Chapter 8

I've Heard that Song Before: The Jukebox Musical and Entertainment in *Jersey Boys*, *Rock of Ages*, *Mamma Mia* and *We Will Rock You*

Perhaps most distant from perceptions of the integrated musical are revue style or so-called 'jukebox' musicals. These are hugely popular entertainments that use many of the same features as other musicals, but they also have some aspects that are more strongly featured. In particular, audiences may know most of the music of these musicals before seeing them, and that knowledge may be linked to a wider intertextual field and offer a different type of dissonance from its context than in 'integrated' musicals. Audiences combine a different balance of features as they interpret and interact with this body of musicals.

Musical constructions of this type are not new to the later twentieth century, though. In the early part of the twentieth century musicals built around a series of songs and sketches were popular as revues with Florenz Ziegfeld's *Follies* (1907–31) and the *George White Scandals* (1919–27) being the most popular. Orly Leah Krasner remarks that the Ziegfeld formula consisted of 'balancing comedy and songs with gorgeous girls in lavish and revealing costumes', while the *Scandals* 'harnessed the streamlined energy of the roaring twenties' and 'included pop standards like "I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise" and "Somebody Loves Me"'.[1] Krasner concludes that burlesques can still be found in *Forbidden Broadway* and revues in 'works like *Riverdance, Smokey Joe's Café* and *Songs for a New World* not to mention seasonal extravaganzas like the Radio City Music Hall Christmas show'.[2] Vestiges of the revue formula attached to a story are also present in the extravagant song, dance and costume spectacles in, for example, the stage production of *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* and in British pantomime.

At the same time composers who wrote for the *Follies* and the *Scandals*, such as the Gershwins, Irving Berlin and Jerome Kern were contributing songs to, or writing complete scores for musical comedies from the 1910s to the 1930s and beyond. The musicals of this period 'remain accused of lacking strong books' but

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1 Orly Leah Krasner, 'Musical Theatre in New York, 1900-1920', in Everett and Laird, *The Cambridge Companion*, p. 42.

2 Ibid., pp. 45–6.

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critics 'did not seem too disturbed about it', and audiences 'did not mind either'.[3] Geoffrey Block continues: 'the central legacy of musical theatre of all types during this period remains the songs … Every successful show and the majority of those otherwise forgotten, offered one or more songs that continued with a life of its own'.[4] The majority of the songs in these shows used the structures of popular songs of Tin Pan Alley with a verse that provided the bridge between speech and song, followed by a 32-bar chorus that was most frequently divided into the AABA scheme, though there were a number of variations. These shows were revived with very little concern for the integrity of the original scores or compilations, and were then further adapted for film, with perhaps new songs or a different selection chosen to fit a new book or lyrics and the whole thing built around contracted film stars.[5] Block concludes that though these musical comedies were extremely popular they are difficult to reconstruct given the alterations demanded by the pragmatic circumstances of production and revival, and, more importantly, these musical comedies 'appear more susceptible to the ravages of time than more obliquely topical genres'.[6] Perhaps one of the reasons they are difficult to revive is that the way they stimulate and entertain is strongly rooted in the current and recent popular experiences of the audiences, so that revivals too far out of time fail to activate the intertextual associations and so fail to entertain.

Compilation shows are still very popular, with a relatively unimportant story as the excuse to revive groups of songs by particular composers or pop or rock groups. *Mamma Mia* (1999), for example, uses the songs of Abba with a story written around them by Catherine Johnson. *Blues in the Night* is a musical revue without dialogue conceived by Sheldon Epps in 1980 and tells the stories of the three characters through blues and jazz songs of the 1930s by Bessie Smith, Duke Ellington, Johnny Mercer and others. *We Will Rock You* (2002) is a compilation of hit songs by Queen with a story woven around them by Ben Elton. This group of musicals also includes the documentary style compilations (bio-musicals) whose texts are biographical rather than fictional, such as *Jersey Boys* (2004) – the story of Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons – and *Buddy* (1989) – the story of Buddy Holly. These musicals appear to eschew developed or complex narrative in favour of a simple plot or biography as the excuse to revisit favourite songs.

The direction of travel of the songs has altered – in the 1930s songs moved from shows into popular awareness, while in many of the recent shows the reverse is true, songs are being re-used in musicals. However, even in the 1930s some popular songs were re-used, especially in film musicals, and in recent musical

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[3] Geoffrey Block, 'American Musical Comedies of the 1920s and 1930s', in Everett and Laird, *The Cambridge Companion,* p. 85.

[4] Ibid., p. 86.

[5] Ibid., pp. 90–4.

[6] Ibid., p. 97.

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theatre the advanced release of albums[7] – alongside marketing campaigns – has developed a following for a show before it is staged, so there is transference in both directions. The focus of this final chapter is those musicals of the last 30 years that are composed from well-known and highly popular songs, because it is the familiarity of the musical materials that creates the attraction for audiences.

