

Film Appreciation
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Lecture - 34
The Hollywood Musicals

Good Morning. We have been talking about musicals in general, with particular reference to Hindi film cinema, and we talked about the Hindi film great musicals and also, the great artists from the Hindi film scenario.

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Today, I am going to refer to as promised earlier to Hollywood musicals, and what were the landmarks in the development of the musical genre. So, here are some of the names. The Broadway Melody is a movie, one of the foremost, one of the earliest films of this genre. Musicals are an important genre as you know. We will be talking about someone called Florence Ziegfeld who was a producer. Then we will be talking about the great artists, that great dancers; you remember, you must note that dance is generally, considered a domain of women, the female actors, but how a couple of male performers change the perception about dancing, especially, about men dancing. So, there is a whole lot of research done about the male dancers and the construct of masculinity there. So, we have the great performers, such male performers Gene Kelly, Fred Astaire, and also, Frank Sinatra. I will write the name on the board; Frank Sinatra; actor, singer and dancer.

So, Gene Kelly, Frank Sinatra and Fred Astaire; these are the men associated with the musical genres.

We also have the great Jean Hagen from the film *Singing in the Rain*; not to confuse this Jean with this Gene. Other female artists include Ginger Rogers, Cyd Charisse and Judy Garland; these are the personalities we will be talking about. We will also talk about the great directors of musicals. So, Ernst Lubich who I have already referred to in one of my earlier lectures on Studio years, studio periods in Hollywood cinema. Stanley Donen and Vincent Menely; so, these are the directors, at least, the key directors. We will also talk about the growth of Hollywood musicals from the tradition of American vaudeville and these are the most renowned personalities and names. They were earlier associated with Broadway and then, they made a move to the Hollywood screen.

Ivan George Gershwin; these are all song writers and composers. So, Ivan George Gershwin, Rodgers and Hart, Irving Berlin, Cole Porter and Oscar Hammerstein; these are the people; these are the names that we are going to refer to in today's lectures. Now, why musicals and what is the importance of relevance of musicals? We have to know that in, at least, in early periods of or early years of Hollywood, film makers saw musicals as the most convenient way to give expressions to their creativity. Now, be it in the form of set designs, choreography, costumes and the way body would perform. So, there, musical was one of the most vivid and most acceptable kind of channel, through which artists give expression to the creativity.

In Hollywood, the musicals were at the peak within the studio system of the 1930s to the 50s. We have been talking about the studio years. We have been talking about the golden age of Hollywood cinema. So, you should be aware of the studio system and musicals were an important part of that period. Now, each major studio had its trademark esthetics. We will be talking about the studio politics as well, but more than that it is important to know that like film making, as in film making; you know that MGM was renowned for something; the great, grand spectacles if you remember what I told you in my earlier classes. More stars than the sky above; that was MGM; whereas, Warner Brothers existed on some other philosophy; Paramount on something else; Columbia pictures on something else.

Warner Brothers was known for gangster cinemas, not MGM. Each major studio had its trademark esthetics. So, some of the greatest musicals of the period were produced and

released from the MGM lot. They had their own sets of stars, dance directors and designers. A major advantage of making musicals was that this genre enabled the film makers to easily, work around censorship. See, when you do a musical and just imagine the grand Hollywood kind of a musical in the early years; in the 30s we are talking about. So, you did not have to worry about the heroine's costume. We are still talking about the time when Hayes's code was in existence; Hayes's code, the censorship code.

So, it has certain restrictions, certain tableau on the way, stars would be portrayed on the screen, but in the musicals, you could work around the censorship code, by way of body movement, gestures the kinds of any undos that the artist would dabble in and also, the kinds of costumes; the stars and the dancers would wear. So, they could get away, resort in by breaking certain kinds of limitations. The history of American or Hollywood musicals can be traced back to the notion of American vaudeville, and musicals grew out of the culture of incorporation of that defined American life after the civil war. So, American vaudeville was in existence after the civil war from the late 19th century onwards.

