Journal Homepage: -www.journalijar.com

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR)

Article DOI:10.21474/IJAR01/20544
DOI URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/20544

RESEARCH ARTICLE

FROM STAGE TO SCREEN: EXPLORING DIRECTORIAL APPROACHES ON ADAPTING MUSICALS TO FILM

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Manuscript Info

Manuscript History
Received: 06 January 2025
Final Accepted: 11 February 2025
Published: March 2025

Key words:-
Film Adaptation, Musical Theatre, Directorial Techniques, Stage-To-Screen Transformation, Cinematic Storytelling

Abstract

This study examines contemporary directorial practice in adapting stage musicals to film, often leading to a direct and mechanical approach to transforming one art form into another. The study suggests improving directorial methods by integrating experimental and auteur cinema aspects. Furthermore, it aims to advocate for a directorial "laboratory," leveraging ideas from avant-garde theories and practices prevalent in 20th-century cinema, theater, and music.

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Introduction:-

The musical is a multifaceted, multi-stylistic, and multi-plot phenomenon with an ambiguous and fluid definition, constantly evolving through artistic mimicry. Though born on the stage, it feels most "at home" in that environment. Its "migration" into the cinematic space is a risky creative endeavor fraught with uncertainties. The creation of the "film musical" hybrid—an intricate synthesis of music, cinema, visual arts, ballet, and literature—becomes a battleground of differing perspectives and a space for experimentation.

The late 20th and early 21st centuries marked a crisis for the film musical genre, driven by directors' persistent inclination toward traditional realist cinematic forms. Successfully blending and effectively positioning the components of this "hybrid" requires the intentional use of aestheticization and a deliberate "artificiality" of form in its various manifestations. These characteristics remain predominantly within the realm of avant-garde and experimental cinema. However, their partial incorporation—limited to isolated scenes in film musicals—is insufficient to elevate the genre to its ideal purity of form. This suggests that constructing a film musical's narrative relies entirely on the dominance of its musical framework, compelling directors to introduce "non-realistic" spatial forms drawn from other art forms.

Nonetheless, the integration of alternative expressive techniques remains fragmented and has yet to be fully established as a foundational principle in the creation of such films. The expressive screen techniques employed by American independent filmmakers—such as extreme angles, axis-breaking camera movements, jump cuts, cadence-based filming, overexposure, and extreme close-ups—are primarily used in Hollywood as "special effects," making them exceptions rather than the norm in conventional storytelling. Furthermore, these elements represent only a small (and arguably already exhausted) fragment of avant-garde film language. More fundamental artistic explorations remain largely untapped, including the "theatricalization" of space, the manipulation of time and spatial perception, the integration of painting, sculpture, and photography into visual storytelling, and the use of performance as an expressive mode that extends beyond the boundaries of theater and cinema.

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What is needed are directorial techniques that dismantle the "illusion" of realism and embrace the inherent theatricality of music as an art form, thereby legitimizing the presence of the "singing character" on screen. Music, as a medium, expresses the internal world of emotions through abstract forms more profoundly than any other art. Musical imagery is the least concrete, lacking a tangible structure, and is thus inherently detached from the physical reality that cinematography depends upon. By its very nature, cinema struggles to assimilate the conventions of poetry, theater, music, and painting, as their distinct and intricate expressive logic does not seamlessly align with the traditional visual language of film. However, this very challenge opens a vast field for experimentation—one that could ultimately lead the film musical toward the purity of its form.

The film musical is a systematic genre in which the canonicity of form coexists with the constant renewal of traditions. This category remains vibrant and highly dynamic, as time, characters, and expressive means are in continuous flux. However, understanding the principles of genre formation and the rationale behind specific methodological choices is essential—without this knowledge, the genre cannot be properly studied, nor can one effectively work within it. While the film musical adheres to established canons, universal directorial approaches can be identified despite the unique characteristics of genre formation shaped by different historical and aesthetic periods.

A film musical is successful when its musical dramaturgy and on-screen transformation are stylistically unified. Due to the genre's fragmentary nature—alternating between dramatic sequences and vocal-choreographic numbers—it may create the illusion that music should dominate only within these numbers. In reality, these moments construct a utopian world that exists alongside the real world of dramatic action.

