

Inseparable:
Crafting a Revisionist Hollywood Musical

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I. ABSTRACT

Through my short film *Inseparable*, I want to utilize the musical genre as a self-reflexive tool in order to examine and dissect the methods in which musicals use the escapist fantasy to promote a white, heterosexual agenda. I will take as many of the basic elements of the musical genre as I can and rebrand them to portray something that is not escapist, and forces the audience to take a closer look at society.

The accompanying paper will place the various musical tropes in context, highlighting the ones I used most prominently in my film. This will primarily focus on the fantasy climax number, obsession with fame, and the gentrification present in the musical genres. By focusing on genre theory, I will show how certain tropes are so ingrained in American consciousness that they have a larger effect on society as a whole.

Musicals have always been an escapist genre. They spiked in popularity during the Great Depression, as the public needed an reprieve from the drudgery of day to day life. The genre has all the ideal elements to construct the perfect distraction: worlds where music can burst in at any moment, a lack of real conflict, and characters who *always* fall in love by the end. As time progressed, musicals portrayed an increasingly idealistic version of the world. While this served an important purpose, not everyone's vision of an ideal world is the same. Musicals are notably ignorant of queer folks, people of color, and pretty much everyone who does not fit the white heterosexual mold.

Another of the most common tropes in the musical genre is the idealization of fame. Going back as far as *The Broadway Melody* (Beaumont, 1929) all the way up to *La La Land* (2016, Chazelle), the pursuit of fame has been an integral element to the genre. In a world where we already idolize celebrities to an unnerving extent, the musical genre does nothing but help perpetuate the false fantasy of fame. Just as revisionist westerns such as *Unforgiven* (Eastwood, 1992) examine the consequences of violence used so freely in classics like *The Searchers* (Ford, 1956), I will use my film to contextualize the unaddressed consequences of fame. By focusing on one day in the life of a fictional celebrity named Julie, I will highlight the isolating reality that comes with being a pop icon.

II. OVERVIEW

I, along with many others, experienced a prolonged glumness following the results of the 2016 presidential election. When I saw *La La Land* (Chazelle, 2016), I came to acknowledge the power and necessity of the musical genre. Upon my abrupt reintegration to the world after the end credits, I realized that this had been the first time I had completely forgotten about the social climate we were (and still are) in. Musicals have a perfect combination of elements to create an artificial diversion; from the lack of any substantial conflict, to the endless love stories, to the sheer magicality of characters erupting into choreographed song and dance at any moment.

Ever since childhood, I have been obsessed with music videos, but (thought) I hated musicals. If people asked, I would use the classic excuse: “People don’t just start singing in real life.” This is an empty argument, as no film is identical to reality, and there is no reason to discredit unprompted singing more than what you would see in a science fiction, fantasy, or even romantic comedy. It is true that musicals require perhaps the most suspension of disbelief of any genre (with the exception of pure fantasy), but that is why they have such a strong escapist effect. The second most common (and even less logical) argument against musicals is that they are ‘too gay.’ This is ridiculous for the obvious reasons, but even more so when considering that nearly every single classical musical attempts (even if unconsciously) to solidify heteronormativity. It is an absolute staple to the genre to have two characters of the opposite sex to fall in love throughout the runtime. Sometimes, this is the only semblance of plot in the entire film, such as in *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* (Donen, 1954), *An American in Paris* (Minelli, 1951), *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* (Demy, 1964), or almost any of the Fred Astaire/Ginger Rogers films of the 1930’s.

Besides this, the other most common plot element in musicals is the relentless pursuit of fame. In almost every Fred & Ginger flick, Fred plays a famous dancer who must seduce Ginger. Going forward to the 50's, *Singin in the Rain* (Donen, Kelly, 1952) portrays a famous star who must maintain his notoriety despite a shifting industry. Going forward further, films such as *Cabaret* (Fosse, 1972) and *Nashville* (Altman, 1975) have a more nuanced portrait of fame, but it still serves as the central plot device. When looking at something like *La La Land*, it is astonishing to see how little the depth of musical genre has evolved over nearly a century.

