

# MUSICALS/DANCE FILMS

**Musicals / Dance Films** are cinematic forms that emphasize and showcase full-scale song and dance routines in a significant way (usually with a musical or dance performance as part of the film narrative, or as an unrealistic "eruption" within the film). Or they are films that are centered on combinations of music, dance, song or choreography. In traditional musicals, cast members are ones who sing. Musicals highlight various musical artists or dancing stars, with lyrics that support the story line, often with an alternative, escapist vision of reality - a search for love, success, wealth, and popularity. This genre has been considered the *most* escapist of all major film genres. Tremendous film choreography and orchestration often enhances musical numbers.

With the coming of talking motion pictures, the musical film genre emerged from its roots: stage musicals and operettas, revues, cabaret, musical comedy, music halls and vaudeville. They were the *last* of the major film genres, because they were dependent on sound captured on film. (How could a movie be "all-singing, all-dancing" without sound?) Musicals are often described as Broadway on film, although many other forms of musicals have been made (e.g., rock 'n' roll movies and disco/dance films). Recently, animated films (with musical soundtracks, such as **Beauty and the Beast (1991)**, **Aladdin (1992)**, **The Lion King (1994)**, and **Tarzan (1999)**) have emerged as one of the major musical forms, and many of them have won Best Original Song Oscars.

## **Warner Brothers' Experiments with Sound:**

Warner Bros. had launched sound and talking pictures, with Bell Telephone Laboratory researchers, by developing a revolutionary synchronized sound system called *Vitaphone*. It was a short-lived system *sound-on-disk* process developed in 1925 that became obsolete by 1931. This sound-on-disk process allowed sound to be recorded on a 16" phonograph record (a fragile disk made of wax) that was electronically linked and synchronized with the film projector. Each disc corresponded to one reel of film, or about ten minutes. The process was first used for short one- and two-reel films, mostly comedies and vaudeville acts.

## **The First Genuine Musical: The Broadway Melody (1929)**

The first *genuine* musical, fully integrating singing and dancing into a 'backstage musical' plot was also MGM's *first* full-length musical, **The Broadway Melody (1929)**. It premiered in Hollywood in early February of 1929 at Grauman's Chinese Theatre, and was the *first* widely-distributed sound feature. It was proudly advertised as "All Talking - All Singing - All Dancing", and the popular film brought in a profit of over \$1.6 million. It was the *first* musical film - and the *first* sound film as well - to win an Academy Award for Best Picture. The film inspired three more **Broadway Melody** films in the following decade - in 1935 (the best of the series), 1937, and 1940. In 1929, it also inspired an abundance of copycat imitators with similar 'backstage' or show-business-related plots.

The landmark musical, with songs composed by Arthur Freed and Nacio Herb Brown, starred Anita Page (as Queenie) and Oscar-nominated Bessie Love (as older sibling Hank) as two sisters seeking fame in the New York theatre - known as the Great White Way - while both were attracted to song-and-dance man Charles King (as Eddie). The musical is outdated today and exhibits its clumsy vaudevillian, stage-bound roots (with Jack Benny as master of ceremonies). However, it featured the innovative use of two-colors in "The Wedding of the

Painted Doll" sequence, a mobile camera, and slangy dialogue. The film was also revolutionary for two sound engineering firsts:

- it used a pre-recorded soundtrack (for "The Wedding of the Painted Doll" sequence)
- it had post-production sound effects and editing

The pioneering sound film was produced by young production head Irving Thalberg, and its original score was written by the team of Nacio Herb Brown and Arthur Freed - the film's hit song was "You Were Meant For Me." Freed remained with MGM and eventually was responsible for some of the studio's most successful and sophisticated musicals, beginning in the 1940s and continuing into the 1950s. Brown's and Freed's songs were later recycled into **Singin' in the Rain (1952)**. Other songs included "Give My Regards to Broadway" (George M. Cohan), "The Wedding Day of the Painted Doll", "Love Boat," "Broadway Melody," "Boy Friend," and "Truthful Deacon Brown" (Willard Robison).

