

Singin' in the Rain in the Lalaland a Comparative Analysis of the Narratives in the Musical Film

Chufan Huang

School of Journalism and Communication, Sichuan International Studies University, Chongqing, China

Chufan233@gmail.com

Keywords: Musical films, Narratives, Comparative analysis, Narrative space

Abstract: Singin' in the rain as a turning point for a musical from a backstage musical to a narrative musical, its reputation is also unusual. As the representative of the second golden ages of film musical development, "narrative musical film", is different from An American in Paris. the structure of the play also had the typical optimism that the film industry wanted to convey to the public at that time. It is not only a representative of contemporary Musical Films, but also a sign of returned peak of musical film. Singin' in the rain and Lalaland have important meaning and turning significance in the development history of Musical Film. This article mainly based four angles of narrative theme, narrative space technology and camera language to discuss the change and the unchanged of narrative two films which nearly half a century apart.

1. Introduction

In nearly a hundred years of development, musical films have gradually changed from backstage to narrative. *Singin' in the rain* and *LaLaLand*, two masterpieces of narrative musical films in development of musical films that have important meaning and turning significance. This article mainly based four angles of narrative theme, space, language of camera and film technology to discuss the change and unchange of narrative two films which nearly half a century apart.

2. Retrospect-Three Golden Ages of the Development of Musical Films

As a kind of film genre, musical films emerged in the 1920s along with the development of the film industry and the emergence of sound films. It was not only a period of economic depression in the United States, but also a period when the mass cultural industry began mass production. At this time, nearly thirty years have passed since the film was born in 1895. Under the premise that American genre films have begun to take shape, in 1927, the world's first sound film was born- *The Jazz Singer* produced by Warner Pictures. This film is not only a turning point in the development of film history, but also the beginning of Musical films. However, some scholars believe that as long as there is a singing and dancing plot in the film, it is considered a musical film. Therefore, *The Jazz Singer* should not be regarded as musical film in the true sense, it can only be regarded as a film describing song and dance. Until 1929, *The Broadway Melody* produced by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) was recognized as the first musical film because with dialogue that in the form of song and dance. It presents performances on the real Broadway stage with the backstage story together, the characters in the film are both actors on the stage and real life, creating a wave of backstage musical films. Therefore, the initial musical films can be said to be the movie versions of most Broadway classic stage plays, with superb dance art and strong appeal. In the following twenty years, Broadway and Hollywood have joined forces to make musical films to be the most popular film genre in Hollywood.

The development of early musical films had three stages. In the 1920s, during the Great Depression in the United States, the demand of public for culture and art was increasing. Musical films were an idealistic and romantic art form to promote the beauty of society. And positive energy has become the spiritual sustenance and psychological comfort of the people. Under such mixed background, *The Broadway Melody* won the best film award at the second Academy Awards. Since

then, various movies have used such backstage musical films as the template for the produce of film industry, such as *42nd Street*, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, *Footlight Parade*, *The Wizard of Oz* and other musical films appeared. The musicals during this period have the soul of Broadway classic operas and superb dancing skills. The storyline is relatively simple, mostly aiming to convey positive energy to the public by full of artistic dances and beautiful fairy tales.

With the foundation laid by Hollywood, the 1940s ushered the second climax of the development of musical films. At this time, the film industry has developed and perfected. MGM, which has popular movie stars such as Kim Kelly and Judy Gallen, has begun to spot the golden industry of musical films. A series of classic work such as *Singin' in the rain*, *Oklahoma*, *The Sound of Music*, *My Fair Lady*, *The red shoes*, *On the Town* and *An American in Paris* appeared. Musical films pay more attention to the combination of song and dance arrangement and plot, and the film technology has begun to apply special effects to them. However, with the development of the television industry, the film industry began to slump, the turbulence and changes in the world situation also made traditional musical films without real life. The appearance of a *West Side Story* in 1961 changed the traditional routine of musical films without exquisite and gorgeous stage scenes and single dance styles. Instead, Multiple dance types are organically combined. There is no more fairy tale, singing and dancing are connected with the actual social order and morality. The strong impact of art and reality has aroused the resonance of the current audience. Compared with the previous musical film, people who were in trouble were refreshed. The symbiotic resonance of song, dance and plot also made its success that lead the musical film on the road of narrative musical film, during this historical period, four musical films won the Oscar for Best Picture in ten years. Therefore, the film industry has taken this path of development. Since then, Broadway, which was backstage musical films also began to make new attempts. there were both traditional opera art and plots such as *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Cat*. its formed the third peak of the musical films.

