

Primetime Goes Hammerstein: The Musicalization of Primetime Fictional Television in the Post-Network Era¹

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Over the past decades, ongoing changes in the way we watch, make, sell, and tell stories have contributed to the continued blurring of the lines of media specificity. As contemporary viewers turn away from once tried-and-true network lineups, they often revel in the freedom gained through the possibility of binge-viewing television shows on Netflix and Hulu, or they tune in indiscriminately to network or cable shows through their DVRs, mobile apps, or new Apple devices. Along with these shifts in viewing and distribution, shifts in television storytelling—often discussed in the context of original cable programming, quality drama, "complex" narratives, and cinematic aesthetics—have greatly altered the very content of once entrenched television genres. Although television scholarship has embraced many of these formal shifts, much of the discussion has been relegated to more in-vogue genres such as the serial drama, cult, and sci-fi programming. Simultaneously, however, scholarship often marginalizes how the more subtle permeation of cinematic and theatrical generic tropes may trend across television content. Since the late 1990s, fictional television characters—dramatic, comedic, animated, supernatural, and soapy—have found themselves bursting into song. Not merely a product of the stylishness of the "meta" or a rise of genre blending, this musical influx reflects how topical and industrial shifts on the Broadway stage and big and small screens created an environment ripe for rousing musical production numbers across television programming.

The musical did not suddenly burst on the small screen in the nineties, but shifts in television, film, and theatre led to the cultivation of an environment that invited a *renewed* musicalization across television forms, one that

transcended underscoring or musical montages and allowed a space for otherwise nonmusical characters (in established nonmusical worlds) to burst into diegetic song, and for the narrative worlds to momentarily become ones akin to the movie or stage musical where life is communicated through song. In these worlds music is not merely a job, a hobby, or what happens underneath the action. Characters communicate through the music in an environment where mere speech cannot contain the emotion. The last decade of the 20th century simply shined a light on the long union enjoyed between television and the musical. The domesticated medium had quickly embraced musical fare in the early years of its development, as Broadway singers and composers crossed the footlights to appear and perform on variety shows, game shows, anthology dramas, and big-budget spectacles.

Between 1944—when DuMont aired *The Boys from Boise*, the first musical produced specifically for television—and 1960, a wealth of televised musicals aired. Projecting the sheen of the silver screen and the Great White Way, the musical of the early days equaled sophistication. After the 1950s, however, with television's shift to Los Angeles-based taped programming and dips in the musical's economic cachet on both stage and screen, the genre lost its high-profile position on the small screen, but the medium never abandoned the form. Variety shows, a staple of the fifties, saw a resurgence in the sixties and seventies, ranging from the wholesome *Andy Williams Show* to the campy *Sonny and Cher Comedy Hour* to the folksy *Hee-Haw*, and provided glimpses of Broadway numbers and stars. Carol Burnett's and Julie Andrews's televised concert specials at Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center, and Mitzi Gaynor Vegas-esque musical specials provided flashes of razzle dazzle; and annual airings of *The Sound of Music* and Debbie Allen's Oscar night dance extravaganzas peppered television schedules for decades to come. Once television found its footing in the fifties, the musical was always close at hand.

The last two decades, however, have brought the television musical back into high-profile relief. *Smash* and *Glee* have placed Broadway and film-style musical performance at the fore of fictional television storytelling, blending generic tropes of the musical with contemporary serialized narratives. Perhaps more telling regarding the symbiotic relationship between television and the musical has been the integration of musical numbers and episodes

into otherwise nonmusical fictional television series. Though *Smash* and *Glee* embrace the genre at their very cores, prior to and since their respective launches, a wealth of shows—across genres and target markets—have integrated musical episodes and tropes into their otherwise "straight" narratives: self-reflective comedies (*Scrubs*, *Pushing Daisies*, and *How I Met Your Mother*), cult sci-fi and fantasy texts (*Xena* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*), mainstream dramas (*7th Heaven*, *Grey's Anatomy*), network and cable animated series (*The Simpsons*, *Family Guy*, *South Park*, and *Daria*), and even daytime soap opera (*One Life to Live*).²

In the decades coinciding with the boom in millennial television-musical integration, the form of the genre shifted both on stage and on screen, and contemporary television evolved into something more welcoming to these new small-screen musical interludes. The apparent "intrusion" of musical tropes has become largely compatible with the medium's increasingly intertextual, cross generic, and narratively complex form. Further, as increased seriality across genres bred what scholars such as Jane Feuer and Linda Williams point to as an increased presence of melodrama on television, the heightened emotion and visual excess associated with the musical seemed a comfortable fit with an expressive mode already linked to visual and narrative excess.³ After all, how better to explore extreme emotion and at times an overwrought search for truth and justice than through diva-esque power ballads and full-company production numbers?

Through a two-tiered approach, this article examines the links between the shifting trends on screen and stage, the emergent technical, industrial, and narrative norms associated with post-network television, and the television musical. A broad overview of television at the turn of the millennium and the contemporary state of the stage and screen musical ultimately sets the scene for a close analysis of *Grey's Anatomy's* one-off musical episode "The Song Beneath the Song." *Grey's Anatomy* embodies both emergent and traditional televisual norms: cult viewership and marketing, deep seriality, and self-reflexive narration, all housed within the traditional "doc opera."⁴ A close examination of "The Song Beneath the Song" in conjunction with a broader historical context will illustrate the late-millennium perfect storm that has ushered in a renewed and more formally complex marriage of the musical and television and the overall usefulness of examining television

content through a lens of cross-medium interaction.

The Great White Way Seeks out Some Alternative Ways

The Broadway musical once served as a major source for the soundtrack of America. With the integration of Tin Pan Alley tunes into musical reviews in the 1920s and 1930s and the soaring popularity of theatrical songs through sheet music and cast recording sales, Broadway's music was America's music. The likes of Jerome Kern (*Showboat*), Rogers and Hammerstein (*South Pacific*, *The King and I*), Steven Sondheim (*West Side Story*, *Company*), and Kander and Ebb (*Cabaret*, *Chicago*) helped to define Broadway's propensity for the musical play from the 1940s to 1970s. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, the big-budget visual dazzlers of Andrew Lloyd Webber (*Starlight Express*, *Phantom of the Opera*) and Claude-Michel Schönberg and Alain Boublil (*Les Misérables*, *Miss Saigon*) had changed Broadway's focus from character to spectacle, making every show an opportunity—and almost mandate—for flying chandeliers, magically appearing mechanical barricades, and descending Vietnam era helicopters. The late 1990s and the early 2000s, however, ushered in an increased sense of intertextuality, whimsy, and cultural critique.

While not necessarily drawing source material from the at times happy-go-lucky musical plays of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, many of the late 20th- and early 21st-century Broadway vehicles found inspiration in Hollywood's presold musical and nonmusical success stories. Between 1997 and 2005, Broadway poached musical storylines from cinematic hits such as *The Lion King*, *Footloose*, *Saturday Night Fever*, *The Full Monty*, *Hairspray*, and *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, while also narrativizing the songbooks of ABBA, Elvis, Johnny Cash, and Billy Joel via *Mamma Mia!*, *All Shook Up*, *Ring of Fire*, and *Movin' Out*, respectively. The *Sesame Street* spoof *Avenue Q*—which includes non-kid-friendly content such as puppet sex and a celebration of internet porn—earned the coveted Best New Musical Tony, as well as the economic spoils of successful New York, Las Vegas, and touring productions. Embracing Justin Wyatt's notion of "high concept," millennial Broadway focused on repacking the genre not as something new and exciting, but as a reimagining of popular (and sellable) stories with presold audiences.⁵

These new musicals often blended familiarity with a wink and a nod, counting on the audience's assumed

knowledge of pop culture, musical styles, and generic norms. The 2005 Tony-winning *Spamalot*, inspired by the 1975 motion picture *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, capitalized on the overall Python premise and the pre-proven content of the film and blended them with the visual pageantry of Broadway and the whimsy, reflexivity, and sarcasm of the modern musical. Musical numbers referenced famous Python bits (for example, "I'm Not Dead Yet" and "Always Look on the Bright Side of Life" from the 1979 Python film *The Life of Brian*) and skewered contemporary Broadway trends. The show mocked the predictability, sentimentality, over-emoting, and overwrought key changes of Broadway in the *Phantom of the Opera*-*Les Misérables* era. "The Song That Goes Like This" laments "Now we're into E, that's awfully high for me. But everyone can see, we should have stayed in D." Ultimately a *Phantom*-esque chandelier shatters from the high notes as Lady of the Lake and Sir Galahad exhaustedly proclaim, "We'll be singing this 'til dawn. You'll wish that you weren't born. Let's stop this damn refrain. Before we go insane." The highly intertextual and tongue-in-cheek style invites the audience to gain cognitive entrance through past experience and pop culture savvy.