### **The Boom in Musicals:**

The 1930s featured the cinematic artistry of the seemingly effortless and carefree, graceful, energetic and inspired dance team of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers - the most enduring, best-loved and complementary stars of the era. Katharine Hepburn was quoted as saying about them, "He gave her class, she gave him sex." In a unique musical courtship, the earthy Rogers matched Astaire's nimble dancing vitality with her own brand of wise-cracking humor and talent. In many of the films, they engaged in a 'challenge duet' of dancing skills and abilities (i.e., "Isn't It a Lovely Day (To Be Caught in the Rain)" in **Top Hat (1935)** or "They All Laughed" in **Shall We Dance (1937)**). Their screwball comedy musical/dance films often seamlessly integrated the musical numbers into the storyline - often one of chance meetings, mistaken identities, breakup or misunderstanding, and reconciliation.

Musicals really came into full flower in the late 1930s and into the 1940s, with an increased demand for escapist entertainment during World War II and bigger budgets for the musical genre. The 1940s inaugurated the heyday of elaborate MGM musicals in technicolor. Color was also being introduced into the major productions. MGM's most popular fantasy musical was the artistic, classic Technicolor masterpiece **The Wizard of Oz (1939)**, starring an appealing and young emerging star Judy Garland as Dorothy in a magical land and dreaming "Over the Rainbow."

Even Disney's **Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937)**, the first full-length animated feature, was also the first animated *musical* - with the title character occasionally singing within the film. Its songs included the tuneful "Heigh-Ho" and "Some Day My Prince Will Come." Although not technically a musical, the visually-brilliant masterpiece **Fantasia (1940)** blended together animation and classical music.

### **Shirley Temple at 20th Century Fox:**

Besides MGM, other studios had their own musical attractions, and merchandising 'cash cows.' One of the biggest money-making, musical super-stars of the mid-1930s was Twentieth Century Fox's talented, naturally-acting, charming child attraction Shirley Temple. The diminutive, curly-topped sensation earned a special Oscar in 1934 "in grateful recognition to her outstanding contribution to screen entertainment." Although her films went into decline by the late 30s as she got older, she achieved legendary film status in such films as:

- **Baby Take A Bow (1934)** - her first starring vehicle
- **Bright Eyes (1934)** - one of Shirley's best, with her classic rendition of "On the Good Ship Lollipop"
- **Little Miss Marker (1934)**
- **Curly Top (1935)** - with Shirley as a resident of an orphanage, and noted for her phrase: "Oh, my goo'ness!" - [this phrase was referenced in the latter film **Annie (1980)**]
- **The Little Colonel (1935)** with her famous staircase dance sequence with 56 year-old vaudevillian and musical stage star Bill "Bojangles" Robinson; has a short Technicolor finale

- **The Littlest Rebel (1935)** - a Civil War era film, the finale includes a 'challenge dance' against Bill Robinson
- **Captain January (1936)** including the delightful song/dance number "At The Codfish Ball" with Buddy Ebsen
- **Dimples (1936)** - famous for Shirley's convincing re-enactment of Little Eva's death scene in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*
- **Poor Little Rich Girl (1936)** - a remake of Mary Pickford's 1917 film, co-starring Alice Faye
- **Stowaway (1936)** - as a character named Ching-Ching, orphaned and stranded in Shanghai, China who stowaways on a ship bound for San Francisco; known for Shirley's frequent spouting of wise 'Charlie Chan' sayings, and her wonderful rendition of "You've got to S-M-I-L-E, To be H-A-Double-P-Y"
- **Heidi (1937)** - includes a dream sequence set in Holland with the singing of "In My Little Wooden Shoes"
- **Wee Willie Winkie (1937)** - directed by John Ford and set in India
- **Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm (1938)** with 10 year-old Shirley performing a medley of many of her earlier hit songs, "On the Good Ship Lollipop," "When I'm With You," and more
- **Little Miss Broadway (1938)**
- **The Little Princess (1939)** - her first Technicolor feature film