Most musical theatre scholarship ignores this group of musicals completely or uses terms such as 'jukebox musicals' to denigrate them as less interesting or worthy of study than their 'integrated' cousins – though the term is used in other materials simply as a descriptor.[8] But this is similar to the issues that have been problematic throughout the development of popular musical theatre scholarship as discussed in the Introduction, which draws attention to the focus on integration and therefore the plot as the central focus for analysis. And, indeed, looking back through the pages of this text the predominant focus has been the relationship between book, lyrics, music and performers. I don't want to dwell on gaps in contemporary scholarship, or my own and other scholars' acceptance of a particular version of history as this is a rapidly developing area, and these gaps are likely soon to be filled. Rather, building on the arguments about the plurality and dissonance in many contemporary musicals, the purpose of this chapter is to draw attention to the entertainment functions of some types of musicals where the story is not really the main point of concern for audiences, and should therefore perhaps be given less weight in the associated scholarship.

The 'camp' of musical theatre derives from a particular type of clear and acknowledged debt to other forms of entertainment and to the clichés that have developed in musical theatre itself, and is necessarily intertextual. The term 'camp' is used to denote a particular level of style, artifice and cliché in musical theatre, and, as Pamela Robertson explains in relation to the films of Busby Berkeley, 'the dissonance between the purported object represented … and the mode of representation which gleefully abandons verisimilitude'.[9] She argues that Berkeley's camp effect relies on the primacy of extravagant style over plot and the pleasure principle over reality. However, she maintains that the camp of the numbers must be read as having a function in relation to narrative, or as parts of a whole.[10] So, for example, the camp of *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* in Chapter 7, derives from the re-placement of popular music in unexpected places in a narrative, and the artifice and spectacle that result from the abandonment of verisimilitude

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[7] Jessica Sternfeld identifies *Jesus Christ Superstar* as the first show to use this marketing strategy that has subsequently become more widespread, in *The Megamusical*, p. 3.

[8] See *Time Out* review for *Rock of Ages*: http://newyork.timeout.com/articles/theater/73407/rock-of-ages-at-brooks-atkinson-theatre-theater-review.

[9] Pamela Robertson, 'Feminist Camp in *Gold Diggers of 1933*', in Steven Cohan (ed.), *Hollywood Musicals: The Film Reader* (London and New York, 2002), p. 131.

[10] Ibid., p. 131.

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during the musical numbers. But the camp effect would not be apparent without the dissonance between narrative and number.

The re-use of existing songs in new settings, which is a feature of bio-musicals, compilation musicals and revues, allows intertextual and personal associations in reception as well as the response to the dissonance and comedy of camp. This contributes to the sense of familiarity and nostalgia experienced by audience members, which in turn allows them to be removed from their everyday lives, to relive fantasies and memories, and to participate in singing and dancing. This infectious experience of joyful community involves the audience as participants in the event, which contributes to the entertainment felt as a result of attendance. And entertainment is the point. Many compilation and revue style shows are extremely good at entertainment. The questions here, then, are: what are the strategies these musicals use to entertain their audiences? What are the results of those strategies for reception, audience involvement and sensation?

Bio-Musicals – *Jersey Boys*[11]

Jersey Boys concerns the rags-to-riches story of The Four Seasons followed by the disbanding of the group and the re-formation as Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons. The story contains the excitement of links to the mob, the corruption or naivety of group members, and the gambling and bad management which inevitably led to the financial collapse and break up of the group, all accompanied by the songs that 'have provided the soundtrack to an entire generation'.[12] Different versions of parts of the story are told by different group members creating a sense of conflict and pointing to the complexities of history and memory.

This story may not be surprising to fans who already know the story, though the programme suggests that the mob connections were not public knowledge.[13] But to those audience members who don't know the facts of these celebrities' lives the plot is interesting – as Rick Elice explains it is 'about revenge and betrayal and crime and punishment and family and women'.[14] But whatever the complexities, and this is certainly an interesting approach to telling the story, it, like those of *Buddy* or *Jolson* could be told, as above, in a few sentences. So the story is there, it provides structural glue and some information, and allows the audience to identify and empathise with the journeys the characters take, and particularly with the developing power relationships between the members of the group. What is

[11] Book by Marshall Brickman and Rick Elice, Music by Bob Gaudio, Lyrics by Bob Crewe, directed by Des McAnuff. I saw the performance at the Prince Edward Theatre on Tuesday 19 August 2008.

[12] Mark Shenton, 'Four Seasons, Four Lives', Programme note for *Jersey Boys* London production, 2008.

[13] Ibid., n.p.

[14] Ibid., n.p.

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more important here are the songs with which the audience members are given opportunities to participate: the format of many bio-musicals is to end the show with a concert performance of many of the greatest hits during which audiences are encouraged to sing, dance and join in. At this point in each performance the clarity of concert and theatrical performance become confused as the performer/characters reprise the famous and favourite songs.