However, the leading role of music extends beyond its presence in the musical numbers. Even if the "real" plane is entirely non-musical, the director must construct it as a "pause" (in Sergei Eisenstein's terms)—a moment shaped by the strict internal tempo-rhythm of the music, depending on its placement within the overall musical fabric of the film. This applies not only to cinematographic techniques—such as camera angles, shot transitions, and editing style—but also to the intra-frame composition, including lighting, movement dynamics, and internal rhythm. Additionally, it influences the intensity of the actor's emotional life and its variations, from sharp drops and outbursts to climactic peaks.

As evident, the unification of the two planes—the "realistic" and the "musical-choreographic"—is achievable through rhythm and various forms of "play" with it. Danish film professor Torben Grodal highlights its universal significance: "Rhythm," he writes, "is traditionally one of the most characteristic features of songs and poetry, and it is also central to many processes regulated by the autonomic nervous system, such as pulse and breathing."[1]The director's ability to structure the entire film musical around a unified tempo-rhythm—integrating the narrative elements rather than isolating them—should serve as the foundation for all directorial exploration.

This raises a fundamental question: What cinematographic techniques should a director employ to visualize a musical performance—whether vocal, vocal-choreographic, or purely choreographic? This is the central challenge of the film musical, as it encapsulates the defining characteristics of this unique directorial approach. The film director works with time, shaping the temporal dimension of space-time relations. In cinema, time serves as the realm of improvisation; its presentation determines the artistic independence of the medium—unlike in theater, where time functions in an inherently different way.

When transforming music for the screen, the linear, real-time flow encoded in the musical score must be converted into cinematic time. However, if this transformation simply turns musical time (as an art form) into the perceptual time of the film viewer, the result will be nothing more than a filmed concert. The goal of adapting a stage musical for film is to achieve a final product that retains the essential (ontological) qualities of film art while respecting the conventions of the stage and the musical score. Alternatively, all these conventions must be reinterpreted within the framework of cinematic time.

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[1]Grodal, Torben. Moving Pictures: A New Theory of Film Genres, Feelings andCognition. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997. C. 55. cited in Wiessinger Scott, Film and Music: An Overlooked Synthesis, Montana State University, Bozeman, Montana, 2009

Thus, a challenge arises—since the external stasis of music must be compensated for by an intensified visual flow, the director often relies primarily on elementary dynamic editing, expressed through the relationship between musical dynamics and cinematographic composition. However, given the complexity of the film musical as a genre, it is clear that the director must seek creative provocations beyond the conventions of traditional cinema.

It is worth reconsidering the influence of experimental cinema, shaped not only by directors but by film artists such as Maya Deren and her successors—Stan Brakhage, Jonas Mekas, Kenneth Anger, John Smith, and Michael Snow. These filmmakers describe their work as art cinema—mythopoetic and lyrical films that are "structural" and "trance-like," reflecting the aesthetics of surrealism, abstract expressionism, pop art, and minimalism.

Paradoxically, it is within the musical genre—traditionally associated with mass art—that the necessity arises to employ the refined "auteur" techniques of experimental and avant-garde cinema. As the prominent Russian-Estonian linguist, semiotician, cultural historian, and literary scholar Yuri M. Lotman observes, one must seek models for "meta-linguistic mechanisms" not only in contemporary culture but also in avant-garde cinema itself."[2]These include the films of the French Dadaists of the 1920s and 1930s (Cinéma Pur), such as René Clair and Marcel Duchamp; the German absolute cinema of Hans Richter, Walter Ruttmann, and Viking Eggeling; and later experimental movements of the 1960s and 1970s, including underground cinema, structural cinema, and Fluxus. Filmmakers like Jim Jarmusch, John Cassavetes, and Maya Deren further explored these approaches. Deren, in particular, experimented not only with expressive techniques but also with the spatial and temporal dimensions of film, emphasizing that "working with space and time becomes part of the natural structure of the film."[3]

