

# Analysis of the film genre – musical film

[Economics](#), [Money](#)



The musical film has always held a special place for me. From my time as a drama student in high school, my eyes have been opened to the amazing world of the musical and especially the musical film. The musical film is a film genre in which the characters sing songs that are integrated into the overall story. Since musicals first began in theaters, musical films usually contain similar elements. These elements often simulate that there is a live audience watching. In a sense, the film viewers become the audience members, at a theater production, as the actor performs directly to them.

Due to the popularity of musicals in the theater, the style was quickly brought over into film. In 1927, the musical film genre began with the accompaniment of the first film talkie, *The Jazz Singer*. While popularity for this genre has fluctuated over the years, it nevertheless has succeeded in becoming a staple in films. Throughout this paper, I will explore what is a film in the musical genre and why it has such a lasting effect through the examination of three considered, classic musical films of their eras. The three films that will be examined are *Singin' in the Rain*, *Grease*, and *Rent*.

These three movies are considered some of the top musicals of their time. *Singin' in the Rain* is a 1952 musical comedy film starring Gene Kelly, Donald O'Connor and Debbie Reynolds. This film is a comic portrayal of Hollywood's transition from silent films to talkies in the late 1920s. It is now frequently described by critics as one of the best musicals ever, and it continually tops on the AFI's 100 Years of Musicals list. Next, *Grease* is a 1978 musical film starring John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John as two students in a 1950s high school.

This is a story of the trials and tribulations of the teenagers of that era. Grease was considered as one of the best films of 1978. Lastly, Rent is a 2005 musical drama film about the depictions of the lives of several Bohemians squatting in the East Village of New York City from 1989 to 1990 and their struggles with sexual preference, drugs, and AIDS. The film was nominated for a number of awards, including a GLAAD Media Award for Best Picture Musical/Comedy. They may seem quite different on the surface; however, the similarities they do have in common are mainly due to the genre they share.

This is shown by the use of music, production design, and film techniques. The use of music is a key to determining if a film is in the musical genre. Not only are songs used to further the story along in a musical, but they also have the ability to put the audience in the emotional state of the character singing. Song has always been used as a good conductor for emotional understanding. For example, during the song "You Were Meant for Me" in *Singin' in the Rain*, Don Lockwood is able to confess his love to Kathy Selden in a way that feels magical and shows a connection between the two would be lovers.

Also, the song "There Are Worse Things I Could Do" in *Grease* is able to betray the emotional depth of the character Rizzo's fear, shame, and anger. At the time this film came out, topics such as teen pregnancy were not generally presented in films. By having this character sing her issue, the audiences, who may have dismissed her outright for her actions, are able to sympathize with her plight. Moreover, in *Rent*, the song "I'll Cover You" by

Angel and Collins allow the viewer to get caught up in this young couple's relationship without having to worry or even consider that this is a gay couple.

Therefore, it is obvious that the power of song is one of greatest attributes that the musical genre has to offer. Music has a tendency to touch a person more than mere words, which might be the reason why musicals do, too. Another item that films in the musical genre share in common is production design. Production design is the creation and organization of the physical world surrounding a film by the use of lighting, staging, and set design. Musicals share many similarities in their production design. For instance, many musicals from the past and present use elaborate production numbers.

A production number is a specialty routine, usually performed by the entire cast consisting of musicians, singers, and dancers of a musical with the use of grand set pieces. All the films being discussed here have, at least, one production number in them. *Singin' in the Rain* has Gene Kelly's legendary performance in the rain. The ending of *Grease* features a carnival with several song and dance numbers. The beginning of *Rent* showcases a beautiful New York block back lot, surrounded with flaming debris. Also, since musicals had their start in the theaters, many lighting choices have theater-like qualities, such as the spotlight.

All three films use a spotlight to highlight their actors. *Rent* and *Singin' in the Rain*, use it to emphasize the theater and movie qualities of their film; while *Grease* uses the spotlight to portray a beginning of a dream sequence. Many musicals, even the grittier ones, have a sense of grandeur to them that can

be seen in the production design. One can say grandeur has always been a calling card for musicals. Once musicals made the transition to film, a number of film techniques have been used repeatedly. First of all, many musicals use the technique of creating lines of movement from background to foreground to foster an illusion of depth.

Singin' in the Rain presents a line of beautiful women in tremendous outfits, in the background, during the " Beautiful Girl" song. The balcony scene in Rent and the carnival scene in Grease provide the same sense of an illusion of depth. In addition, the use of ellipsis, an omission of time to that separates one shot from another, allows films, such as these, to show a long progression of time quickly. The stories of these films take place over a matter of months like Singin' in the Rain, a school term like Grease, or a full year like Rent. Since all that time cannot be shot, ellipses are used.

Another technique, which is commonly used, is the fadeout. Since several of the song and dance scenes are basically vignettes, a fadeout is typically a good transition or ending. Grease uses it at the end of Beauty School Dropout, and the other films use it at the end of their films. Furthermore, the long shot, also known as the full-body shot, is used frequently in musicals to allow the audience to see the dexterity of the actors. The scenes like the ballet in Singin' in the Rain, the hand jive in Grease, and the tango in Rent, must be shown with such shots to enhance their performances.

Hence, while the feel of a musical can differ from one to another, the general format tends to follow a set path that one allows the viewer a measure of comfort. In conclusion, the genre of the musical has had a long standing in

film for many years. From mere comedy to critiques on our society, the musical has taken many forms. For some reason, our society allows one to express their point of view through a musical to a mass audience. Such musicals as *Hair*, *Tommy*, and even *Rent* would not have been shown if not in musical form.

The use of song and dance has always been a factor in any civilization from the rituals to entertainment. It is said that music soothes the savage beast, but music also allows the viewers of musicals to almost experience movie firsthand. One can easily get caught up in the songs of the musical. Have you ever caught yourself singing the songs after the show? That is a sign of an excellent musical. Whether it is live or on a screen, I receive so much enjoyment out of watching a musical. I hope the same can be said about you.