By the new millennium, an increasingly waning sense of performer-related media specificity had blended with the increased level of narrative intertextuality. Although a move from film to television once appeared to be a sure sign of a career in peril, and a shift from stage to big or small screen might have been met with ambivalence, today's media walls are permeable.⁶ Big- and small-screen actors like perennial Tony Awards host Neil Patrick Harris (*Assassins*, *Cabaret*), four-time Emmy winner David Hyde Pierce (*Spamalot*), and five-time Emmy winner and two-time Oscar nominee John Lithgow (*Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*) have found major success on the stage, and Broadway stars like Sara Ramirez (*Spamalot* to *Grey's Anatomy*), Kristin Chenoweth (*Wicked*, et. al to *Pushing Daisies*, *Glee*, and *GCB*), and Lea Michelle (*Spring Awakening* to *Glee*) have made successful shifts from live theatre to critical and rating successes on the small screen. With this transfer they brought stage-proven musicality into television programming.

Sara Ramirez singing *Spamalot*'s "Find Your Grail" on the
2005 Tony Awards

Video: [Sara Ramirez singing *Spamalot*'s "Find Your Grail" on the 2005 Tony Awards](#)

Singing onto the Big Screen

Just as the stage musical embraced a 21st-century edge, a similar form of the genre led the musical back to the big screen after a decade-long hiatus. 1996 was the first year to see the release of multiple integrated movie musicals since 1984, with releases of the MTV-inspired and music video-esque Madonna/Antonio Bandaras *Evita*, Woody Allen's *Everybody Says I Love You*, and Trey Parker's genre parody *Cannibal: The Musical*.⁷ Though these lackluster performers may not have represented a musical renaissance, the productions' nontraditional singers, unexpected musical subject matter, and high level of intertextuality embodied this new incarnation of the form as something contemporary, playful, edgy-yet-youthful, and free from the bounds of topical or medium specificity. Like the aforementioned trio, many of the film musicals of the 1990s and 2000s embraced contemporary trends in both content and marketing as they projected something timely and in tune with both high-concept filmmaking and the kind of intertextuality and customization common to media of the iPod generation.⁸

Moulin Rouge! (2001) and *South Park: Bigger, Longer, and Uncut* (1999) best exemplify the intertextuality of the era's film musical. Their narratives and design sensibilities project a playful critique of the genre and popular culture icons in general. Like *Spamalot* five years later and various musical television episodes over the next decade, *South Park: Bigger, Longer, and Uncut* strikes a scathing blow at the musical's more classical form. Parker and Matt Stone make ironic use of musical tropes as they interweave familiar visuals and musical styles with historically unmusical subject matter based on scatological humor, prepubescent sexuality, and interspecies romance. Although it includes more traditional romance plotlines, *Moulin Rouge!* embraces similar trends, alternately using lyrics from *The Sound of Music*, the musical style of 19th-century operettist Jacques Offenbach, and Busby Berkeley-esque choreography and cinematography.

Unlike many of the kinder, gentler musicals that scholars such as Rick Altman, Jane Feuer, Richard Dyer, and Thomas Schatz position as often reinforcing social mores, heterosexual romance, and communal bonding, these new films fly in the face of generic norms as they critique both the society in which they circulate and the

genre they inhabit.⁹ The viability of the movie musical continued into the new millennium with a spate of successful—perhaps more traditional and often music-video flavored—Broadway transfers: *Chicago*, *Hairspray* (now twice removed from John Waters's 1988 campy original), and *Dreamgirls*.¹⁰ The new motion picture musicals compromise any remaining vestiges of stage-to-screen specificity, as their subject matter proves to be increasingly fluid: television cartoons, popular music songbooks (*Rock of Ages* and *Across the Universe*), and previously musicalized films. As with the Broadway star's emergent clout and cross-medium marketability, the film musical's new popularity and playfulness projected an increasingly attractive product that spoke to more than just diehard musical fans. Though it may not have been the ubiquitous musical of the 1940s and 1950s, the genre was regaining steam, popularity, and edge.

Small-Screen Sing-alongs in the Post-Network Era

The generic shifts occurring within the musical on stage and screen ran parallel to major shifts in content, marketing, and structure occurring within the television industry. As early as the late 1980s and early 1990s, the American television industry was struggling to combat challenges posed by a sharp rise in cable content and decline in network viewership. By the turn of the millennium, a significant drop in overall audience share enjoyed by the networks (58 percent by 1999) and a rise in the adoption of multiplatform viewing (with 85 percent of households subscribing to cable or satellite by 2003) left the networks reeling to salvage their once solid status as television's go-to for content.¹¹ The formal innovation that occurred within—and in response to—this environment was one that welcomed audience interactivity and the type of genre blending, satire, and intertextuality common to the millennial musical and television's adoption thereof.

Narrative, visual, and marketing shifts of the early post-network era would serve as hopeful stopgap measures for the floundering networks. John Caldwell frames 1980–1990s television as embracing a "structural inversion," whereby style transcended storytelling in an attempt to draw in the elusive audience. He argues,

In several important programming and institutional areas, television moved from a word-based rhetoric and transmission, with all the issues that such

terms suggest, to a visually based mythology, framework, and aesthetic based on an extreme self-conscious style.¹²

This turn toward the visual (or *televisual*), as well as reliance on the "very special" episode and a heightened intertextuality, fostered a space acquiescent to the integration of musical content. The era's high style and break from established visual and narrative norms define the nineties' most high-profile examples of musical integration outside of actual music video: *Moonlighting* (1985–89), *Northern Exposure* (1990–95), and *Cop Rock* (1990).

All three shows embraced a deviation from strict generic specificity and zero-degree style, as well as programmers' attempts to find something new to capture an audience of cable defectors and time-shifters.¹³ *Moonlighting's* and *Northern Exposure's* one-off musical interludes—"Big Man on Mulberry Street" (1986)¹⁴ and "Old Tree" (1993), respectively—fit neatly within the series' overall rejection of narrative stasis and their embrace of the economic-aesthetic balancing act Feuer associates with MTM-style quality television.¹⁵ Although perhaps not reaching the levels of stylistic self-consciousness present in the era's televisual benchmark, the MTV-flavored *Miami Vice*, both series were rife with self-referential dialogue and plotlines, broken fourth walls, high concept one-off episodes, and rampant intertextuality. Steven Bochco's critically disastrous *Cop Rock* eschewed the one-off musical episode for a full-genre blending experience—rife with weekly doses of drama, action, gospel juries, and rapping drug runners—to garner some of the lowest ratings of all time.¹⁶ Musical integration of this early post-network era, while fleeting, fully reflected the era's motto of innovation through desperation.

