


Hello and welcome! In this video in conjunction with the Gluck Fellowship for the Arts, we'll be talking about Disney movies. Yes, Disney movies! We'll explore the dramatic structure of Disney movies—what makes the stories so interesting and effective—and look at how Disney movies borrowed from musical theatre traditions to create the incredibly popular global phenomena they are today.



First, a bit about me. I'm a graduate student at UC Riverside studying music. I research pop singers in a country called Indonesia—pretty far away from musical theatre in the U.S.A.! But I have a degree in singing, took many theatre classes, and have a lot of experience performing in musicals. I've also taught many guest lectures about musical theatre history and a whole class about analyzing movies! The program will also include a special guest: actor and teacher Wyn Moreno. He has an MFA in acting and teaches theatre at Riverside City College. He's going to help me out throughout this program, and you'll even get to hear him sing later in the program!



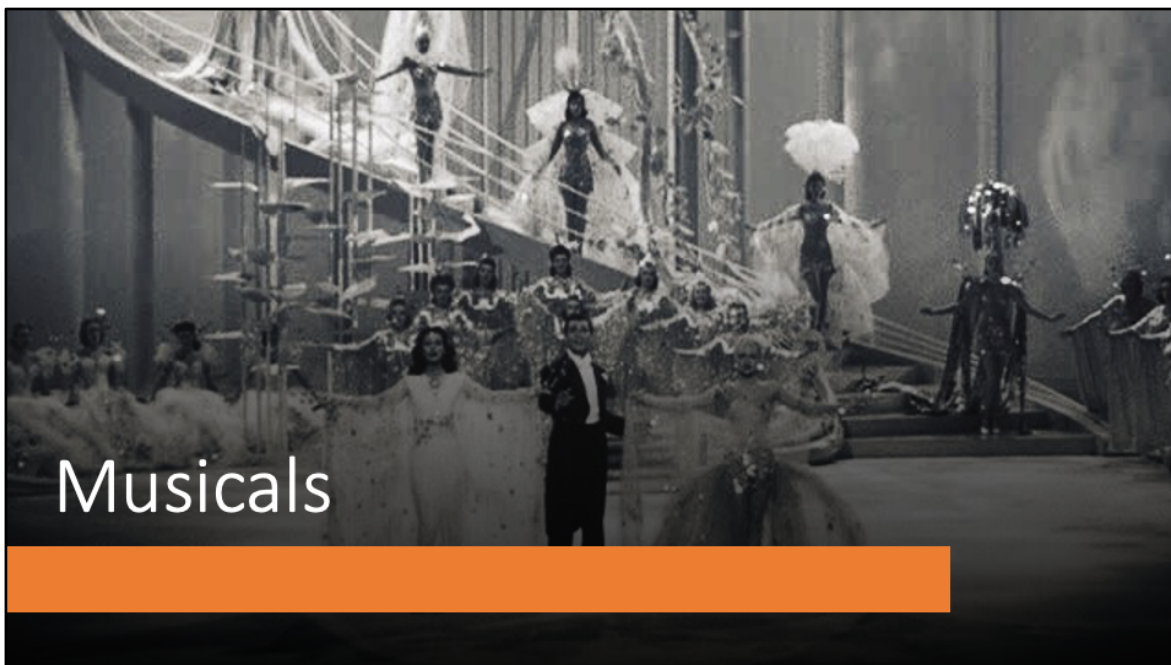
Our first question is: what's the history of Disney movies, and how are they connected to musicals? The plot structure is very similar, so how did that come to be



## Some Questions to ask:

- What's the history of Disney movies?
- How are they connected to Musical Theatre?
- Have you seen a Live Disney Musical? (The Hyperion Theatre)

Even today, Disney still makes musical versions of their most popular movies—has anyone seen the Frozen or Aladdin shows at the Hyperion Theatre in Disney Land? ? Disney movies and musicals are connected, and by looking at the history of musical theatre, not only can we get better at performing musical theatre; we can learn something about Disney too!

