To my mother, who used to sing Bodo's songs during my childhood
and who introduced me to the pleasures of operetta

and

To Brit, Davey, Elizabeth, and Finn, who for decades have shared my passion for opera

Contents

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Introduction

"Without music, life would be a mistake."
—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* (1889)

Hollywood's Favorite Offspring

A multifaceted genre born of 1920s technological innovations—diegetic sound and its synchronization with image—the film musical was a quintessentially Hollywood product of the studio system. Its heterogeneous provenance encompassed revue, vaudeville, operetta, ballet, the minstrel show, Tin Pan Alley, and Broadway stage productions. A combination of studios' competitiveness, commitment to entertainment, and stake in the music publishing, recording, and radio industries[1] prompted Warner Bros. in October 1927 to pioneer a musical as the first talkie—Alan Crosland's *The Jazz Singer*.[2] In September of the following year, the same studio released *The Singing Fool* (directed by Lloyd Bacon). Both starred the immensely popular stage and nightclub singer Al Jolson. Although in the first, he simply adlibbed a few lines of dialogue,[3] while only two-thirds of the second film contained songs and speech, the promise of sound cum music was self-evident, and the films triggered a veritable avalanche of offerings in the genre, by Warner, Fox, and RCA.[4] From 1927 to 1930 an astonishing two hundred-plus musicals appeared on screen, peaking in volume from 1929 to 1930—not coincidentally, during the onset of the Great Depression (1929–1939). In that grim decade the musical's spectacular orientation, upbeat

1 John Izod, *Hollywood and the Box Office 1895–1986* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 82; Pam Cook and Mieke Bernink, *The Cinema Book* (London: BFI, 1999), 209.

2 For a detailed survey of the circumstances leading Warner Bros. to make and release the film, see Douglas J. Gomery, "Writing the History of the American Film Industry: Warner Bros and Sound," *Screen* 17, no. 1 (Spring 1976): 40–53.

3 Izod, *Hollywood and the Box Office 1895–1986*, 75.

4 While *The Jazz Singer* fared quite well, *The Singing Fool* proved a genuine blockbuster, strikingly lucrative, as was Jolson's rendition of the song "Sonny Boy," records of which sold more than a million copies. See "A. J. Recordings: The Singing Fool—1928," https://jolson.org/works/film/tsf/singfool.html. Copious information about *The Jazz Singer* is available at "*The Jazz Singer*," Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Jazz_Singer.

song and dance routines, espousal of bourgeois heteronormative love, and illusion of community testified to the genre's embrace of fantasy, offering both a welcome respite from, and a reassuring compensation for, the trials of everyday lived reality. Whereas the genre was deemed lowbrow by those indentured to hierarchies and auteur cinema, audiences' enthusiasm for the musical, which reigned as the most popular genre from the thirties into the mid-to-late fifties, stayed undimmed. It elevated singers and dancers such as Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, Gene Kelly, Cyd Charisse, and Judy Garland to the rank of screen idols.

The genre's conventions during the thirties and forties remained largely stable—indeed, definitive in such classics as *42nd Street* (1933) and *Footlight Parade* (1933), both with their signature Busby Berkeley extravaganzas, as well as *Flying down to Rio* (1933),[5] *The Gay Divorcee* (1934), *Top Hat* (1935), *Swing Time* (1936), and *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944). Yet a few individual musicals of the forties such as *The Pirate* (directed by Vincente Minnelli, 1948) at MGM, with Garland and Kelly, modified the model in their portrayal of gender and ironically inflected treatment of those very conventions. Even earlier, such films as *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) and *Ziegfield Follies* (1946) had deviated from the paradigm that scholars such as Rick Altman and Jane Feuer have elaborated in an explicative mode, their purviews marginalizing the distinctive, creative anomalies vis-à-vis the so-called norm so as to make their case for the generic utopian blueprint.[6] Various film scholars have created their own taxonomies for that template, which inevitably appears in a bifurcated form determined by the role of music and choreography within the film's narrative. For instance, Louis Giannetti calls "realist" a musical in which efforts to stage a performance rationalize the song and dance numbers. By contrast, in its "formalist" counterpart characters can burst into song and dance with putative spontaneity at any moment in any situation,[7] giving new meaning to Jacques's observation in *As You Like It*, that "all the world's a stage." Altman labels that distinction as the "show" or "backstage" versus the "integrative" musical, which strives to embed musical numbers convincingly into a narrative structure in which music plays a

5 Like Ernst Lubitsch's *Merry Widow* (1934), based on Franz Lehár's 1905 operetta, *Flying down to Rio* antedated the moralistic Production (or Hays) Code, which went into effect later in 1934. Both musicals engage in risqué dialogue and in the latter case show considerably more flesh than the code would approve.