Musical integration of the later 1990s and early 2000s embraced a whimsy similar to that of dramadies such as *Northern Exposure* and *Moonlighting*, while reflecting the intertextuality of the new film and stage musicals. Much of this musical integration would embody what Jason Mittell describes as the "narrative pyrotechnics" of the complex narratives of the post-network era; musical episodes and interludes of *Ally McBeal*, *Chicago Hope*, and *Drew Carey* inject a "how'd they do that?" sensibility into shifting genres and a medium once built on more predictable and repeatable stylistics.¹⁷

Bochco protégé David E. Kelly took the musical helm

with varying degrees of musical integration, intertextuality, and Broadway homage in a one-off musical episode of his doc opera *Chicago Hope* ("Brain Salad Surgery" in 1997) and series-defining musical flourishes in the lawyer dramedy *Ally McBeal*. The latter debuted in 1997 alongside film-to-Broadway transfers such as *Big*, *Victor/Victoria*, and *The Lion King*, and big-screen musicals *Cannibal!*, *Evita*, and *Everyone Says I Love You*. *Ally McBeal's* random and repeated integration of musical tropes mirrors a larger trend within American broadcast television to target the niche by breaking with somewhat historically stable boundaries regarding television content: sitcom versus drama, straight fiction versus musical performance, half-hour comedy versus hour-long drama. Kelly's narrative flourishes simultaneously nod to the musical's rejuvenation on the big screen and its overall embrace of a more self-referential, intertextual, and parodic theatrical and cinematic form. *The Drew Carey Show* joins *Ally McBeal* as a major site for late 1990s musical integration, including diegetic performances of would-be theme songs "Five O'Clock World" and "Cleveland Rocks" and musical tributes to *The Full Monty*, *Adventures of Priscilla Queen of the Desert*, and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*.

After these earlier years of increased and repeated musical integration, the majority of musical episodes of the late 1990s and early 2000s found homes in shows that played fully with their own cult statuses or tongue-in-cheek sensibilities. Such forms were both amenable to the generic play of the contemporary musical and textually flexible enough to withstand such narrative interruptions.¹⁸ These shows integrated the new fluid stars of Broadway into hyper-aware television narratives, while capitalizing on the internet-driven potential for easy-access fan interaction. Fans could now immerse themselves in a show's history, backstory, and fan community. Millennial television programming used the contemporary fan's participatory potential and the shifting cultural cachet of the musical genre on stage and screen to play with the complexities of contemporary storytelling.

The largest cluster of episodes has appeared in shows at least loosely deemed situation comedies. The genre has surely shifted over the past couple of decades, with a move toward one-camera style, a heightened presence of seriality within narratives, the popularity of the hour-long dramedy, and more oddball series than traditional sitcoms or domestic comedies.¹⁹ Shows such as *Scrubs*, *How I Met Your Mother*, *Pushing Daisies*, and *30 Rock*

introduced musical moments into series that had already broken the hermeneutic seal of narrativity. The first three utilize voice-over narration and varying levels of visual or narrative fantasy in their week-to-week episodes, while *30 Rock* projects rapid-fire pastiche and parody. Whereas a sudden integrated musical number in the middle of *M*A*S*H* or *All in the Family* would have disrupted the established world of the show, many contemporary comedies and dramedies embrace characteristics that *invite* the intrusion.

Scrubs dabbled in musical integration from its outset. Season 1's "My Way or the Highway" includes a *West Side Story*-esque hospital rumble, and more than a dozen episodes prior to the Season 6 musical episode would include integrated musical interludes or other diegetic performances: Ted's recurring all-lawyer theme song a cappella group, an episode involving the hospital's air band ("My Half Acre"), Men at Work's front man Colin Hay musically narrating JD's thoughts ("My Overkill"), and so on. The show's foundational one-camera filmic shooting style; its self-conscious narration via voice-over, flashbacks, and fantasy sequences; and a high level of popular culture referentiality simultaneously set it apart from more traditional sitcoms and link it to a post-network shift in style and content. Musical integration fits naturally with the show's well-established narrative solipsism, as musical numbers have traditionally—both on stage and screen—served as a quasi-Shakespearean means for externalizing one's emotions or fears (for example, Maria's "I Have Confidence" in *The Sound of Music* or Danny's "Sandy" in *Grease*). JD's series-structuring internal monologue provides a natural backdrop for private self-expression through music.²⁰

Scrubs's Season 6 "My Musical" fully embraces the converging styles and stars of stage, screen, and small screen, exemplifying the porousness of talent pools and self-conscious intertextuality common to this period. The episode imports Broadway talent, starring Tony Award nominee Stephanie Abruzzo and penned by Jeff Marx and Robert Lopez, all three of *Avenue Q*. Like the adult-themed *Sesame Street* spoof and an array of contemporary film musicals (*Moulin Rouge!*, *Cannibal: The Musical*, and *South Park: Bigger, Longer, and Uncut*) the episode firmly embraces both the musical's and contemporary sitcom's parodic sensibility. Musicalization erupts through clear classic Hollywood homage, as the opening number "Sacred Heart" becomes a full-blown Busby Berkeley-esque production number, including the obligatory overhead shot of the

ensemble and highlighting the type of choreographed geometric patterns common to Berkeley and parodied in contemporary musicals (for example, *The Producers*, *South Park: Bigger, Longer, and Uncut*). Other numbers evoke cross-period musical iconography, such as the music of Gilbert and Sullivan ("The Rant Song") and *Rent* ("For the Last Time I'm Dominican"), the overwrought nature of contemporary Broadway musical ballads ("Guy Love"), and the iconic movie musical *Grease* ("Friends Forever").²¹ With a cast built of self-proclaimed theatre geeks (Zach Braff), Broadway stars and expats (Abruzzo and Ken Jenkins from Broadway's original cast of *Big River*), and a faux boy-band/song-and-dance man (Donald Faison of 2001's *Josie and the Pussycats Du Jour*), the talent necessary to execute such a big-scale musical undertaking was already largely in place.²² Through its high-quality performances and innovative (yet well-entrenched) series form and format, it transcends the awkward musicalization of *Cop Rock* and the momentary flights of fancy of *Moonlighting*.

Although none produced complete musical episodes of the scale of "My Musical," *How I Met Your Mother*, *30 Rock*, and *Pushing Daisies* similarly embrace the compatibility of their self-referential styles, cultural pastiche, and Broadway homage. Like *Scrubs*, each had preestablished narrative or visual style that welcomed flights of fancy and an acting ensemble that included Broadway singers (Neil Patrick Harris, Jane Krakowski, and Kristin Chenoweth, respectively). *How I Met Your Mother* included three integrated musical moments over its first eight seasons ("Girls vs. Suits," "Of Course," and "Ring Up").²³ The most elaborate, "Nothing Suits Me Like a Suit" ("Girls vs. Suits"), includes both large-ensemble song and dance and individual patter, and capitalizes on the musical reputation and talents of Harris. *Pushing Daisies* and *30 Rock* call on similar tropes, with *Pushing Daisies*'s Olive (Chenoweth) bursting into a rendition of *Grease*'s "Hopelessly Devoted" and the *30 Rock* ensemble closing out an episode with a traveling montage sequence of characters singing "Midnight Train to Georgia" (only to be cut off by a disgruntled Gladys Knight).²⁴ Like *Scrubs*, both shows welcome the intrusion of musical moments via their preestablished narrative whimsy, self-reflective narration, and Broadway-flavored casts.

"Nothing Suits Me Like a Suit" from *How I Met Your Mother*'s
"Girls vs. Suits"

Video: ["Nothing Suits Me Like a Suit" from *How I Met Your Mother's* "Girls vs. Suits"](#)

Both in the vein of the popular jukebox musical and through the creation of new narrative-specific music, these tongue-in-cheek series capitalized on millennial television trends as they embraced generic tropes of stage and the big screen that reconfigure the musical as something intertextual, self-conscious, and somewhat suspicious of its own historical idealism. Running alongside these comedies was a musical injection into cult TV series. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Xena* embrace not only post-network stylistic innovation but also the potential for musical integration in a more fan-aware environment of internet access and web 2.0–style participation.²⁵ Both relied on dedicated fan bases who proved early adopters of online fan communication, and who—much to the delight of the powers that were—invested in narrative expansion through mass-marketed ancillary products such as sell-through priced DVDs, soundtracks, and action figures.