In August 2008 I attended a midweek matinee of *Jersey Boys*; a day and time of performance that one might imagine to be the least likely to promote audience participation. The audience began clapping along with the singer in response to the very first song 'Oh What a Night', and so it continued, with the middle-aged and older audience members singing along with most songs, suggesting a level of anticipation of content and knowledge of the material that was extremely high. Many of these audience members were clearly fans who had invested some part of their sense of identity in this music at some point in their lives and were enjoying reliving the music as concert performance. This activity in the audience relates to the emotional or mimetic contagion discussed in previous chapters so that a feeling of communitas was created.

Some songs were presented as diegetic numbers performed as onstage concert pieces which had a clear finish with a bow from the performers. These generated enormous applause from the live audience who engaged with the experience both as concert and theatre piece. The sense of attendance at a concert performance was also promoted by the amount of music staged as concert performance for the audience, signifying the audience's presence at a concert as well as at a theatre event.

In general there was a sense of fluidity between the narrated and re-enacted storytelling and the moments of diegetic concert performance. The construction of the performance as a flashback related by different members of the band allowed this fluidity as performers moved between direct address and 'realistic' acting. The continuity of backing music in some scenes allowed for smooth transitions between singing and performing songs and between speech and song. One example was the transition from 'practice' to 'performance' of 'My Eyes Adored You' between Mary and Frankie leading into the performance of the song by the whole quartet. However, there are examples of the juxtaposition of images as discussed in previous chapters. One of these occurred when the band sang 'Sherry' while 'holding up a convenience store and rolling a safe out of the back and putting it in the trunk of their car and trying to get away before the police come'.[15] This gave a sense of seeing the concert personas and simultaneously gaining an insight into the 'real' experiences of the characters' lives, and it is this type of simultaneous presentation of different images as a montage that offers audiences the opportunity simultaneously to relive the songs, and to extend their knowledge of the lives of the celebrities who created them. As the writers explained: 'it is easy to hear this music in a cursory way … but, casting it in the light of what their lives were like,

[15] Ibid.

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makes it more interesting, too.'[16] Audiences blend these images of the music and the celebrities' stories with their prior knowledge and create a personal as well as a social and cultural understanding of the work.

Although I knew many of the songs they didn't feel part of my history or identity, yet, nevertheless, as a member of the audience group I felt the contagion and was uplifted and transported to stand and clap along and was thoroughly entertained by the excellent performances. I am as guilty as anyone of denigrating these shows, though I found this one to be well crafted, but going along in the right spirit led to a real sense of joy in the experience. This was not only the result of intellectual stimulation, engagement with the story, satirical subversion or camp comedy. It resulted from a shared experience of emotional contagion and communitas with my fellow audience members, produced through recognition of the musical materials which activated personal associations and nostalgia, mimetic response to audience members and performers, and the physical activity of participation.

In the last chapter of *Performing Rites* Simon Frith discusses the place of the musical performance of pop music in the construction of identity. He suggests that in responding to a song, or to a sound, audiences are drawn into affective and emotional alliances.[17] As has been argued in the previous chapter the cognitive and emotional effects of embodied music listening, rather than their cultural associations, give access to a unique emotional intensity so that songs are absorbed into people's lives and the rhythms into their bodies. This has become even more pervasive since the introduction of the Walkman and now MP3 players that accompany many people through their lives. Frith suggests that this induces an intensely subjective sense of being sociable.[18] The mirror imagery through which people learn also helps initially to establish a sense of identity around musical tastes and cultures, by allowing an experience of collective identity with the sub-group who identify with the same music. So the song or music is doing two things, first it is creating a direct relationship with the listener through embodied response, but it is also creating an association, through co-presence, with a musical culture and a collective social identity. The created identity is always ideal and idealised, and allows the listener to participate in 'imagined forms of democracy and desire, imagined forms of the social and the sexual. And what makes music special … is that musical identity is both fantastic … and real: it is enacted in activity.'[19] Frith quotes Paul Gilroy's discussion of black identity to suggest that identity results from 'language, gesture, bodily significations, desires' that are condensed in musical performance through the interaction of performer and crowd.[20]

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16 Ibid.

17 Frith, *Performing Rites*, p. 273.

18 Ibid., p. 273.

19 Ibid., p. 274.

20 Paul Gilroy, 'Sounds Authentic: Black Music, Ethnicity, and the Challenge of a *Changing* Same', *Black Music Research Journal*, 10/2 (1990) quoted in Frith, *Performing*

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People hear the music they identify with as something special, as a part of life that reflexively encourages a sense of self-recognition and specialness, a feeling of transcendence. This reinforces one's own social narratives and creates a fusion of the imaginative fantasy and the bodily engagement with music.[21] Frith goes further in suggesting that '[i]dentity is necessarily a matter of ritual: it describes one's place in a dramatized pattern of relationships – one can never really express oneself "autonomously"'.[22]

This argument suggests that it is possible that attendance at a bio-musical focusing on a musical genre or performer with whom the audience member identifies can trigger these feelings of transcendence through the reinforcement of social narratives and imaginative identity. Such responses are then augmented by the shared experience and the mirroring of responses within the audience.