6 Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); and Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: BFI, 1999); Jane Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

7 Louis Giannetti, *Understanding Movies* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1999), 218–219.

vestigial, deflective, or irrelevant but audience-pleasing role.[8] His terminology and concepts essentially have codified the critical discourse for three decades.

In the fifties, as the musical inevitably evolved, it gradually absorbed new elements associated with melodrama—hyperbole, heightened emotionalism, suppressed desires, archetypal characters, and the conflict of clear-cut good and evil. These tendencies within the genre hardly conduced to utopianism. Indeed, the impulse to hybridity resulted in musicals that tackled problems less lightly than in the classic versions of the genre; many also bypassed the obligatory happy endings associated with the latter. Alongside more traditional fare such as *An American in Paris* (1951), *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* (1954), and *Oklahoma* (1955) appeared the refractory, thought-provoking *Love Me or Leave Me* (1955), *It's Always Fair Weather* (1955), *Carousel* (1956), and *Silk Stockings* (1957)—a musical reworking of Ernst Lubitsch's film *Ninotchka* (1939) that concludes without a rousing musical celebration of consensus. Moreover, in the second half of the fifties the widespread prevalence of television, which by 1959 was present in ninety percent of American households,[9] and the dramatic advent of rock'n'roll—with *Rock around the Clock* (1956), *The Girl Can't Help It* (1956), and *Jailhouse Rock* (1957)[10] hitting the screens—destabilized if not outright unseated what had been the standard model of the screen musical's unchallenged sovereignty. Music and dance no longer appeared capable of solving social and personal problems, including violence, crime, pathology, and unzipped sexuality. And while the sixties seemed to revive the genre with such popular "family entertainment" as *The Music Man* (1962) and the "home apple pie" Julie Andrews vehicles, *Mary Poppins* (1964) and *The Sound of Music* (1965),[11] public thirst for the genre dwindled, as did the number of its Hollywood releases, though the Broadway-inspired *My Fair Lady* (1964) made a considerable splash and garnered a plethora of awards. Both films with Andrews restored the efficacy of song as community glue and moral tonic; what rescued them from saccharine banality were the catchy melodies and, in the case of *Mary Poppins*, some clever lyrics.

When film musicals regained a portion of their earlier audiences in the seventies, the aftermath of the preceding decade's volatility inspired a dystopian vision far removed from the conviction during the genre's heyday that "all's well

8 Altman, *The American Film Musical*.

9 Izod, *Hollywood and the Box Office 1895–1986*, 166.

10 Elvis Presley's film debut.

11 *The Sound of Music*, which cost $10 million, benefited hugely from the economically triggered adoption of middle-class values that placed the family on a pedestal, earning approximately $100 million in rentals (Izod, *Hollywood and the Box Office 1895–1986*, 171).

that ends well." The Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, the Watergate scandal, unremitting protests and riots, as well as the assassination of John Kennedy, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy created a *Zeitgeist* of retractive disillusionment rather than joyful celebrations of community. Irony and skepticism pervaded a divided and uncertain country in the throes of loss. And in this atmosphere of anomie the versatile, talented Bob Fosse (1927–1987) proved the ideal screen spokesman for a new sense of American life and, accordingly, a new concept of the film musical. An innovative choreographer, dancer, actor, and director who worked in both film and theater, Fosse enjoys widespread fame in cinema primarily on the basis of two landmark film musicals: *Cabaret* (1972), which earned him the Oscar for Best Director,[12] and *All That Jazz* (1979), which won the Palme d'Or at Cannes in 1980. Apart from enjoying a sterling reputation for originality in Broadway shows, Fosse had brought his distinctive choreography to such earlier screen musicals as *The Pajama Game* (1957) and had danced in his inimitable vein in *Kiss Me Kate* (1953). What distinguished the two seventies' outings, however, was not only his new style of dance (with distinctive leg and hand movements), but the replacement of the generic paradigm's carefree atmosphere with the dark, sordid world of entertainment—in 1930s Nazi-ruled Berlin in *Cabaret* and in New York's theater environment in *All That Jazz*—culminating in inevitable doom and death, respectively. The essentially benign, wholesome veneer of Hollywood's early musical has no place in Fosse's dystopian environments, where entertainment rubs shoulders (and other body parts) with sleaze, betrayal, and egotism run amok. Martin Scorsese's *New York, New York* (1977), though commercially and critically much less successful, likewise eschewed the fabled happy ending. Realism in an aporetic vein, in short, invaded utopian fantasies and dissipated them.