Xena and *Buffy* evoke the winding narrative mythologies, complex seriality, and sweeping fan participation commonly associated with contemporary cult television.²⁶ With an eye toward the industry's investment in fan participation, Sharon Marie Ross links both shows to the practice she dubs "obscured invitation" to internet activity, one in which complicated narrative mythologies implicitly encourage fan participation.²⁷ For example, she contends that *Lost's* winding narrative begs for fans to unite to create a clear roadmap. *Xena's* and *Buffy's* musical episodes capitalize on these textual and participatory characteristics, calling on both their open narrative potentials and audiences dedicated to combing the series' stylistic, mythological, and episodic intricacies. While breaking with the series' nonmusical tradition, *Xena's* musical episodes "The Bitter Suite" (1998) and "Lyre, Lyre, Hearts on Fire" (2000) do so in the context of its highly anachronistic and ironic text. In both cases, *Xena* maintains its series authenticity as the episodes musically embrace the show's mythos. The former depicts a battle over the death of Xena's son, and includes ongoing personal conflicts related to Xena's pregnancy. The latter includes plotlines about Joxer's brothers and Draco's unrequited love for Gabrielle.

"Lyre, Lyre" and *Buffy's* "Once More With Feeling" (2001) reflect not only trends in post-network cult television,

but also the shifting form and spirit of the musical itself. Like *Scrubs*, *Spamalot*, and *Moulin Rouge*, "Once More" includes original songs that playfully evoke and critique a string of musical tropes and styles: Disney ("Going Through the Motions"), *West Side Story* ("Walk Through Fire"), 1940s musical comedy ("I'll Never Tell"), and Broadway power ballad ("Under Your Spell").²⁸ Dialogue and short musical bits mock the spontaneous communal musicalization of the mundane, such as a community-wide production number sparked by a dry cleaner's successful mustard stain removal.²⁹ The jukebox musical-esque soundtrack of prerecorded hits in "Lyre, Lyre" (for example, "Sisters Are Doin' It for Themselves" and "War") also heavy-handedly parodies the genre's history with its Grecian rendition of *Bye Bye Birdie*'s "Telephone Hour."³⁰

In less than three months from the episode's February 2, 1998, airdate, the preeminent *Xena* online journal/fansite Whoosh.org had uploaded an entire "issue" relating to "The Bitter Suite," including critique and an interview with the composer. This complemented the site's running episode guide, Whoosh.org promos, synopses, fan "things to look out for," and episode transcriptions.³¹ A string of *Buffy* fansites also broke down the episode's music and its contextualization within the larger Buffyverse.³² Not to be outdone by self-directed fan activity, the powers that be monetized not only fans' preestablished tendency to rewatch and collect (via sell-through DVD pricing and Anya, Dawn, and Buffy "Once More" action figures), but also through developing and selling merchandise more commonly associated with the film and Broadway musical: CD soundtracks for both *Xena* episodes and a CD soundtrack and script/scrapbook/Whedon commentary for *Buffy* fans.

Both the comedy and cult sci-fi/fantasy series engage fully with emergent norms across media. The high level of reflexivity present in contemporary comedy and the complex mode of storytelling common to many contemporary cult texts created welcoming spaces for musical integration. These narratives easily embraced the rising popularity of the film musical, the intertextual and self-critical form emerging on stage and screen, and the overall playfulness of the millennial musical. Lying outside these television genres but embracing elements of each—genre blending, self-conscious stylistics, and mainstream cult tendencies—the 2011 one-off *Grey's Anatomy* musical episode "The Song Beneath the Song" provides one of most complex examples

of the millennial television musical. It further highlights the usefulness of interrogating simultaneous shifts between media and across genres when examining innovation or trends in television storytelling. Calling on comprehensive and cult fan-like knowledge of *Grey's* history, catering to consumer desires, capitalizing on the contemporary fluidity of television and Broadway, and activating both musical and television aesthetics, the episode resulted in a highly dynamic integration of soap opera and musical theatre within a product that retained the spirit of the show's established visual and narrative styles. Perhaps even more so than *Buffy*, *Xena*, and *Scrubs*, *Grey's* blends the specialness of the musical episode with the ordinariness of its weekly narratives.

The Perfect Storm: *Grey's Anatomy* and the Singing Surgery

Pejoratively compared to *Cop Rock* as "out of tune" by the *Boston Herald*, *Grey's Anatomy's* "The Song Beneath the Song" aired to mixed reviews but strong ratings during the show's overall low-rated seventh season.³³ Perhaps a platonic ideal of today's cross-media musical hybrid, it unites the "very special" episode premise by musicalizing the episode through integrated musical numbers, and embraces both the forward movement of contemporary nighttime drama and the detailed narrative past common to contemporary complex narratives and consumed by today's cult and networked fans. Simultaneously, showrunner Shonda Rhimes took full advantage of star fluidity, positioning Broadway Tony Award winner Sara Ramirez (Callie Torres) at the episode's center.³⁴ The episode's visual and narrative integration of music reflect both 21st-century television style and the contemporary MTV-influenced movie musical. Finally, its choice of integrating music already intrinsic to the series' narrative reflects both the popularity of the jukebox musical and industrial and narrative strategizing in an environment of media conglomerates, multiplatform viewing, and teleparticipation.

The episode begins with the aftermath of a car crash, just prior to which pediatric surgeon Arizona had proposed to the pregnant Callie. Arizona awakens from the airbag explosion to discover a bleeding Callie on the car's hood. Callie immediately appears outside of herself watching the ensuing panic and her twitching, injury-riddled body. Like the previously addressed comedies, *Grey's* traditionally breaks the hermeneutic seal with character-driven monologues at

each episode's introduction and conclusion. Much like recitative's slide into music from "real world" speech, Callie's spoken introductory monologue moves straight into the first notes of sung music as she sings, "Nobody knows where we might end up. Nobody knows."³⁵ The ensuing episode swirls around the accident, the *Grey's* team's frantic attempt to save both Callie and her unborn baby, and Mark Sloan's (the baby's biological father and Callie's best friend) and Arizona's struggles to survive the emotional trauma and negotiate their feelings and legal parental and quasi-spousal rights. Throughout, the story is told in traditional integrated musical fashion by shifting between sung and spoken moments. As in the contemporary MTV-inspired musical (*Chicago*, *Dreamgirls*, and so on), the music alternately comes directly from the mouths of characters as sung dialogue and emerges as underscoring for other onscreen action.³⁶ "The Song Beneath the Song" performs a delicate balancing act: part one-off musical and part medical drama maintaining long-term story arcs.

Although *Grey's* position as doc opera made it a somewhat unusual choice for musicalization, the show itself had already been built on seasons of high-profile musical inclusion.³⁷ Prior to the musical episode's airing, Hollywood Records—like *Grey's Anatomy's* ABC network, a holding of Disney—had released three *Grey's* soundtrack CDs. Like *The O.C.* and *Gossip Girl*—both musically helmed by *Grey's* music supervisor Alex Patsavas—the show heavily featured indie music within its narrative, usually as underscoring. As with her other shows, Patsavas's design cultivated a signature series sound and an economic windfall for both Hollywood Records and featured bands such as Snow Patrol ("Chasing Cars") and The Fray ("How to Save a Life"). After its 2007 appearance on *Grey's*, "Chasing Cars" saw weekly download sales jump from fewer than 2,000 to over 21,000 tracks.³⁸ The narrative significance of music to the overall series would make "The Song Beneath the Song" both special and ordinary, and Rhimes's choice of using songs already popularized by previous episodes would pay off on various levels. Instead of resulting in a storyline like *Mamma Mia!* with lyrics shoehorned into new narrative contexts, the episode uses choice lyrical passages and the emotive power of past episodes, as well as audience dedication to detail, to construct an episode that both rewards hardcore viewers and encourages rewatching and online sharing.