In 1970s, it seems that musicals no longer attract the public's attention as usual with the fatigue of the audience's aesthetics and changes in social patterns. such as *New York, New York*, *All That Jazz*, *Evita* and other films were lack of innovation. Until the 21st century, *a Dancer in the Dark* that focused on linking dance rhythms, scenes and plots together broke this deadlock. A large number of repetitive scenes and full of post-modern editing techniques brought audiences with a brand new feeling make that won the Palme d'Or at the time. The appearance of the *Moulin Rouge* in 2001 brought the musical films back to the Oscars' podium, and the *Chicago* that followed the social turmoil of 911 once again became a spiritual relief for the audience. It remarked the full revival of Hollywood musical films in the early 21st century. The musicals of this period began to be very different from the previous musicals. The technical editing and the switching of rich shots, the combination of retro scenes, pop music and dances, unique color matching, also and social metaphors made the musical films have more confidence, more new types of musical films were created after 2006, such as the youth musical *High School Musical*.

3. Analysis of Narrative Theme

3.1 Eternal Dream Catcher

Generally, dream-related issues are inseparable from hard work and appreciation from others. Dreams are also one of the eternal themes of musical films. The themes of many musicals are inseparable from hard pursuit of dreams of the protagonist, such as the early *The Jazz Singer*, *An American in Paris* and the contemporary *The greatest showman*, *Blinded by the Light*, etc. *Singin' in the rain*(1951) was set in the 1920s when sound films had just entered the public eye. The movie tells the story of Donald and Cosmo who have been struggling to become excellent film actors. During the period, they fell in love with Kathy, and finally they harvested love and realized their dreams together. The movie *LalaLand* (2016), which has passed nearly a hundred years, also tells the story of two young people with dreams. The logic of the plot structure from the beginning is like every young man who chased dreams. After experiencing some misunderstandings and setbacks,

they are more precious and mutually formed. Dream is the first important theme interspersed in the film, moreover, dreams become the main factor in the promotion of the plot, as well as the foreshadowing of the acquaintance, falling in love and forgetting in the end.

3.2 Ideal and Real Love

After dream became the main line of the two films, ideal and reality are the important ideological differences between the two films. *Singin' in the rain* conveys more of an optimistic dream-catching spirit, which is reflected in the story of the man in the film or the story of the man has imagined. The plot also conveyed a positive concept for the audience, although dream chasers will encounter setbacks in big cities, a positive and optimistic attitude is what dream chasers should have faith in love and dreams.

Although the theme of *LaLaLand* is also the love of dream-seeking young people, the ending is that the hero and heroine have harvested their dreams and not together. The same is from the “misunderstanding the enemy” to the “soulmate” at the beginning of the plot, but the two films reflect the more biased values of the contemporary social environment. During the Great Depression in the 1920s, people believed that beautiful fairy tales could become a temporary relaxation of people's minds, so *Singin' in the rain* took advantage of the trend to convey an idealistic spirit to the audience. Economy and culture not only has a richer and diversified development process than 100 years ago, the social environment but also has become more complex and impetuous, and realistic factors are more considered by life and art. In *LaLaLand*, the early scenes pave the way for the collision of the souls of the male and female protagonists and also convey the idea that it is very precious to appreciate each other's love from the depths of the soul. The film no longer narrates such thoughts from the structure of fairy tale, but portrays such love from the perspective of realism. The director seems to tell the audience that it is not difficult to find love in such an impetuous age, finding people who truly share the soul and having a good experience is what people desire and cannot reach in the current social environment. Audiences who are already somewhat aesthetically tired of the ending of fairy tales will look at dreams and love from a closer life perspective and mentality, but will find inner resonance, cherishment of love and thinking about dreams.