Part of this process possibly was aided by the unique, unrestrainedly irreverent British *Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975). Directed by Jim Sharman, the hilarious cult classic teeming with visual and verbal cinematic intertexts, saturated with multiple modes of unconventional sexuality, and focused on the irrepressible, half-naked *male* body, took the United States by storm. It showcased the rewards of nihilistic parody while exploring the injection of science fiction and horror into what earlier had seemed an impregnably "nice" genre.[13]

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12 The film also won seven other Oscars.

13 Parody of a genre, of course, normally signals that genre's exhaustion and the need for its rejuvenation by its wholesale reconceptualization or the infusion of transformative elements, frequently from other genres.

Its iconoclastic hybridity recalled that of several fine musicals of the fifties insofar as the latter likewise benefited from the (more cautious) admixture of features from another genre—melodrama. Frank Oz's American pseudo-analogue, *The Little Shop of Horrors* (1986), which drew on Roger Corman's identically titled sci-fi film, likewise courted horror and suggested the benefits of infusing a somewhat tired genre with "alien" elements but paled beside its British predecessor.

Much less revolutionary during the seventies in the United States and abroad was the abrupt, brief explosion of extraordinarily popular disco film musicals, above all John Badham's *Saturday Night Fever* (1977), which propelled its male lead, John Travolta, into stardom and immediately led to his role in the unprecedently profitable teen musical *Grease* (1978).[14] Both subscribed to the "dual focus" that Altman and Feuer attribute to the genre, but the treatment of sexuality, which had been constrained by the puritanical Production Code—adopted in 1930, enforced in 1934, and abandoned in 1968—contains some nasty overtones in both films.[15] What accounts for the originality of *Saturday Night Fever*, however, are the skillful dance routines, which captured viewers' imagination and fueled a veritable craze for disco dancing in numerous clubs in the United States and abroad. Moreover, the single by the Bee Gees issued in advance to promote the film resulted in the best-selling soundtrack album ever after the film's release.[16] Whereas no happy marriage unfolds onscreen, in this case the wedding of cinema and music recording was an ideal union made in Hollywood marketing heaven.[17]

In the ensuing decades, as Hollywood increasingly relied on successful Broadway musicals for transfers onto the screen, the formula that had enchanted audiences for years dissolved almost entirely. Nonetheless, Hollywood largely stayed faithful to the notion of romantic love and a happy ending buttressed by song, for which Europeans often expressed attitudes ranging from envious skepticism to ridicule, with film critics and reviewers in both Poland and Russia adopting the expression "happy end," identified exclusively with the myopic or

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14 Transferred from Broadway, where it had a record run, *Grease* reportedly "grossed $150 million on its first run alone" and generated sequels and imitations internationally (Jim Hillier and Douglas Pye, *100 Film Musicals* [London: Palgrave Macmillan/BFI, 2011], 92).

15 In 1938, the straitjacketing Production Code had put an end to the hilariously suggestive lines of Mae West (1893–1980), a major creative talent in film during the Depression and popular with audiences from 1932 to 1937. Censorship essentially ended her film career (Izod, *Hollywood and the Box Office 1895–1986*, 105, 107).

16 Hillier and Pye, *100 Film Musicals*, 196.

17 For a glance at *Saturday Night Fever* and other musicals of that period, see J. P. Telotte, "The New Hollywood Musical: From *Saturday Night Fever* to *Footloose*," in *Genre and Contemporary Hollywood*, ed. Steve Neale (London: BFI, 2002), 48–61.

oblivious optimism that all too frequently renders American mass-addressed films jejune. Even as the traditional film musical faltered, a curious development in the 1990s was the sudden increase in animated film musicals, such as *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), and *Hercules* (1997), recalling Disney's pioneering *Snow White* (1937)—a cinematic milestone that became one of Hollywood's greatest moneymakers. It was the film, in fact, "on which the Walt Disney empire was built."[18] The trend in animation, however, weakened in the second half of the 2000s.

