it's a good script and score, and if there's something in it that can really sell it, then the show lives on, just as *Chicago* is living now.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — Can I ask who your inspirations have been, and are?

Chita Rivera — First of all, Gwen Vernon – such an extraordinary dancer. Also Carol Haney. I didn't watch a lot of movies, but the elegance of Fred Astaire! And I thought Gene Kelly was great. My original idols – or at least, people I wanted to be like – were ballerinas, because that's what I wanted to do at first: Nora Kaye for instance, and Maria Tallchief, both beautiful ballerinas. Tommy Rall and Max Mattox were fabulous dancers as well; and so were the choreographers, like Jack Cole of Bob Fosse. They all had different personalities. So I guess you could say my inspirations were a mixture of ballet and other things.

4 *Chicago*, music by John Kander, lyrics by Fred Ebb, book by Fred Ebb and Bob Fosse, original staging and choreography by Bob Fosse, 1975.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — Out of all the parts you've played, are there any that you feel closer to (or is it always the part you're going to play next)?

Chita Rivera — I can honestly say that *West Side* was very much a part of me. It was also a show that catapulted all of us; we were all very lucky and very blessed to have done it. But *Chicago* was fun too, I liked Velma, she was sensational – though you never saw the killer side of her because Roxie took over that part. I think all of them had a part of me. Rosie from *Bye Bye Birdie*[5] was great fun too. I have to tell you, all of these shows – I've been lucky!

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — I guess, perhaps, when you're bringing a character to life for the first time, you can put more of yourself into it?

Chita Rivera — Well, that's all you have. You follow the stage directions and the director, but you have to put yourself in it. And you're all working on it together; the director and the choreographer have the upper hand, but they give you a certain amount of freedom so they can see what you're got to offer. You go in to rehearsal as yourself, you take whatever it is that got you that audition, and you just throw that out – and if the casting is right, then you're on the nose. I always figured I had qualities of most of those characters, automatically, because I understood them.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — Because you had been cast right?

Chita Rivera — Yes; I was lucky. All those incredible shows I was involved in – *Zenda*,[6] *1491*,[7] *Can-Can*,[8] *Guys and Dolls*.[9] And those great shows still live, for other people to do – that's the proof of the pudding!

And one thing you have to know: when you're on stage, whether you're dancing, speaking or singing – acting is in every single one of these elements. Dancers act through the music and through their bodies, even if they never open their mouths. You

5 *Bye Bye Birdie*, music by Charles Strouse, lyrics by Lee Adams, book by Michael Stewart, original staging and choreography by Gower Champion, 1960.

6 *Zenda*, music by Vernon Duke, lyrics by Lenny Adelson, Sid Kuller and Martin Charnin, book by Everett Freeman, staging by George Shaefer, choreography by Jack Cole, 1963.

7 *1491*, music and lyrics by Meredith Willson, book by Meredith Willson and Richard Morris, staging by Richard Morris, choreography by Danny Daniels, 1969.

8 *Can-Can*, music and lyrics by Cole Porter, book by Abe Burrows, original staging by Abe Burrows, choreography by Michael Kidd, 1953.

9 *Guys and Dolls*, music and lyrics by Frank Loesser, book by Jo Swerling and Abe Burrows, original staging by George S. Kaufman, choreography by Michael Kidd, 1950.

don't really need the words, you can live through the body. You can also live through just the word, or just the music. Each element is very valuable and very satisfying.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — I had an acting coach who used to tell us, "If you can't interest me when you're silent on stage, then I'm not interested in anything you have to say."

Chita Rivera — I completely agree, and it was a wonderful thing when someone said "I can't take my eyes off you when you're listening." Physical bodies can speak without words, because the performers should still be thinking and listening. If you're listening, what is inside you is very strong, and it shows. Another great thing is that you don't have to face front. People think you have to face front, but your back is as important as your front! When I'm in the audience, my eye goes straight to the least obvious thing on stage. You get an awful lot from watching the person that receives, as opposed to the person that gives. The theater is a wonderful place!

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — Thank you for sharing your expertise, your stories and enthusiasm. As a final question, I would simply like to ask what your next project is.

Chita Rivera — Tomorrow I'm opening at the Carlyle for two weeks; I'll be doing my club act, which was originally written by Fred Ebb and John Kander, and is full of wonderful songs, along with some stories from those shows that I've done. After that I'll be doing Voices Across America, and then I'll be going to London for the 60th (I can hardly believe it!) anniversary of *West Side Story*. So yes, I'll be very busy!

DANSER *WEST SIDE STORY* À LA SCÈNE ET À L'ÉCRAN

Entretien avec Patricia Dolambi

Professeur de danse jazz au Conservatoire à rayonnement régional d'Aubervilliers et titulaire d'un Master recherche en danse, Patricia Dolambi pose sur le geste du danseur un regard aiguisé de chercheuse et de praticienne. Elle revient ici en détail sur la chorégraphie de Jerome Robbins pour West Side Story*, comparant le film de 1961 à plusieurs versions scéniques pour analyser, au fil des scènes, la posture et la tonicité des corps, l'ancrage au sol sur la scène ou dans la rue, en baskets ou en talons, et l'énergie du geste brut ou esthétisé.*

Cet entretien s'est déroulé à Paris, le 22 novembre 2017. Les hyperliens permettent de visionner en ligne les séquences dont il est question.

Anne Martina – Bonjour Patricia, et merci d'avoir accepté de nous accorder cet entretien. J'aimerais aborder avec toi les questions suivantes : quel impact les transferts médiatiques ont-ils sur l'écriture chorégraphique ? L'image cinématographique et le montage changent considérablement notre *perception* des corps en mouvement, mais qu'en est-il des artistes ? En quoi, par exemple, la nature du lieu où l'on danse (décors réels, décors de studio, scène de théâtre) influe-t-elle sur le geste du danseur et modifie-t-elle son rapport au corps ?

Prenons l'exemple de *West Side Story*, que tu connais bien. Ce qui me frappe, dans la longue séquence d'ouverture qui suit le générique du film, c'est le dynamisme des corps et la dimension à la fois réaliste et symbolique de la chorégraphie, que je trouve plus prononcés qu'à la scène. À quoi est-ce dû ? Dès les premiers pas, par exemple, les enjeux de territoire apparaissent clairement, mais sur un mode détourné, faussement ludique. Une petite fille dessine à la craie un espace clos en forme d'escargot, que les *Jets* contournent. Puis ils s'emparent d'un ballon de basket, avec lequel ils font un pas de danse. Ces détails ne figurent pas dans la version scénique. Est-ce cela qui donne à la chorégraphie du film une dimension plus réaliste ? Ou cette impression est-elle seulement due au fait que la séquence a été tournée en décors réels ?

