

# The American Film Musical

**The American Film Musical** the american film musical: An In-Depth Exploration of its History, Evolution, and Cultural Impact

**Introduction** The American film musical stands as one of the most vibrant and enduring genres in the history of cinema. Combining storytelling, song, dance, and visual spectacle, these films have captivated audiences for over a century, shaping cultural narratives and reflecting societal changes. From the golden age of Hollywood to contemporary productions, the American film musical continues to evolve, serving as a mirror to the nation's cultural identity and artistic innovation. In this article, we will delve into the origins of the American film musical, its key characteristics, influential films and figures, and its ongoing significance in modern cinema.

**Origins and Early Development of the American Film Musical**

**Roots in Stage Theater and Vaudeville** The roots of the American film musical can be traced back to the early 20th century, drawing heavily from the vibrant traditions of stage theater, vaudeville, and operetta. The integration of music and dance into storytelling was a natural extension of these performance arts, which emphasized spectacle, choreography, and musical innovation. Early filmmakers recognized the potential of these elements to create engaging cinematic experiences.

**Silent Film Era and the Transition to Sound** While silent films relied on visual storytelling, some experimental productions incorporated music scores and sound effects. However, the true birth of the American film musical is linked to the advent of sound technology in the late 1920s. The release of *The Jazz Singer* in 1927 marked the first feature-length film with synchronized dialogue and musical sequences, revolutionizing the industry and paving the way for musical films to flourish.

**The Golden Age of the American Film Musical**

**Key Characteristics and Innovations** The 1930s through the 1950s are often regarded as the golden age of American film musicals. During this period, musicals became a dominant genre in Hollywood, characterized by:

- Elaborate choreography and dance routines
- Colorful and extravagant production design
- Iconic musical scores and songs
- Star-studded casts featuring legendary performers

These films often combined escapism with social commentary, reflecting both the hopes and struggles of American society.

**Influential Films and Studios** Some of the most iconic musicals from this era include:

- *The Wizard of Oz* (1939)
- *Singin' in the Rain* (1952)
- *An American in Paris* (1951)
- *West Side Story* (1961)

Major studios such as MGM,

Warner Bros., and 20th Century Fox heavily invested in musical productions, creating a competitive environment for innovation and excellence. Notable Figures in the Golden Age – Gene Kelly: Dancer, actor, and director known for *Singin' in the Rain* – Fred Astaire: Legendary dancer and performer in films like *Top Hat* and *Holiday Inn* – Judy Garland: Iconic star of *The Wizard of Oz* and *Meet Me in St. Louis* – Stanley Donen and Vincente Minnelli: Visionary directors who shaped the style and choreography of musicals

The Evolution of the American Film Musical Post-Golden Age Changes After the golden age, the American film musical faced various challenges, including the decline of studio dominance, changing audience tastes, and the rise of television. Despite these obstacles, the genre adapted through several key phases: – The integration of more contemporary storytelling themes – Diversification of musical styles, including rock, jazz, and pop influences – Experimentation with narrative structures and cinematic techniques

Notable Post-Golden Age Musicals – *Cabaret* (1972): A darker, more mature musical reflecting societal upheavals – *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975): Cult classic blending musical, horror, and comedy – *Chicago* (2002): Revitalization of the genre with a modern aesthetic and bold choreography – *La La Land* (2016): A contemporary homage to classic Hollywood musicals with a modern twist

The Rise of the Musical in Contemporary Cinema Today, the American film musical continues to thrive, blending traditional elements with innovative storytelling. Blockbusters like *The Greatest Showman* (2017), *Frozen* (2013), and *Hamilton* (2020, filmed version) demonstrate the genre's versatility and broad appeal. Additionally, musicals are increasingly crossing over into other genres, such as animated films, fantasy, and even horror.

### 3 Key Elements of the American Film Musical

**Music and Song** Songs in American musicals serve multiple functions: advancing the plot, expressing characters' emotions, or providing entertainment. Memorable tunes often become cultural phenomena, with some songs achieving iconic status.

**Choreography and Dance** Dance routines are central to the visual spectacle of musicals. They often reflect the era's style and serve as a storytelling device, with choreography crafted to enhance the narrative.

**Storytelling and Integration** The integration of music and narrative distinguishes musicals from other genres. Successful musicals seamlessly weave songs into the story, ensuring they serve a purpose beyond mere spectacle.