By and large, the most memorable and profitable among the few American film musicals to have surfaced in the new millennium evidence the influence of Fosse and continue to depend on the success or failure of Broadway shows as a predictive indicator of screen adaptations' financial viability—currently exampled by the musical biopic *Hamilton* (2020).[19] Notably, the Australian Baz Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge!* (2001)[20] and Rob Marshall's *Chicago* (2002) have led the way, winning awards and large audiences even as they reconceived both genre and gender. A musical featuring an expensive *cocotte* loved by a naïve writer and expiring of tuberculosis in *fin-de-siècle* Paris (*Moulin Rouge!*)[21] or two female prison inmates guilty of murder in the 1920s (*Chicago*) was unimaginable during the era of the genre's sunny, affirmative phase. *Volens nolens*, sordid realism has crept into the formula and altered it, perhaps for good. Ultimately, the success of individual film musicals notwithstanding, the genre incontestably has declined since its unchallenged supremacy in the thirties. Nostalgic efforts to resuscitate its former status and part of its template, instanced by the inexplicably popular and professionally applauded *La La Land* (directed by Damien Chazelle, 2016), which borrows its ending from Jacques Demy's 1964 sing-through *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg*, demonstrates just how nerveless and clichéd such efforts can be.[22]

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18 Hillier and Pye, *100 Film Musicals*, 216.

19 The reverse likewise operates in the transfer to Broadway of such popular films as *The Lion King*, *Hairspray*, *Spider-Man*, *Legally Blonde*, and others.

20 Luhrmann's debut feature, *Strictly Ballroom* (1992), was a colorful comedy (bordering on gaudy) that featured dancing competitions, with some remarkably athletic numbers and apostrophes to the audience.

21 The scenario, of course, is familiar from opera, specifically Verdi's *La Traviata* and Puccini's *La Bohème*.

22 *Annette* (directed by Leos Carax, 2021), the latest such outing, met with a stinging review by the *The New Yorker*'s witty, incisive film critic, Anthony Lane (Lane, "The Uncanny Valley of *I'm Your Man*," *The New Yorker*, September 17, 2021, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/09/27/the-uncanny-valley-of-im-your-man).

Critical Delay and Relay

Until the late seventies, film studies neglected the musical as a genre too frivolous to warrant scholarly investigation. Eventually, however, it drew the attention of the British academic Richard Dyer, followed by Altman and Feuer, among many others.[23] At first glance, Dyer's 1977 article "Entertainment and Utopia" would seem to state the obvious—namely, that musicals provide escapist entertainment, but his examination of precisely what aspects of the genre collectively keep audiences entertained is still one of the most valuable analyses available today. Contending that musicals rely on representational and non-representational signs to purvey utopia, he identifies "colour, texture, movement, rhythm, melody, camerawork" among the non-representational signs before specifying energy, abundance, intensity, transparency, and community as those phenomena that the musical conveys to assuage audiences' anxieties and needs.[24] Dyer's brief, lucid article remains a foundational text. Many years later, Feuer (1993) expanded on the centrality of utopianism in the genre, which works to enlist viewers' cinematically engineered participation in the bracing solution to clashes and contradiction toward which the musical's narrative hurtles. And Altman's various publications, culminating in his monograph (1989; first edition 1987), essentially cover the genre's conventions, based chiefly on early examples from the thirties and forties: a formulaic plot centered on a romantic couple, a dual focus, strong sexual differentiation, a narrative that showcases singing and dancing talents, a display above all of the female body, and a happy ending that reconciles the conflicts featured throughout. As the specialist deemed the foremost authority on the genre, Altman has compartmentalized Hollywood musicals into "show," "folk," and "fairy tale" variants—categories that illuminate the orientation of various films, yet cannot fully accommodate some of the most original and interesting instances of the genre and slight the cultural and industrial context in which they originated.[25] Since, as noted above, the incursion of melodrama into the genre

23 For a compact synopsis of the critical literature on the genre, see Steve Neale, ed., *Genre and Hollywood* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 104–112.

24 Richard Dyer, "Entertainment and Utopia," in *Genre: The Musical: A Reader*, ed. Rick Altman, 220–232 (London, Boston, and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981). Originally published in *Movie* 24 (Spring 1977).