A provocation must be staged against the established model of the film musical as a mainstream genre—a provocation grounded in a distinctly modernist stance, where form takes precedence over content. This is the key to achieving the "blow to the solar plexus" that, notably, one of the most prominent producers of film musicals, Cameron Mackintosh, strives for. Such an alternative is offered precisely by the American avant-garde, which perceives form not as static but as processual—emerging through the act of filmmaking and experienced as a creative process, a space for fantasy, play, theatricality, and sensory engagement with music. "What is needed is not the ability for mimesis or for creating a 'double of reality,' but a special form of subjectivity, analogous to dreams, to the state of dreaming."[4]Or—achieving the quality of 'poetic' cinema." In his 1927 article Poetry and Prose in Cinematography, Russian theorist V. Shklovsky observes that poetic and prosaic cinema "differ not only in their rhythm but in the predominance of technical-formal elements (in poetic cinema) over semantic ones, with the formal replacing the semantic."[5]

Of course, both methods can coexist—traditional narratives often contain poetic elements, just as many avant-garde films incorporate aspects of plot. However, it is undeniable that the cinematic avant-garde, which broadly represents metaphorical cinema, seeks to expand the possibilities of poetic expression, whereas conventional narrative, with its emphasis on illusionism and literary storytelling, tends to suppress them. If we delve deeper into the American avant-garde, we must first highlight the work of Maya Deren (born Eleanor Derenkowska)—an independent filmmaker, choreographer, and theorist. Deren not only embodied the unique philosophy of this cinematic movement but also proposed a systematic "method" for capturing reality and transforming it into a "non-realistic environment."[6]

Synthesized as "An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film," this method is valuable because it links "the state of nature," "the forms of art," and "the forms of film" with "the tools of invention." Describing her explorations, Maya Deren notes that her "insistence on the creative attitude and on 'non-realistic' forms that it must create is an attempt to analyze Hollywood films, which have an artificial form. Nevertheless, film has access not only to the elements of reality but also—these elements as part of reality—to the ready-made forms of other arts. Moreover, the degree of

[2]Lotman, M. Mesto kinoizkustvo v mehanizme kultura. Trudai po znakovim sistemam. Vip. 8. Tartu, 1977 p.148

[3] Deren. M.. Opredelenie tvorcheskovo protsesa i rabota s prostranstvom i vreme . Hrenov. A. Evolutsia amerikanskogo eksperimentalnogo kino. - M.: EGSI, 2000. C. 15.

[4] Hrenov, A. Magi i radikali: vek amerikanskogo avangarda. – M. Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2011. p. 69

[5] Shklovski, V. Poezia i proza kinematografii. Poetika kino. Tsitati po: Hrenov, A. Magi i radikali: vek amerikanskogo avangarda. – M. Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2011. p. 89

[6]Deren, Maya. “An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film”, Outcast Series, Number 9, Alicat Book Shop, p.37-38 http://monoskop.org/images/3/31/Deren_Maya_An_Anagram_of_Ideas_on_Art_Form_and_Film.pdf

realism with which Hollywood confronts these realities of art—literature, drama, dance, and others—and the degree of fidelity to their original components is such with what degree the documentary film confronts social reality."[7]

Deren directed six films, five of which were made between 1943 and 1948. One of her most striking explorations is Meshes of the Afternoon (1943), which won the experimental film award at Cannes in 1947. This film exemplifies poetic psychodrama and trance cinema. Deren employs light, mirrors, sharp optical angles, and a ritualistic rhythm to transport the viewer beyond the confines of real space and time, immersing them in a state of hypnotic enchantment.

The Bulgarian film researcher Maya Dimitrova characterizes the film as featuring "...the presence of a dream reality, in which the authentic author herself plays her imaginary self. It is populated with Freudian symbolism and is oneirically immersed in sensual reverie. The erotic undertone of this dream reality is dissonantly intertwined with signs of the beyond—a figure in a black cloak with a mirrored face vanishes in daylight, casting a blinding 'glance'—a flash into the eye of the camera."[8]Dimitrova (2009) also emphasizes the theatrical elements in this particular cinematic vision, stating: "… clown glasses, from which the 'eyes' of the woman pop out on springs—intriguingly shaped like a hypnotic spiral. As participants in this playful spectacle, we, the enchanted viewers, perceive only a light, skipping movement in the style of clowning, infused with an expressionist flavor and the eccentricity of Clair…”[9]And finally—though no less important—the entire cinematic structure of Maya Deren’s work is organized according to the principles of music. "Over time, the film undergoes metamorphoses," namely, with the later addition of a soundtrack by Japanese composer Teiji Ito. However, as M. Dimitrova rightly points out, even without this musical accompaniment, the film was originally "...conceived editorially as visible music," in which she identifies "a resemblance to the experiments of Germaine Dulac from the second half of the 1920s."[10]