After seeing *La La Land*, I became increasingly interested in the musical genre. With the exception of having seen the musical shows my high school had put on, I had no experience with the genre. As my obsession grew, I noticed some serious potential for the musical genre, despite most of them being so loyal to a concrete formula. This culminated in *Inseparable*, a film I wrote and directed to embrace the musical genre while at the same time exposing its systemic flaws.

My film provides an angle on one of the most common tropes of musicals: the pursuit of fame. Being famous is sometimes seen as the crux of the human experience, as a result of the media's obsession with celebrities and the constant reinforcement of the desire to be famous through all types of entertainment. Despite this being a desire that all of us have felt at one point or another, I think being mega-famous would actually be quite constricting. Through my film, I wanted to analyze the downsides of fame through a character study of a fictional celebrity pop star reminiscent of Selena Quintanilla. The film adopts various elements from the musical genre in order to create a self reflexive analysis of what it means to be a celebrity.

III. BACKGROUND

Music has always often an instrumental part in film. Even before the development of sync sound, the filmmakers constantly attempted to integrate the two art forms. Silent films were never truly silent, as there were frequently live narrators, actors doing line readings, or musicians playing along with the action on screen. *The Jazz Singer* (Crosland, 1927), widely regarded as the first true sync sound film, functioned as a silent film with the exception of the musical performance scenes. Gerald Mast's writing in *A Short History of the Movies* identifies the two most prominent genres to come out of the early sound movement as the musical and the gangster film. "Just as synchronized sound brought the pungent, brittle crackle of thug talk to American audiences, synchronization also brought the possibility of complex rhythmic and musical effects." In fact, if a film was not a gangster flick, it was almost required for it to have musical numbers. Three staples of the musical genre arose during this early period and would later become fully integrated with the genre's language. The first was the prioritization of musical dance scenes over plot, a direct result of Busby Berkeley's elaborate dance numbers. He stood out by choreographing routines designed to be viewed from impossible perspectives or taking place in impossible spaces. One of his trademarks was a shot from straight above, looking down at the kaleidoscopic movement of the dancers. He was one of the only filmmakers to truly distinguish his work from the stage by creating scenes that could never be experienced from a traditional theatre seat. However, the plots of his films are thin at best. For how much of the runtime the musical numbers occupy, there is next to no concrete development of characters or story events. For example, in perhaps his most famous film, *Gold Diggers of 1933* (Berkeley, 1933), there are three musical numbers, each one getting progressively longer and more complex. The

centerpiece, “Pettin’ in the Park” takes up over seven minutes of the film’s runtime. However, it is a fictional stage play inside the film, and thus does nothing to advance the plot other than show that the characters are performing.

If not done right, the transition from a traditional narrative to a musical number can be quite abrasive. Operas and plays had easily been integrating music with story for a while, but it was not as simple with film. As a result, many of the earliest musicals dealt with “backstage themes, dealing with the struggles of young and talented entertainers fighting their way to the top,” as Charles Higham and Joel Greenberg state in their book *Hollywood in the Forties*. It was not until the musical was cemented in American culture that the filmmakers began to experiment with other narratives, along with less obvious musical bridges. However, as a result of the sheer abundance of these stories and the seamless combination of this plot with musical performances, the pursuit of fame became an integral part of the musical genre.

The third important musical trope that was established in these early days was ‘the relentless pursuit of heterosexual coupling’, as Ernesto Acevedo-Muñoz says in his book *West Side Story as Cinema: The Making and Impact of an American Masterpiece*. This became the other central plot line for musicals, and established the purpose of escapism that has since enveloped the genre. The usual routine for a musical hit these beats: Boy and girl meet, usually through a coincidence. Boy attempts to seduce girl a few different ways, usually in a somewhat predatory fashion until despite her best attempts at resisting, eventually falls for him. Then there is an ultimately inconsequential obstacle which is eventually resolved, leading to true, infinite love. This plot is so transparent, thus most musicals lack any true conflict.