**Visual Style and Production Design** Colorful costumes, elaborate sets, and innovative cinematography contribute to the immersive experience of musicals, highlighting their spectacle-oriented nature.

**Influential Figures and Their Contributions** – Busby Berkeley: Pioneered elaborate geometric dance routines and production numbers – Bob Fosse: Known for his distinctive dance style and musicals like

Chicago and Cabaret – Andrew Lloyd Webber: Composer whose musical adaptations (e.g., Cats, The Phantom of the Opera) influenced film musicals – Rob Marshall: Director known for modern adaptations of classic musicals

### The Cultural Impact and Significance of the American Film Musical

Reflecting American Society

Musicals have often mirrored societal values, struggles, and aspirations. For example, West Side Story addressed racial tensions, while Rent highlighted themes of love and social issues.

### 4 Shaping Hollywood and Global Cinema

American film musicals set standards for production quality, storytelling, and choreography, influencing filmmakers worldwide. They also fostered the careers of numerous legendary performers and directors.

### Fostering Community and Cultural Identity

Musicals have a unique ability to bring audiences together, creating shared experiences and cultural memories. They often celebrate American diversity, resilience, and creativity.

### Conclusion

The American film musical remains a vital and evolving genre, blending storytelling, music, dance, and spectacle to create unforgettable cinematic experiences. Its rich history, from the early days of synchronized sound to contemporary blockbusters, showcases its resilience and adaptability. As society continues to change, the American film musical will undoubtedly find new ways to inspire, entertain, and reflect the spirit of the nation.

### SEO Keywords for Optimization

– American film musical history – iconic musicals – Hollywood – evolution of the musical genre – famous American musicals – Hollywood musical stars – modern film musicals – significance of musicals in cinema – top American musical films – musical choreography in movies – cultural impact of American musicals

### Question Answer

What defines a traditional American film musical? A traditional American film musical combines storytelling with song and dance, often integrating musical numbers seamlessly into the narrative to enhance character development and plot progression.

How has the Golden Age of Hollywood influenced American film musicals? The Golden Age (1940s–1950s) established many classic musicals like 'Singin' in the Rain' and 'The Sound of Music,' setting standards for production quality, elaborate choreography, and memorable songs that continue to influence the genre.

What are some modern trends in American film musicals? Modern trends include blending musical elements with other genres such as drama and comedy, using digital innovative choreography, and exploring diverse stories and voices to reflect contemporary society.

Which American film musicals have been most influential internationally? Films like 'West Side Story,' 'The Sound of Music,' and 'Chicago' have had significant international impact, popularizing the genre worldwide and inspiring adaptations across various media.

### 5

How do contemporary Broadway adaptations influence American film musicals?

Contemporary Broadway adaptations often bring fresh interpretations, modernized storytelling, and updated musical arrangements to screen versions, helping to reinvigorate the genre and attract new audiences. What role did African American artists play in shaping American film musicals? African American artists have contributed iconic performances, groundbreaking choreography, and culturally rich stories, enriching the genre and promoting diversity—examples include performances by performers like Lena Horne and collaborations like 'Cabin in the Sky.' How has the rise of streaming platforms affected American film musicals? Streaming platforms have expanded access to musicals, facilitated the release of new and independent projects, and allowed for more experimental and diverse musical films to reach wider audiences. What challenges do American film musicals face today? Challenges include balancing spectacle with compelling storytelling, appealing to younger audiences, competing with other entertainment forms, and managing high production costs. What is the future outlook for the American film musical genre? The future looks promising with technological advancements, increased diversity, and crossover appeal, suggesting that American film musicals will continue evolving and captivating audiences worldwide.

The American Film Musical: A Comprehensive Exploration  
--- Introduction: The Cultural Significance of the American Film Musical The American film musical stands as one of the most vibrant and enduring genres in the landscape of

cinema. Rooted in the rich traditions of stage performance and infused with a uniquely American spirit, these films have captivated audiences for over a century. From the golden age of Hollywood to contemporary blockbusters, the musical genre reflects the cultural, social, and technological evolution of the United States. This exploration delves into the origins, development, stylistic elements, key figures, and future prospects of the American film musical, offering a detailed understanding of its significance and legacy. --- Origins and Early Development of the American Film Musical The Roots in Theatre and Vaudeville