Grey's Anatomy's embrace of the traditional soap opera and doc drama genres, as well as its overall ratings and critical success, in some ways distance it from the common connotation of the designator cult television show.³⁹ However, its textual and viewer practices nonetheless enable it to slip into the category of mainstream cult, making it a natural choice for musical inclusion based on the past successes of the *Buffy* and *Xena* musical episodes.⁴⁰ Scholars have more recently engaged with the topic of cult from marketing and reception standpoints, with ABC's megahit *Lost* often earning the moniker for its complicated storyworld, high level of transmedia storytelling, and large online fan base committed to more fully fleshing out obscure narrative details.⁴¹ Fan dedication exhibited through repeated viewings, ancillary product purchases through multiple revenue streams (DVDs, games, books, music), and active interaction (with the texts and each other) prove attractive to network executives as they attempt to build a foothold on a rating share and fan investment in today's sketchy multiplatform post-network viewing environment.

"The Song Beneath the Song" functions on two levels simultaneously, foregrounding the contemporary drive to address both the casual and the cult viewer. Although one can easily follow the episode without a detailed memory of musical moments from previous seasons, the dedicated cult viewer reaps the reward of "intent attentiveness."⁴² While forwarding the plot in the present, the episode calls back to salient musical moments of the past to emotionally move the narrative forward.⁴³ The song used in the first full-blown integrated musical number, "Chasing Cars," had been used in the Season 2 finale to underscore a triad of major narrative moments: Denny's death, Derek and Meredith's re-consummation of their relationship, and Christina's comforting of a recovering Burke. The climactic point for three major plotlines and multi-episode arcs, the original appearance of "Chasing Cars" would likely have been a memorable one for diehard *Grey's* fans.

Other numbers would hearken to equally significant moments throughout the show's run: "How to Save a Life" was the show's original theme song and featured in Season 2's "Superstition"; "How We Operate" underscored Burke's hand surgery and Denny's heart transplant in "Deterioration of the Fight or Flight Response"; and "Breathe" underscored the triad of Meredith pulling a live artillery shell out of a

patient's chest, Derek operating on Bailey's gravely injured husband, and Addison and George helping to deliver Bailey's baby in Season 2's "As We Know It." Resembling Baz Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge* and reflecting Mittell's position regarding the "how are they going to pull this off" quality of complex narratives, the episode created an hour-long guessing game that repeatedly rewarded its dedicated viewers for their memory and subtly urged them to share their mastery with the online community.⁴⁴ Within a day, the blog Popsugar.com (<http://www.buzzsugar.com/Grey-Anatomy-Musical-Episode-Full-List-Songs-Original-Scenes-15381503>) had satiated the fan community's nagging desire to pinpoint previous song inclusion with a post that both embedded and linked to YouTube videos of the original episodes where songs had appeared as underscoring.⁴⁵ In addition to stroking the knowing fan's ego, the multipurpose quality of the songs narratively encouraged an affective blending of the drama of the present with that of the past. *Grey's* assumes strong audience investment from beginning to end.

The episode's smooth musical integration also arises out of the show's embrace of the post-network era tendency toward high-style visuals and a complex interaction between the sound and visual tracks. Post-1980s quality television has been identified by its shift away from zero-degree style visuals across genres and the rise of a more highly stylized or cinematic television aesthetic.⁴⁶ *Grey's Anatomy's* aural-visual structure illustrates a convergence of classic and contemporary television and musical tropes: the musical's traditional reversal of the causal primacy of the visual and audio tracks (with the aural cue of—seemingly nondiegetic—music driving the diegetic action or burst into song),⁴⁷ the MTV era musical's tendency toward underscoring with dynamic visuals,⁴⁸ the complex visual stitching together of concurrent television plotlines,⁴⁹ and the complex narrative's one-off spectacles.⁵⁰ "The Song Beneath the Song" capitalizes on generic trends and an assumed audience familiar with intertextual nods to form and content, while maintaining the overall series aesthetic. By combining the aural, visual, and narrative norms of the post-network melodrama and the musical, *Grey's* created a product that—through both its sung and "straight" moments—maintained series integrity while playing with notions of television and film genre.

Unlike the showier *Scrubs* and *How I Met Your*

Mother, the episode does not embrace the heavy-handed excess of Berkeley through traditional production numbers; neither does it evoke the tongue-in-cheek generic critique or self-awareness present in *Buffy* or *Pushing Daisies*. Instead, *Grey's* integrates its music with drop-dead seriousness, using the heightened emotion common to both melodrama and musical integration to affectively forward the story.⁵¹ Williams pinpoints suspense, the drive to "achieve moral legibility" or the "right to live," the possibility of a "space of innocence," and an intrinsic excess as inherent to the melodramatic mode.⁵² Like the musical, melodrama emerges through worlds and scenarios where heightened emotion transcends mere words. Whether through nondiegetic or diegetic musical integration, overblown emotional performance, or visual excess associated with color, editing, or cinematography, both forms convey their emotion by means beyond the spoken word. Williams's recent work on the "mega-melodrama" explores the mode's contemporary relationship to cinematic spectacle and nighttime television's increasing seriality. *Grey's* commonly embraces both, and its musical integration into a space already soaked with pathos, suspense, and life-and-death action only compounds its narrative (and relatedly visual) excess.

Bucking the trend in jukebox musicals to squeeze stage and screen action into the lyrics of existing works, *Grey's* relies more heavily on the overall emotion evoked from the *spirit* of the music, choice phrases, and residual emotions tied to the show's past use of the songs. As Callie arrives at the hospital and is rolled into the ER, the Out-of-Body (OOB) (and uninjured) Callie begins singing "Chasing Cars." The camera captures the frantic action of the doctors behind her, and the soundtrack vacillates between full sung voice and the muffled sounds of the doctors' work on the injured Callie. Occasionally, spoken dialogue rises in volume as the music track fades. Salient lyrics may resonate with the action, such as Bailey singing, "If I lay here, if I just lay here. Would you lie with me and just forget the words," as she grabs the panicking Callie's hand; more significantly, however, the *emotion* of the singing and the emotive power of the song's original series context compound the emotions of the narrative moment. Simultaneously, viewers are affectively rewarded for past and present investment in the series.

Throughout the episode, whether through dramatic numbers or the oddly perky booty call number "Running on

Sunshine," the music possesses an emotional presence common not only in the musical play, but also in the series' musical ancestor, opera. Whereas the emotion of opera often translates irrespective of the language of origin, the emotion of *Grey's* music translates via key words, past connotation, or the mere heightened emotion of music. Highlighting the inherent compatibility of the genre to musical tropes, David Thorburn likens the television melodrama to the operatic tradition, arguing that those who "complain about the genre's improbability" refuse to acknowledge the genre's *operatic* rather than conventionally dramatic form.⁵³ *Grey's* has embraced this operatic sense of tragedy and improbability season after season through such devices as talking dead people, main characters being dragged behind buses, and dramatic Virginia Woolf–esque drowning suicide attempts. Integrating the music within a traditional *Grey's*-style storyline involving medical emergency, personal tragedy, and soap opera–level hysteria only heightens its doc opera melodramatic tradition, and the post-network era's amenability to flights of fancy opens the door just enough to overtly integrate the genre's operatic roots into the otherwise *straight* text.