25 Steve Neale has been one of the few voices raised against Altman's attachment to a canon (Neale, "Questions of Genre," *Screen* 31, no. 1 [Spring 1990]: 45–66). Altman's later work, however, likely in response to Neale's objections, pays greater attention to the effects of temporality and external forces on a genre's evolution (Altman, *Film/Genre*). As Thomas Austin phrases it, more recently "Altman shows how genres are always in process and subject to the interventions of producers, critics (both popular and academic) and (potentially) audiences"

in the fifties resulted in musicals that omitted some of the features ruling earlier films and assimilated new ones, the critical vocabulary became loaded with epithets and other qualifiers, the taxonomical differentiation intended to register what actually was an aspect of the genre's origins.[26]

Categories and subcategories, as Steve Neale has argued, can only go so far when critics' formal emphasis does not take into account historical and sociological, as well as institutional, factors that cannot be separated from the choices made in film production and in one of its favorite genres, which has undergone such significant revisions over the years.[27] As he notes, "Genres do not consist only of films: they consist also, and equally, of specific systems of expectation and hypothesis which spectators bring with them to the cinema, and which interact with films themselves during the course of the viewing process." Sagely pointing out that "genres exist always *in excess* of a corpus of works," Neale (rightly, in my view) criticizes the impulse to establish a canon,[28] and though Altman briefly acknowledges such works as *The Wizard of Oz*, *West Side Story* (1961), *Grease*, and *Flashdance* (1983), his main interest lies in "canonical" examples of the genre. The typologies he has established are nevertheless useful as a starting point, which one may adopt, develop, or polemicize with, but certainly should not ignore. American film musicals as well as theoretical analyses of them have had an incalculable impact on the genre and its critical reception throughout Europe, including Poland and Russia, where scholarship on musicals is scant.

West to East: A Moveable Feast with Local Seasoning

> "After silence, that which comes nearest to expressing the inexpressible is music."
>
> —Aldous Huxley, "The Rest Is Silence" (1931)

Not all film industries and not all "stars" succumbed immediately to sound and to the heady appeal of song on screen. Sound, in fact, elicited enormous skepticism on the part of such prominent film personalities as Charlie Chaplin, the cornerstone of whose comedies was the singular expressiveness of his body language. And the career of John Gilbert, Greta Garbo's major leading man

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(Thomas Austin, "*Gone with the Wind* Plus Fangs," in *Genre and Contemporary Hollywood*, ed. Steve Neale [London: BFI, 2002], 296).

26 Cook and Bernink, *The Cinema Book*, 209.

27 Neale, "Questions of Genre"; Neale, *Genre and Hollywood*.

28 Neale, "Questions of Genre," 46, 51.

famous as "the Great Lover," ended with the introduction of sound as well as the machinations of studio politics. Likewise, Hollywood's chief swashbuckler, Douglas Fairbanks, who during the twenties impressed audiences in the sword-wielding roles of Zorro, d'Artagnan, and Robin Hood, found his signature athleticism less in demand with the advent of talkies. Meanwhile, not *The Jazz Singer*, but *The Singing Fool* introduced Europeans to the innovation of sound and musicals, for most cinemas in 1927 still lacked the equipment to project sound. Although not without delay, Europe by and large welcomed the new phenomenon, imitating the Hollywood musical's template or selectively adopting its constitutive features to produce its own versions of the musical during the thirties. Internationalism was the order of the day, and two of Germany's prominent directors—the urbane, witty Ernst Lubitsch (1892–1947) and Fritz Lang (1890–1976), the creator of the single most influential sci-fi film, *Metropolis* (1927)—were responsible for several of Hollywood's most original early musicals: Lubitsch's *The Love Parade* (1929), *One Hour with You* (1932), and the operettish *Merry Widow* (1934), with Maurice Chevalier and Jeanette McDonald; Lang's *You and Me* (1938), with music by Kurt Weill.

England, Germany, and France had no difficulty accepting the new technology. From the thirties through the fifties film musicals proliferated in Germany, but the industry's interest in them petered out at approximately the same time as the genre experienced a slump in Hollywood. Instances of the genre that stand out are G. W. Pabst's *Die Dreigroschenoper* (1931), Erik Charell's *Der Kongress tanzt* (1931), and Reinhold Schünzel's cross-dressing *Viktor und Viktoria* (1933), which a half-century later Blake Edwards reincarnated in the gender-bending British-American *Victor/Victoria* (1982) partly as a vehicle for his wife, Julie Andrews. And France swiftly embraced the genre, contributing *Il est charmant* (directed by Louis Mercanton, 1932), *Antonia* (directed by Jean Boyer and Max Neufeld, 1935), and *Prends la route* (directed by Jean Boyer, 1936) to the international corpus. But the most memorable French film musicals appeared in the 1960s: Demy's sui generis *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg*, followed by his *Les Demoiselles de Rochefort* (1967). England joined its continental counterpart with such works as *Evergreen* (directed by Victor Saville, 1934), which relied on the genre's staple of an assumed identity in its daring plot revolving around an illegitimate child;[29] *Look up and Laugh* (directed by Basil Dean, 1935), and