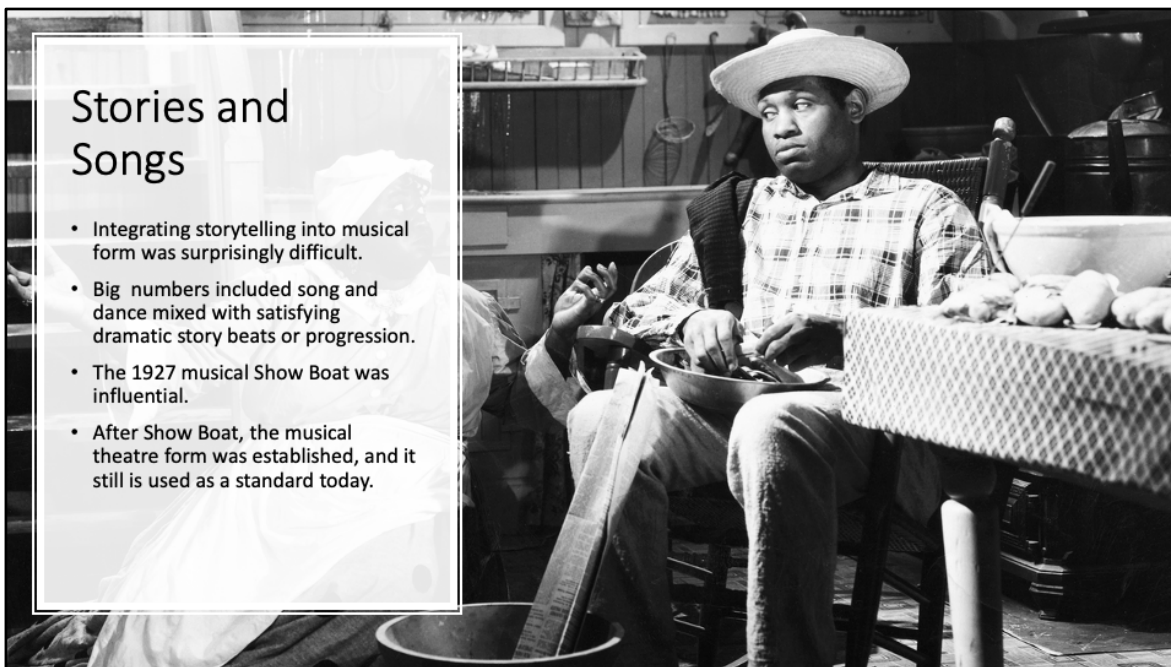


Imagine you're living in New York City in the early 1900s. The world seems to be changing rapidly. Your family didn't always have a lot of money, but your father owns a factory and now you've moved up to the middle class. You've been able to make a huge purchase: an upright piano, which you've learned to play to show off your new high-class status and to entertain your family in the evening. Sometimes, on special occasions, your family goes to the theatre on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, where new electric lights brighten the street so much advertising the shows and the actors that you call it "The Great White Way." Most of the shows you see are vaudeville, variety shows, with lots of music and dance numbers and comic scenes with no story connecting them, or revues, big song and dance spectacles with no story at all. When you love a song you hear onstage, you take the streetcar to nearby Tin Pan Alley, a road where music composers sit in windows, playing the piano and singing, to get people to buy songs. There, you buy sheet music so you can take the song home and play it on your new piano.

In this period, most musical theatre didn't have a clear story. Each individual song, skit, or dance number, called "acts," needed to stand on their own and be entertaining. Plays existed, and they might even have songs or dances during the intermissions, or breaks, but they weren't part of the story.

At the same time, opera and operetta (light opera with dialogue) came over to the


U.S from Europe. Composers and performers loved these art forms, but they were foreign to the U.S. They wanted to develop their own, uniquely American art form. This is how musical theatre was born: combining operetta with American musical styles and storylines.



In this new art form, songs couldn't just be good songs. Because musicals relied on complicated stories that had to last for two hours instead of ten minutes, songs had to contribute to the story and move it forward. In the past, most songs were showstoppers—big song and dance numbers that literally stopped the show with outrageous spectacle. Now, most songs and even dances had to continue telling the story.

The 1927 musical Show Boat was an important example: an early musical with a story that lasted the whole night, with a serious message. The story was based on a novel, and it dealt with racial prejudice, poverty, and tragedy. In the flirty song "Make Believe," the two main characters sing about only pretending to love each other: a Hypothetical Love Song. While the song is lots of fun, it also foreshadows, or hints at, their later tragic love story. When the young protagonist Magnolia sings, "Can't Help Loving That Man," she sings of her objective or motivation, what she wants more than anything: an I Want song. And the classic song "Ol' Man River" stops the show with a demonstration of emotion and vocal skill while setting the scene of racial discrimination in the American South. Three musical theatre conventions, or dramatic plot points that would be repeated again and again, were born.

Soon after Show Boat premiered on Broadway, musical theatre began to face competition from another new art form: movies with sound.



## Musicals go to Hollywood

- The first “talkies” were musical theatre performers singing!
- Tin Pan Alley
- Broadway competing with Hollywood.