- Theater Influence: The American musical film draws heavily from vaudeville, Broadway stage productions, and operettas. Early filmmakers adapted popular stage hits to the screen, translating stage spectacle into cinematic spectacle. - Key Pioneers: Early innovators like D. W. Griffith and Cecil B. DeMille recognized the potential of integrating song and dance into narrative films, setting the stage for the genre's growth. The Silent Era and the Transition to Talkies - Silent Musicals: Although silent films lacked

synchronized sound, filmmakers employed innovative techniques like music exaggerated physical performances to hint at musical elements. - The Jazz Singer (1927): Marked a turning point, as it was the first feature-length film with synchronized dialogue

and singing, heralding the era of "talkies" and revolutionizing musical filmmaking. --- The Golden Age of the American Musical (1930s-1950s) Paramount and MGM: Titans of the Genre - Studio Systems: The Hollywood studio system played a pivotal role, with MGM (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer) leading the charge due to its lavish productions and star power. - Signature Films: Classics like *The Broadway Melody* (1929), *42nd Street* (1933), and *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) set benchmarks in production value and storytelling. Characteristics of Golden Age Musicals - Integrated Songs: Songs were seamlessly woven into the narrative, advancing plot and character development. - Star Power: Legendary performers like Judy Garland, Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, Gene Kelly, and Frank Sinatra became synonymous with the genre. - Spectacle and Technicolor: The use of Technicolor added visual splendor, enhancing musical sequences' vibrancy and appeal. Notable Films and Innovations - Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers: Their partnership epitomized elegance and innovation in dance-on-film, exemplified in films like *Top Hat* (1935). - Gene Kelly's Choreography: Kelly revolutionized musical dance with *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), emphasizing realism and athleticism. - Narrative Depth: Films like *Oklahoma!* (1955) integrated musical numbers into compelling storytelling, influencing future productions. --- Decline and Transformation (1960s-1980s) Challenges Faced - Changing Audience Tastes: The rise of television and changing cultural norms led to a decline in traditional musical popularity. - Studio Shifts: Studios began prioritizing other genres, and big-budget musicals became less common. - Perceived Staleness: Critics argued that many musicals of this era relied on formulaic plots and spectacle over substance. The Revival and Evolution - Innovative Approaches: Directors like Bob Fosse brought a new edge to musicals with *Cabaret* (1972) and *All That Jazz* (1979), blending darker themes with musical elements. - Integration with Popular Music: Films like *A Star is Born* (1976) and *Fame* (1980) integrated contemporary music styles, reflecting cultural shifts. - The Role of Disney: Disney animated musicals, such as *The Little Mermaid* (1989) and *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), redefined family-oriented musical filmmaking. --- The Modern Era: 1990s to Present Revitalization and Diversification - Broadway Crossovers: Films like *Chicago* (2002), *Mamma Mia!* (2008), and *Les Misérables* (2012) showcased the enduring appeal of musical theater adaptations. - Technological Advances: CGI and digital editing allowed for more elaborate musical sequences and immersive experiences. - Diverse Genres and Themes: Modern musicals explore a range of topics—from social issues (*Rent*, 2005) to personal tales (*La La Land*, 2016). Notable Contemporary Films - *La La Land* (2016): A modern homage to classic Hollywood musicals, blending jazz music

with contemporary storytelling. – The Greatest Showman (2017): Celebrates American show business history with catchy tunes and spectacle. – Hamilton (2020): A groundbreaking adaptation of Lin-Manuel Miranda’s stage hit, integrating hip-hop and historical narrative. --- Artistic and Stylistic Elements of the American Film Musical

**Musical Integration and Narrative Function** – Songs are more than entertainment—they serve to reveal character, advance plot, and evoke emotional responses. – Musical numbers often act as emotional or thematic peaks within the story.

**Dance and Choreography** – Dance sequences range from graceful ballet to energetic tap, reflecting American dance traditions. – Key figures like Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, Gene Kelly, and later, performers like Beyoncé and Lin-Manuel Miranda, exemplify the diverse styles.