Maya Deren's creative style is closely linked to the cinematic experiments of the Surrealists and Jean Cocteau. It also became a source of inspiration for the next generation of American avant-garde filmmakers, including Stan Brakhage, Jonas Mekas, Kenneth Anger, and John Smith. The evolution of her ideas is particularly noted by director Jonas Mekas, who states: "For the previous generation, film art (I use the literal translation 'film art' to distinguish it from the concept of 'the art of cinema,' which includes the mainstream—note P.O.) was something new and exotic. But for this generation, it is part of our life, like bread, music, trees, steel bridges."[11]

A unique form of qualitatively new visual experience is embodied in the film practice of American filmmaker and theorist Stan Brakhage, one of the leading figures in experimental cinema. His films explore the boundless possibilities of a multifunctional, convention-free gaze, breaking the automatism of perception. Debuting in 1952, Brakhage was influenced by Eisenstein’s concepts and Cocteau’s films. He created metaphorical films—or visual poems—using collage techniques that disrupt narrative continuity, as well as special methods of filmstrip processing that challenge the "realistic" nature of the image. In Brakhage's film poems, the focus is not on a character in front of the camera, as in surrealist "trance films," but on the filmmaker’s own consciousness behind the camera, seemingly transmitting its sensations and emotions directly to the viewer. In his pursuit of pure cinematography—of an unfiltered movement of images—Brakhage achieves what can be described as "moving painting." Shades, flashes, and explosions of color create a dynamic interplay of visual music, generating ever-changing melodies and rhythms. It is clear that this cinematic space has no place for voice or logos—only the language of pure visual expression.

Another filmmaker who actively deconstructed the illusion of cinematic time was the experimentalist Mary Ellen Bute. In films such as Rhythm in Light (1934)—a visual interpretation of Edvard Grieg’s Anitra’s Dance—as well as Synchrony No. 2 (1935), Parabola (1937), and Tarantella (1940), Bute sought to visualize musical compositions by integrating painting into the cinematic medium, identifying it as "frozen music." She also experimented with "painting with light," pushing the boundaries of visual expression.

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[7]Ibid
[8]Dimitrova, M. Evropeysko kino v epoha na globalizatsia. Sofia, Institut za izsledvane na izkustvata, 2009, p. 32
[9]Ibid, p.33
[10]Ibid, p.33
[11]Mekas, Ionas. “The Experimental Film in America”, Film Culture 1, no. 3. (May-June, 1955). As cited in: Horac, Jan- Christopher , “The First American Fim Avant-Garde, 1919-1945; „Experimental Cinema: The Film Reader“, edited by: Wheeler W. Dixon,Gwendolyn Audrey Foste, 2002. Routlegde, 11 New Fetter lane, London. p. 19-20

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, the ideas of structural film emerged, challenging the illusionism of mainstream cinema while also rejecting the mystical avant-garde approach of Brakhage, Mekas, and Deren. Structural filmmakers such as Michael Snow, Hollis Frampton, and George Landow took an even more radical perspective, treating cinema as a visual art form in itself. Their work explored the spatial and temporal dimensions of the image, experimenting with paradoxes of movement, direction, continuity, and wholeness.

o the sensually innovative experience of the cinematic avant-garde—which "opens a window" to the coexistence of cinema with other arts and, when applied, could grant the film musical greater flexibility in absorbing music—we must also add the tradition of experimenting with the theatricalization of screen action. The return of theatrical conventions to cinema reflects a search for new expressive means, inevitably leading to a degree of elitism—at least for individual films—which may seem at odds with the inherently mass nature of the film musical. Yet, at the same time, the theatrical foundation of this genre compels directors to explore ways of interpreting screen action in a distinctly scenic manner.