29 One of the few other musicals featuring an unwed mother is Grigorii Aleksandrov's *Tsirk* (Circus, 1936), which contrasts Soviet acceptance of an illegitimate Black child driven out of town with his mother by the intolerant Americans. Indeed, the United States was and continues to be racist, but so was the Soviet Union, as is Post-Soviet Russia.

Everything Is Rhythm (directed by Alfred J. Goulding, 1936)—all three generally adhering to Hollywood precepts and elaborating plots around musical performers. Although the genre never became a firm favorite on the British screen, notable musicals largely independent of the Hollywood model included Richard Attenborough's anti-war *Oh! What a Lovely War* (1969)—which ends with a stunning overhead shot of thousands of crosses on the graves of those killed in World War I—and, six years later, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, noted above. In other words, by the end of the thirties, the film musical was firmly established in western Europe, and the ineluctable permutations it underwent over time were fueled mainly by the individual traditions and priorities of each country. As might be expected, cinema at the easternmost end of the continent trod a parallel yet somewhat different path.

Poland's Exuberant Musical Culture of the Thirties

> "My motto is not to educate, but to entertain. What matters most is a film's success with the general public."
>
> —Michał Waszyński[30]

Poland, with cinematic connections closer to Germany and its operetta traditions than to Hollywood, nonetheless had American studios' distributors in Warsaw, Łódź, and Wrocław, which ensured that the Polish public's broad access to foreign films included Hollywood fare. Moreover, Polish film personnel, such as directors Aleksander Ryder, Ryszard Bolesławski, and Emile Reinart and cameramen Piotr Nowicki, Eugeniusz Modzelewski, and Jan Skarbek-Malczewski, collaborated in Austrian, French, Italian, and American projects. The Polish actress Pola Negri enjoyed a successful career in both Germany and Hollywood.[31] These and other sustained interactions meant that the potential of sound and the possibilities of film musicals reached Poland in September 1929, when *The Singing Fool* made its Polish premiere in Warsaw's movie theater

30 "Moją dewizją jest nie wychowywać, lecz dawać rozrywkę. Ważne jest przede wszystkim powodzenie filmu u szerokiej publiczności." Cited in Stanisław Janicki, "Michał Waszyński—artysta czy wyrobnik?," *Kino* 5 (2018): 31.

31 For a rundown on Poland's internationalist modus operandi during this period, see Charles Ford and Robert Hammond, *Polish Film: A Twentieth-Century History* (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2005), 42–61.

Splendid.[32] Among the array of reactions provoked by both novelties was a strongly negative rejection that assumed a startling form, possibly explained by the country's entertainment traditions. Cosmopolitan interwar Poland boasted a robust cabaret culture that showcased a host of formidably talented composers, singers, and dancers, who became stage stars with devoted fans. Perhaps the popularity of this "live onstage" genre accounted for Poland's initial response to the mediated nature of sound film and the screen musical. In its most extreme form, the strenuous resistance resulted in courts established in Warsaw, Łódź, and Kraków "to publicly denounce the evil of the talkies." Some in the profession viewed sound as "the destruction of the human voice," and others found it inimical to "the lively and dynamic action of the silent film."[33] Yet, during the 1930s, film as a cheap form of entertainment thrived, and eventually the privately owned cinema industry, guided by profits, accepted the arrival of sound and the new genre of screen musicals.

Fiscal considerations explain why during that decade most films on average were shot in a month—the accelerated production keeping pace with audience demand for new movies, some of which were shown briefly, sometimes for less than a month, with most films unable to make a profit.[34] Musical comedies particularly appealed to audiences, who preferred light, frothy fare and above all comedies, with or without music. Scriptwriters, composers, and leading actors and actresses in musicals migrated from the country's richly developed genre of cabaret, which laid the preparatory ground for the screen musical—a transfer that all too often resulted in loose plot development, to put it kindly, but seduced through excellent music, skillful singing, and exuberant dance routines. Recognizability doubtless played a key role in the film musical's popularity when famous cabaret performers appeared in fictional roles instead of themselves on stage.