**Visual Style and Cinematography** – Use of vibrant colors, elaborate sets, and innovative camera work (e.g., long takes, crane shots) enhances spectacle. – The integration of dance and music with cinematography creates dynamic visual storytelling. --

**Key Figures and Their Contributions**

Name	Contribution
Fred Astaire & Ginger Rogers	Pioneers of dance on film, setting standards for elegance and innovation
Gene Kelly	Brought athleticism and realism to musical dance, emphasizing storytelling through movement
Judy Garland	Iconic star, blending vulnerability and talent, exemplified in The Wizard of Oz
Stanley Donen & Gene Kelly	Directors who elevated the genre with films like Singin’ in the Rain
Bob Fosse	Choreographer and director, introduced a darker, jazz-influenced style in musicals
Lin-Manuel Miranda	Modern innovator integrating hip-hop and historical storytelling in Hamilton

--- Thematic and Cultural Impact

**Reflection of American Identity** – Musical films often mirror American ideals: optimism, resilience, diversity, and innovation. – They serve as cultural artifacts capturing societal changes, from the Great Depression to contemporary social movements.

**Social and Political Commentary** – Musicals like South Pacific (1949) addressed racial prejudice. – Rent (2005) highlighted LGBTQ+ issues and urban struggles. – Hairspray (2007) tackled themes of racial integration and acceptance.

**Influence Beyond Cinema** – Many musicals have crossed into popular culture, inspiring stage productions, fashion, and music genres. – They have contributed to national identity, celebrating American history, folklore, and aspirations. --- Challenges and Future of the American Film Musical Industry

**Challenges** – High production costs and the risk associated with musicals often deter studios. – Audience fragmentation and the dominance of streaming platforms impact theatrical releases.

**Emerging Trends** – Diversity and Representation: Increasing inclusion of

marginalized voices and stories. – Hybrid Genres: Fusion of musicals with other genres like fantasy (The Greatest Showman) or sci-fi. – Technological Innovation: Use of virtual reality and augmented reality to create immersive musical experiences. The Future Outlook – As hybrid and multimedia projects grow, the American film musical is poised to evolve further, blending traditional elements with new technology. – Streaming platforms and global markets will likely play a significant role in sustaining and transforming musical filmmaking. – – – Conclusion: The Enduring Legacy of the American Film Musical The American film musical remains a vital and dynamic genre that encapsulates the nation's cultural diversity, artistic innovation, and storytelling prowess. From its early days of silent pantomimes to today's technologically advanced productions, musicals continue to inspire, entertain, and provoke thought. They serve not only as entertainment but also as reflections of American society's hopes, struggles, and dreams. As new generations of The American Film Musical filmmakers and artists reinterpret the genre, the musical's legacy as a quintessential American art form remains secure, promising exciting developments on the horizon. – – – References and Recommended Viewing – The Wizard of Oz (1939) – Singin' in the Rain (1952) – West Side Story (1961) – Chicago (2002) – La La Land (2016) – Hamilton (2020) – Additional literature on Hollywood musicals, dance in film, and American cultural history. – – This comprehensive overview underscores the richness and complexity of the American film musical, illustrating its profound impact on both cinema and American cultural identity. Hollywood musicals, American cinema, musical theater, classic musicals, Broadway adaptations, film choreography, musical film history, 20th-century musicals, American cinematic genres, song and dance films

The American Film Musical American Film Musical Themes and Forms Free and Easy? A History of the American Film Film It with Music The Migration of Musical Film The Movie Musical The Hollywood Film Musical American Film Musical Themes and Forms The Hollywood Musical 100 Film Musicals Dance Me a Song The Sound of Musicals A History of the American Film Musical America Contemporary Musical Film Body and Soul Disintegrating the Musical Film it with Music American Film Music Rick Altman Michael Dunne Sean Griffin Mel Marvin Thomas S. Hirschak Desirée J. Garcia Desirée J. Garcia Barry Keith Grant Michael Dunne Ethan Mordden Douglas Pye Beth Gennip Steven Cohan Christopher Durang K. J. Donnelly Peter Stanfield Arthur Knight William Darby The American Film Musical American Film Musical Themes and Forms Free and Easy? A History of the American Film Film It with Music The Migration of Musical Film The Movie Musical The Hollywood Film Musical American Film Musical Themes and Forms The