### **Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers: The Greatest Dance Duo**

The resurgence of musicals for RKO in the 1930s featured the cinematic artistry of the seemingly effortless and carefree, graceful, energetic and inspired dance team of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers - the most enduring, best-loved and complementary stars of the era. Katharine Hepburn was quoted as saying about them, "He gave her class, she gave him sex." In a unique musical courtship, the earthy Rogers matched Astaire's nimble dancing vitality with her own brand of wise-cracking humor and talent. In many of the films, they engaged in a 'challenge duet' of dancing skills and abilities (i.e., "Isn't It a Lovely Day (To Be Caught in the Rain)" in **Top Hat (1935)** or "They All Laughed" in **Shall We Dance (1937)**). Their screwball comedy musical/dance films often seamlessly integrated the musical numbers into the storyline - often one of chance meetings, mistaken identities, breakup or misunderstanding, and reconciliation.

Astaire, arguably the greatest dancer in film history and an import from Broadway, was the creative and revolutionary force behind the choreography and cinematography. He didn't fit the profile of a studly, good-looking actor, but he changed forever the way in which the camera moved in musicals. Musical numbers would now be filmed in long takes with minimal camera movements and cuts, and Astaire also insisted that his full-figure had to be captured in the camera frame. The fact that long dance sequences would be filmed in only one or two takes meant that the dance routines had to be performed flawlessly - or repeated. Film technicians designed a so-called "Astaire dolly" that could move on wheels and capture his whole body from a low-angle.

### **Gene Kelly: MGM's New Musical Dance Star**

Freed was responsible for bringing a new musical star from Broadway to Hollywood in the early 40s - the dynamic, ballet-oriented, Irish-American Gene Kelly. As a dancer, Kelly brought an imaginative freshness and athletic-style, muscular vitality to a number of films, projecting a very different down-to-earth persona from the sophisticated, suave and stylish tap dancing of Fred Astaire who often wore top hats and tails. His first major role, in a stage production of **Pal Joey**, brought him a Hollywood contract.

In Kelly's film debut, he was teamed with director Busby Berkeley, playing a song-and-dance man opposite co-star Judy Garland in MGM's **For Me and My Gal (1942)**. He was successful in Columbia's Technicolor **Cover Girl (1944)** opposite Rita Hayworth, particularly when he danced with his own reflection in "Alter Ego." And then in MGM's Best Picture-nominated **Anchors Aweigh (1945)** in the post-war years, Kelly (with his *sole* Best Actor nomination in his career) performed a dance with a scene-stealing Jerry, the cartoon mouse from "Tom and Jerry" - and the film co-starred a young and thin Frank Sinatra who crooned Styne-Cahn

tunes. As mentioned earlier, Kelly also performed a song-and-dance duet with Fred Astaire (their sole dance together) in **The Ziegfeld Follies (1946)**. **The Pirate (1948)** featured Kelly's singing and acrobatic, graceful dancing opposite Judy Garland, accompanied with a Cole Porter score - its most famous dance sequence was "Be a Clown."

Teamed with co-director Stanley Donen for the first time (they directed three MGM post-war musicals), Kelly made his directorial debut with **On The Town (1949)**, an energetic dance/musical that took the musical out of the wall-bound studio and on location into New York City. The adapted Leonard Bernstein stage show was a story about three on-leave sailors (Kelly, Sinatra, and Munshin) looking for romance during a 24-hour shore leave-furlough. Some of the film's production numbers included the opening "New York, New York," the "Miss Turnstiles" ballet, and "Prehistoric Man." Stanley Donen also directed MGM's **Royal Wedding (1951)**, a story inspired by star actor Astaire's real-life story, and featuring Astaire's two famous solos: a 'tap-dance on the ceiling' routine, and a hat-rack duet.