Victor Turner's definition of 'spontaneous communitas' is useful here. He describes it as the experience of a group of compatible people who together experience

> a flash of lucid mutual understanding on the existential level, when they feel that all problems … could be resolved, whether emotional or cognitive, if only the group … could sustain its intersubjective illumination. This illumination may succumb to the dry light of the next day's disjunction, the application of singular and personal reason to the 'glory' of communal understanding.[23]

The memory of the experience of communitas can lead avid fans to try to replicate the event by repeated attendance at the performance, which can lead to more dangerous consequences for group members as they lose sight of the real. Of course this type of response can be triggered within other group situations, and it can be resisted, but the theatre space offers a safe location in which to indulge in the pleasure of having one's emotions manipulated before returning to the real. Moreover, this type of experience does begin to account for the engagement and participation of audience members with shows where the story is already known or relatively simple, but where the music activates particular types of identification.

Turner describes mass entertainments as liminoid activities; activities that are playful or leisured, separate from work activities, and existing within an industrial society. Liminal activities are a function of ritual, relate to defined group activities and 'invert but do not usually subvert the status quo'.[24] The importance of a defined group allows these shows to begin to create a transference or a flexibility between the liminoid experience of mass entertainment and the liminal – a sharing or joining with others in a desired membership. However, since the desired

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Rites, p. 274.

[21] Frith, *Performing Rites*, pp. 275–6.

[22] Ibid., p. 275.

[23] Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* (New York, 1982), p. 49.

[24] Ibid., p. 41. More complete definitions of liminal and liminoid are at pp. 53–5.

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membership is unlimited and available simply by buying a ticket the liminality is always superficial.[25] Nevertheless, a shared fandom calls on genre understanding and experience of the same events, concerts or musical theatre performances so that these songs are placed into new surroundings and provide the experience of reinforcing shared fantasies and idealised identities and removing the listener from established contexts into the liminoid space. Here, new intertextual associations are created in experiencing the music in its new context, but more importantly the audience members become part of the group and can share in the momentary transcendent experience of communitas. The participation in singing and dancing in the final stages of many of these types of performances further extends the feeling of group identity. The audience is encouraged from the stage to participate, which, when conformed to, leads to greater feelings of engagement and pleasure.

The Rocky Horror Show

In 1991 I was musical director for a European tour of *The Rocky Horror Show*[26] – not a compilation show but one that exemplifies some of the ideas of participation described above – that was rehearsed in Budapest. During the rehearsal period a group of students were brought into rehearsals and coached in the responses that have become commonplace for audiences to interject in performances. This small group of students were then encouraged to return to their colleges and universities and teach the responses to their peers. The result of this was that the audience members engaged in a participatory way with the performance even though they had no knowledge of the development of the participation in response to the film version. The enormous audiences returned to the performance repeatedly, partly because they had never seen anything like this, partly because the part of the narrator was being played by a celebrity Hungarian blues singer who had been critical of the communist regime and was by this time something of a hero, and partly because they felt the experience of joyful congregation and participation activated by the show and the learned responses. Clearly, though, the management was aware of the importance of participation to the cult success of the show and felt the need to re-create that through artificial means in order to ensure the success of the production.

The 2004 British tour moved further towards a rock concert in its stage presentation, and further towards a ritual event in its deliberate incorporation of the audience participation derived from the cult responses to the film version. The 2006 version reverted to a stronger focus on storytelling, but by directly addressing the audience, and allowing time and space for the audience interjections encouraged them as participants in the experience. The audience, in a deliberate extension of the spontaneous response to the late night film showings in New

25 Ibid., p. 55.

26 Book, Music and Lyrics by Richard O'Brien.

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York, is encouraged to dress up or cross-dress, coming to the theatre wearing outrageous versions of the costumes of the leading characters. There is something grotesque and carnivalesque about the revelation of imperfect bodies, the cross-dressing and transgressive playfulness in the streets around the theatre before the performance begins and later as it spills back out into the streets. The atmosphere communicates itself, multiplies and feeds back into the performance so that each new performance builds on all the other experiences in a continuing re-creation and intertextual re-imagining.

Jill Dolan describes similar experiences of shared events and imagination in different types of performance in *Utopia in Performance*. The performances she describes are from contemporary performance genres and contain a different aesthetic than the one I'm describing here, and perhaps offer a greater radicalism, but the experience of theatregoing that she describes is potentially present in these works of commercial entertainment too. She says 'Such moments return me, too, to performance, lured by the possibility that in its insistent presence (and *present*), my fellow spectators and I might connect more fully with the complexities of our past and the possibility of a better future'.[27] The utopias she describes are fleeting and unstable, always in process and only partially grasped as a desire or a fantasy in the space of the performance. They exist in a performative that she relates to a Brechtian notion of *gestus* that offers spectators the opportunity to observe social relations in ways that offer the opportunity for critical contemplation and the hope for a more equal and less oppressive future. However, she is clear that such utopias are not enacted or demonstrated in the performances that she discusses, but rather 'spectators might draw a utopian performative from even the most dystopian theatrical universe'.[28] Dolan refers here to Sarah Kane's *Blasted* but the point remains that the experience of ephemeral moments of illumination or emotion are open to multiple interpretations that may be individually utopian and potentially transformative, and they may occur in response to all sorts of performances.