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on the history of the american musical in cinema

the musical has been called the most popular form of entertainment in the world this work examines the subjects themes and contemporary relevance of hollywood musicals through their long popularity placing each show in historical and political context and analyzing it in detail a chapter is devoted to how goldiggers of 1933 1933 and stand up and cheer 1934 deal with the economic crises of the depressions another addresses race issues by examining the prevalence of blackface minstrelsy in the 1930s and 1940s looking at productions like swing time 1936 and dixie 1943 rock and roll culture which started in the 1950s and threatened america with teenage sex and rebellion is addressed through such hits as girl crazy 1943 bye bye birdie 1963 and grease 1978 the work also explores dance as a signifier of character the geography of musicals such as new york or the south fantasy settings fred astaire and gene kelly and the musical biopic mentioning biographies of such figures as ziegfeld cohan rogers and hart cole porter and jerome kern a later chapter discusses intertextuality in such shows as singin in the rain 1952 which refers to many earlier musicals kiss me kate 1953 which refers to taming of the shrew and all that jazz 1970 which refers to the life and work of bob fosse the work concludes with an examination of the continuing popularity of the musical with such hits as moulin rouge 2001 and chicago 2002 instructors considering this book for use in a course may request an examination copy here

a history of the american musical narrates the evolution of the film musical genre discussing its influences and how it has come to be defined the first text on this subject for over two decades it employs the very latest concepts and research the most up to date text on the subject with uniquely comprehensive coverage and employing the very latest concepts and research surveys centuries of music history from the music and dance of native americans to contemporary music performance in streaming media examines the different ways the film musical genre has been defined what gets counted as a musical



why and who gets to make that decision the text is written in an accessible manner for general cinema and musical theatre buffs whilst retaining theoretical rigour in research describes the contributions made to the genre by marginalized or subordinated identity groups who have helped invent and shape the musical

this encyclopedic reference to the american movie musical identifies and describes the musicals and the artists who made them film entries range from the legendary the jazz singer in 1927 to fantasia 2000 artists ranging from gene kelly to elvis presley busby berkeley and john travolta are included as are musicians as varied as irving berlin paul williams and the beatles entries also detail animated musicals studios perettas rock documentaries sequels and remakes and dance movies as a reference work or as a book for browsing this encyclopedia serves as a valuable companion to stage it with music an encyclopedic guide to the american musical theatre greenwood 1993 and will appeal to film scholars and fans alike information is cross referenced throughout a chronological list of musicals and an appendix of academy award winning musicals are included

movie musicals are among the most quintessentially american art forms often celebrating mobility self expression and the pursuit of one s dreams but like america itself the hollywood musical draws from many distinct ethnic traditions in this illuminating new study desiree j garcia examines the lesser known folk musicals from early african american yiddish and mexican filmmakers revealing how these were essential ingredients in the melting pot of the hollywood musical the migration of musical film shows how the folk musical was rooted in the challenges faced by immigrants and migrants who had to adapt to new environments balancing american individualism with family values and cultural traditions uncovering fresh material from film industry archives garcia considers how folk musicals were initially marginal productions designed to appeal to specific minority audiences and yet introduced themes that were gradually assimilated into the hollywood mainstream no other book offers a comparative historical study of the folk musical from the first sound films in the 1920s to the genre s resurgence in the 1970s and 1980s using an illustrative rather than comprehensive approach garcia focuses on significant moments in the sub genre and rarely studied films such as all en el rancho grande also familiar favorites that drew inspiration from earlier folk musicals everything from the wizard of oz to zoot suit if you think of movie musicals simply as escapist mainstream entertainment the migration of musical film is sure to leave you singing a different tune

putting asian and european musicals into conversation with hollywood classics like *singin in the rain* and *la la land* this study demonstrates the flexibility and durability of the genre it explores how the movie musical mediates between nostalgia and technical innovation while foregrounding the experiences of women immigrants and people of color

this revealing history of the american film musical synthesizes the critical literature on the genre and provides a series of close analytical readings of iconic musical films focusing on their cultural relationship to other aspects of american popular music offers a depth of scholarship that will appeal to students and scholars leads a crucial analysis of the cultural context of musicals particularly the influence of popular music on the genre delves into critical issues behind these films such as race gender ideology and authorship features close readings of canonical and neglected film musicals from the 1930s to the present including *top hat* *singin in the rain* *woodstock* *gimme shelter* *west side story* and *across the universe*