Complementing the aural integration of music, the show combines the series' traditional interweaving storylines with an occasional nod to music video aesthetics and the heightened drama of the close-up common to the television melodrama and soap opera.⁵⁴ The stage musical simply cannot capture the closeness enabled by the camera, and the big screen must at times avoid the close-up because of the overwhelming impact of the large image.⁵⁵ Thorburn argues that "in the kind of psychologically nuanced performance elicited by good melodrama, the smaller television screen would seem even more appropriate," whereas the cinematic screen has the "power to transform merely robust nostrils into Brobdignagian caverns."⁵⁶ In *Grey's*, the repeated use of close-up and medium close-up—whether Bailey's soulful performance of "Wait," Callie's panicking and blood-covered face, or Lexi's plea to Callie in "Breathe"—complement the focus on emotion through the face in a scale not overwhelming.

Juxtaposing the visual and emotional intimacy of the more traditional television melodrama or soap opera, *Grey's* integrates excessive style through the visual and aural disjointedness of music video—a cornerstone of past 1980s televisual musical integration (*Miami Vice*) as well as post-1980s film musical style (from *Flashdance* to *Chicago* and

Dreamgirls). In stark opposition to the simple communicative close-ups associated with melodrama, music video commonly divorces the visuals from the lyrics.⁵⁷ As the song's aural track moves fluidly from beginning to end, the associated visuals often lack any narrative or psychological coherence.⁵⁸ This splintered visual style became common in the 1980s dance films whose videos played heavily in the MTV rotation.⁵⁹ It also emerges through high-style underscored montage in the contemporary movie musical (*Dreamgirls*' "Steppin' to the Bad Side" and *Evita*'s, "Rainbow High").

Grey's integrates the stylization of music video and the emotive power of the transcendent sung voice with its more emotionally intimate and narratively cohesive melodramatic mode, to an end of simultaneous dynamic musical integration and continuation of cohesive and ongoing serial narrative. These varying styles occur throughout the episode but are perhaps best illustrated through its climactic song, "The Story," sung by OOB Callie. The number embraces the convergence of the various musical and television forms through a complex relationship with the episode's visual, aural, and narrative threads. Like the rest of the episode's musical numbers, "The Story" functions somewhat as an integrated musical number—one that further elucidates or forwards the existing nonmusical narrative by transcending the everyday non-sung world. High-style camerawork mirrors music video and contemporary film musicals as it captures Callie's highly emotional climactic performance. To cater to series demands and keep the larger, serial, nonmusical storylines moving, however, focus continually shifts from the singing Callie and her out-of-body "interaction" with the narrative to other underscored (and un-sung) moments in need of development for future episodes.

"The Story"

As the number begins, the "real" aural soundtrack becomes echoey—signposting the shift into music—as Arizona tells Callie her premature baby is doing well but cannot yet open her eyes (as she's looking for Callie). Music begins and the camera slowly moves away from the grieving Arizona to a close-up of OOB Callie, who strokes the face of comatose Callie as she begins the show's final number. The episode then cuts to a sequence more reminiscent of music video than musical film. OOB Callie appears on the often-

seen second-story walkway, a locale that provides both a beautiful view—with surrounding windows, deep space, and angular architecture—and a loaded emotional past as one of the main sites of Season 6's "shooter in the hospital" cliffhanger. The visuals in "The Story" reflect the high style and heterogeneous nature of music video as they, all the while maintaining aural continuity, eschew diegetic spatial and temporal coherence through a series of jump cuts that occur as the camera continues a series of 360 degree rotations around a belting OOB Callie. Following the trend of highlighting fleeting relevant lyrics established in earlier numbers, the scene cuts to the NICU and Sloan sitting with their baby just as Callie sings, "But baby I broke them all for you. Because even when I was flat broke, you made me feel like a million bucks. You do, and I was made for you."

Briefly abandoning the musical integration of the number, an extended instrumental interlude follows, where the music's volume significantly drops, to foreground the spoken action by the non-singing ensemble members. Momentarily, OOB Callie has disappeared (although the spirit of the music remains through the soft underscoring). Short scenes temporarily resolve additional serial plotlines—Jackson and Lexi's romantic relationship and Christina and Teddy's teacher-student conflict—and further prepare for the next (nonmusical) episode of the series. The first scene demonstrates an adherence to soap visuals, as close-ups, alternating over the shoulder shots, and rack focuses are used to reveal the romantic conflict and resolution of Jackson and Lexi. Much in the vein of television melodrama, the music—only moments earlier diegetic—increases in volume as a close-up of Jackson and Lexi's clasping hands ends the scene. Similar visual and aural cues accompany the Christina-Teddy scene; just prior to a quasi-match-on-action where Teddy throws a door open to storm out of the room, the image cuts to OOB Callie bursting through an entirely different set of doors. The camera movements and discontinuous shots reflect her previous video-esque sequence, as the Tony Award winner appears more pop star than orthopedist. Through another series of jump cuts, she closes her eyes and sings (as action around her appears completely unaware of her presence). She strides into the hospital room with Arizona and comatose Callie. As she hits the song's climax, she sings directly to the comatose Callie. With the video aesthetic built on continued jump cuts and hyper-mobile camerawork, the show brings OOB Callie into the "real" action. As she belts the final lines of the song, she

grabs the feet of comatose Callie and awakens her from the coma. As she awakens, OOB Callie fades away aurally and visually. The story returns to the nonmusical diegesis that will continue the following week, and all is right at Seattle Grace. The next episode begins (nonmusically) with action around the baby's progress in the NICU and Callie's slow recovery.

Unlike the majority of the shows airing one-off musical episodes, this highly serialized drama required a significant amount of action to be continued in the next episode. Whereas *Pushing Daisies*, *30 Rock*, *How I Met Your Mother*, *Scrubs*, *Buffy*, and *Xena* include some degree of serialization within their plotlines, the musical episodes themselves functioned largely as self-contained narratives. The means by which *Grey's* played with volume, layered sound, and instrumental interludes—in "The Story" and throughout the episode—allowed for the conveyance of detailed plot information and the continuation rather than retardation of a forward-moving, complex serial narrative. "The Song Beneath the Song" perhaps stands as an ideal representation of the multiform influence on the musicalization of fictional television in the early part of the 21st century, as well as the need to look inside and outside of television when exploring emergent trends in television narrative and style.

"The Story" from *Grey's Anatomy's* "The Song Beneath the Song"

Video: ["The Story" from Grey's Anatomy's "The Song Beneath the Song"](#)

Over the Rainbow or in your Roku Box

The future of the televisual musical remains in question, but perhaps more in terms of form than continued presence. The genre has remained on television in one form or another despite over half a century of industry evolution, connotative and economic instability within the genre, and an ever-shifting relationship between the music industry, film, television, and the stage. As they have been for the past decades, the moving parts are still in motion: unstable delivery systems; a continued on-again/off-again relationship between the musical and the big screen; the uncertain viability of the big Broadway musical; and more recent trends toward live television musicals and internet-based musicals such as *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog*, *Prop 8:*

The Musical, and *A Very Potter Musical*. The very meaning of the term *television series* has more recently come into question, with innovative series airing first through non-television dependent interfaces such as Hulu or Netflix, and with rumblings of HBO's consideration of offering HBOGo access to non-cable subscribers. Would *Orange is the New Black: The Musical* still be considered television?⁶⁰ If the last thirty years can stand as any kind of barometer, formal, technological, and industrial shifts will only provide fodder for further integration between the genre and "television," whether that be content that comes out of a traditional television, computer, or other mobile device. The continued destabilization of media forms and increased cross-pollination between these forms will only create new spaces for creative musical content. In the fitting words of "The Song," today's television content has "crossed all the lines and broke all the rules, but baby [it] broke them all for you." In response, scholars must recognize the importance of rigorous study not just within the television form, but also across forms and between genres.