Such approaches can be found not only in the film operas of the 1970s but also in Federico Fellini’s And the Ship Sails On (1983) and Luchino Visconti’s White Nights (1957). However, the most distinct explorations in this direction come from French director Alain Resnais, who states: "I am a formalist. I am interested in the very construction of the narrative. And in this sense, cinema can still offer many undiscovered possibilities. Cinematography is the art of spectacle and performance, like theater, the music hall, or the circus. And it seems to me that performance, by its nature, requires the development of some action. And here, there are many options."[12]

Alain Resnais employs a similar approach in his film Mélo, based on Henri Bernstein's 1929 play. The film’s extended exposition unfolds in Romain’s garden, within a picturesque gazebo where the three protagonists finish their dinner around a small round table. Strikingly, this setting is placed within what resembles an indoor street—flanked by artificial façades constructed with an unnatural perspective, much like diagonal wings in theater design, which create an illusion of depth. The nighttime lighting is distinctly theatrical, dominated by deep, inky hues. In the background, at the point where the converging streets meet at an angle, Resnais presents a section of dark blue sky, adorned with oversized golden stars and a large, motionless moon—resembling a painted backdrop. This stylized nightscape evokes comparisons to Baz Luhrmann’s Moulin Rouge! and its similarly theatrical visual aesthetic.

A notable example of the theatricalization of film action can be seen in Resnais’s later works, such as Mélo (1986) and You Ain’t Seen Nothin’ Yet (2012). The latter is based on two plays by Jean Anouilh: Dear Antoine (1967) and Eurydice (1941). While Mélo brings cinema closer to theater—structuring its narrative into theatrical acts, each introduced by a rising stage curtain—You Ain’t Seen Nothin’ Yet transforms theater into cinema within cinema. (Notably, the same theatrical curtain appears in the film’s trailer, echoing its presence in Mélo.) In this film, Resnais employs the semiotic model of text within text, emphasizing how Eurydice undergoes multiple layers of encoding. The mythological paradigm reshapes elements of 20th-century reality—such as the train station and hotel—into symbolic signs, shifting the viewer’s focus from their realism to their timelessness.

To achieve his goal, Alain Resnais creates a quasi-theatrical environment—one that is almost conventional yet subtly subversive. The viewer, along with the film's characters, enters a vast and uncanny space: Antoine's house, which—thanks to artists Jacques Saulnier, Mathieu Beot, and Fabrice Bourdieu, along with cinematographer Éric Gautier—resembles a cardboard set, frontally oriented toward the audience. Behind the expansive glass door, a theatrical wind "blows," and when it opens, autumn leaves—clearly artificial—sweep in along with the arriving couples, reinforcing the film’s staged aesthetic. The lighting that floods the living room further enhances this sense of artifice; its source is deliberately unindicated, as it would be in a natural setting. Instead, it emanates from above, unmistakably evoking theatrical spotlights. The camera’s function in this sequence is deliberately restrained: long, static shots dominate, with only occasional panning behind the seated characters, mimicking the perspective of a theater auditorium. Editing is kept to a minimum, and instead of conventional cuts, the shot scale changes within the frame as actors move toward the camera. A particularly striking technique is repetition, which is introduced emphatically at the beginning of the film—through extended phone calls in which identical lines are spoken to different recipients and through repeated close-ups of fragmented facial features, a visual strategy reminiscent of the opening of Ingmar Bergman’s The Magic Flute. This repetition extends to the depiction of the characters’ arrivals at Antoine’s house, where nearly identical mise-en-scènes play out with only slight individual variations.

[12]Rene, A. Skoree remeslenik-lubitel, izkustvo kino, 2012, Noemvri, №11

All of these elements combine to create a ritualized rhythm and a distinct sense of theatrical convention.

The interplay between screen and theatrical action is particularly evident in the film's unusual mode of communication between its characters. The guests, who are invited to watch a filmed performance, are former performers of the same roles. As the boundaries blur, the spectators of the home film begin to recite the lines of their on-screen counterparts and enact subsequent scenes—this time in the living room. This expansion of the theatrical space transforms cinematic reality into a state of "non-reality." Alain Resnais reinforces this aesthetic strategy by introducing a striking visual device: suddenly, one of the living room's wings transforms into a restaurant, a railway platform, or even a hotel room. These spaces, deliberately artificial in their design, heighten the film's constructed nature. The filmmakers intentionally create a visual style that evokes either rudimentary 3D graphics or crudely rendered 2D images, further destabilizing the viewer's perception of space and reality.