All three of these tropes construct an escapist ideology that melds perfectly with the cheery tunes, bright (techni)colors and eternally happy endings ever-present in musicals.

IV. IN CONTEXT

After my encounter with *La La Land*, I began to explore other films in the genre I had dismissed for so long. First came *Singin in the Rain*, and what immediately stuck out to me was just how similar it was to *La La Land* in terms of plot, ideologies, and structure. Both were self reflexive appreciations towards cinema, both had an aggressively ideological pursuit of fame, and both had an enormously elaborate finale sequence. The fantasy sequence is what really drew me into the genre, as no other established film form can so effectively transfer between ‘reality’ and such a surreal inner world. However, upon watching more of the MGM films from the classical period, I began to realize how little of these dance sequences actually contributed to the plot. In *An American in Paris*, the final dance sequence takes us out of the plot, then after eighteen minutes of abstract dance, drops us in at the exact same spot. Similar things happen in many of the other musicals from this period, most obviously in *On the Town* (Kelly/Donen, 1949), *It’s Always Fair Weather* (Kelly/Donen, 1955), and *Hans Christian Anderson* (Vidor, 1952). I began to see a serious potential for the integration of character development through such interior spaces as these fantasy sequences. In a later section, I will talk about how I incorporated this idea into *Inseparable*.

Coincidentally, at the same time as I was ideating this film, I developed an immense interest in the band Talking Heads, and especially their famous concert film, *Stop Making Sense* (Demme, 1984). Already having been interested in Jonathan Demme’s other films, I started

investigating more into his directing style. Through the book *What Goes Around Comes Around: The Films of Jonathan Demme* (Michael Bliss and Christina Banks), I was able to glean some insights about his and David Byrne's process of crafting *Stop Making Sense*. The reason this film was so revolutionary was that it adopted the point of view of the audience. There is never a shot of the crowd (until the finale) and as Bliss and Banks describe, "closeups don't prevent us from becoming fully engaged in the film, in fact these techniques act as corollaries for the way that a concertgoer might shift his or her eyes from one part of the stage to another, or, through concentration, might seem to zero in on a certain musician." This technique creates an incredibly immersive film that allows the spectator to be wrapped into the music seamlessly. Knowing that I was planning a massive concert scene for *Inseparable*, I started thinking about how these tactics could be implemented in my own filmmaking. I quickly realized that they could not.

Because I was deconstructing the escapist fantasy through my film, I could not allow the spectator to be seamlessly involved with the music during the concert. I needed to show how the crowd obsession with her celebrity was more important than the music. Thus, I looked at another famous concert film, *Gimme Shelter* (Maysles, 1970) in which the music was portrayed very differently from in *Stop Making Sense*. This film begins just as any other concert documentary, through the introduction of the band, and consecutive songs. However, as it progresses and violence breaks out, it becomes obvious that the documentary is about something much larger. The film becomes an examination of what should and should not be captured on film, while at the same time questioning the escapism of concerts. After the front-row patrons begin to exhibit violence, Mick Jagger repeatedly attempts to calm the crowd and continue playing music. The

spectator is prevented from enjoying the music, as the tension becomes more and more palpable. The concept of the differing levels in which a scene can be experienced is described in great detail in Vivian Schoback's *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*. Thus, the Maysles are able to achieve something much deeper than the exhibition of a band or unique concert; they deconstruct the illusion of music as a means of escape. Ultimately, even the Rolling Stones cannot stop lethal violence with their songs. I incorporated this ideology into my film, keeping the audience at a distance by showing shots of the crowd, the disinterested musicians on either side, and cross-cutting between other scenes of fans exhibiting their obsession with Julie.