Dolan builds on Turner's exploration of communitas to suggest that disparate people become communities and that the simple fact of this grouping might encourage them to be active in other spheres. This is perhaps most apparent in some community theatre performances that have derived from the experience of audiences, such as at the Victoria Theatre Stoke-on-Trent under the direction of Peter Cheeseman, but the experience of community in performance can activate audiences. Dolan describes a play about a local football team and the impact it had on the fans in the audience, as well as helping those who were not fans to understand the experience of fandom. More importantly it was a space where the communities of theatre spectatorship, football field and city coalesced.[29] This is a utopianism, then, that reaches out from the theatre into other forms of social relations, and one that could be activated by the communitas of interaction or

[27] Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*, p. 5.

[28] Ibid., p. 8.

[29] Ibid., p. 12.

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participation with a commercially produced performance, though it is certainly less likely.

Dolan describes a moment of communitas in a performance by Peggy Shaw of *Menopausal Gentleman* when Shaw sang 'My Way' moving within the audience and making individual contact. I saw a similar moment in a performance by Peggy Shaw and The Clod Ensemble of *Must* in which she sang songs that were both familiar and new, including 'Ain't No Sunshine When She's Gone'. What I'm drawing from this is that the interactions may be between stage and audience or between audience members, but the experience of sharing a moment with both these groups acknowledges our shared attention and pleasure. This is the type of activation that has the potential to unite many different types of spectator in a momentary experience of communitas and a utopian pleasure. This type of pleasure is perhaps most obvious in musical theatre in those performances that activate a participatory and joyful coming together in an interactive or nostalgic musical memory.

Jukebox Musicals – *Rock of Ages*

Rock of Ages is a 'sexy feel-good romp'[30] with book by Chris D'Arienzo that I saw at the Brooks Atkinson Theatre in New York in May 2009.[31] The plot, narrated by Lonny, concerns a naive girl, Sherrie, who arrives in Los Angeles and gets a job at the Bourbon Bar on Sunset Strip. After being convinced that Drew – the hero and a waiter at the Bourbon – only wants to be friends she falls for an aging rock star. However, true love wins out. Drew has been signed to a recording contract but is turned from rocker to boy band star – a terrible fate for a rocker – and Sherrie is now working as a stripper. Both are disillusioned but realise they can't live without each other. As *The New Yorker* reports: 'In truth the plot – kudos for even having one – is really just a chain of segues into the hits of Styx, Journey and Twisted Sister.'[32] More important than the plot is the music and the knowing, comic self-reflexive stance the musical takes as the songs are inserted into the simple plot peopled by outrageous stereotypical caricatures. David Cote writes in *Time Out*:

> When it premiered Off Broadway last year, this jokey tuner impressed me as a conventional book musical, albeit one that constantly winked at its contrivances—a *Urinetown* scored to recycled songs by Journey, Foreigner, Pat Benatar and the like. Kristin Hanggi's sight-gag-stuffed production, in the transfer to Broadway, is now harder, louder and even more self-aware of its

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30 www.rockofagesmusical.com, accessed 3 August 2009.

31 Music supervision, arrangements and orchestrations by Ethan Popp, directed by Kristin Hanggi.

32 'Is there a Tony Award for Baddassery?' *The New Yorker*, 20 April 2009.

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> silliness, and the fit is excellent: tribute rock and broad comedy reinforcing one another in perfect proportion.[33]

This is an excessively camp compilation musical that creates a new and unexpected context for the songs so that the dissonance creates comedy and irony. The show culminates with the song 'Sherrie' as the two lovers finally come together, a moment that has been anticipated since the introduction of the heroine named Sherrie.

There is a similar comic sense of anticipation and appreciation of the intertextual playfulness in the film *Moulin Rouge*[34] beginning when Christian sings lines from 'The Sound of Music' in the introductory scenes, and repeated throughout the film as other songs from recent popular music are introduced. The joyful sense of sharing a cultural language and the uncanny associations created by the new contexts induce a response to the comic juxtaposition, but also a sense of intellectual self-congratulation in that recognition, reinforcing the identity of the audience member and creating feelings of pleasure and transcendence.

Angela Ndalianis argues that in cinema and multimedia of the last two decades 'entertainment forms have increasingly displayed a concern for engulfing and engaging the spectator actively in sensorial and formal games'.[35] Rather than a focus simply on a story, the story is only a limited part of what is on offer. Instead she quotes Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin in arguing that media have become networks revealing new convergences between themselves and alternative modes of reception.[36] Ndalianis says that the contemporary entertainment industry

> has embraced classical storytelling and placed it within new contexts, contexts that incorporate a further economization of classical narrative form, digital technology, cross-media interactions, serial forms, and alternate modes of spectatorship and reception.[37]

This is a conjunction that Ndalianis describes as the 'neo-baroque'[38] since she argues that the similarities with the Baroque period lie in the emphasis on serial

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[33] David Cote, '80s Rock Hits Return in a Deliriously Fun New Jukebox Musical', *Time Out New York*, Issue 707, 18–22 April 2009.