There were two musicals that won the Academy Award for Best Picture in the 1950s, and both were the works of Freed's and MGM's remarkable musical production unit, and directed by Vincente Minnelli. Kelly expressed his amazing appeal and choreography in MGM's trademark film, **An American in Paris (1951)**, a classic, Award-winning Best Picture film (over **A Streetcar Named Desire (1951)** and **A Place in the Sun (1951)**) about the romance between an American painter (Gene Kelly) and a French girl (Leslie Caron). It featured George and Ira Gershwin music and a climactic, 17-minute, half-million-dollar 'dream ballet' - one of Freed's pioneering inventions. The musical won five other Oscars (Best Screenplay, Best Score, Best Cinematography, Best Art Direction and Best Costume Design), and Kelly was awarded an honorary Oscar for "his brilliant achievements in the art of choreography on film."

Freed's other Best Picture award winner was another Minnelli-directed film, MGM's adaptation of Colette's story of **Gigi (1958)**. The story within this original film musical was about a shy Paris courtesan (Leslie Caron) who was courted as a wife by a wealthy Parisian playboy/patron named Gaston (Louis Jourdan). [Leslie Caron's other major musical hit was in the title role as the charming **Lili (1953)**, a film that became the basis for the 1961 Broadway musical hit *Carnival*.] The visually-enjoyable, Parisian-flavored film was actually filmed in the City of Lights and used the talents of the composers (Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe) and the costume designer (Cecil Beaton) of the play *My Fair Lady*. **Gigi** set a new record by winning nine Oscars in all the categories in which it was nominated - one more than any other film had received up to that time (**Gone With the Wind (1939)**, **From Here to Eternity (1953)**, and **On the Waterfront (1954)** each had received eight Oscars). Maurice Chevalier received an Honorary statue, and Vincente Minnelli became the *first* director to win an Oscar for a musical. The win was Minnelli's second nomination as Best Director and first and only Best Director win. His first nomination was for another 50s musical, **An American in Paris (1951)**.

### **The Greatest Musical Ever:**

By most accounts, the greatest musical ever produced (co-directed by Kelly and Donen and produced by Freed), a comic, satirical spoof of the dawn of the Hollywood sound era, was MGM's **Singin' In The Rain (1952)**. It included Kelly's now-classic solo dance of the title song in the rain, Donald O'Connor's energetic, acrobatic, slapstick dance/song "Make 'Em Laugh," the Kelly/O'Connor duet of "Moses Supposes," and a remarkable "Broadway Melody" ballet sequence in the finale with Kelly dancing with Cyd Charisse.

### **The Rise of Big-Budget Screen Adaptations of Broadway Hits:**

During the age of television (and song-and-dance variety shows), the Hollywood studios played it safe. Most musicals were lifted directly from established Broadway smash-hits on the "Great White Way" - and adapted into film versions for the big screen. Classic Broadway hits that opened on the silver screen in the 50s.

In addition, there were other great hits in the 50s and 60s:

- Frank Loesser's **Guys and Dolls (1955)**, that substituted Frank Sinatra and Marlon Brando for the original musical talent

- Fox's and collaborators Rodgers and Hammerstein's **Oklahoma! (1955)**, derived from the smash 1943 Broadway musical of the same name
- **The King and I (1956)** with Yul Brynner in an Oscar-winning, Best Actor role as the King of Siam and Oscar-nominated Deborah Kerr (with singing dubbed by ghost vocalist Marni Nixon)

### **Best Picture-Winning Musicals in the 60s:**

From 1958 to 1968, there were *five* musical Best Picture winners out of eight nominees. Four musicals in the decade of the 1960s adapted for the screen won the Academy Award for Best Picture. All four were based on Broadway hits, but with a distinct difference - each one involved a major cast change:

- UA's **West Side Story (1961)**, from Best Director-winning co-directors Jerome Robbins and Robert Wise, with ten Academy Awards from eleven nominations, was the *Romeo-and-Juliet* inspired 1957 hit Broadway musical with spectacular choreography (especially in the film's opening), hit songs including the exhilarating "America" (performed on a rooftop), and "Maria" with music by Leonard Bernstein and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim. Its romantic tale featured star-crossed young lovers: Puerto Rican Maria (Natalie Wood replacing Carol Lawrence, with singing dubbed by Marni Nixon) and American Tony (Richard Beymer replacing Larry Kert, with singing dubbed by Jim Bryant) associated with competing juvenile gangs in Manhattan's Upper West Side
- Warners' and Lerner's and Loew's musical play **My Fair Lady (1964)**, with twelve nominations and eight Oscars, was directed by the legendary George Cukor and based upon George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* and the 1956 stage production. It was about a Cockney street urchin named Eliza Doolittle (Audrey Hepburn replacing Broadway star Julie Andrews, with singing again dubbed by Marni Nixon) who was transformed by linguist Henry Higgins (Rex Harrison) into a proper lady; Cukor won his *sole* Best Director Oscar with his fifth nomination, and all three British cast members (Stanley Holloway, Gladys Cooper, and Rex Harrison) were nominated in acting categories, with Harrison the winner as Best Actor; Audrey Hepburn was conspicuously absent from the nominees; **My Fair Lady (1964)** defeated another Best Picture-nominated musical, **Mary Poppins (1964)**

Rodgers and Hammerstein's and producer/director Robert Wise's most successful work - 20th Century Fox's romantic musical/drama **The Sound of Music (1965)** based on Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse's 1959 Broadway hit about a romance between a nun-turned-governess (Julie Andrews) and a widower (Christopher Plummer) with seven children, with ten nominations and five Oscars, featured an unforgettable Julie Andrews (replacing Broadway star Mary Martin) in the lead role, singing melodic Rodgers and Hammerstein songs (including the lively "Do-Re-Mi" and lyrical "Edelweiss"). The sweet, somewhat sentimental film was set in 1938 Salzburg, Austria and shot with beautiful views of the Alps and the city.

### **Elvis 'The Pelvis' Presley: The King of Rock 'N Roll**

The hip-swiveling king of rock 'n' roll, singer Elvis Presley broke into films, making a total of thirty-three films in his career from the mid-50's to 1970. Although most of them were forgettable, formulaic, low-budget, sappy 'boy-meets-girl' pictures sprinkled with hit songs, **Jailhouse Rock (1957)** captured the real magnetism of the music star. He was also featured as an actor in many money-making films after signing his first film deal in 1956. His screen debut was in Paramount's Civil War drama **Love Me Tender (1956)** (originally titled *The Reno Brothers*), with a #1 single hit song ballad. **Jailhouse Rock (1957)** is generally acknowledged as his most famous and popular film, but he also appeared in **Loving You (1957)** (noted for his first screen kiss) and in director Michael Curtiz' **King Creole (1958)** as a New Orleans teen rebel (acclaimed as one of his best acting roles) before the decade ended. His induction into the Army in 1958 was a well-publicized event. After his Army stint, he also starred in **G.I. Blues (1960)**, in Don Siegel's western **Flaming Star (1960)** (with only two songs) as a half-breed youth, in the southern melodrama **Wild in the Country (1961)**, and in other formulaic 60's films (i.e., **Blue Hawaii (1961)**, **Kid Galahad (1962)**, and his biggest box-office hit **Viva Las Vegas (1964)**). By the 70s, his film roles had deteriorated, and although he returned to stage performances and revived

his singing career, he was physically on the decline until his death in August, 1977 of heart disease and drug abuse.