The development of the vaudeville marked the beginning of popular entertainment, accessible to all and that could become understood and afforded by all. Like cinema in its later years, vaudeville was also the domain or the big business and was dependent on the organizational efforts of a growing number of upper class workers, the bureaucrats, the industrialists. They appeal to these people; they were financed by these people. These people have the spending power; they could produce this film. They could also spend money to enjoy the show. So, vaudeville change according to the changing taste of an urban middle class audience, just like cinema and then, soon business savvy showmen, utilize development in industrialization and communication technologies.

They created and control vast networks of theatre circuits and control popular American entertainment. So, musicals are marked on a screen by several terms; the operator, review, musical comedy, musical drama and the back stage musicals; these are all just names given to the kinds of musicals that prevailed. Now, coming to back stage musicals, this is also a kind of musical, which grew out of the tradition of the American vaudeville. So, one of the earlier, rather the foremost film or the musical film, was the 1929, *The Broadway Melody*, which invented the genre called the back stage musical. So, it is a musical genre within the back stage musical. You also remember that the Jazz singer was the very first talking picture, 1927. Now, the plot of back stage musicals

involve the problems of putting onus to; this is something very common in our films also.

You can relate to perhaps; a number of films that you must have watched in any language within our own country. So, the problems are putting on the show. The process includes the concept of, the process of audition; getting the right kinds of people for the show; the rehearsals, the gossip, the bantering, the back biting, the financial hurdles; some kinds of obstacles are put in the way, and then, the final show that is staged to thunders applause. So, that is the formula of back stage musicals. It is a in-depth process, is put before you; how difficult it is or how challenging it is or how exciting it is to put up a show. So, needless to say, there was a plenty of singing and dancing during the rehearsals, as well as the show on screen, and the actors would stage and dance and perform as if they are actually on the stage, and viewing the audience or in a real theatre, watching these people, perform just for us; that was the impression given to it.

So, trying to perhaps; break the wall that, exists between the cinema audience and the actors. At the Broadway Melodies also, notable film, because the title as I have already told you; Broadway refers to New York's Broadway as a major source of Hollywood musicals. So, it refers to something that is such an important landmark in American culture and therefore, very little. The film features lyrics by someone called Arthur Freed, who joined MGM as a regular and also, were instrumental in inducting a number of musical stars at the studio. Some of the greatest names from Broadway were brought to Hollywood; these are the names; Cole Potter, the Geshwin, Rozer and Hammerstein, Irwin Berlins. So, these are the names if you go back to Broadway if you are interested in Hollywood musicals and the genre; these are extremely important names.

If you watch classic Hollywood films, you may often come across these names on screen. The earlier musicals plot wise; they had little to do with the stories or with plotted (refer time: 12:39) So, the song and dance now, must have thrown it, thrown there. Characters would often break into songs arbitrarily, and randomly, not necessarily, to push the narrative forward. Soon, musicals got a European touch when artists from Europe, started to flood Hollywood; we are talking about the late 30's, earlier 40's and introduced the operator style on American screen. Now, musicals change there. They became a little more professional and classy.

One of the earliest directors to whom, we credit the growth of the early musicals, at least, we are talking about the more sophisticated kinds of musicals; was Ernst Lubish. He is credited with four musicals in the early years of sound, the Love, Parade, Monte Carlo, the smiling lieutenant and one hour with you, and these musicals helped define what talking movies would be; what musical genres would be. Lubish was embraced with open hours by the Hollywood Mughals, and the famous Lubish touch, included his felicity with actors. He is genius for concentrating their maximum amount of narrative information in a few carefully, chosen shots and symbolic details, and his masterful sense of ellipses; you know, presenting only the important story points, and leaving the rest to the viewer's imagination.

So, what we are talking about? Plenty of details, plenty of research would go in the way he would compose his shots, but he would also not tell the audience all what he was just showing you and the audience also, had to use their imagination; the same concepts, the same philosophy was applied for his musicals also. Here, enjoy the song beyond the blue horizon from Lubish's Monte Carlo. The depression years; American depression which started with the crash of the wall street in 1929, and continued till the early years of the 1930's, like a decade. So, surprisingly or maybe not so surprisingly, musicals were very popular during the financial crisis of the 30's perhaps, because of the escapist elements.