[34] I'm referring here to the 2001 musical film written and directed by Baz Lurhman. Original Score by Craig Armstrong.

[35] Angela Ndalianis, *New Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment* (Cambridge, 2004).

[36] Ibid., p. 4 refers to Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, 1999).

[37] Ibid., p. 4.

[38] This makes reference to the use of the term in Omar Calabrese, *Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times* (Princeton, 1992) and to Umberto Eco's use of the term in the Foreword to that text as discussed in Ndalianis, *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics*, pp. 71–3.

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narratives and the spectacular as forms that address transformed mass cultures. However, the neo-baroque sensory experience is a product of conglomerate entertainment industries, multimedia interests and spectacle that is often reliant on computer technology.[39] This may not be entirely appropriate for a discussion of live musical theatre performance, but importantly for the discussion here, she argues that the 'baroque's difference from classical systems lies in its refusal to respect the limits of the frame that contains the illusion'.[40] This is clearly a feature of the intertextual compilation musicals discussed here. As identified above, storytelling is not the primary driver of these works, but reference to other media, in this case popular musical works, is integral and contributes to an open interpretation and to the processes of interpretation. So this type of intertextual citation engages the audience in a game or series of games that allow it to pay homage to, and renegotiate, the past. As with the types of film and gaming examples Ndalianis refers to, the resulting 'hyperconsciousness' permits participants to become engrossed in the narration in the conventional sense, but also to participate with the work on the paradigmatic level through the 'multi-layered intertextual references'.[41]

Ndalianis relates this to Walter Benjamin's writing on the Baroque in arguing that 'these entertainment forms function like ruins and fragments, evolving the existence of a past in the present while simultaneously transforming the ruin into a restored, majestic structure that operates like a richly layered palimpsest'.[42] While it might be fanciful to regard compilation or jukebox musicals as 'majestic', this argument does suggest ways in which these musicals fit into an understanding of the functions and practices of the mass media of their times. However, they are unlike works of the Baroque period since that period involved a synthesis of techniques and styles in order to perfect and transcend those techniques. Instead, these musicals, though they create a discourse between past and present and a self-reflexive attitude to the creative process, do so with less sense of critically engaging than of offering an entertaining and joyful event and potentially a ritual experience of communitas.

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[39] Ndalianis, *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics*, p. 5.

[40] Ibid., p. 25.

[41] Ndalianis, *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics*, p. 73. Here Ndalianis refers to Jim Collins, 'Batman: The Movie, Narrative: The Hyperconscious', in Roberta E. Pearson and William Uricchio (eds), *The Many Lives of the Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and his Media* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 164–81.

[42] Ibid., p. 73.

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Mamma Mia[43]

Mamma Mia is the world's most successful musical. As Malcolm Womack reveals in his recent article 'Thank You For the Music',

> *Mamma Mia!* is, without hyperbole, the most successful musical in the world. The production in London's West End has celebrated its tenth year, the Broadway production is currently in its eighth, and along with several international tours there have been resident companies of the show in Las Vegas, Hamburg, Moscow, Fukuoka, and twelve other cities ('mamma-mia.com'). Over thirty million people around the world have seen *Mamma Mia!* – about seventeen thousand audience members a night – and the 2008 feature film with Meryl Streep grossed over six hundred million dollars internationally, for an estimated audience of sixty million (Dawtrey et al 2009).[44]

The focus of Womack's article is the revisioning of the Abba songs through a feminist rewriting and re-attribution across genders in the musical, which is important here as an unsettling device that sees the songs used in altered contexts. This creates a sense of disruption of the nostalgic readings of the texts, and camp through the dissonant repositioning of the songs in the new contexts. Comedy is also created through production devices and comic spectacle as, for example, the singing of 'Mamma Mia' is accompanied by a chorus only seen as heads peering over a wall. Later, 'Lay All Your Love on Me' is accompanied by a chorus of men dancing in diving suits and flippers, while the rendition of 'Super Trouper' by Donna and the Dynamites is performed wearing white lycra imitations of Abba's costumes. All of these devices are comic, create distance from identification with the story, and create a new camp context for the songs.

The work functions as a musical in its own right containing a plot with songs that enhance moments within it. As John Peter writes in the *Sunday Times,* 'The fun of this show lies in the skill and wit with which the songs are fitted into the story, not just as decorations, but moving it along, almost as if they had been written for it'.[45] The plot and the production offer a comic and camp reading of the material that draws on the cultural understanding of the place of Abba as an iconic, camp pop group of the 1970s that became something of a cult both at the time

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[43] Music and Lyrics by Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus and some songs by Stig Anderson, Book by Catherine Johnson, Directed at the Prince of Wales Theatre in London by Phyllida Lloyd. I saw the production in August 2008.