The use of music to accent an emotion is one of its most abundant uses in film, and by proxy, the least interesting. It is easy to be wrapped up in the music and experience it on a purely immersive level. That is why most of us go to concerts (and musicals) after all, to just listen to the music and forget our issues. I wanted to break away from this for my film. Despite them coming out after I had wrapped *Inseparable*, the films *Bohemian Rhapsody* (Singer, 2018) and *Vox Lux* (Corbet, 2018) demonstrate this dichotomy perfectly. Both films surround a pop superstar (one real, one fictional) that is surrounded by controversy, and end with an extended concert sequence. The Live Aid scene in *Bohemian Rhapsody* functions as a significantly less interesting version of the finales of the 50's musicals. It is there purely for experiential reasons, and does not further the plot. Anyone who enjoys Queen's music will likely be enticed by the songs, and enjoy the scene, leaving everyone feeling good. However, in *Vox Lux*, the final concert scene requires contemplation. The singer in the film, Celeste, has a life and career that is irrevocably connected to violence. Her career took off after she sung about her experience in a

school shooting, and then her music later inspired more shootings. The concert scene, much like *Gimme Shelter* does not allow us to be wrapped up in the music, instead forcing us to contemplate the role of her music in inciting violence.

It might be obvious, but the main inspiration for the character of Julie was the international pop star, Selena Quintanilla. Before suffering an infamous death at the hands of her fan club manager, she reigned the world of Tejano music. Being the first female to rise to prominent fame in this genre, she was an inspiration to people everywhere, but especially young latina women. Her death was so tragic because it was so avoidable. Her killer, Yolanda Saldivar, had been her fan club manager. After Selena and her father realized Yolanda had been embezzling money from her fan club and boutiques, they decided to fire her. Yolanda, petrified at being separated from someone she idolized so much, shot Selena. This was the ultimate example of someone falling victim to the negative parts of fame.

Selena's ties to fame in addition to her icon status in pop culture made her the perfect model for my character of Julie, and guided me to deconstruct the celebrity image that is ever-present in musicals.

V. REVISIONIST GENRE

Inseparable walks the line between being a musical and a music film. Though these two terms may sound similar, they have very distinct purposes and forms. A musical generally means that the characters are 'unaware' that they are singing; and each song advances the narrative. Hence, the film could not exist without those musical elements. A music film is one where the plot surrounds music, but the musical sections themselves take place within the diegetic world, and

thus are usually scenes of performances or rehearsals (much like the earliest musicals). The music film mostly consists of biography films of famous musicians. There are literally hundreds of examples, but the most famous are *Coal Miner's Daughter* (Apted, 1980), *Walk the Line* (Mangold, 2004), *Ray* (Hackford 2004), and of course *Selena* (Nava, 1997). Most of these music films maintain an extremely formulaic approach, but they never lose their appeal because they utilize the preexisting fan base for that artist. The same structure is the foundation for all these films: first we get the childhood scenes that show a key moment that will come into play for the artist later. Then we see them as a struggling artist for a while, and then a rise to fame after being discovered. From here, there are two dominant directions: they experiment with drugs or other vices until their career and home life is on the brink of chaos, ultimately being reintroduced to their passion for music. Or, there is a sudden tragedy that leads to their death.

For my film, I was inspired by many of these music films and how they portrayed the celebrity life. However, although many of them dealt with issues that were caused by fame and success, I always thought there was much more nuance to the idea of fame itself. I was led to the idea of combining the musical structure with the thematic elements of a famous musician film. Initially, I planned on having Julie having drug problems, or even being killed by a crazy fan at the end. However, the more I tried to work these elements into the plot, the more I realized they were not necessary. In order to examine the nuances of fame, I needed to eliminate all other distracting elements from the film.

The revision and reinterpretation of established genres is something I had wanted to explore. The American genre that has gone through the most significant revisionist period is the western. There is no hiding the fact that most classical westerns painted an extremely reductive

portrait of American values, reducing women to subservient roles at best, native people to radical villains, and the traditionally masculine cowboy as the epitome of human experience. As society became more aware of social issues, there came a wave of revisionist westerns. One of the most personally important films to come out of this movement was *The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly* (Leone, 1966). Despite the clearly identified labels of the three main characters, the moral ground between them is constantly shifting. Even Clint Eastwood, 'The Good,' is only out for himself, and commits incredible acts of cruelty throughout the film. Throughout this, the film displayed the fallibility of such discrete labels from classical Westerns. Other films such as *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* (Altman, 1971), *Once Upon a Time in the West* (Leone, 1968) and *Unforgiven* (Eastwood, 1992) also play into these tropes to create morally ambiguous narratives that question the themes of their inspirations.