### **The Beatles:**

The Beatles' improvisational and imaginative first film was producer Richard Lester's **A Hard Day's Night (1964)**, made at the peak of "Beatlemania" popularity. It captured a surrealistic day and a half in the lives of the "Fab Four" Beatles from Liverpool, and heralded a new kind of musical. Their music was also featured in **Yellow Submarine (1968)**, an animated musical feast. Two great rock documentaries focused on the life of singer/writer Bob Dylan: D.A. Pennebaker's **Don't Look Back (1967)** followed his 1965 tour of England, including appearances by Joan Baez and Donovan, and Martin Scorsese's **No Direction Home (2005)** focused on the first six years of Dylan's career.

### **Jim Henson's The Muppets:**

Puppetmaster Jim Henson's loveable creatures, the Muppets (from *Sesame Street* and *The Muppet Show* (1976-1981)), including Kermit the Frog, Miss Piggy, and a host of others, crossed over to family-oriented feature films in the late 70s. Inevitably, these profitable films in the original trilogy included energetic and silly musical numbers:

- director James Frawley's **The Muppet Movie (1979)**, with the Oscar-nominated "Rainbow Connection" song
- **The Great Muppet Caper (1981)**, Henson's feature film directorial debut film
- director Frank Oz's **The Muppets Take Manhattan (1984)**

### **A Revival of Dance Pictures:**

Dance pictures were revived in the late 1970s by director John Badham's classic urban drama/dance film **Saturday Night Fever (1977)** that starred John Travolta (with the film's sole nomination for Best Actor) as a vulgar, blue-collar Brooklyn paint-store clerk - transformed into a pulsating, white-suited disco king Tony Manero who struts across a dance floor of rainbow-colored squares. The famous disco film featured a popular Bee Gees soundtrack (un-nominated by AMPAS!). Dance champion Denny Terrio and choreographer Lester Wilson trained Travolta, who was a teen idol and starring on TV's *Welcome Back, Kotter* (as Vinnie Barbarino), to swivel his hips on the dance floor. The film, costing about \$3.5 million, made almost \$300 million for Paramount Studios. [The film's lesser sequel was Sylvester Stallone's **Staying Alive (1983)**.]

The next year, Travolta co-starred with Australian singer Olivia Newton-John in Randal Kleiser's popular, spirited, nostalgic 50s film **Grease (1978)** with smutty dialogue - it was a former 1972 hit Broadway musical that brought two big hit songs: "Summer Nights" and "You're The One That I Want", to the charts. (The film's only nomination was Best Song for "Hopelessly Devoted to You.")

In response to *Grease*, independent film producer Roger Corman provided the low-budget **Rock 'n' Roll High School (1979)** with a soundtrack by The Ramones. A Western-style *Saturday Night Fever* film, James Bridges' **Urban Cowboy (1980)**, with popular young stars John Travolta and Debra Winger, featured Houston honky-tonks, mechanical bull-riding in bars, blue-collar cowboys, and country music dancing (including the Cotton-Eyed Joe). Alan Parker succeeded with the dance musical **Fame (1980)**, a story of eight struggling young dancers in New York High School for the Performing Arts - so popular that it helped launch a television show - and it received six Academy Award nominations and two wins (Best Score and Best Song). Adrian Lyne's slick **Flashdance (1983)** was the immensely popular, highly kinetic, music-video style film - with an Oscar-winning title song by Irene Cara. It featured 19 year-old Jennifer Beals in her first starring role as Alex - a day welder in Pittsburgh and night dancer in a men's club who aspired to successfully audition for ballet school. Herbert Ross' energetic rock/dance film **Footloose (1984)** was also a culturally-significant film with a pounding, hit soundtrack (that featured Kenny Loggins' Oscar-nominated hit single of the title song, and a second nominated Best Song "Let's Hear It For the Boy"). It starred John Lithgow as a strict minister and Kevin Bacon as the illegal and defiant dancer in town. Singer Prince (in his first starring film) played "The Kid" in the feature-length music video **Purple Rain (1984)**, and succeeded in having the #1 movie, album, and single

simultaneously. The sleeper hit, feel-good teen-oriented dance/romance film **Dirty Dancing (1987)** with Jennifer Grey and Patrick Swayze provided nostalgia, great dance routines, sexy young stars, and a coming-of-age story set in the Catskills in 1963.