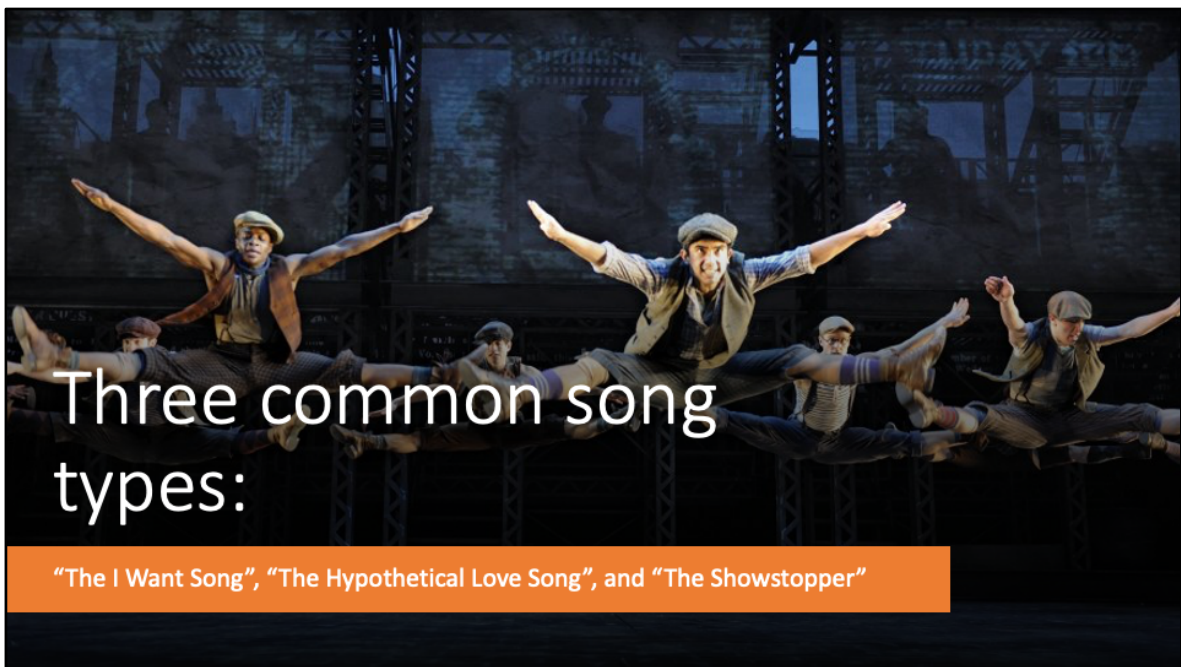
The same year *Show Boat* premiered on Broadway, 1927, the first full-length motion picture, or film, to use synchronized talking and singing in addition to a musical score—in other words, the first “talkie.” Talking picture technology took off, and lots of the composers who once worked on Tin Pan Alley moved to Hollywood. Broadway had to compete with movies, and movies started to win.





## Early Disney

Disney's first full-length animated film, *Snow White*, came ten years later. Up to then, Disney had mainly made animated shorts. *Snow White* took three years to make. The songs were an important part—a full-length animated feature had never been made before, and Disney wanted the songs to match how impressive the animation would be. The songs, like "I'm Wishing," "Someday my Prince will Come," and "Whistle While you Work," were written in the Tin Pan Alley musical theatre tradition. Disney was right—the songs were so popular that the soundtrack became the first movie soundtrack ever released. From that moment on, Disney and songs were inseparable.



In this Gluck Digital DIY Curriculum, we'll look at three song types common to most musicals and most Disney movies and analyze how to perform them. These three song types are the "I Want" song, the "Hypothetical Love" song, and the "Showstopper."