Patricia Dolambi – C'est tout cela à la fois : le cadre réel transforme la danse (et le danseur) autant que la danse métamorphose le réel. Ce qui m'intéresse, dans cette

ouverture, c'est le surgissement de la chorégraphie. Regarde comment Robbins transforme le geste du basketteur en un geste de danse : tout se joue dans la tension du corps. Cela dure deux secondes, puis le réel reprend ses droits et les *Jets* se remettent à marcher. La chorégraphie surgit de nouveau lorsqu'un des personnages rompt le rythme de la marche groupée par un piqué dans le sol, suivi d'un rond de jambe et d'une large ouverture des bras. C'est un geste difficile et très frappant, car la jambe doit tenir en équilibre, alors même que toute la partie supérieure du corps est en mouvement : le danseur ouvre grand les bras tandis que son regard balaie l'horizon. La tension du haut du corps et du regard contraste d'autant plus fortement avec le bas du corps dans le film de 1961 que cet horizon n'est pas du tout le même qu'au théâtre, où le champ est beaucoup plus restreint. En décors réels, l'espace est plus large, et cela se voit dans la tonicité du regard. Le changement de perspective, l'ouverture de l'espace et du champ changent le regard et donc la tonicité du danseur. C'est physiologique. Je dis toujours à mes élèves : « Arrête de regarder tes chaussettes ! ». Si tu regardes tes pieds, ou si tu regardes en toi, tu perds ta tonicité. Si tu regardes de façon frontale, beaucoup de tonicité va se loger dans les cervicales, ce qui change ta posture. Mais plus ton regard est englobant et plus l'espace est large, plus ton corps est tonique. C'est pourquoi dans la version cinématographique, l'opposition entre le haut et le bas du corps est très forte, très expressive. Dans le spectacle scénique, où l'espace du danseur est plus restreint, je l'ai moins ressentie. Ce n'est sans doute pas seulement une question de champ. Sur scène, ce piqué ouvert apparaissait également plus codé, plus ouvertement chorégraphié.

Anne Martina – Cette opposition est pourtant cruciale dans la séquence comme dans le film dans son ensemble. On pourrait dire qu'elle métaphorise dans le corps des danseurs la tragédie des personnages, pris entre deux désirs contradictoires : s'enraciner, d'une part, dans un territoire conquis (les *Jets*) ou à conquérir (les *Sharks*) ; mais aussi s'émanciper d'un contexte socio-politique qui les écrase. Et qu'en est-il du bitume ? Le passage d'un revêtement de plateau à un revêtement de rue a-t-il un impact ?

Patricia Dolambi – Quand les danseurs sautent ou tournent, oui, mais pas quand ils marchent. Pour maintenir la rapidité et la tonicité du geste lorsqu'on est sur du bitume, il faut descendre son centre de gravité. En pas chassés, on ne change pas de niveau, donc le revêtement a un impact limité : le centre de gravité reste horizontal. On avance sur des jambes pliées pour être le plus proche possible du sol. Le choix de la posture est évidemment délibéré : cela donne un air de prédateur (on retrouve cela en art martial). C'est également pour cette raison que la symbolique de la conquête

semble plus prononcée dans la version filmique. Les danseurs doivent jouer avec l'adhérence du sol. Tourner en baskets sur le bitume ne peut se faire simplement par une vrille. Si tu t'amuses à engager tes épaules, puis ton bassin, c'est fichu ! Pour tourner sur du bitume, il faut une posture très compacte, très dense. Les épaules et le bassin doivent former un grand rectangle avec un centre de gravité bas ; tout le corps est retourné vers le centre, et ce centre doit être très puissant pour que le danseur puisse tourner d'un bloc.

Anne Martina – La présence du bitume contribuerait donc à donner plus de puissance, plus de dynamisme, peut-être même plus de violence au geste chorégraphique ? Je trouvais la chorégraphie sur scène plus stylisée en effet.

Patricia Dolambi – Cela s'explique également par la formation des danseurs. Personnellement, j'ai trouvé le spectacle de 2017[1] un peu académique. Les danseurs sur scène avaient visiblement une formation classique, leur esthétique du geste était très codifiée. À l'écran, on voit que les danseurs maîtrisent la technique classique, mais ce sont avant tout des danseurs de danse jazz. C'est ce qui donne ce côté « roots », ce côté brut que je n'ai pas retrouvé sur scène. Le jazz et le hip-hop ont le même berceau, ils viennent de la rue. La danse jazz est plus naturelle parce qu'elle permet au danseur d'être au plus proche de son organicité en tant qu'être humain, plus proche du quotidien. Dans le spectacle scénique, la technicité du danseur était mise en avant ; dans le film, les danseurs ont une façon d'être en danse différente, ils sont au plus proche de leur nature. Le fait d'être en extérieur et de danser sur le bitume accentue ce phénomène. Avec mes élèves, lorsque nous avons travaillé ce passage, nous avons cherché à être au plus proche de cet état de danse et à oublier le plateau. C'était extrêmement difficile. Danser en baskets aide un peu, parce que cela oblige à appuyer davantage dans le sol. Quand tu danses pieds nus, la peau est en contact avec le sol et cette perception change toute ta posture. En baskets, tu as une autre sensation. Tu dois aller chercher le sol au travers de la basket et descendre ton centre de gravité. C'est encore plus vrai sur du bitume. C'est cet état de danse que j'attendais sur scène, mais je ne l'ai pas trouvé. C'était trop lisse, trop carré. Il y avait trop d'attention à la beauté du geste. Or, dans le film, ce qui prime, ce n'est pas le geste en lui-même, mais sa dynamique. C'est un être-ensemble différent.

1 Spectacle scénique présenté à la Seine Musicale du 12 octobre au 12 novembre 2017, à l'occasion des soixante ans de *West Side Story*, dans une mise en scène de Joey McKneely.

Anne Martina – La violence entre les deux gangs me semble en effet plus palpable dans le film. La séquence repose sur une gradation. La dimension plus ludique du début cède le pas à un antagonisme presque meurtrier, qu'exprime également la partition de Bernstein. Sur scène, la musique est la même, mais la violence semble plus esthétisée.

Patricia Dolambi – Oui. Dans le film, la haine entre les deux gangs transparaît dès la première confrontation, entre Bernardo et les *Jets*. Les *Jets* ont tous les jambes fléchies ; lui seul est debout. Nous avons un homme debout, seul face à un groupe : comme les moments plus ludiques qui précèdent et qui suivent, tout cela est très symbolique et humain en même temps. Nous voyons des hommes qui parlent au travers de leurs gestes. C'était moins le cas sur scène, il m'a semblé, où l'on voyait plus le danseur que le personnage.