### **Biopics of Musical Singers:**

Both Diana Ross and Bette Midler were Best Actress-nominated for their lead roles (based respectively on the lives of legendary jazz singer Billie Holiday and tragically burned-out rock star Janis Joplin) in **Lady Sings the Blues (1972)** and director Mark Rydell's **The Rose (1979)**. Director Michael Apted's **Coal Miner's Daughter (1980)** with Best Actress-winning Sissy Spacek was a quasi-musical/biopic about country music singer Loretta Lynn. Patsy Cline (portrayed by Best Actress-nominated Jessica Lange) was also remembered with **Sweet Dreams (1985)**, as was Jim Morrison (portrayed by Val Kilmer) in Oliver Stone's **The Doors (1991)**, Tina Turner (portrayed by Oscar-nominated Angela Bassett) in **What's Love Got to Do With It? (1993)**, Bobby Darin (portrayed by Kevin Spacey) in **Beyond the Sea (2004)**, and country singer Johnny Cash (portrayed by Joaquin Phoenix, with Oscar-winning Reese Witherspoon as wife June Carter) in **Walk the Line (2005)**.

### **Animated Musicals from Disney Revived:**

Animated musical blockbusters from Disney's studios also succeeded with high-quality feature films that kept musical scores alive. They proved to be more popular than live-action efforts (such as **Bedknobs and Broomsticks (1971)**, **Pete's Dragon (1977)**, and others). Alan Menken was instrumental in leading the songwriting and storytelling for a number of Disney animations in the 1990s, as were pop stars (such as Elton John, Phil Collins, and Sting):

- **The Little Mermaid (1989)**, based on the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale with the popular songs "Part of Your World," "Kiss the Girl," the Oscar for Best Original Score (Alan Menken) and Best Song-winning "Under the Sea"
- **Beauty and the Beast (1991)**, the classic French romantic fable (from Jean Cocteau's 1948 *La Belle et La Bete*) that was the *first* Best Picture-nominated animated musical feature film, with the Oscar for Best Original Score (Alan Menken), a Best Song-winning title tune, and two other Best Song nominees including "Belle" and "Be Our Guest"; its success was recreated when it was adapted into a Broadway show
- **Aladdin (1992)**, with the Oscar for Best Original Score (Alan Menken), the Best Song-winning "A Whole New World", and Robin Williams as the voice of the Genie
- **The Lion King (1994)**, with a pop music score by Elton John and Tim Rice, including the Oscar for Best Original Score (Hans Zimmer), the Best Song-winning "Can You Feel the Love Tonight," also "Circle of Life" and "Hakuna Matata"; later in 1997 became a Broadway hit musical
- **Pocahontas (1995)**, with Academy Awards for Best Original Score (Alan Menken, Stephen Schwartz) and Best Song-winning "Colors of the Wind"
- **The Hunchback of Notre Dame (1996)**, inspired by Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, with songs composed by Alan Menken (Oscar nominated for Best Original Score) and Stephen Schwartz
- **Hercules (1997)**, a Disneyfication of the myth of Hercules, with the Academy Award-nominated Best Original Song "Go the Distance"
- **Mulan (1998)**, nominated for an Academy Award for Best Original Music Score
- **Tarzan (1999)**, with songs by Phil Collins, including the Best Song-winning "You'll Be In My Heart"
- **The Emperor's New Groove (2000)**, Academy Award-nominated for Best Song "My Funny Friend and Me" (performed by Sting)

Dreamworks' attempted to compete with the Disney animated musicals with **Prince of Egypt (1998)**, and won the Academy Award for Best Song (Stephen Schwartz) for "When You Believe." Another unbelievably tasteless animated musical was director Trey Parker's independent **South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut (1999)**, a spin-off based upon a cable-TV series with foul-mouthed characters - it had an obscene title song ("Blame Canada") that was nominated for Best Original Song.