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About the Author

Kelly Kessler is an Associate Professor of Media and Cinema Studies at DePaul University. Her work largely engages with issues of gender and genre in American television and film. Kessler's book, *Destabilizing the Hollywood Musical: Music, Masculinity, and Mayhem* examines the gendered ramifications of the genre's shift in the latter part of the 20th century. She has more recently been exploring the genre's history on the small screen. Her work can be found in journals and anthologies such as *Television and New Media*, *Cinema Journal*, *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, and *Feminism at the Movies*.

Endnotes

¹ Thank you to Sharon Ross and Michael DeAngelis for their incredibly helpful advice through the writing process, and thank you to DePaul University's College of Communication for granting the research leave that was partially dedicated to the completion of this article.

Notably, as Hollywood continued to focus on big-budget tentpole films that tended toward the male targeted and action driven, many of these television programs—targeting varying ages of women through female action heroes, nighttime and daytime soaps, and female-centered animated series—took feminized content and doubled-down with the traditionally feminine genre of the musical. Some of the cheekier musical episodes appeared in more male-targeted series (e.g., *Scrubs*, *South Park*, *Family Guy*), maintaining a critical distance from the feminized musical.

³ Jane Feuer, "Melodrama, Serial Form and Television Today," *Screen* 25.1 (1984), 4-17.

[doi:10.1093/screen/25.1.4](https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/25.1.4). Linda Williams, "Mega-Melodrama! Vertical and Horizontal Suspensions of the 'Classical,'" *Modern Drama* 55.4 (Winter 2012), 523-43. [doi:10.1353/mdr.2012.0064](https://doi.org/10.1353/mdr.2012.0064). Also coinciding with this rise of the musical genre's presence within fictional nonmusical television has been the increased presence or significance of musical underscoring. Shows like Fox's *The O.C.*, NBC's *Friday Night Lights*, and AMC's *Mad Men* employ a heavy use of montage underscored by popular music. Although this kind of musical inclusion falls outside of this study, it speaks to the generic roots of melodrama in an era of increased serialization on television, as well as increased tie-in marketing of television products. *Friday Night Lights* produced two soundtrack albums, *The O.C.* spawned six "mixes" and a holiday album, and *Man Men* has to date produced four albums of music from the show.

⁴ Although *Glee* and *Smash* provide the two most obvious instances of Broadway and movie musical-linked texts of the 2000s, for the purposes of this paper, I have chosen to shelve these two often discussed shows to instead focus on the ways in which the musical has sneaked into less suspecting texts. Their heavy and weekly inclusion of musical numbers and tropes created space for this genre blending from Episode 1. I am more interested in looking at how established shows in the new millennium include cracks or fissures where the musical can sneak in for a visit.

⁵ Justin Wyatt, *High Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1994), 15.

⁶ For more on the move from big and small screen, see the following: Paul Harris, "Hollywood Stars Flock to Broadway Stage," *Guardian*, March 19, 2010,

<http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2010/mar/19/hollywood-stars-broadway-theatre> (accessed October 13, 2013); and Karu F. Daniels, "TV Stars on Broadway: Growing Trend and Winning Formula," *CNN.com*, June 8, 2012, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/06/08/showbiz/tv-stars-broadway/index.html> (accessed October 13, 2013).

⁷ Although the 1980s and early 1990s were not musical-free—with successful strings of dance musicals and animated musicals—not until the late 1990s did the integrated live-action musical find its way back to the big screen in any substantive manner.

⁸ Kelly Kessler, *Destabilizing the Hollywood Musical: Music, Masculinity, and Mayhem* (London: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2010), 180–201.

⁹ Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987); Jane Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis and Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1993); Richard Dyer, "Entertainment and Utopia," in *Hollywood Musicals: The Film Reader*, ed. Steven Cohan (London and New York: Routledge, 2002); Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1981).

¹⁰ Notably, all relied on stars not primarily associated with singing (e.g., Renée Zellweger, Richard Gere, Christopher Walken, Michelle Pfeiffer, and Eddie Murphy) but reliable at the box office.

¹¹ Amanda Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 2007), 13.

¹² John T. Caldwell, *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1995), 651.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 56, 64.

¹⁴ Notably, the *Moonlighting* Hollywood-esque dream sequence was staged by Stanley Donen, director of classics such as *Singin' in the Rain* and *On the Town*.

¹⁵ Jane Feuer, "The MTM Style," in *MTM Quality Television*, eds. Jane Feuer, Paul Kerr, and Tise Vahimagi (London: BFI, 1984), 38. Also see Betsy Williams's "North to the

Future," which more specifically interrogates the links between the high-style and highly self-reflexive 1990s dramedy, quality television designators of the 1970s, and the network crisis of the 1980s and 1990s. Betsy Williams, "North to the Future: *Northern Exposure* and Quality Television," in *Television: The Critical View*, ed. Horace Newcomb, 5th ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994), 141–54.

¹⁶ For more on *Cop Rock*'s musical contribution, see George Plasketes, "Cop Rock Revisited: Unsung Series and Musical Hinge in Cross-Genre Evolution," *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 32 no. 2 (2004), 64–73.
[doi:10.1080/01956051.2004.10662053](https://doi.org/10.1080/01956051.2004.10662053).

¹⁷ Jason Mittell, "Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television," *Velvet Light Trap* 58 (2006), 35.
[doi:10.1353/vlt.2006.0032](https://doi.org/10.1353/vlt.2006.0032).

¹⁸ Exceptions to the rule appeared in shows such as *7th Heaven* and *One Life to Live*, but a trend toward these forms was evident.

¹⁹ For more on changes in the situation comedy, see Mittell, "Narrative Complexity," 34–35; Ethan Thompson, "Comedy Verité? The Observational Documentary Meets the Televisual Sitcom," *Velvet Light Trap* 60 (2007), 63–72.
[doi:10.1353/vlt.2007.0027](https://doi.org/10.1353/vlt.2007.0027).

²⁰ Aaron Frankel, *Writing the Broadway Musical* (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1977), 31.

²¹ Margaret Lyons, "The Best Medicine," *Time Out Chicago*, January 18, 2007, <http://www.timeoutchicago.com/arts-culture/movies-on-demand/47152/the-best-medicine> (accessed September 13, 2013).

²² Michael Portantieri, "Scrubbing Up," *Theatremania*, January 12, 2007, http://www.theatermania.com/new-york-city-theater/news/01-2007/scrubbing-up_9857.html (accessed September 13, 2013).

²³ The show also includes various nonintegrated Robin Sparkles music videos and performances.

²⁴ In addition to capitalizing on the Broadway cachet and chops of Chenoweth, the show also takes advantage of Ellen Greene's musical past. Greene, *Pushing Daisies*' Aunt

Vivian, had played Audrey in the Off-Broadway and film versions of *Little Shop of Horrors*. She and Chenoweth perform a duet of They Might Be Giants' "Birdhouse in Your Soul."

²⁵ By 2005, 89 percent of households owned VCRs, 7 percent owned digital video recorder (DVR) technology, and 59 percent had computers that were online and facilitated "viewsing." Such shifts in viewing practices allow audiences to locate or create fan communities much more easily than in a network era driven by a singular dominant mode of distribution. Lotz, *The Television*, 55, 255.

²⁶ Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2002), 134; Sara Gwenellian-Jones, "Virtual Reality and Cult Television," in *Cult Television*, eds. Sara Gwenellian-Jones and Roberta Pearson (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2004), 90.

²⁷ Sharon Marie Ross, *Beyond the Box: Television and the Internet* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 43.

²⁸ Joss Whedon, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Once More with Feeling* (New York: Simon Spotlight Entertainment, 2002), 76–80.

²⁹ Jane Feuer, "The Self-Reflective Musical," in *Hollywood Musicals: The Film Reader*, ed. Steven Cohan (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 33.

³⁰ The number goes as far as to replicate much of the film's choreography and its use of split screen.

³¹ "The Bitter Suite," *Whoosh!*, <http://www.whoosh.org/epguide/bitter.html> (accessed September 13, 2013).