Anne Martina – N'est-ce pas lié également au réalisme du décor urbain dans le film, qui contraste avec le rendu plus abstrait, plus suggestif du décor de scène ?

Patricia Dolambi – Oui, sans doute, mais ce n'est pas seulement le regard du spectateur qui en est affecté. La perception kinesthésique est également cruciale pour le danseur, qui travaille avec tout ce qui l'entoure : l'environnement visuel, bien sûr, mais également sonore et tactile. En extérieur, tu ressens le contact de l'air sur ta peau ; pendant le tournage, ils devaient également entendre les bruits de la ville. Le corps est là dans un espace riche, complexe, ouvert horizontalement et verticalement. Au théâtre, la perception kinesthésique est réduite et l'espace s'ouvre uniquement vers le public. D'où la tentation de la frontalité, à laquelle cédaient trop souvent les danseurs de la version scénique, j'ai trouvé. « Regardez, on danse pour vous », semblaient-ils nous dire, comme s'ils souhaitaient nous offrir en permanence le spectacle de leur technicité (somptueuse il est vrai). La caméra, quant à elle, va chercher des angles de vue variés qui visent à mettre en exergue la situation, plus que le spectacle de la danse. Regarde leur façon de marcher dans la scène d'ouverture. Sur scène, quand ils se quittent, ce sont des danseurs qui marchent ; dans le film, ce sont des hommes de la rue. Par contre, les poursuites étaient assez bien rendues sur scène, ce qui n'est pourtant pas évident. Dans le film, l'espace urbain prend une dimension labyrinthique grâce au montage, si bien qu'on pénètre nous aussi dans leur territoire. C'est impossible de susciter le même effet sur scène. Pour la course en elle-même, c'est différent. Mais là encore, je trouve la séquence filmique supérieure. Ce que j'adore, dans la chorégraphie et la mise en scène de 1961, c'est que la course a du sens. Ce n'est pas la même chose de courir après quelqu'un pour l'attraper ou pour le rattraper, ou de courir pour

s'échapper, ou encore pour sauter par-dessus un obstacle. À la scène, le sens donné à la course aurait pu être plus poussé, ce qui aurait permis aux danseurs d'habiter davantage la scène. Selon les raisons pour lesquelles tu cours, la posture de ton corps est différente, la gestion de ta gravité est différente, ton poids, ta façon de courir et la tonicité de ton regard sont différents. Dans le film, la course est habitée de multiples façons ; sur scène, beaucoup moins.

Anne Martina – Une telle diversité dans la manière d'incarner le mouvement n'est-elle pas impossible sur scène, où les danseurs sont limités par l'espace du plateau ?

Patricia Dolambi – C'est très difficile d'obtenir les mêmes effets, mais ce n'est pas impossible. Ce sont des professionnels. Il faut d'abord programmer ta façon d'être dans la course ; puis, dans un espace très réduit, il faut réussir à habiter, à incarner ta course. Évidemment, au cinéma, le montage, la multiplicité des prises de vue et l'espace dont les danseurs disposent facilitent les choses, mais tout de même, ce qui me frappe dans le film, c'est la vivacité. Ils courent, ils escaladent, ils sautent…

Anne Martina – Le paysage urbain n'aide-t-il pas les danseurs à habiter diversement leur mouvement ? Pour toutes les micro-scènes de poursuite, Robbins semble avoir volontairement sélectionné des lieux très différents, propices à de multiples explorations chorégraphiques : rues étroites, trottoirs sous échafaudages, terrains de basket, *no man's land*. Le cadrage des plans vient même souvent souligner la spécificité des lieux : en accentuant la fermeture ou l'ouverture du champ, les prises de vue donnent aux poursuites un sens accru. Tout cela est impossible sur scène.

Patricia Dolambi – Oui, mais le décor scénique aurait pu être traité différemment. On aurait pu envisager un espace autre, moins nu, moins plat. L'espace de danse, sur scène, n'était pas un espace habité, ou très peu. Lorsque j'ai travaillé ce morceau avec mes élèves, nous avons passé beaucoup de temps à réfléchir au sens à donner à ces poursuites. Pour les aider à programmer leur corps et à habiter la course, on a joué à l'épervier. L'idée était de les placer dans une situation connue, donc naturelle. Et ludique. L'espace était restreint, comme l'espace de plateau. Tout le monde avait un objectif : attraper quelqu'un (pour celui qui est au milieu) ou ne pas se faire attraper (pour les autres). On a d'abord joué tous ensemble, puis je leur ai demandé de le refaire, dans le souvenir, avec une personne invisible. Les danseurs partaient chacun à leur tour d'un coin de la salle et couraient en diagonale, avec un objectif que l'on essayait de deviner : « Il essaie de s'enfuir ! » « Il court pour attraper quelqu'un ». La course dansée

prend alors un sens. Ce qui est important, c'est que le corps se programme, s'accorde avant de bouger.

Anne Martina – Peut-on encore parler de chorégraphie ? Qu'est-ce qui distingue ces « courses dansées » du jeu de l'acteur qui court ?

Patricia Dolambi – L'aspect chorégraphique n'est pas que dans l'esthétique. Le fondement de la danse de Robbins, c'est le projet dynamique du geste. Si je saute, que veut dire mon saut ? La tension, la vitesse, la gestion de mon poids ne sont plus les mêmes selon le sens que je donne à ce geste ou à ce saut. La chorégraphie, c'est le choix d'une direction, d'une intensité dans le geste pour créer un effet qui a un sens particulier. J'appelle cela le projet dynamique. On le voit bien dans la scène du mambo, où ce qui importe n'est pas d'être ensemble. D'ailleurs, le moindre arrêt sur image révèle que rien n'est millimétré : les jambes, les bras ne sont pas au même niveau, ce n'est pas le corps de ballet de l'opéra de Paris. Par contre, ce qui est important, c'est que tous partagent la même énergie. Ce sont des mouvements qui partent de l'intérieur des danseurs, qui jaillissent vers l'extérieur, avec un centre très puissant et une façon d'être dans le sol qui est très importante. Pour moi, c'est l'essence même du geste dans *West Side Story*. C'est cela que j'attends quand je vais le voir sur scène, et non pas de me dire « Ah, que c'est beau ! ». Le spectacle de la Seine Musicale, je l'ai trouvé très beau, mais trop propre, trop léché. À trop esthétiser le geste, on perdait l'intensité, l'énergie du geste. Mais peut-être cela répondait-il aux attentes du public. Et puis le code du théâtre est différent. Il faut montrer qu'on est excellent.