As chapter one makes clear, the interwar film musical in Poland would be unthinkable without five key individuals: the director Michał Waszyński (né Moshe Waks; 1904–1965); the composer Henryk Wars (1902–1977); the actors Eugeniusz Bodo (1899–1943) and Adolf Dymsza (born Adolf Bagiński; 1900–1975), and the actress/dancer Helena Grossówna (1904–1994).[35] This

32 Sheila Skaff, *The Law of the Looking Glass: Cinema in Poland, 1896–1939* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008), 103.

33 Ford and Hammond, *Polish Film: A Twentieth-Century History*, 66–67.

34 Skaff, *The Law of the Looking Glass: Cinema in Poland, 1896–1939*, 156.

35 It was common at that time for assimilated Polish-Jewish public figures to alter their names so as to avoid the stigma of their Jewish origins. By the 1930s, Catholic Poland's earlier indifference to religious and ethnic "otherness" remained but a memory.

cohort—three of them Jewish—deserves much of the credit for the vitality of Poland's thirties musicals, for which audiences seeking visual and aural pleasure but indifferent to lapses in continuity and plotline had a healthy appetite.[36] The supreme director committed to offering the eager public entertainment pure and simple, Waszyński was unprecedentedly prolific, directing thirty-seven features during the thirties—approximately a quarter of that decade's output of 147 films.[37] Adhering to Hollywood conventions of the musical and later of melodrama, he managed to complete some films in a matter of two weeks.[38] His musicals included *Co mój mąż robi w nocy* (What my husband is up to at night, 1934), *Pieśniarz Warszawy* (The songster of Warsaw, 1934), *Będzie lepiej* (It'll be better, 1936), and *Bolek i Lolek* (Bolek and Lolek, 1936), which attracted viewers partly because he favored popular stars and also because he collaborated indefatigably with multiple Polish studios, such as Sfinks (the first Polish studio, owned by Aleksander Hertz), Leo-Film, Blok-Muza-Film, Rex-Film, and Feniks, which widely advertised their offerings.[39] As Stefania Zahorska, a film critic writing in the thirties, phrased it, "his filmmaking was efficient, cheap and popular with . . . audiences."[40] A colorful figure who had a finger on the pulse of the average viewer and became known as The King of Polish Popular Humor, during World War II he joined the peripatetic Anders Army, and after the war ended up as a high-profile, successful producer in Hollywood.[41] In Poland, however, he is best remembered for the country's most durable and fascinating Yiddish-language film, the remarkable *Dybuk* (The dybbuk, 1937).[42]

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36 On the colossal contribution of Jewish Poles to early Polish film and musicals, as well as music performance during World War II, see Beth Holmgren, "How the Cabaret Went to War," *The Cosmopolitan Review* 6, no. 3 (Fall–Winter 2014), http://cosmopolitanreview.com/how-the-cabaret-went-to-war; and Beth Holmgren, "The Jews in the Band: The Anders Army's Special Troupes," *POLIN* 32 (2020): *Jews and Music-Making in the Polish Lands*, ed. François Guesnet, Benjamin Matis, and Antony Polonsky, 177–191; as well as Janicki, "Michał Waszyński—artysta czy wyrobnik?"

37 Janusz R. Kowalczyk, "Michał Waszyński," Culture.pl., accessed August 31, 2021, https://culture.pl/en/tworca/michal-waszynski.

38 His *Dwanaście krzeseł* (Twelve chairs, 1933), an adaptation of Il'f and Petrov's novel, *Dvenadtsat' stul'ev* (1928), with Adolf Dymsza, testifies to the lively give-and-take across national borders during this period.

39 Kowalczyk, "Michał Waszyński."

40 Ibid.

41 He co-worked with Anthony Mann on the blockbuster costume epics *El Cid* (1961) and *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964) (Kowalczyk, "Michał Waszyński"), assisted in Orson Welles's production of *Otello*, and contributed to *Roman Holiday* and *The Barefoot Contessa* (Janicki, "Michał Waszyński—artysta czy wyrobnik?," 31).

42 In 2017, Elwira Niewiera and Piotr Rosołowski released *Książę i dybuk* (The prince and the dybbuk), a documentary about Waszyński's life and works that won the Venezia Classici