Say, you go to a movie; you forget for two hours or so, all your worries and problems, and you lose yourself in a spectacle. So, musicals gave the audiences a hope. It is not surprising that the greatest musicals and composers flourished, during the worst financial crisis in the early years of the last century; that is the great depression. A star that emerged during this decade was the child star Sherley Temple, who starred in 11 films between 1934 and 36. She was a money ticket for the studio. She lead the fox studio out of financial problems and also, brought hope to the audiences as well to the studios alike, through her songs and performances.

A movie musical that made history during the great depression was the Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, the first full length animated feature, which was a huge lead for both the film and the musical industries. We move on now to talk about someone, who most people consider the greatest ever performer, and dancer on screen, the Hollywood screen; Fred Astaire. As they form the legendary partnership with Ginger Rozers at RKO studio, and is considered the greatest dancer ever. Together they worked on films such as the Gray Divorcee, Top Hat, Roberta and Swing Time. After Ginger retired prematurely,

Astaire starred in several other films, successful films, with actresses such as Rita Havord, Sheth Shales, Judy Garlin and also, (refer time: 18:00) in the films like The Band Wagon and Funny Face.

So, a number of popular films starring Fred Astaire. Most are still Ginger Rozer films are lead through the prism of sexual politics and ideology. So, gender ideology, gender politics, through critics or film historians and scholars have done a major amount of research on the sexual politics that was played out between the performances on stage. So, that is something, you know, our topic or a discussion for some other class. So, here is a scene as a musical moment by Fred Astaire. The MGM musicals are remarkable for the way, the directors weave the songs and dances into the narrative.

Now, in the films of Jean Kelly, Stanley Donnen and Vincent Manely, music serves to advance their story. The early musicals were rather, simple and lack the complexity or characterization of the later works of the genre, and with the arrival of Jean Kelly, Stanley Donnen and Vincent Manely, musicals acquired a kind of respectability, which they hadn't before. The another important name is Florence Zigfield, who was the most influential producer in the history of Broadway musicals, and MGM paid homage to Zigfield's films such as great Zigfield, Zigfield Girl and Zigfield Follies. Again, this also starred Fred Astaire and Jean Kelly; two of the biggest products by MGM. MGM's other greats; by greats, I mean the great musicals; include Annie get your gun, guys and dolls Oklahoma the king and I, south pacific, Westside story, my fair lady and of course, the sound of music.

Judy Garland till date is remembered for her somewhere over the rainbow song from the wizard of ours in 1939, and this movie was directed by Victor Fleming. Now (refer time: 20:29) is a fantastic tale about a Kansas farm girl, named Dorothy, and who gets magically carried off, spirited away to the land of ours. Judy Garland was one of the most loved, most admired child star, who also became a great leading lady of her times, and acted in several great films; most of which were musicals. She is still remembered for her songs. She did meet me in Saint Louis in 1944 and also, matched steps with Jean Kelly in the pirated 1947.

She was nominated for the Oscar award in A Star is Born, where she sings; the man that got away, and those of you who are interested in A Star is Born is a very, it is a classic movie about; it is a love story and story of the plot is propelled through songs and

dances. So, a third version of the film, before Judy Garlands, there was earlier version also. But the third version had Barbara Strison and many people feel that Judy Garland's version is the best of all. Here is Judy Garland is doing Somewhere over the rainbow from the wizard of falls. We have been talking about Jean Kelly; he is often compared to another great dancer; that is Fred Astaire.

Jean Kelly has his own unique style; he was very urban; very modern; very sophisticated; he brought dance into real life in his films, performing largely in regular clothes and in common settings. In Anchors Away, Kelly danced a duet with Jerry, that is a cartoon mouse; a first feat of its kind. He has zealously performing Ballymore's on the towns in which, he also starred with a great Frank Sinatra. He worked with directors, such as Stanley Donnen on *Singing in the Rain* and also, Vincent Minnelli, and where he continued taking dance as an art form to greater heights with films such as *An American in Paris*. So, here is Jean Kelly in *Cover Girl*. 1944.