Anne Martina – Surtout pour un spectacle iconique comme *West Side Story*, je suppose. Sais-tu si la chorégraphie et la mise en scène originales de 1957 avaient ce côté naturel, presque brut que tu as décrit à propos du film, ou si les gestes étaient plus esthétisés, comme dans la version scénique que nous avons vue ?

Patricia Dolambi – À mon sens, Robbins reproduit dans le film ce qu'il avait déjà trouvé sur scène, mais il le fait dans un cadre et avec des espaces différents. Ce qui reste mystérieux surtout, c'est comment Robbins est parvenu à créer quelque chose qui fait jazz, alors qu'il a une formation classique, qu'il *est* classique. Pour moi, il a tout compris. Ce qui fait jazz, c'est l'intention et la dynamique. C'est quelque chose, je crois, que nous avons un peu perdu.

Anne Martina – Dans un épisode de 1958 d'une célèbre émission de télévision américaine, le Ed Sullivan Show, la troupe du spectacle de Broadway était venue jouer le numéro « Cool ». Certes, il s'agit d'un enregistrement pour la télévision mais l'on peut imaginer qu'il s'agissait d'une version très proche de l'original. J'aimerais que tu me dises ce que tu en penses.

Patricia Dolambi – Le numéro est formidable, et cela confirme ce que je te disais tout à l'heure, à savoir que Robbins fait dans le film ce qu'il avait déjà trouvé sur scène. Dans la version télévisée de 1958, on retrouve cette façon d'être en danse propre à *West Side Story*, cette façon vraiment jazz de danser que Robbins est parvenu à concevoir et à populariser, alors même qu'il venait du ballet classique. Bien sûr, ce n'est pas lui qui l'a inventée. Jack Cole, autre grand chorégraphe américain, l'a beaucoup influencé. Patricia Karagozian, qui a dansé *West Side Story* sur scène et que j'avais interviewée dans le cadre d'un travail de recherche, m'a confirmé que les postures en dedans, les pliés bas, les façons de glisser, de sauter typiques de la danse jazz que l'on trouve dans *West Side Story*, tout cela vient de Cole, qui dans les années 40 et 50 signe la chorégraphie de nombreuses comédies musicales, à Broadway et à Hollywood. Robbins les connaît très bien. En 1948, m'a-t-elle dit, il assiste à presque toutes les représentations de *Magdalena*, chorégraphié par Cole, où il puise beaucoup d'idées. On les retrouve dans « Cool », plus encore que dans la séquence d'ouverture. C'est assez logique d'ailleurs, puisque les danseurs sont là dans un espace confiné (dans le film du moins) et que le numéro repose sur une idée dramatique forte : la nécessité de restreindre son énergie, de la renfermer, alors même que les personnages sont prêts à exploser. C'est cela « Cool » : il faut que tout rentre. Là encore, on est au cœur du projet chorégraphique de Robbins. Comment gérer son énergie ? C'est la question que pose explicitement le numéro ; et c'est la question que doit se poser tout danseur qui aborde l'œuvre dans son ensemble. Quelle est la dynamique ? Comment la gérer ? C'est pour cela que j'insiste : si l'on passe à côté de la dynamique du geste, me semble-t-il, on passe à côté de *West Side Story*.

Anne Martina – C'est cela, dirais-tu, qui porte le sens du numéro ? Dans le prologue, la dynamique est centripète car il s'agit de conquérir l'espace : il faut se dégager et se répandre, donc le corps jaillit, horizontalement et verticalement. Dans « Cool », la dynamique serait plus centrifuge : il faut se contrôler, même si parfois l'énergie explose.

Patricia Dolambi – Elle explose comme une pulsion. C'est toute la difficulté de ce numéro : il faut penser les gestes qui jaillissent comme de la pulsion, et en même temps contrôler, aspirer de l'intérieur. Ce qui unit le prologue et « Cool », au-delà des

différences, c'est leur esthétique typiquement jazz. En danse jazz, tout est impacté. Ce sont des trajets directs. Le bras va directement à son trajet. C'est un impact. « Pow ! », comme disent les personnages dans « Cool ». La pulsion jaillit : « Pow ! ». C'est impacté, ce n'est pas impulsé. Impacté, c'est jazz. Impulsé, c'est plus contemporain, ou plus moderne comme on disait à l'époque. D'où l'expression « modern-jazz ». Ce qui est caractéristique également, c'est la façon d'être ensemble, de jouer le groupe. Un critique appelait cela : « la force du collectif ». Le terme « collectif » est très intéressant et très pertinent. Ce n'est pas une danse de groupe. On est loin du corps de ballet académique, où tout le monde doit danser à l'identique, ce que malheureusement, me semble-t-il, l'on retrouvait presque dans le spectacle de la Seine Musicale, où l'on voyait qu'ils avaient tous eu la même formation. Dans le film et dans la version de 1958, au contraire, toute la singularité des danseurs apparaît : chacun a sa manière de faire le mouvement, et c'est cela qui est mis en avant. La seule chose qui importe, c'est l'impact. La manière qu'ils adoptent pour produire l'impact (la hauteur du bras par exemple) est presque secondaire.

Anne Martina – L'énergie du mouvement est plus importante que l'exactitude du geste ?

Patricia Dolambi – Oui. Je ne dis pas que le spectacle scénique ne dégageait aucune énergie. Il y avait de l'énergie, bien sûr, mais cela manquait d'impact. Le spectateur doit sentir que ça bout à l'intérieur.

Anne Martina – Concrètement, comment fait le danseur pour obtenir cet impact dont tu parles ?

Patricia Dolambi – Cela commence par la tête. Le danseur doit se poser plein de questions : qu'est-ce que c'est que des mouvements saccadés ? Comment se regrouper d'un geste ? Un impact, c'est quoi ? Ça passe souvent par des contrastes. C'est quoi, l'inverse d'impacter ? Tu essaies, tu t'entraînes, tu évalues les différences. Regarde le geste de mon bras. Mon geste part de mon sternum et va vers l'avant. Où est-ce que je mets l'accélération, au début ou à la fin ? Ce n'est pas pareil. Pour impacter, l'accélération doit commencer dès le début et le geste doit rester tendu jusqu'à la fin ; il faut que ça fouette.

Anne Martina – Comment travailles-tu ce type de mouvement avec tes élèves ? Comment est-ce que tu l'enseignes ?