I thought about how revisionist genre theory could be applied to other genres. Musicals are probably the second most clearly defined genre behind westerns, but we have yet to see a popular revisionist example. The closest thing to it was *La La Land*, which, rather than placing the tropes into new contexts, it chose to reinforce them by creating a self-reflexive love letter to the genre. While musicals tend not to be as outwardly morally misguided as classical westerns, they often are incredibly racist and homophobic. This that has long had a creative force consisting largely of queer folks such as Vincente Minnelli, George Cukor, and Randal Kleiser, nonetheless has aggressively established heteronormativity. Recently we have gotten a few musicals that have embraced gay characters such as *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (Mitchell, 2001) but they still struggle to make their way into mainstream culture. Perhaps the most prolific director of contemporary musicals, Rob Marshall of *Chicago* (Marshall, 2002), *Into the Woods*

(Marshall, 2014) and *Mary Poppins Returns* (Marshall, 2018), has yet to make a film that does not reinforce heterosexual relationships, despite being gay himself. I do not see this as the fault of Marshall, it should not be his burden to completely restructure the genre, yet it still shows that even in contemporary times, the Hollywood system does not have room for homosexual stories. The genre is notoriously white as well. Even in films that borrow musical elements from minorities, it is rare to find people of color in front of the camera. The most notable example of this was *West Side Story* (Robbins/Wise, 1961). Although they made significant strides in portraying the immigrant experience in popular culture, it cannot be ignored that many of the ‘Puerto Ricans’ in the film were actually white actors (Natalie Wood and George Chakiris) with brown makeup. This tradition of cultural appropriation has frequently been present in musicals, even Fred Astaire donned blackface and performed an extremely racist number called “Bojangles of Harlem” in *Swing Time* (Stevens, 1936).

When writing my film, I needed to address these tropes in order to create a true revisionist musical. However, because it was a short film and I was already dealing with complex themes of fame, I narrowed my approach, and decided to focus on the racial appropriation issue. However, I still made the conscious choice to eliminate any love story for Julie, and made no mention of her sexuality in order to not fall into the same tropes as the classical musicals.

The race and musical appropriation issues became an integral part of the plot. However, as a white person, I knew I did not have the right to tell this story completely on my own. I enlisted help from one of my best friends, Gabriel Aude, who is a Mexico native and pursuing a degree in music production. He wrote and produced both songs in the film, while helping to craft

the story. The two of us developed the musical trajectory, which was the core of the film. When ideating musical approaches we could take, he expressed his interest in *reggaetón*, an integral genre in Latin music, which stems from Puerto Rico and is becoming increasingly popular. It has recently become popular in the United States, with Americanized versions of the music blasting out of the radio for months at a time, with songs like “Despacito” by Luis Fonsi and Daddy Yankee and “I Like That” by Cardi B, Bad Bunny, and J Balvin. Because of the contemporary relevance of this music, we decided to create an Americanized *reggaetón* piece as Julie’s ‘hit song.’ The lyrics are indicative of the appropriation, starting with her line “Got me singin’ in Spanish too.” The song also is about love, with no real meaning behind the lyrics, an homage to the classical musicals.

In order to contextualize the desire for fame common to in the genre, I approached the story in a fashion that of a stage musical by the name of *Into the Woods*. When I first saw this production, I was struck by how it ‘ended’ with all the characters living happily ever after just before the intermission. Then, the second half of the play explores what happens to these characters afterwards, and the events from the first half have unexpected consequences. I wanted to use this approach in my film, structuring it as a continuation of the collective mindset in classical musicals. My film starts as Julie is already an established pop star, yet fame is different from what she anticipated. By exploring the consequences of being a mega celebrity, along with utilizing the approaches to genre that I have described, I hoped to create a powerful reenvisioning of the musical genre.