## Modern Day Musicals: The 80s and After

*Pink Panther*-director Blake Edwards' **Victor/Victoria (1982)** with a Henry Mancini score featured the director's wife Julie Andrews in a 1930's Parisian story "of a woman pretending to be a man pretending to be a woman." [In 1996, **Victor/Victoria** was transformed into a Broadway musical, again directed by Edwards and starring Andrews.] Barbra Streisand's directorial debut film **Yentl (1983)**, the story of a young Jewish woman disguised as a boy, won only one Oscar (Best Original Song Score) from its five nominations. And the 1984 Best Picture Oscar victor, **Amadeus (1984)**, was a drama/musical about child prodigy Mozart. An off-Broadway musical was successfully adapted into Frank Oz's cartoonish film version **Little Shop of Horrors (1986)** - originally based on horror film director Roger Corman's 1961 low budget cult favorite. Live-action musicals seemed to almost fade in the 1990s. There was only one successful live-action musical in the 90s - director Alan Parker's musical drama **Evita (1996)**, adapted from the 1976 theater version by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice, with Madonna (singing the Oscar-winning Best Original Song "You Must Love Me").

## The New Millennium:

It would take the new millennium to bring more well-received musicals, but the first few struggled to find audiences. Baz Luhrmann's eye-catching and dazzling, Best Picture-nominated **Moulin Rouge (2001)** (the *first* live-action musical to be nominated for Best Picture since **All That Jazz (1979)**), and choreographer Rob Marshall's debut feature film and razzle-dazzle film **Chicago (2002)** (at \$171 million) proved that adaptations of modern stage musicals (a rock-opera bio in this case) or inventive fantasy musicals were still possible. Marshall's film was a musical drama and a screen adaptation of the 1975 Broadway hit musical *Chicago* from John Kander and Fred Ebb, originally directed and choreographed by Bob Fosse, and revived on Broadway in 1996. It garnered six Oscars from its thirteen nominations, including Best Picture. It was the *first* musical since **Oliver! (1968)** to win the top award.

However, the trend could be short-lived, due to the total box office failures of stage-to-screen adaptations of such acclaimed and popular Tony-winning musicals as Joel Schumacher's **The Phantom of the Opera (2004)** (at \$51.2 million), **Rent (2005)** (at \$29.1 million) and the get-rich-quick scheming of theatrical con-men in **The Producers (2005)** (at \$19.4 million). Director Bill Condon's **Dreamgirls (2006)** (at \$103.1 million) was a lavish and vibrant screen adaptation of Michael Bennett's popular 1981 Broadway musical about a trio of Motown-style soul singers *The Dreams*, in a thinly veiled *roman a clef* of the real Motown singing group The Supremes. It acquired eight nominations but came away with only two wins: Best Supporting Actress (Jennifer Hudson), and Best Sound Mixing, even though it won at the Golden Globes awards as the Best Musical or Comedy. **Hairspray (2007)** (at \$119 million) - the song-and-dance adaptation of the Broadway smash hit, with stars Nikki Blonsky and John Travolta in early 1960s Baltimore, became one of the few movie musicals that grossed over \$100 million, joining **Chicago (2002)**, **Dreamgirls (2006)**, and **Grease (1978)**. However, it received no Oscar nominations, although it did have three Golden Globe nominations. Also, Tim Burton's **Sweeney Todd (2007)** (at \$52 million), with Johnny Depp as a Victorian-era vengeful barber, was recognized with three Oscar nominations (and only one win). In some respects, the entire musical genre wasn't being blamed for the decline in big-screen movie musicals, only individual films.

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