Patricia Dolambi – Je tiens d'abord à préciser que mes élèves n'ont pas un tel niveau professionnel ! Pour essayer de leur faire comprendre le geste et les aider à le reproduire, je joue avec leur imaginaire. Imaginons un ballon qui vole. Avec mon doigt, j'essaie de le percer ; puis je me contente de le pousser. La tonicité n'est pas la même ; les muscles posturaux que je sollicite ne sont pas les mêmes. Si tu demandes à quelqu'un de reproduire un geste que tu lui montres, cela ne va pas fonctionner, parce que seuls les muscles superficiels seront convoqués. Le geste ne pourra donc pas être le même. Les muscles posturaux sont très liés à l'émotion ressentie, c'est pour cela qu'il faut en permanence être dans l'imaginaire, se représenter les choses pour *incarner* le geste. Dans « Cool », tout doit venir des tripes. Cela se voit ; cela s'entend jusque dans leur façon de chanter. On se demande d'ailleurs comment ils parviennent à produire la moindre note après une chorégraphie aussi physique. Ce ne sont pas des sons de gorge, ni même de poitrine, ça vient des tripes. Comme leurs gestes.

Anne Martina – Tu parlais tout à l'heure de la force du collectif. Je la trouve presque plus prononcée dans la version de 1958 que dans celle du film. Ce qui me frappe notamment, c'est la tenue vestimentaire des filles. Dans la mise en scène de « Cool » de 1958, elles portent un pantalon et des baskets, comme les garçons, alors que dans le film de 1961, les différences genrées sont très marquées. Les copines des *Jets* ont toute une jupe assez courte, un haut moulant et des talons, qui limitent l'énergie et l'envergure de leurs mouvements. Cet aspect était encore plus exacerbé dans la production de la Seine Musicale. J'avoue que cette sexualisation des corps féminins, et la symbolique implicite portée par le contraste garçons-filles, me gênent, d'autant que le sexisme des *Jets* est rarement mis à distance par le récit.

Patricia Dolambi – C'est vrai, même si dans le film ce contraste a un intérêt, qui est de nous permettre de mieux identifier, et de mieux comprendre, le personnage d'Anybodys. Dans la version de 1958, on la distingue à peine ; on parvient seulement à l'identifier grâce à son petit haut un peu plus court. En la distinguant plus nettement du groupe des filles, le film lui donne une présence accrue. Anybodys veut appartenir au clan des garçons, elle adopte leurs gestes et leurs postures. Son androgynie se donne donc doublement à lire, dans sa tenue vestimentaire et dans sa chorégraphie. Les deux sont d'ailleurs liées, dans la mesure où une contrainte vestimentaire forte (une jupe serrée, des talons hauts) change la couleur de la danse en obligeant les danseurs à modifier leur posture. Lorsqu'on danse en talons, il faut répartir tout son poids sur l'avant du pied. C'est ce que font les danseuses ici, et c'est aussi pour cette raison qu'elles sont moins pliées. Cela leur donne un aspect plus érigé, plus élégant, donc plus

symboliquement féminin. Tu remarqueras néanmoins que malgré ces contraintes, elles parviennent souvent à faire presque comme les garçons, à lever presque aussi haut les jambes et à donner une intensité à leurs gestes qui est très forte. Je dirais que la couleur est différente, mais la dynamique est la même. En baskets, les contraintes, comme on l'a déjà dit, sont différentes. Elles sont d'autant moins fortes dans la séquence de 1958 que les danseuses ne portent visiblement pas de baskets traditionnelles. Regarde comme cette danseuse monte tranquillement sur la demi-pointe, avec un pied complètement délié ; la semelle est donc moins épaisse que dans des baskets classiques. Elle doit avoir des chaussures spéciales faites pour la scène, comme en ont les danseurs de hip-hop qui se produisent aujourd'hui et qui ont besoin de baskets avec une faible adhérence au sol afin de pouvoir glisser plus facilement.

Anne Martina – Des trois versions de « Cool » que nous avons vues, la version originale de Broadway telle qu'elle a été reprise pour la télévision en 1958, la version filmique de 1961, et la version scénique de 2017, laquelle préfères-tu ?

Patricia Dolambi – J'aime beaucoup la version de 1958 que tu m'as montrée, pour son côté brut, énergique et non léché, mais c'est le film que je préfère. Il y a dans tous les gestes une tension, une énergie et une dynamique très fortes et très particulières, qui vient à la fois des danseurs et de leur environnement : la lumière tamisée et l'espace confiné du garage accentuent l'effet de claustration et la violence de la séquence. La tension est d'autant plus forte que le contexte du numéro est dramatique. Dans la version scénique, « Cool » est joué dans le premier acte ; dans le film, la séquence a lieu juste après la mort de Riff et de Bernardo, ce qui donne une tout autre tonalité.

Anne Martina – Contrôler son énergie, maîtriser ses pulsions devient en effet une question de vie et de mort… Patricia, merci beaucoup d'avoir partagé tes réflexions avec nous !

LE *TWANG*, LE *BELT* ET LES HARMONIQUES DE LA VOIX

Entretien avec Mark Marian

À la fois artiste de comédie musicale et coach vocal formé à la pédagogie de l'école Richard Cross, Mark Marian est spécialiste de technique vocale et d'interprétation. Tout en évoquant sa carrière variée, il nous parle des évolutions du placement de la voix, entre l'opéra, la comédie musicale classique de l'âge d'or, et la comédie musicale contemporaine.

Cet entretien s'est déroulé à Paris, le 3 mai 2017.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — Comment en es-tu venu à chanter et enseigner la comédie musicale anglo-saxonne en France ?

Mark Marian — En plusieurs étapes. J'étais intéressé par la musique dès l'enfance mais mes parents n'y étaient pas favorables (ce qui rend tout de suite plus fort !). J'ai commencé le piano à l'insu de mon père, pour intégrer ensuite une section lettres-musique au lycée. J'ai pris des cours de théâtre, chanté dans une chorale – j'étais très à l'aise sur scène, puisque j'avais aussi l'habitude de participer à des groupes de chant et de danse traditionnels polonais, de par mes origines.

Après le lycée, je suis parti un an aux États-Unis, où je me suis retrouvé au fin fond du New Hampshire dans une cabane en bois chauffée au poêle… en plein milieu d'une communauté d'artistes ! Un professeur de chant, Peggy Johnson, m'a inscrit à un *talent show* (où l'on m'a demandé d'interpréter des titres d'Édith Piaf et de *Starmania*), et à l'issue du spectacle on m'a proposé d'auditionner pour le rôle de Rolfe dans une mise en scène locale de *The Sound of Music*[1], que j'ai obtenu. Ça a été ma première expérience du travail à l'américaine, où tout est dans la précision et rien n'est laissé au hasard : on a passé trois jours sur la prononciation anglaise de « *lieutenant* » qui me donnait du mal ! Cette expérience a débouché sur des cours de chants très intensifs à l'université. Mon professeur, Dr. Daniel Perkins, m'a notamment fait travailler « Being Alive » de *Company*[2] et « Why God Why ? » de *Miss Saigon*[3]. Il m'a mis dans un bus

1 *The Sound of Music*, musique de Richard Rodgers, paroles d'Oscar Hammerstein II, livret de Howard Lindsay et Russel Crouse, 1959, d'après les mémoires de Maria von Trapp.