One of the greatest musicals ever made is *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*; this was again an MGM film and starred, Howard Keel and Jim Powell, and the story is about a backwards man, who meets a town girl and marries her, and this motivates his six younger brothers to find wives for themselves. So, they kidnap six girls they meet at a country fair, and then love happens. So, the entire story again, the plot is driven, propelled by great music and also, great dance numbers. The film was directed by Stanley Donnen. So, here is the farm scene, the country fair dance and scene from *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*.

A film that most of you must be very well aware of; I am sure many of you have watched this film, *The Sound of Music*. This was a 1965 film, Starring Julia Enrose and Christopher Plummer. It is remarkable for its excellent score and is based on the life of Winthrop family, who escaped from the Nazis in Austria, along with their children. The film was directed by Robert Wise and had music by Razars and Hammerstein. *Gentle men prefer Blawns* is a Horward Fox movie, starring Jayne Russel and Marilyn Monroe in the roles of show girls. who are off to Paris on a luxury ocean liner. The musical numbers include the classic diamonds or a girl's best friend; Marilyn Monroe's song, who also sang some great numbers in Willy Wylder's, *Some Like it Hard*.

She was not just a great star. She was not just a beautiful actor. She was also a great performer and a very good singer. There are a number of songs and scores, credited to

Marilyn Monroe. Again, we cannot complete this lecture without referring to *Singing in the Rain*; although, I may have referred to this film several times when I was particularly, talking about studio years. So, this is a 1952 film. It is a musical spoof of Hollywood when talkies first replaced silent films. The Gene Kelly and Jean Hagen appear in a silent film, stars, who must made the transition to sound or lose their careers. The film is considered the greatest musical ever made. The unique quality of the film is that it spoofs the old Hollywood, while still displaying a deep sense of nostalgia for it. Some of the memorable songs are *Make a Laugh*, *My Lucky Star*, *Broadway Melody* and of course, the Title Track. Here is a track from *Singing in The Rain*.

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My Fair Lady is the Hollywood version of the Broadway hit, of the same name, based on Bernat Shaw's play *Pygmalion*. Rex Harrison here is Professor Higgins and Eliza Doolittle is played by Odry Hebber. Professor Higgins, who is a distinguished professor of phonetics, sets out to make a lady of Eliza Doolittle. The music is by Ellen J Learner Here is the song, songs and dances, were integrated, although the film didn't really have dances, but dialogs were integrated in the songs or may be, the other way around. Here is the beautiful song from *My fair lady*.

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A hard day's night is a Beatle's movie when we were talking about the British new way, refers to this film. It stars the Beatles as Beatles themselves, and revolves around their hectic work, scheduled during a trip to London. The Fallsome demonstrates their excellence at their music, as well as comedy. So, there are plenty of Beatle songs. The film had a documentary feel and was directed by Richard Lester and another extremely, popular film that won ten academy awards, during this time is Robert wild's directed Westside story. Again this was a Broadway musical, which was brought to the Hollywood screen. Natalie Wood and Richard are the lovers in this story, about rival gangs in New York get to where, Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet is relocated. The film was shot on locations and had music by Leonard Bentsen and Steven Sontime. The film was, as I have already told you by Broadway musical. Here is a song from Westside story.

Another popular genre especially, that started from the 50s onwards, is the rock musicals with the team pictures, such as Elvis Presley's Jail House Rock Now. Elvis is a star in number of popular musicals and he was not just a super star singer and a rock and roll artist also, and was a fairly successful movie star and his movies also, like Song and Dance Vehicles for him, like Made for Elvis. So don't expect too much of a plot, but still they are quite popular. They remain popular mainly, because of the music. Another great film, which utilize Rock and Wills music in that time, was the Girl Cant Help It. The 1955 Teen Picture, Black Board Jungle made the Rock and Roll revolution by featuring

the hit number by Billy Helly, and his comments rock around the clock. Here is the scene from Black Board Jungle.