[44] Malcolm Womack, '"Thank You For the Music" Catherine Johnson's Feminist Revoicings in *Mamma Mia!*', *Studies in Musical Theatre*, 3/2 (2009): pp. 201–11. The article he refers to is at www.variety.com/article/VR1118002072.html?categoryid=3592&cs=1, accessed 25 June 2009.

[45] John Peter, 'Thank you for the Musical!', *Sunday Times*, www.mamma-mia.com/worldreviews.asp, accessed 4 August 2009.

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and subsequently as a result of the karaoke performances of *Sing Alonga Abba*. This complex reading is further nuanced by the placing of individual songs in new settings, sung from different gendered positions. This provides an intertextual irritant to the audience's reading of the plot.[46] Finally, and most recently, this is further overlaid by reading the live performance in light of the cinematic version with its star performances and beautiful locations. This multiplicity of frames and fragments allows the core musical to construct a story that reaches its audience in ways not available to writers of original musicals. As Charles Spencer records in the *Daily Telegraph*:

> Catherine Johnson's witty and ingenious script weaves the famous ABBA songs around characters you care about. At the end the whole audience is on its feet and swaying blissfully along to the hits. What a pleasure to see that girl, watch that scene and dig the Dancing Queen.[47]

Or, as Jeremy Vincent in *The Australian* remarks: 'What makes MAMMA MIA! work is the ingenuity with which the songs leap from the story – they come like brilliant bolts out of the blue and the audience roars its approval.'[48] Here there is the open acknowledgment that the songs function differently in a jukebox musical than in an 'integrated' musical, in that rather than simply amplifying and expanding on their context, they leap from it and make connections with other parts of the audience's lived experience.

Similar arguments can be made with reference to the translation or adaptation of musicals between film and theatre and to the importance of CD release, YouTube advertising and other marketing and merchandising on the impact of musical theatre of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The musical theatre offering becomes part of a series of offerings with which the spectator engages while simultaneously becoming involved with the plot of the particular show. Examples of this include the creation of live versions of several Disney films including *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Lion King*, both of which are necessarily altered in their mode of production for the stage, but which give the viewer a simultaneous reminder of the film and an experience of the live performance. Even more interesting in this argument is the recent integration of television game shows into this media circulation with UK terrestrial television running reality show competitions to cast the leading performers for West End productions of *The Sound of Music*, *Oliver, Joseph* and most recently, *The Wizard of Oz* with the active involvement of Lord Andrew Lloyd Webber.

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46 Womack, 'Thank You For the Music'.

47 Charles Spencer, 'An Irresistable Enjoyable Hit', *Daily Telegraph*, www.mamma-mia.com/worldreviews.asp, accessed 4 August 2009.

48 Jeremy Vincent '*****', *The Australian*, www.mamma-mia.com/worldreviews.asp, accessed 4 August 2009.

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Clearly there is an effect in marketing terms as the television shows provide weeks of advertising and ensure sell-out runs of the theatre productions, but in terms of audience experience, the viewer becomes an interpreter of the story of the musical, its earlier theatre and film releases, its CD release and its star personas and rivalries through the television programme. In a sense the television programmes are creating a reflexive awareness that undermines the storytelling of the musical by encouraging a focus on the lead performer as celebrity above character. This is not really any different to the experience of cinema, but represents a democratising of the theatre experience in which the theatre cognoscenti have always been aware of star performers and their other roles, but which has now become more clearly a focus of mass public awareness. This intensity has, of course, changed the experience of performance, but perhaps this is a change of degree and scale rather than a change in the processes of interpretation. After all, Stacy Wolf's study of gender and sexuality in musical theatre, *A Problem Like Maria*, bases its arguments partly around the celebrity and appeal of its leading performers and refers to musical productions from 1930 to 1983.[49] The function of celebrity notwithstanding, the musical has become part of the circulation of mass media, and the texts of compilation shows give the clearest examples of the importance of intertextual interpretation in the entertainment of audiences.

We Will Rock You[50]

We Will Rock You contains a utopian story set in a dystopian world; a world where the music – rock – has died to be replaced by computer generated pop. The hero, Galileo, and heroine, Scaramouche, escape from the evil Killer Queen and her henchman Kashoggi and join a group of bohemians led by Brit and Meat – references to Britney Spears and Meat Loaf – before they release the hidden axe – electric guitar – and bring down the evil regime. This story carries deliberately strong echoes of Arthurian legend. In addition, the history of rock rests on a construction of rockers as rebellious urban youths, an association that is enacted in this story as the outlawed Bohemians subvert and eventually overthrow the ruling elite. These two fictions create an intertextual cultural framework within which the plot develops according to expectations.