2 *Company*, paroles et musique de Stephen Sondheim, livret de George Furth, 1970.

3 *Miss Saigon*, musique de Claude-Michel Schönberg et Alain Boublil, paroles de Richard Maltby Jr., 1989, d'après *Madame Butterfly* de Giacomo Puccini.

pour New York en m'assurant qu'il était essentiel que je voie ces spectacles sur scène, et à partir de là, j'ai découvert tout le champ de la comédie musicale. Le reste de ma formation vocale a suivi plus tard, après mon retour en France.

Anne Martina — Tu parles de rigueur à l'américaine, trouves-tu que les Français ont une approche moins précise dans la comédie musicale ?

Mark Marian — Je ne veux pas englober tout le monde, mais les contraintes de production rendent parfois inévitable une part d'improvisation ; on monte sur scène en croisant les doigts. J'ai souvenir d'avoir travaillé à Paris sur un spectacle intitulé *Dog and Cat Story* (trame de *West Side Story*, chansons de Michael Jackson) : le budget n'autorisait que deux semaines de répétition pour régler le chant, la chorégraphie, le jeu et la mise en place. Nous n'avons pu voir les musiciens que deux fois !

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — Est-ce que ce n'est pas le cas aussi à l'opéra : les musiciens arrivent tardivement ?

Mark Marian — À l'opéra, les musiciens arrivent la dernière semaine, mais la différence, c'est que les chanteurs connaissent leurs contrats deux ou trois ans à l'avance, ce qui leur permet de travailler toute la partition très en amont en piano-voix. Là aussi, c'est « à l'américaine », tout est hyper-organisé, avec des répétitions dirigées par le metteur en scène au cours desquelles le chef d'orchestre n'intervient pas, et séparément des filages orchestre où le metteur en scène prend des notes sans intervenir. La première fois que j'ai travaillé comme figurant dans un spectacle à l'opéra, venant du monde de la comédie musicale, j'ai été très surpris. En comédie musicale, chacun est responsable de ses entrées et sorties. À l'opéra, il y a une personne à jardin et une autre à cour pour donner les tops, qui doivent être impérativement respectés quoiqu'il arrive. Tout est très codifié et protocolaire ; c'est un système différent mais qui a fait ses preuves, notamment vu l'énorme machinerie et les décors dangereux de l'opéra.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — Tu travailles parfois à l'opéra Bastille, c'est bien ça ?

Mark Marian — Oui, et j'ai fait deux productions au Palais Garnier. Ce sont de petites interventions de comédien, je ne chante pas car ce n'est pas autorisé pour les personnes qui ne font pas partie de l'opéra de Paris ni du chœur surnuméraire, même lorsqu'ils ont des qualifications ; les syndicats sont très vigilants.

Anne Martina — Quel est ton contrat, dans ce cas ?

Mark Marian — Pas un contrat de chanteur. Selon les cas on peut avoir un contrat de figurant, d'acrobate, de danseur, de comédien ou de comédien-mime. La seule fois où un metteur en scène a essayé de nous faire chanter, cela a soulevé un tollé. Laurent Pelly, habitué à la comédie musicale, avait choisi des acteurs de comédie musicale pour la figuration de *La Fille du régiment*[4] : il a voulu nous faire intégrer le chœur pour introduire plus de jeu dans le chœur, mais cela n'a pas été autorisé. Nous n'avions pas non plus le droit de faire semblant de chanter, pour ne pas donner de fausse impression.

Anne Martina — Et lorsque tu chantes dans des comédies musicales, c'est plutôt en français ou en anglais ?

Mark Marian — En dehors de quelques productions spécifiques, plutôt en français ; par exemple quand j'ai chanté le rôle de Fyedka pour la tournée de *Fiddler on the Roof*/*Un Violon sur le toit*[5], c'était une adaptation en langue française. Selon les cas, l'adaptation est de qualité variable, mais un bel exemple est celle de *Cabaret*[6] : Éric Taraud a fait un travail superbe sur les paroles ; je fais d'ailleurs souvent travailler mes élèves sur cette œuvre pour leurs auditions, ce sont des chansons très intéressantes par leurs personnages, leur technicité. On demande de plus en plus aux artistes d'auditionner en langue française pour entendre comment la voix sonne en français, car il peut y avoir des différences : pas exactement le même timbre, nasalité qui apparaît dans une langue et pas dans l'autre, par exemple.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — Qu'entends-tu par « nasalité » ? Le français a plus de voyelles nasales que l'anglais, mais on dit toujours que « chanter Broadway », c'est chanter nasal.

4 *La Fille du régiment*, opéra-comique de Gaetano Donizetti, livret de Jules-Henri Vernoy de Saint-Georges et Jean-François Bayard, 1840. La mise en scène de Laurent Pelly avec Natalie Dessay, Juan Diego Flores et Felicity Lott a été créée à Covent Garden en 2007 avant de tourner notamment à Vienne, New York, San Francisco et Paris.

5 *Fiddler on the Roof*, musique de Jerry Bock, paroles de Sheldon Harnick, livret de Joseph Stein, 1964. Adaptation française de Stéphane Laporte.

6 *Cabaret*, musique de John Kander, paroles de Fred Ebb, livret de Joe Masteroff, 1966, d'après *I Am a Camera* de John van Druten, pièce elle-même adaptée des *Berlin Stories* de Christopher Isherwood. Adaptation française de Jacques Collard (livret) et Éric Taraud (paroles).

Mark Marian — À Broadway, la technique du *twang* s'impose de plus en plus. Si vous travaillez le *twang* avec un spécialiste, on vous fait parler comme Droopy pendant une demi-heure, le but étant de placer un filet d'air dans le nez pour enlever un peu de pression laryngée et obtenir ce son particulier, nasal mais pas trop. Ce travail permet ensuite d'accéder au *belting*, cette technique américaine qu'on identifie avec la nouvelle comédie musicale anglo-saxonne.

Anne Martina — Y compris en France ?

Mark Marian — En France, les jeunes ont de plus en plus envie de ça. Les Américains le disent bien : le *belting* est un cri maîtrisé. Aujourd'hui, pour la comédie musicale on utilise généralement une tessiture vocale en poitrine : la technique du *belting* permet d'atteindre quelques notes supplémentaires au-dessus, avec beaucoup de puissance, sans jamais passer en voix de tête. Cela donne une couleur cuivrée, en médium-aigu, sans chercher à élargir les résonateurs : Christina Aguilera est la représentante du *belting*, qu'elle a utilisé à la fois en pop et dans la comédie musicale *Burlesque*[7]. « Defying Gravity », dans *Wicked*[8], par exemple, est une chanson qui s'aborde en *belting*. C'est un son qui se distingue complètement d'une comédie musicale plus ancienne, celle qu'on peut identifier à Julie Andrews, à une époque où la comédie musicale se chantait en voix mixte et en voix de tête, mais pas en voix de poitrine, ou alors en forme allégée. Ce sont les années 1970 qui ont modifié ça.