4. The Integration of Singing, Dancing and Space

4.1 Dance and Music with Emotional Construction

Dance is the soul of musicals, also is an expression art that uses body language to aesthetically express emotions. It has important functions such as narration, lyricism, and beautification on the screen and reflects the thoughts and artistic realm. The film composed of dance and music has become a symbol field that forms the narrative space of song and dance, In musical films, dance has changed from an independent art form to an important element of expressive expression and participation in narrative. According to the six categories of music narrative function proposed by the Wingstedt, The Emotive function, The Informative function, The Descriptive function, The Guiding function, The Temporal function, The Rhetorical function. Music is a necessary condition for dance, the new conditions for communication via the screen is however not restricted only to visual modes of communication. two blending together, in addition to its independent aesthetic characteristics, also produced many new artistic functions, such as lyricism and narration.

First of all, dance and music can help picture to show the image of the characters which is the informative and guiding function, with a huge emotive descriptive background. The lyrics, music rhythm, and dancing movements of the protagonist in the backstage musical film can reflect the mood in *LaLaLand*. Picture matched with the sound of piano when the male protagonist playing piano alone, not only shows the protagonist's profession, but also shows the emotional ups and downs of the character. dance and music also as a scene of the love development of the male and female protagonists in *Singin' in the rain*. When Donald and kathy had a misunderstanding from the

beginning, to the mutual understanding with good feeling from each other, and then express their feelings, singing and dancing also accounted for the rapid development of their emotions. The male lead first expressed his love for the female in the form of singing, fluctuation of pitch also have a rhetorical function that Promote the releasement of emotions.

Although dance and song have a certain degree of narrative function, they do not have the narrative function of promoting the plot function. *Singin' in the rain* has less narrative than *LaLaLand*, Most of scenes still have the shadow of the backstage musical films, The song and dance here not actually promote the plot, but a pure dance interspersed used to set off and create a happy atmosphere and express the various mentalities and emotions of the characters in the film. In addition to the three functions mentioned above, the role of dance and music are the most important narrative roles in musical films. Music was used to ease the audience to the world of the film, preparing them for what was to come, with the help of multi-angle shooting techniques, Gene Kelly's expressions and movements during a solo dance in the rain for a long time were fully presented, making audience has a better understanding the emotion of characters in the films. If *Singin' in the rain* is the beginning of the narrative musical film, then *LaLaLand* has developed the narration of musical film to a next new level.

4.2 City Image and Space Construction

Space has been widely studied as a core proposition of sociology. In the category of communication and media, space has begun to have the attributes of media, which can transmit information and construct discourse. the narrative itself gives moving space its coherence, As Mark Garrett Cooper said, 'the coherent, unified space we have been calling the diegesis is less a precondition of Hollywood's favourite narrative than its goal'. Because of the narrative, the coherence of the space is formed, and the two are complementary.

Space is an essential element in the narrative of musical films, the narrative of dance and music was not much in the early musical films, that became an important scene that the picture wanted to construct and the information and meanings conveyed in different spaces are different. when describing the prosperity of the film industry, it complete presents the surrounding scenes and backstage during filming of movies and stage plays on the screen(Figure 1). This scene simply wants to express the story of the gradual prosperity of the film industry. The backstage scenes that appeared later were used as scenes to promote the emotional development of protagonists. The love story evokes a multiplicity of spaces in order to make spatial homogeneity equal safety, destiny and resolution. Donald wants to express his thoughts about Kathy when Donald walks alone with kathy in the film and then Casey pulls to the empty backstage of the movie, and then opens the special effects screen which formed the setting sun sight, there is a romantic pink-purple cloud picture, a beam of light imitating the moonlight, and a machine that makes clouds(Figure 2).The backstage of the film here has become the only space where these factors are gathered. Only under such artificial atmosphere can the male and female protagonists have a delicate feeling that can be triggered by being in a romantic and beautiful natural environment. Therefore, it serves as a foreshadowing to promote the in-depth exchange and development of the inner feelings of protagonists. Furthermore, space can play a role in promoting the releasement of emotions, at the same time, the development of emotions can also reflect the state of space. For example, when the male and female protagonists dance at the Griffith Observatory in *LaLaLand*, the dark lights of the Tesla coil formed a tense atmosphere, which corresponds to the protagonists into the observatory at the beginning. The Foucault pendulum perfectly integrated with the dance of the hero and the heroine, the romance of love and the rationality of technology are intertwined to sublimate the entire picture, paving the way for the subsequent presentation of the hero and heroine's emotions(Figure 3).