³² Aside from being mentioned in general *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* sites, various sites have been created specifically for sharing information about "Once More With Feeling" (with varying levels of opportunity for interaction). As of 2013, both the sites Going Through the Motions (created November 6, 2001, the day of the airing) and Buffymusical.com (listing a 2002–2003 copyright date) were still functional. *Buffymusical.com*, <http://buffymusical.com> (accessed September 13, 2013); *Going Through the Motions: The Once More with Feeling Fansite and Fanlisting*, <http://musical.chosentwo.com/main.php> (accessed September 13, 2013).

³³ Mark A. Perigard, "Grey's Musical Ep Arrives D.O.A.," *bostonherald.com*, April 1, 2011, http://bostonherald.com/entertainment/television/love_tv/2011/04 (accessed October 15, 2013); Marisa Guthrie, "'Grey's Anatomy' Musical Episode Lifts Ratings," *Hollywood Reporter*, April 1, 2011, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/greys-anatomy-musical-episode-lifts-173947> (accessed September 12, 2013).

³⁴ Chandra Wilson (Dr. Bailey) appeared on Broadway in *Caroline or Change*, *On the Town*, *Chicago*, and *Avenue Q*.

³⁵ Beginning and ending character-driven monologues were often used to frame larger philosophical issues in medical terms. In the musical and in opera, recitative refers to the practice of adopting a vocal style that reflects natural patterns of speech. Often in the musical, a song will begin with recitative as a pathway into the fully sung song (e.g., "raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens" in *The Sound of Music's* "My Favorite Things").

³⁶ For more on the MTV musical style in the dance musical, see Kelly Kessler, "Gone in a *Flash(dance)*: The Estrangement of Diegetic Performance in the 1980s Teen Dance Pic," in *Movies, Moves, and Music: The Sonic World of Dance Films*, ed. Mark Evans (London: Equinox, forthcoming).

³⁷ Notably, all of the show's episodes are named after (not necessarily included) songs: "Who's Zoomin' Who" (Season 1, Episode 1), "Kung Fu Fighting" (Season 4, Episode 6), and "The Time Warp" (Season 6, Episode 15).

³⁸ Tamara Conniff, "A 'Natural Extension' for 'Grey' Music Chief," *Hollywood Reporter*, March 29, 2007, <http://web.archive.org/web/20070923003040/http://www.hollywo> (accessed September 30, 2013).

³⁹ During the show's first four seasons, it ranked in the top 10 Nielsen rankings and remained in the top 20 until falling to 31 in Season 7. During that same time, the show's overall season ranking never fell below 12 for the coveted 18–49 demographic, landing in the top 5 for its first five seasons. As of late December 2012, the show was resting at number 20 overall and 11 for the 18–48 demographic for its ninth

season (*Wikipedia*). Although these numbers have been pulled from *Wikipedia*, the entry had compiled the data from a combination of *Zap 2 It's TV by the Numbers* and *Medianet*. "Grey's Anatomy," *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grey's_Anatomy#cite_note-season8-218 (accessed September 13, 2013).

⁴⁰ Matt Hills complicates the binary of "mainstream" and "cult" through his discussion of the "mainstream cult." Here he challenges *Buffy's* designator as cult, based on its international success, and highlights the cult participation by fans of *Dawson's Creek*. *Grey's*, like *Dawson's Creek*, embraces the feminized form of the soap opera, while still inviting viewer engagement through its winding narrative and hailing fans through tie-in merchandising. The musical episode further calls on engaged viewing via its repeated references to past episodes through music choice. Matt Hills, "Mainstream Cult," in *The Cult TV Book*, ed. Stacey Abbott (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), 70; Roberta Pearson, "Observations on Cult Television," in Abbott, *The Cult TV Book*, 8.

⁴¹ Catherine Johnson, "Cult TV and the Television Industry," in Abbott, *The Cult TV Book*, 143–44.

⁴² Rhonda Wilcox, "The Aesthetics of Cult Television," in Abbott, *The Cult TV Book*, 31.

⁴³ Becky Kirsch on Popsugar breaks down the musical numbers by past episode, including the original screen action from the episode in which the song originally served as underscoring. The only song not to come from a previous episode, the climactic "The Story," sung by Callie, appeared in the season three-hour-long special, which featured Brandy Carlile singing the song over a montage sequence of past moments. Becky Kirsch, "Behind the Musical: Watch the Original Grey's Anatomy Scenes That Featured the Songs!" *Popsugar Entertainment*, April 1, 2011, <http://www.buzzsugar.com/Grey-Anatomy-Musical-Episode-Full-List-Songs-Original-Scenes-15381503> (accessed September 13, 2013).

⁴⁴ Mittell, "Narrative Complexity," 35.

⁴⁵ Kirsch, "Behind the Musical."

⁴⁶ For more on the infusion of cinematic style into television,

see Caldwell, *Televisuality*, 84–88; and Jeremy Butler, *Television Style* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 138–72.

[47](#) Altman, *The American*, 69.

[48](#) Kessler, *Destabilizing*, 178–79.

[49](#) David Barker, "Television Production Techniques as Communication," in *Television: The Critical View*, ed. Horace Newcomb, 5th ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994), 174–75.

[50](#) Mittell, "Narrative Complexity," 35.

[51](#) As early as 1956, Joseph Kerman argues of operatic musical integration, "Music can be immediate and simple in the presentation of emotional states or shades. In opera, people can give themselves over to sensibility; in a play nobody ever quite stops thinking." Joseph Kerman, *Opera as Drama* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), 12–13.

[52](#) Williams "Mega-Melodrama!" 252.

[53](#) David Thorburn, "Television Melodrama," in *Television: The Critical View*, ed. Horace Newcomb, 6th ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), 599–600.

[54](#) Robert Allen, *Speaking of Soap Operas* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1985), 66.

[55](#) The 2012 film version of *Les Misérables* includes a heavy-handed use of the close-up, producing, I argue, an overwhelming affect as the close-up and heightened emotion of opera combine to create a moment of what Kristin Thompson in "The Concept of Cinematic Excess" refers to as *excess* rather than emotion. Kristin Thompson, "The Concept of Cinematic Excess," *Ciné-Tracts* 1 no. 2 (Summer 1977): 54–63.

[56](#) Thorburn, "Television Melodrama," 604. Relatedly, Jane Feuer's 1984 exploration of the emergent nighttime serial notes that "*Dallas*, *Dynasty*, and their imitators appear to lack visual excess as it has been described in the fifties melodrama" (8). Although the visual style of many nighttime serials has taken on a cinematic flair, her argument still rings true for many of the more traditional network dramas, even if special events like the musical episode tend toward the visually excessive. Feuer, "Melodrama, Serial Form," 8.

- ⁵⁷ Marsha Kinder, "Music Video and the Spectator: Television, Ideology and Dream," *Film Quarterly* 38 no. 1 (1984), 3; Richard Gehr, "The MTV Aesthetic," *Film Comment* 19 no. 4 (1983), 39.
- ⁵⁸ Blaine Allan, "Musical Cinema, Music Video, Music Television," *Film Quarterly* 43 no. 3 (1990), 2–14.
- ⁵⁹ Kelly Kessler, "Gone in a," forthcoming.
- ⁶⁰ Sarah Perez, "Hulu Debuts Previews of Its 2013 Original Programming and Exclusive Series," *TechCrunch*, January 8, 2013, <http://techcrunch.com/2013/01/08/hulu-debuts-previews-of-its-2013-original-programming-and-exclusive-series/> (accessed September 13, 2013); Felix Gillette, "HBO GO Without Paying for Cable? It May Be a Tease," *Business Week*, March 22, 2013, <http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2013-03-22/hbo-go-without-paying-for-cable-it-may-be-a-tease> (accessed September 12, 2013).