J'ai beaucoup d'élèves qui hésitent entre le lyrique et la comédie musicale contemporaine, mais je sais par expérience qu'à de rares exceptions près, il est quasiment impossible de chanter professionnellement les deux à la fois, surtout pour les femmes. Une convention historique veut que les femmes chantent principalement en voix de tête, les hommes en voix de poitrine. Cela perdure à l'opéra, où à part quelques contraltos qui vont chercher des notes très graves en poitrine, les femmes chantent uniquement en voix de tête. Pour chanter la comédie musicale contemporaine en arrivant du lyrique, il faut bien un an de travail physique intensif pour muscler les cordes vocales. Ce n'est pas du tout comme en danse, où l'on peut se dire qu'une base classique servira d'appui plus tard à un travail contemporain. En chant, les placements ne sont pas les mêmes : la voix de tête suppose une bascule laryngée dont on n'a pas besoin en poitrine, et la technique moderne travaille sur le muscle des cordes vocales

7 *Burlesque*, film musical écrit et réalisé par Steve Antin, avec Cher et Christina Aguilera, De Line Picture, 2010.

8 *Wicked: The Untold Story of the Witches of Oz*, musique et paroles de Stephen Schwartz, livret de Winnie Holman, 2003, d'après un roman de Gregory Maguire.

alors que la voix de tête (donc lyrique, pour les femmes) travaille uniquement sur le ligament. Natalie Dessay, pourtant arrivée au sommet de son art en lyrique, a eu l'énorme courage de se remettre en formation pour apprendre à chanter du jazz. Il lui a fallu plusieurs années pour réussir son pari, mais c'est un choix qui lui a aussi permis de mettre en valeur son grand talent de comédienne, notamment dans *Passion*[9], au Châtelet.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — Mais tu disais que, pour les hommes, la question se pose différemment ? J'ai vu par exemple Paul Szot, baryton d'opéra, dans *South Pacific*[10] au Lincoln Center, et, en tant que spectatrice, ses origines lyriques ne m'ont absolument pas parues en contradiction avec le rôle (pour lequel il a d'ailleurs eu un Tony).

Mark Marian — Effectivement. Pour les hommes, on a moins ce problème de bascule, puisque tant qu'on travaille en voix de poitrine, on travaille de toute façon le muscle des cordes vocales. La différence tient davantage au travail des ouvertures, notamment l'ouverture du pharynx qui n'est pas la même en lyrique et en moderne. Comme on chante sans micro à l'opéra, la contrainte de passer par-dessus un orchestre de quatre-vingt musiciens exige d'ouvrir tous les espaces de résonances : pharynx, bouche, positionnement des lèvres pour amplifier les harmoniques de la voix… Il faut trouver le « singing formant », cette fréquence hertzienne précise à laquelle la voix humaine se distingue de tous les instruments de l'orchestre (le plus proche étant le violoncelle, auquel il faut faire particulièrement attention). Ceci permet de chanter, même en *pianissimo*, avec un orchestre. C'est une préoccupation primordiale en lyrique mais pas en comédie musicale, où le chanteur a à sa disposition un autre instrument, le micro.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — Ce qui permet à la comédie musicale de travailler largement l'éventail entre le parlé et le chanté ?

Mark Marian — Exactement. Le micro permet de faire du « détimbré », c'est-à-dire de mettre beaucoup d'air dans la voix pour apporter de l'émotion, de la confidentialité, du souffle. Il autorise des nuances fines entre le parlé et le chanté, des changements de registre.

9 *Passion*, musique et paroles de Stephen Sondheim, livret de James Lapine, 1994, d'après le film d'Ettore Scola *Passion d'amour*. Natalie Dessay a chanté dans la mise en scène de Fanny Ardant, en 2016, au Théâtre du Châtelet.

10 *South Pacific*, musique de Richard Rodgers, paroles d'Oscar Hammerstein II, livret de Hammerstein et Joshua Logan, 1949, d'après un ouvrage de James A. Michener.

Anne Martina — Donc tu fais travailler tes chanteurs directement avec un micro ?

Mark Marian — Lorsque leur ambition professionnelle a trait au répertoire moderne, oui : il est important d'intégrer d'emblée ce « résonateur supplémentaire », qui vient s'ajouter aux quatre que nous avons dans le corps : le pharynx, l'espace buccal, les lèvres et les fosses nasales. En répétition, le travail avec l'ingénieur son sur les balances et l'amplitude de la réverbération est très important. Cela se règle au millimètre près. C'est aussi vrai quand on enregistre un album, d'ailleurs – ce qui est au centre des préoccupations de la comédie musicale « à la française ».

Anne Martina — Qu'entends-tu par « comédie musicale à la française » ?

Mark Marian — C'est davantage un album mis en scène ou un « *show* musical » qu'une comédie musicale selon la tradition anglo-saxonne. Cela a beaucoup de succès, et donne du travail à beaucoup d'artistes, mais l'exercice est un peu différent : on pense d'abord à vendre des titres. Les chanteurs sont choisis pour leur voix plus que pour leur capacité à jouer. Le livret est souvent moins travaillé que la composition musicale.

Anne Martina — Ce que tu décris ressemble à la comédie musicale telle qu'elle était conçue aux États-Unis jusqu'aux années 1930, avant la célèbre théorisation de l'« intégration » du chant et de la danse à l'histoire par Rodgers et Hammerstein. Le librettiste était d'ailleurs bien moins protégé légalement que le compositeur. Est-ce qu'aujourd'hui, en France, c'est aussi une question de formation ?

Mark Marian — Oui. Aux États-Unis, la danse et le chant font partie des cours obligatoires à valider pour être acteur de théâtre ou de cinéma… ce qui explique qu'on peut découvrir des artistes qu'on connaissait à l'écran soudain dans la comédie musicale, par exemple Catherine Zeta-Jones dans *A Little Night Music*[11], ou Glenn Close dans *Sunset Boulevard*[12]. En France on n'a pas la même tradition, mais de vraies écoles pluridisciplinaires sont en train de se mettre en place, notamment l'ECM à Paris.

Anne Martina — Comment peut-on aider l'artiste à gérer à la fois le chant et la danse ?