Fig.1 Back Stage



Figure.2 Narrative Back Stage



Fig.3 Ve Space



Figure.4 City Background-Nyc

In addition to the backstage of the movie, the space for presenting singing and dancing can also use the city as the background to express together with singing and dancing. story in *Singin' in the rain* took place in Los Angeles, a song and dance storyline with NYC as the background appeared(Figure 4). In *LaLaLand*, the scene that also combines spirit and space, the dance moves and the on-site planning are more orderly, and both use long shots to show the integration of singing and dancing with urban space(figure 5).

At the end of the film, the male and female protagonists recalled the first scenes they had imagined in the piano music, screen quickly switches to the fact that the male and female protagonists walk into a manually built scene(Figure 6). After the camera switched, the position of the director in the screen can be seen, indicating this scene is to imitate the backstage singing and dancing in classic Hollywood musicals, and use the constructed scenes to express emotions, it can be regarded as a tribute to the elements in classic Hollywood musical films.



Fig.5 Ackground-La



Figure.6 Background-Hollywood

5. Storytelling of Camera Expression

Superimposition, refers to the production technique of superimposing two or more images with different contents into a single screen. It was usually used in recalling past events, telling stories over a long period of time, and setting off the atmosphere invented by French film director Merière in 1898. At the beginning of *Singin' in the rain*, camera used Superimposition when the actor recalled his past struggles in an interview before the premiere of the film. According to the timeline, the more important experiences in the male protagonist's career are strung together bit by bit through overlapping projections. Such a picture condensing a long timeline of hard work for dreams

into a few important turning points in career development. The most authentic sensory experience expresses the emotional and psychological activities of the inner memory of the past. The same technique also appeared in *LaLaLand*. The picture overlaps with a halo, showing a life of luxury and dissipation, both hostess a person and the surrounding lively world created a sharp contrast. Also, long lens in the musical films is usually presenting a complete and artistic value of the song and dance process. The two or three long shots in *Singin' in the rain* are all dance-related, starting directly from the set up stage, and the scenes that are replaced along the way are in the studio, mainly to show the relationship between the city space and the mass group through dance. Unlikely, *LaLaLand* begins a long shot of song and dance in the closest thing to real life. The picture starting with a scene of people waiting in a crowded highway in Los Angeles turns to an ordinary man singing in a car. The macro significance of the lives of ordinary people showed when it caused more people to participate in the dance.

There are many repetitive scenes in *LaLaLand*, such as the film's first heroine Mia looked to the working restaurant outside the already successful actress's "daily life", and in the end she become a real actress(Figure7,Figure8), the repeat montage edit skill highlight the changes in the fate, character and emotion of the characters, and achieve the goal of carving the characters and deepening the theme. And, two repetitive images also show the men and women extending their emotional state of mind outside the cinema, paving the way for subsequent emotional development. The film appeared the Griffith Observatory which symbolizes tragedy from *Rebel Without a Cause* appeared at the same angle in *LaLaLand* (Figure9 Figure10).Cross-over montage, alternate narrative can split the complex time into different perspectives of characters to describe, more conducive to the audience to understand the character's state of mind, two seemingly separate and interdependent stories, to promote the follow-up plot.