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traces and analyzes the colorful history development of the american film musical from its

beginning in the 1920s to the latest releases of the 1980s

from the coming of sound to the 1960s the musical was central to hollywood production exhibiting often in spectacular fashion the remarkable resources of the hollywood studios musicals came to epitomise the very idea of light entertainment films like top hat and 42nd street meet me in st louis and on the town singin in the rain and oklahoma west side story and the sound of music were hugely popular yet were commonly regarded by cultural commentators as trivial and escapist it was the 1970s before serious study of the hollywood musical began to change critical attitudes and foster an interest in musical films produced in other cultures hollywood musicals have become less common but the genre persists and both academic interest in and fond nostalgia for the musical shows no signs of abating 100 film musicals provides a stimulating overview of the genre s development its major themes and the critical debates it has provoked while centred on the dominant hollywood tradition 100 film musicals includes films from countries that often tried to emulate the hollywood style like britain and germany as well as from very different cultures like india egypt and japan jim hillier and douglas pye also discuss post 1960s films from many different sources which adapt and reflect on the conventions of the genre including recent examples such as moulin rouge and high school musical demonstrating that the genre is still very much alive

traces the history of famous hollywood collaborations as the palimpsest of dance film and musical techniques were developed over time provides lively and necessary scholarship for all dance enthusiasts

despite having had its obituary written many times the movie musical remains a flourishing twenty first century form and as this volume demonstrates one that exists far beyond the confines of broadway and hollywood the sound of musicals examines the films stars issues and traditions of the genre from the 1930s to the present day featuring sixteen original essays by leading international scholars this illuminating collection addresses the complex history and global variety of the movie musical and considers the delight and passionate engagement that musicals continue to inspire in audiences around the world the contributors address key issues for understanding the movie musical questions of genre and generic traditions questions of history bringing fresh perspectives to a consideration of classical hollywood musicals and the musical beyond hollywood looking at alternatives to the hollywood model from the new hollywood and american

independent cinema to bollywood and other national musical traditions individual chapters consider key musical stars such as frank sinatra julie andrews and barbra streisand film makers including robert altman and christophe honoré and classic musicals such as south pacific 1958 and hairspray 1988 in his introduction to the volume steven cohan addresses the significance and enduring appeal of this multi faceted genre and considers its recent renaissance with movies such as the high school musical franchise and the success of the television series glee

a comedy musical about american films in the 1930s to 1950s with a satirical movie scenario includes parodies from many hollywood genres a silent tearjerker slum idyll gangster epic courtroom melodrama chain gang social justice thriller screwball comedy busby berkeley backstage musical war propaganda canteen musical not to forget casablanca citizen kane and a variety of minor genres

since the turn of the millennium films such as chicago 2002 and phantom of the opera 2004 have reinvigorated the popularity of the screen musical this edited collection bringing together a number of international scholars looks closely at the range and scope of contemporary film musicals from stage adaptations like mamma mia 2008 and les misérables 2012 to less conventional works that elide the genre like team america world police 2004 and quentin tarantino s kill bill 2003 04 looking at the varying aesthetic function of soundtrack and lyric in films like disney s wildly popular frozen 2013 and the fast and the furious franchise or the self reflexive commentary of the post millennial rock musical this wide ranging collection breaks new ground in its study of this multifaceted genre

alongside extensive thought provoking and lively analysis of some of the most popular jazz and blues songs of the 20th century this text contains new work on blackface minstrelsy in early sound movies racial representation and censorship torch singers and torch songs the hollywood left and hot jazz

the history of african americans in film musicals and their reception by black audiences and critics

this encyclopedic reference to the american movie musical identifies and describes the musicals and the artists who made them film entries range from the jazz singer in 1927 to fantasia 2000 artists ranging from gene kelly to elvis presley busby berkeley and john

travolta are included as are musicians as varied as irving berlin paul williams and the beatles entries also detail animated musicals studios operettas rock documentaries sequels and remakes and dance movies

from the neighborhood pianist of silent movie days to the synthesized effects and music video sequences of the 1980s the great and not so great moments in film scoring scores from countless films from birth of a nation 1915 through top gun 1986 are painstakingly analyzed how does the score relate to onscreen activity how does it follow or depart from tradition how does it represent the strengths and foibles of its composer the book includes discussion of trend setting work such as max steiner s king kong 1933 an early instance of music carrying a significant portion of onscreen action bernard herrmann s psycho 1960 with its unusual high scraping strings only support of the famous shower scene and alex north s a streetcar named desire 1951 the first essentially jazz oriented score as well as remarks on the work that followed within the resulting trends discussions are enhanced by musical reproductions of significant themes and motives chapters on 14 individual composers working largely within the united states are given perspective by summary chapters on the silent and early sound years the decades 1930 1980 and the work of composers outside the united states

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