11 *A Little Night Music*, musique et paroles de Stephen Sondheim, livret de Hugh Wheeler, 1973, d'après le film *Sourires d'une nuit d'été* d'Ingmar Bergman.

12 *Sunset Boulevard*, musique de Andrew Lloyd Webber, paroles et livret de Don Black et Christopher Hampton, 1991, d'après le film de Billy Wilder du même titre.

Mark Marian — En tant que coach, je travaille en amont avec la chorégraphe pour regarder sur quelles syllabes vont tomber les pas qu'elle propose et je lui précise les endroits qui vont être particulièrement exigeants en termes de souffle. Je consulte d'ailleurs aussi la costumière, pour travailler les contraintes du costume : s'il y a un corset, par exemple, il faut qu'il soit très souple. La posture exigée de l'acteur par son personnage et son costume peuvent être déterminantes pour le chant : c'était par exemple le cas pour Garou dans *Notre Dame de Paris*[13], il a dû travailler avec un coach pour apprendre à chanter dans la position particulière du bossu.

Anne Martina — Et au cinéma, comment cela se passe-t-il pour le chant ?

Mark Marian — Les scènes chantées sont enregistrées en studio, en général avant de tourner le film, pour avoir les bandes musicales lors du tournage et effectuer un *lip-synch* parfaitement en adéquation avec les titres enregistrés. Il y a des exceptions, comme le récent film des *Misérables*[14], où les scènes chantées ont été enregistrées en prise directe, sans réverbération, ce qui donne au chant un aspect très quotidien. Mais en général le chant se fait en studio, où d'ailleurs on n'est pas obligé de tout faire en une fois du début à la fin ! On commence souvent par faire trois prises complètes, pour garder le meilleur de chacune en faisant une sorte de patchwork. La technologie est extraordinaire (elle peut même permettre à l'occasion de corriger une note s'il le faut !)

Anne Martina — As-tu déjà travaillé avec des enfants ? Je pose la question car il y en a beaucoup dans les comédies musicales anglo-saxonnes contemporaines.

Mark Marian — J'ai préparé quelques enfants notamment pour les auditions du *Roi Lion*. Mais en France, les productions hésitent beaucoup à distribuer des enfants car la loi ne leur autorise que peu de représentations par semaine, ce qui suppose une triple ou quadruple distribution. On privilégie en général de jeunes adultes avec des voix d'enfants.

Avant la mue, il faut donner les empreintes du geste vocal (bons réflexes de soutien, bon accolement des cordes vocales), sans pour autant aller trop loin. La croissance

13 *Notre Dame de Paris*, musique de Richard Cocciante, paroles et livret de Luc Plamondon, 1998, d'après l'œuvre de Victor Hugo.

14 *Les Misérables*, musique de Claude-Michel Schönberg et Alain Boublil, paroles de Jean-Marc Natel (en français) et de Herbert Kretzmer (en anglais), 1980, d'après l'œuvre de Victor Hugo. Le film dont il est question ici a été réalisé en par Tom Hooper, avec Huck Jackman, Russel Crowe, Anne Hathaway et Amanda Seyfried (Working Title & Cameron Mackintosh Ltd, 2012).

du larynx n'étant pas finie, il faut rester très précautionneux pour ne rien abîmer. Un phénomène inquiétant, depuis l'envol des émissions de téléréalité comme *The Voice* ou *Star Academy*, est que la mue peut avoir lieu plus tôt : les petites filles chantent à longueur de journée ce qu'elles entendent dans ces émissions ; or ce sont plutôt des chansons où l'on « pousse » la voix. On se retrouve alors avec des fillettes de sept ou huit ans qui ont un muscle vocal déjà très développé. Et comme cela suscite l'admiration des adultes, elles continuent, mais on a peur des conséquences plus tard.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — Alors que dans *Fun Home*[15], par exemple, où le rôle de la narratrice enfant a récemment été incarnée par de jeunes actrices extraordinaires, elles chantaient plutôt avec des voix très aiguës…

Mark Marian — À ce moment-là, on utilise leur tessiture d'enfant. Même chose pour *Les Choristes*[16], par exemple : on respecte le larynx sans faire « poitriner » les notes avant que le muscle autour de la corde vocale ne se soit naturellement développé.

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — À titre personnel, as-tu des voix préférées ?

Mark Marian — Je suis un fan invétéré de Liza Minelli et de Bette Middler. J'aime bien les voix légèrement cassées, en fait !

Anne Martina — Puisque tu parles de Liza, par curiosité : que penses-tu de Judy Garland ?

Mark Marian — C'est une artiste extraordinaire, qui s'est perdue. Elle a commencé jeune et elle a été enveloppée par un système hollywoodien très dur avec les comédiens. Mais sa voix était à la fois exceptionnelle et complètement atypique : elle avait un spectre résonantiel élargi, qui lui permettait de chanter en poitrine mais sans *belting*. Cela donne un son plein d'harmoniques médium-graves, qui va presque vers le *blues*.

Anne Martina — Pour conclure cet entretien, peux-tu nous résumer les différentes facettes de ton travail de coach vocal ?

15 *Fun* Home, musique de Lisa Kron, livret et paroles de Jeanine Tesori, 2013, d'après le roman graphique d'Alison Bechdel.

16 *Les Choristes*, film de Christophe Barratier, avec une musique de Bruno Coulais (Pathé Films, 2004), a été adapté en spectacle scénique musical par son réalisateur en 2017.

Mark Marian — Si un artiste vient me voir pour préparer un rôle de comédie musicale, je pars du personnage pour essayer de trouver, avec le chanteur, *la voix de ce personnage*. On travaille aussi les codes attendus, surtout s'il s'agit d'une audition : par exemple dans la comédie musicale anglo-saxonne, en fin de phrase, on a l'habitude de tenir la note bien droite et de ne déclencher le vibrato que sur les deux dernières secondes, ce qui crée un bel effet de clôture, une mise en valeur. En revanche, quand un chanteur me consulte pour enregistrer son propre disque, je pars du brut, de la voix telle qu'elle est avec ses défauts, en cherchant ce qu'elle peut avoir d'intéressant, en prenant en compte le marché du disque actuel. Les défauts peuvent être pertinents car ils rendent la voix reconnaissable, mais mon rôle est de m'assurer que, tout en gardant les spécificités qui peuvent faire l'identité vocale de tel ou tel chanteur, le geste vocal lui-même soit sain. Enfin, il arrive que des artistes viennent me voir ponctuellement pour une problématique extrêmement précise, parfois même telle note qu'ils sentent trop faible dans telle chanson, juste avant un spectacle !

Julie Vatain-Corfdir — Merci infiniment, Mark, de ce témoignage généreux et précis !

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DÉJÀ PARUS

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