The set reflexively signifies a rock concert with scaffolding supporting a light show, a runway into the audience for performances by the Killer Queen and Kashoggi and most of the songs performed concert-style, directly to the audience rather than in onstage interactions. More importantly, the intertextual associations

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[49] Stacy Wolf, *A Problem Like Maria: Gender and Sexuality in the American Musical* (Ann Arbor, 2002).

[50] Music and Lyrics by Queen, Book and Direction by Ben Elton. Original West End Production Directed by Christopher Renshaw. I saw a performance at the Dominion Theatre London in August 2008.

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with contemporary life are extended into the details of the script. The names of the principal characters are derived from Queen's lyrics, the songs are some of the most famous of Queen's hits, and the script is constantly updated with references to the history of pop and rock music and contemporary events. All the Bohemians have names of pop stars of the present, though often used across genders, the premise being that the names are known from old posters. So Britney Spears is a man in a kilt, Meat Loaf has become a woman, Madonna is a man complete with metal bra, and even Robbie Williams is present. There are many more references to contemporary culture that are satirical as well as intertextual: the X Factor television reality shows are responsible for the demise of music and culture; reference is made to Victoria Beckham and the Teletubbies; to the demise of the Northern Rock Building Society and there are references to the Beatles including the question 'Where is Penny Lane?'.[51] The list of performers who died young included Michael Jackson when I saw the show in August 2009. The list concluded with Freddie Mercury before a performance of 'Only the Good Die Young'. The show ended with a rendition of 'We are the Champions' during which the entire audience joined in and waved their arms in the air, before rapturous applause. Following the question from the stage, 'Do you want Bohemian Rhapsody?' and the vocal assent from the audience, it was played in full.

As with *Rock of Ages*, the story of *We Will Rock You* is the glue for what Fiona Sturges of *The Independent* refers to as 'A Queen song-fest – The songs will have even the most curmudgeonly punter tapping their feet and remind you just how fabulous Queen were',[52] while Neil Massey of *Q Magazine* records that 'The audience – love it. They cheer and clap and laugh a lot'.[53]

Perhaps, though, the story is more than glue. The utopian, Arthurian inspired story, the characters and the references to popular culture all contribute to an intertextual and contemporary re-appropriation of myth. It calls on the audience to make connections, to understand references and to participate in a nostalgic evocation of the music of a bygone era. There is a compression of past and future within a referenced present time, and recognition of the audience as an active body of participants able to engage with the materials and transcend the present moment through the communitas of the performance and its associations.

This could be regarded as hopelessly utopian – and clearly the plot is exactly that – but the utopianism Dolan discusses is not based on the plot alone. Rather it is based on the coming together of groups of people who form a community in their responses to a performance. The activation of that community around particular bodies of work, in this case by Queen, leads to a sense of identification and

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[51] Such references are updated regularly, so this list is drawn from the performance I saw on 8 August 2009.

[52] Fiona Sturges, 'We Will Rock You', *The Independent*, 15 May 2002, www.wewillrockyou.co.uk, accessed 4 August 2009.

[53] Neil Massey, *Q Magazine*, June 2002, www.wewillrockyou.co.uk, accessed 4 August 2009.

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reinforcement, while the experience of entrainment is enhanced by the audiovisual connections of narrative and number, singer and song. The incorporation of further materials that provide a satirical and reflexive glance at contemporary culture adds greater intertextuality, and the conflation of histories and media provides entertainment in ways that Ndalianis notes as features of contemporary cultural practice. So camp and nostalgia are linked, and both provide access to moments of transcendence and pleasure. In the end it is not surprising that the reviewer of *The Daily Mirror*, James Whittaker, reported that

> I loved every moment of the evening and so did everybody else in the packed auditorium. By the end we were all on our feet waving our arms. There were numerous calls for encores and, if we'd had our way, the cast wouldn't have been allowed home until breakfast.[54]

I saw the show on the 8 August 2009 and surprised myself by feeling the same.

Conclusion

This chapter has identified features of different types of musical that use existing music. Bio-musicals rely on the nostalgia for the music of a particular writer or group but are written as 'realistic' fictions so that the audience can identify with the characters and understand the events of the characters' lives. They create a sense of identification within the audience through reinforcement of social narratives and imaginative identity, so that the audience responds by participating in singing and dancing to the nostalgic re-creation. The jukebox musicals have another level created by the reconstitution of the songs within an entirely new plot, with songs sung in dissonant new contexts, and sometimes with new meanings produced by contexts, gender variations and the camp comedy of performance. While the bio-musicals draw on social connections and identity with particular bodies of music, the jukebox musicals give access to a sense of self-awareness, silliness and camp that provokes the audience to a greater intertextual and camp awareness that voluptuously exceeds the boundaries of a 'realistic' text. It is the voluptuousness and excess of these texts that flow into contemporary life and allow audiences the transcendental pleasure of attachment, intelligent interpretation and nostalgic re-creation.

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[54] James Whittaker, *Daily Mirror*, 8 July 2002, www.wewillrockyou.co.uk, accessed 4 August 2009.

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