Fig.7 Titive Scenes in Lalaland (1)



Figure. 8 Repetitive Scenes in Lalaland (2)

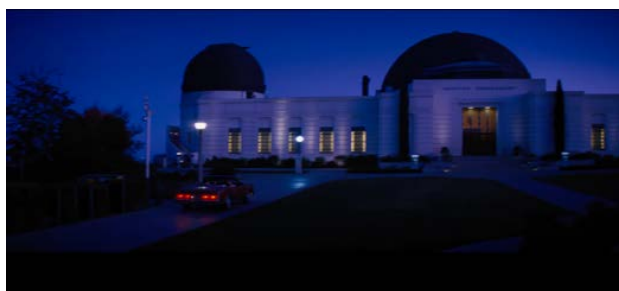


Fig.9 Itive Scenes in Lalaland (3)



Figure. 10 Repetitive Scenes in Lalaland (4)

6. Film Technology - Broadway's Fantasy Narrative

Film special effects is an important narrative method, formed from the era of Georges Méliès, the early stages of the film industry is simply fixed animation, model micro-shooting, motion control cameras, keying technology and other simple film special effects. When the director presents all the visual elements on the screen in a special effects manner, he is able to reflect the atmosphere the film wants to express, thus forming the structural field of the narrative.

As a typical work of 1850s movies, simple special effect that represents the level of special effects production in most films at that time. The picture with cheerful jazz songs and dances,

colorful vocal scenes, dynamic flamboyant dance moves, the flamboyant ballerinas in the horn and other elements, with a short period of ten seconds and full of visual tension of the screen to sum up the 1820s sound film came out, the film industry a happy and prosperous scene(Figure11,12,13). The hero is in the storyline he imagines falling in love with a woman, when they meet in a hotel, the picture directly turned to a scene of only two of them began to dance in the fantasy scene(Figure14). The film is based on the construction of a high and low sense of the scene corresponding to the high and low positions of the characters in the hotel. Such a scene also reflects the musical film on the movie background of this scene dependence.



Fig.11 special effect1

Figure. 12 Special Effect2

Figure. 13 Special Effect3

In 2016, the film industry's technical level can fully meet the use of special effects to present delicate feelings. For example, when the male and female protagonists dance together in the observatory, walked to the Observatory, the feelings of the characters had reached their peak, and the male and female owners in the picture lifted up and floated in the air, strolling in the background of the universe(figure15). Presented by the dance is the romantic waltz as if the picture is also in the transmission of a highly versed and intersection. Using modern film technology, we can present the feeling of resonance between the inner soul of the male and female owners in a more intuitive and romantic way, bring the perfect psychological and visual experience to the audience.



Fig.14 Cial Effect

Figure.15 Special Effect

7. Conclusion

Musical films have gone through a long period of development, with many similarities and differences. Therefore, some conclusions are drawn from the comparative analysis of the two films. First of all, the theme continues the style of the past. Dreaming and love are the more ancient themes of musicals, but under the same theme it reflect the needs of different eras and backgrounds, and then forming different endings. Secondly, due to the continuous development of technology and the maturity of film editing technology, the narrative of musicals has become stronger. For musicals with the same theme, there are now more narrative parts of musical scenes than former movies. Thirdly, the current musical films are more diverse in editing techniques, with crossover and repetition techniques, which strengthen the narrative function. The narrative elements of *LaLaLand* are many, not only contains the song and dance type with *Singin' in the rain*, on the basis of which modern song and dance elements are added, but also on this basis of the classic song and dance films of the past have been imitated and saluted. For example, in both films, the actor singing rotates the lamppost, using the form of song and dance to depict the emotional changes within the character. The progress of *LaLaLand* is that the singing and dancing scenes not only express the

characteristics of the characters, but also promote the development of the plot to a large extent. The role of song and dance not only includes the lyrical, baking atmosphere and more narrative than before. In the future, there will be more narrative musical films combined with backstage musical films.

References

- [1] Wingstedt, J., Brändström,S., &Berg, J. “Narrative music, visuals and meaning in film”. *Visual Communication*, vol.9, no.2, pp.193-210, 2010.
- [2] Winters, Ben. “The non-diegetic fallacy: Film, music, and narrative space.” *Music and Letters*, vol.91, no.2, pp.224-244, 2010.
- [3] Heath, Stephen. “Narrative space.” *Screen*, vol.17, no.3, pp.68-112, 1976.
- [4] Cooper M G. “Narrative spaces”. *Screen*, vol.43, no.2, pp.139-157, 2002.
- [5] Gorbman, Claudia. “Narrative film music.” *Yale French Studies*, vol.60, pp.183-203, 1980.
- [6] Brownrigg, Mark. “Film music and film genre.” *University of Stirling*, pp.49-52, 2003