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Rock Around the Clock that was a landmark song, which was later on used in other films also. Now, let us talk about American graffiti and we move towards the 70s. Now, the movie directed by George Lucas is an accurate picture of the American youth culture in the 60s. There is a nostalgic take on the 60s, before as a nation of president JF Kennedy. It is about the experience of some high school seniors on the eve of leaving for college or military services. The coming of age film; the plot is episodic in structure and the film is very ground breaking. It brims with nostalgic atmosphere and it has some of the best sound tracks, sourced as well as the original.

The sound track in this film is peppered with Wolfman Jack's nonstop Disco Jockey Show, which is very crucial and very right, because the film is set in those times when the radio was on every weekend movement. So the relevance of significance of that period is heightened, because the radio was there all the time when wood play seamlessly. An interesting musical of the 70s is directed by Robert Altman. Now, we are talking about the American new wave directors, and this is Nashville. It is set in Nashville country and western music scene and is a panoramic reflection of America's Joyce frustration and also Smugner's encompancy. It has again, the movie too again, has episodic structure.

The story is unfolded through the eyes of 24 characters, who are eventually, convened at a national political rally. So they meet at a political rally and there is a crisscross between the musical music festival and a political rally. The film arrived at the intersection of two important periods in American history; the scandal of water gate, involving President Nixon and Vietnam or which reduced America's fate in its government, but then this was also a period when the country proceeded with celebrating its bicentennial celebrations. The Altman's films recognized the hypsography of celebrating the roots of a nation, amid such chaos. Nashville, the setting for the film is apt, because it is the home of country music.

The film depicts how, over a course of five days, a music festival and a political campaign was passed. The actors were encouraged to improvise and work on their own musical materials. The actors really shown in this film particularly, Keith Carry dine and his song I am Busy. Another great performer of this period is Barbara Streisand. She performed on Broadway in 1964, A Funny Girl. The movie rolls include Funny Girl for which, she won the 1968 best actress Oscar; also, The way we work, On a Clear Day, You See Forever, Funny Lady and Young Till. Her range goes from comic to tragic, but has films worked within the framework of traditional music. So, here is a song from Barbara Streisand's The Way We Were.

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I would also like to refer to country music in the 70s and 80s. Country music increasingly, find a place in Hollywood's sound tracks, such as Five Easy Pieces, Honky Tonky Man and the Tender Mercies. Major artists of this genre were Canny Rozers and

Dolly Parton. The 70s also witnessed an increase in rock musicals again, as we were talking about the nostalgia as displayed in the American graffiti, and we also, had the documentary types of rock musicals as well. For example, Woodstock and also, Norman Judson's Jesus Christ super stars. So they were more or less, like rock musicals as well as they had a documentary touch. An unforgettable movie of this period is Saturday night fever, made in 1977. John Travolta has starred as a young disco dancer in this film, about a tough teen ager from Brooklyn in his poverty stricken life.

The only moment of glory comes, every Saturday night on the dance floor of a local disco. The music is by the great BG; set the standard for many years to come. Now, this is also a period when musicals started losing their power, after the debacle of star studded Hello Dolly. The musical as a genre, fell out of favor with the studios, but is still, it remains; it shows bits and parts as we have already talked about with films, such as Saturday night fever and also John Travolta's Grease. We have already talked about Grease in one of our earlier classes. So, musicals may be over, but we still, get a glimpse of this genre, occasionally in Hollywood films, such as Evita, which was made in 96, starring Madonna in the title role, along with Antonio Banderas. Again, Moulin Rouge was the block buster; Dream Works' Mamma Mia, Chicago and Hair Spray.

I must mention Baz Luhrmann's contribution towards generating interest in this genre particularly, with Moulin Rouge, which is like an MTV version of an 1890 Paris; Paris in during the later part of the last decade of the 19th century. The film is a celebration of show business as well as the great musicals. Here is a scene, song from Mamma Mia, starring Patsy Kensit and Pierce Brosnan.

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So, as I was talking about though musical as a genre is not or has lot of esteem in Hollywood, in our cinema it continues.

Thank you very much. We will meet in our next class.