VI. CREATING THE FILM

The first scene in *Inseparable* was the primary idea I had, and the rest of the film followed. I loved the idea of starting with an approach more in line with horror films. The first scene contains no dialogue or context, and simply thrusts the spectator into the film. I used the lack of information to generate suspense; because upon first viewing, the audience is unaware that Julie is famous, the fact that random people are following her is much more unnerving. This also served a narrative purpose: to expose the audience to the intense paranoia before they know she is famous. Thus, when her celebrity is revealed during the concert scene, they associate it with the fear and skepticism from the previous scene. If the film had started with a cold open of the concert, it would have been much different, and much more conducive to a normal concert video. In order to craft the opening scene, I had to look at films outside the musical genre, as it is not known for suspense. The principal inspiration for this scene was the depiction of zombies in *Night of the Living Dead* (Romero, 1968). They are slow, but unstoppable. In my film, you can never hear the strangers, or even make out their faces. My intention was to make them seem less human and more ominous, thus ratcheting up the tension. The scene consists of three distinct long takes, each one building off the last. The first one begins, and you might think Julie's just a normal person walking down the street. Once we see the first stranger in the background, a hint of irregularity is introduced. Once we see that she is being followed, the tension becomes more apparent. In the next two shots, Julie becomes become more and more enclosed, climaxing in the shot in the field, as the camera swings around to see people coming from all directions, slow but unstoppable. These shots completely break spatial continuity and make little geographical sense, however I decided to cut around the emotion rather than logic as a result of Walter Murch's arguments in the book *In the Blink of an Eye*. During this sequence, the camera stays with Julie,

pivoting around her, creating a subjective experience for the audience. This is vital in maintaining tension, as Hitchcock describes repeatedly in the book *Hitchcock/Truffaut*. The ominous music comes in during this sequence, providing a relentless bass that continuously gets louder. Once Julie gives in and talks to the fans, the music speeds up into the pop song, “Like a Dream.” This was intended to connect her own song directly with the fear she experiences during the opening.

The concert scene was the most technically difficult sequence of the film, but I knew that the illusion of Julie’s fame, and thus the reality of the entire film, rested upon this scene. I knew that I would never be able to recreate a convincing concert of that scale on my own, so I had to get creative. By implementing visual effects and manipulative editing combined with footage I took from a real concert, I was able to portray the interaction between Julie and the crowd to the scale that I wanted. However, I had to keep this concert scene dynamic and engaging, because on its own I knew it could become stale. For this sequence I researched music and performance videos, dissecting what made them interesting and engaging to watch. The most useful resource for this sequence was a graphic for a sequence in the film *Alexander Nevsky* (Eisenstein, 1938). In this graphic, sheet music was compared side-by-side with the movement and compositions in the film. The extreme devotion to detail enlightened me on the importance of pre-production for this scene. Beforehand, I sat down and planned out where the best moments for music were in relation to the music so I could create an engaging and aesthetically pleasing sequence. This involved timing the closeups to match the instruments on the sound track, cutting seamlessly with the rhythm of the song, and manipulating the actress’ performance to accentuate the music.

In terms of the aesthetic choices for the concert, I went with strong purples, reds and blues. The oversaturation of them not only provides a realistic concert-going experience, but because it is so obviously artificial, it displays the artificiality of the entire scene. As soon as the concert is done, I cut to someone picking up the trash, bathed in gross yellow light. This shot was not planned, but after reviewing the footage I could tell it starkly contradicted the concert scene. We also dressed Julie in an America-themed costume, just to accentuate the cultural appropriation that was happening. In another subtle nod to this theme, once the concert finishes, she is seen in a bright white spotlight, making her complexion look white as well. The spectator is not meant to notice this outright, but it gives a hint as to what is going beneath the surface, as the crowd's cheers increase immensely once the light comes on.