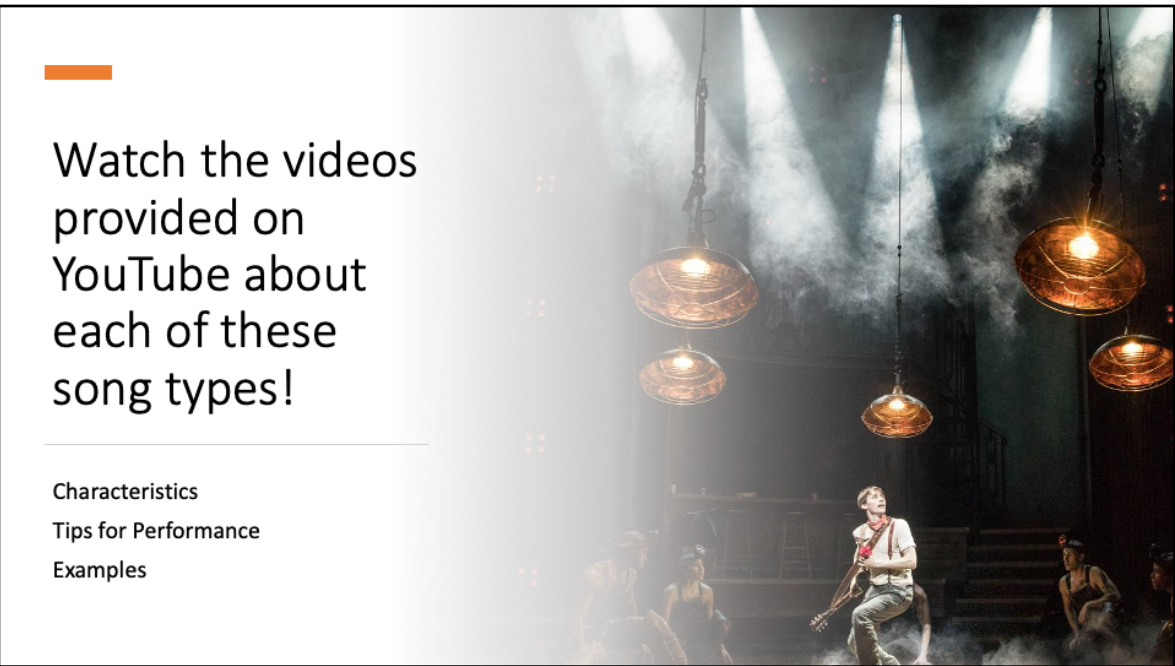
The I Want Song is usually sung towards the beginning of the movie or musical. Sometimes called the "Sitting on a Rock" song, in this song a protagonist pauses to reflect on what they want more than anything, what their motivation is. Some examples are: "How Far I'll Go" from Moana, "Where the People Are" from the Little Mermaid, and "My Shot" from Hamilton.



The Hypothetical Love Song is almost a love duet, but the two characters involved never come out and say they love each other. It's like saying, what if we fell in love? Some examples are: "People Will Say We're in Love" from Oklahoma, "Love is an Open Door" from Frozen, and "Light my Candle" from Rent.



Showstoppers are a holdout from vaudeville and revues. The story stops for a moment for a showcase of technical skill and spectacle, like big dance numbers, vocal fireworks, intense emotion, or impressive set or costume changes. Some examples include: "Let it Go" from Frozen, "The Room Where it Happens" from Hamilton, and "Defying Gravity" from Wicked.



Watch the videos  
provided on  
YouTube about  
each of these  
song types!


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Characteristics

Tips for Performance

Examples

Look for videos about each of these song types! In each video, I'll talk about some common characteristics of the song type and give you some tips for analyzing and performing it. We'll also look at some examples.



1. Watch the three videos about song types

2. Brainstorm: for each song type, think of three Disney or Musical Theatre songs that fit that type.

3. If you're a performer, pick an "I Want" and "Showstopper"

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Your activity:

For your activity today, I want you to explore these three types of songs. First, watch the three videos about the song types: the "I Want" song, the "Hypothetical Love" song, and the "Showstopper." Then fill out this worksheet!

1. Brainstorm. For each song type, think of three Disney or Musical Theatre songs that fit that style and list them here. They can be from anything—get creative! Bonus points for thinking of one I haven't thought of before.

"I Want:"

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Hypothetical Love Song:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Showstopper:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

2. Listen to the songs you pick, and think about how they're different.

Are the songs fast or slow? Loud or quiet?


What are the lyrics about? How do they contribute to the plot? What do we learn about the story or characters from the songs?

3. If you like to sing or think of yourself as a performer, pick an "I Want" song and a Showstopper that fit your voice and character type. Look for songs you could actually use in a show or an audition, characters you might actually play. How would you perform these songs differently?

What's the character's mood or emotion in each song? Are they singing to anyone?

What does the character want in each song?





## Vocal Warmups, Cooldowns, and Styles

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Please see the accompanying files in the Gluck Creative Classroom for more ways to develop your singing technique. These are exercises you can do on your own or by following along with the video to help you sing in a healthy way that allows you to express all the nuances of a character's emotions. These files are available on the Gluck Creative Classroom Library <https://gluckprogram.ucr.edu/gluck-creative-classroom-music>

Thanks for reading, and see you next time on Gluck Digital DIY!