However, the true impact of this heightened theatricality in space, present in both of Resnais' films, emerges from its fusion with an almost microscopic focus on details and nuances in the actors' performances. The director shapes his modernist vision by experimenting with space and manipulating time—expressed not just through editing but also through the actors' performances, which evoke the conventions of theater. Resnais' actors are highly "theatrical," though not in the conventional sense of exaggerated expression. Instead, their performances are defined by an intense processuality, far exceeding the norms of traditional cinema. This fusion of a deliberately stylized environment with a hyper-real human presence produces an unusual cinematic aesthetic—one that deeply resonates with the essence of theater, where "living people" are physically present on stage. It represents a distinctive approach to transforming theatrical reality into cinematic reality, meticulously crafted through the seamless integration of all its elements.

An examination of alternative directorial approaches within cinematic practice reveals both the challenges and the unpredictable nature of this genre. It also highlights the risks undertaken by a creative team under the director's leadership. Increasingly, the finest examples of this cinema belong not to mass culture but to the realm of art, becoming a niche fascination among the "initiated." Is the film musical evolving? Absolutely! It has been transforming ever since Offenbach's first adaptation in the 1850s. More importantly, change itself is the clearest indication that the musical remains a vibrant and evolving genre. Its enduring appeal may stem from its alignment with the modern viewer's "clip-like" consciousness—one that thrives on fast-paced, visually striking, and emotionally engaging storytelling. This dynamic energy allows audiences to actively immerse themselves in the spectacle of the musical. At its core, the film musical is a genre where the mere act of presenting singing and dancing on screen carries immense emotional power. Cinema uniquely enables audiences to witness performers in ways that neither dramatic theater, opera, nor ballet can fully replicate. But will the genre ever return to its so-called "golden age," when musicals dominated popular culture? Unlikely. Audience tastes have shifted fundamentally, and commercial art can only flourish where the paying public allows it.

It is clear that success in this genre depends not only on the director's technical skills but also on their ability to blend these with a particular sensitivity—even sensuality. This rare quality is exemplified by masters of the genre such as Vincente Minnelli, Bob Fosse, and Baz Luhrmann, who possess the unique ability to craft an intoxicating fusion of passion, humor, sadness, music, and the exhilarating spectacle of song and dance. Their work, grounded in musical dramaturgy, ignites the creative imagination while also addressing the practical challenges of translating stage musicals onto the screen.

This immediately raises the question: How does the synthesis of music and cinema manifest? It is important to clarify that this is not merely about the musical arrangement of the action, its explication, dramaturgical accompaniment, or even a "phraseological" enhancement of the screen sequence. Rather, the focus is on identifying the precise formula by which a director can achieve harmony in visual expression—one that preserves the depth and intent of the original artistic vision (in this case, that of the composer and dramatist) while delivering a powerful emotional impact on the viewer.

The answer to this question lies in musical dramaturgy and, consequently, in its written counterpart—the score. A practical approach for directors, combining the analysis of musical dramaturgy with its artistic transformation on screen, is the active study of the musical score. The score unveils the intricate world of the musical stage image, shaped by the complex interplay between narrative and music.Within the score, the composer "encodes" a character's personality, the meaning behind their sung words, their emotional stance toward the dramatic event, and

their evaluation of their own actions. It captures all levels of both narrative and musical text, embedding "codes" of emotional and active relationships. Additionally, the score offers a visual-auditory representation of the simultaneous interplay between spoken, vocal, choral, and orchestral elements. Through musical notation, each part is arranged "horizontally" in alignment, with bar lines coinciding vertically to ensure cohesion across all components.

To unlock the secrets of a musical score, a director must not only possess musicality but also be able to "read" the score or consult a musically trained expert. The director must "anticipate" the drama and, based on this foresight, construct a dynamic logic of events. While different directors may encounter the same "riddles" within the notation, their interpretations and solutions will vary. This variation primarily stems from the director's imagination, which should not only accompany the analytical process but also be stimulated by it, ultimately giving rise to distinct artistic "visions."