Through the cutaways to the fans during this sequence, I established two important elements that will pay off later. The first is the selfie Julie takes with her fan. The second is the idea of her dancing fans looking at themselves in the mirror as they sing along to her song. This is indicative of their desire for fame, and attributes an importance to mirrors.

Once we cut to the inside of the car, the tone of the film shifts. This is the first time we are introduced to her manager. When we cut to the car, they are both speaking on the phone. Theoretically, this could be the first time that the audience even realizes that Julie speaks Spanish, which shows the extent of her public persona. The manager is also continuously speaking over her, his deep, booming voice always drowning out hers. This, combined with his position in the front seat, establishes the power dynamic between the two of them. He assumes he has control over all parts of Julie's life, and through his Freudian slip, reveals his racist

motives of making her seem more 'white.' He looks at her only through the rearview mirror, which becomes a motif at this point.

After this, we get to the apartment. This scene is intentionally lit in a hue similar to the yellow light from the shot after the concert scene, giving an uncomfortable air to the environment. Her brother, José, barely looks at her throughout the conversation. In fact, he also sees her only through the mirror on the wall. Before he even says anything to her, he takes a selfie with her, one of the most important moments in the film, as it is the indicator that José no longer sees his sister as family, but as a celebrity. This is the start of a conversation that spirals downwards, ultimately revealing what Julie has sacrificed for her fame. The blocking of the scene was planned out extensively, with José constantly 'running away' from Julie throughout the scene. There are almost always barriers between them, whether it be a counter or a table. During the climax of the conversation Julie is again framed through the mirror. Not only does this framing solidify the visual motif I have already established, but makes the distance between them seem greater as Julie feels smaller. When Julie finally asks the central question - "Why do you call me Julie instead of Julieta?" she crosses the frame, coming right up to the camera. This is the first time José looks directly at Julieta, and it sets off her journey inwards. First there are a few shots of them as children. I opened the film with a blurred version of this shot too, intending to show Julie's ignorance of this memory. This is directly inspired by *Once Upon a Time in the West* (Leone, 1968), which uses this technique to heighten the emotional impact of the flashback to Frank at the end. In my film, the shot of them eating the tré leches cake is meant to create an association with an earlier moment in the film, when José refused to share the same dish with Julie.

Finally, we have the fantasy scene. I wanted this moment to be visually reminiscent of those in musicals by having it take place in a large white set, like “Cheek to Cheek” from *Top Hat* (Sandrich, 1935), “Beauty School Dropout” or “Grease Lightning” from *Grease* (Kleiser, 1978), and “Epilogue” from *La La Land*. However, in order to express the interiority of Julie, it takes place in the same auditorium as the concert scene, yet now it is daylight. She intimately sings lyrics from “Like a Dream,” but this time in Spanish. “Loving you is like a dream, I wake up and see reality,” she says, bringing a deeper meaning to these lyrics now that they are placed in more personal context. Finally, to end this sequence, she looks out at the empty seats, a visual expression of her desire to no longer be famous after realizing that she is so distanced from the people she once loved.

We transition back to reality by cutting to Julie picking up the trash in her brother’s apartment, mirroring the shot after the concert. Once outside, walking back towards the cheering crowd, she reintegrates herself with fame, simply because it is easier than reconnecting with her family. It is the same bridge as the opening shots, emphasizing the cyclical nature of Julie’s pursuit of fame. I intended to compare it with José’s alcoholism, as they are both addictions that ultimately have caused more harm than good. By eliminating the false happy ending, this is the last musical trope I subvert.

VII. CONCLUSION

Musicals have always often intended to be an exercise in escapism by showing an idealistic vision of the world. However, not everyone has the same vision of an ideal world. Escapism is a very important function of art, thus it is ever more important to make art to serve *all* people. The

reason we have films showcasing an aggressively heteronormative and white world is because they reflect who is in power. The constant reinforcement of these norms come from the insecurity of those in power who feel threatened by people unlike them. However, this has consequences that are long-lasting, and that we have not come close to solving as a society. By examining the various representative works from the musical genre, I hope to start the path to a more inclusive film industry.

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