The method of screen visualization of a musical score involves more than just "reading" the notes, tempo, and tonal relationships or mentally "listening" to the music—it also requires "seeing" the action, identifying aesthetic points of conflict, and transforming musical dramaturgy into cinematic form while preserving its inherent conventions. The director’s task is to discover the screen symbols that will most effectively translate the stage performance to film, crafting a unique cinematic intrigue through the interplay of sound and image. Similarly, just as each musical part is arranged "horizontally"—one beneath the other—with bar lines aligned vertically, the visual "part" can be superimposed, with the beginning of an editing sequence synchronized with the strong beat of the first bar of the musical score. Through pre-visualization, key turning points and accents in the future visual-editing sequence can be mapped out in direct interaction with the rhythmic and structural cues derived from the score analysis. This process helps project the shots that will be used in constructing the scene while respecting the distinct conventions of both music and film. Ultimately, the foundation of "fantasy" must be sought within the musical score itself.

Just as the concept of a "synthetic actor" exists, one could argue that the director of a film musical is a "synthetic director." Their expertise must encompass theater, music, and cinema, blending these disciplines seamlessly. Guided by the musical score, the director must craft a stylistically cohesive screenwork with a "mathematically" precise composition—one that does not fragment into separate elements: dramatic plot and vocal-choreographic performance, realism and artistic conventions, psychology and musicality, theatricality and cinema. The challenge lies in discovering the internal "spring" of harmony among these multidirectional elements so that the entire work ultimately aligns with and submits to the musical score.

Thus, the director faces the complex challenge of defining the nature and structure of their analytical method in deciphering the musical score as a foundation for future practical work on the film. Given the musical’s unique fusion of various art forms, it is clear that the traditional method of action analysis—widely used in theatrical directing to decode dramaturgical structure—cannot serve as the sole approach. While it remains an essential component, it is merely one part of a broader analytical framework. Moreover, its role must be determined in accordance with the established aesthetic principle governing the relationship between music and drama, in which the "musical" element takes precedence over the "dramatic."

In analyzing this issue, we do not consider the opposition between the musical score and the libretto. It is indisputable that treating the libretto as the primary material for directorial analysis is a flawed approach. Today, it is unlikely that any director would rely solely on the dramaturgical structure of a work as their guiding framework. The challenge of interpreting the musical score—as an already unified and synthesized entity—is far more complex. From what perspective should the director approach it—as music or drama? With which professional "tools" should it be deciphered—those of musical analysis or action analysis? Where do the analytical methods of these different "muses" intersect?

The development of the dramaturgical line in the score primarily falls within the director's competence, while the musical development is the domain of the conductor. But is this truly the case? After all, isn't it ultimately a synthesis?

Today, every director understands that a musical is a synthesis of theater and music, yet this phrase has become an empty cliché and dogma. Too often, "synthesis" is reduced to merely meaning "both together," a misconception that disregards the true nature of musical theater. Directing is, by nature, an interpretative profession. Moreover, every

interpretation inevitably involves engaging with the "foreign." The real question is: to what extent and in what way? From what perspective? With what artistic sensibility? Yet this measure lacks any objective standard—it depends on an inner sense of hearing and sensitivity, an instinct for harmony and proportion, and ultimately, a matter of culture itself.

Modern film musical directing presents numerous challenges due to the genre's complexity, often resulting in a direct and mechanical approach to adapting one art form into another. In contemporary cinema, the film musical ranges from auteur masterpieces to commercial entertainment. At the start of the 21st century, several arthouse musicals emerged, significantly reshaping the genre. This "colorful" landscape—along with the looming clichés of conventional cinema, theatrical space, and broader cultural stereotypes that inevitably surround the musical film—can stifle a director's imagination. Their task is further complicated by the fact that the uniqueness of the screen musical lies in a form of cinematic synthesis where the musical element takes precedence. This shift redefines the traditional role of the screenplay in structuring the cinematic narrative, fundamentally distinguishing the film musical from a conventional feature film.

To conclude, let us recall the words of renowned American librettist Oscar Hammerstein: "It is pointless to say what a musical should or should not be. It should be anything it wants to be, and if you don't like it, you don't have to watch it. There is only one absolutely indispensable element that a musical must have. It must have music. And it must be just one thing—it must be good."[13]

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