



From Musical Theater to Film: An Analysis of the Medial Transposition of *The Phantom of the Opera*

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Abstract. This research delves into the transformative journey of "The Phantom of the Opera" from musical theatre to film, focusing on the adaptation's difference in structural music, content remediation, and mise-en-scène. The objective is to analyze and compare the differences in these elements between the two mediums, shedding light on their unique characteristics and strengths. The research employs a comparative analysis approach, examining the use of structural music, the role of remediation in media shift, and the disparities in mise-en-scène. Key findings reveal distinct shifts in the structural use of music, narrative enrichment through remediation, and differentiated visual expression in film mise-en-scène. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamic interplay between musical theatre and film, emphasizing the evolving nature of artistic expression across different media.

Keywords: medial transposition, structural music, mise-en-scène, cinematic adaptation, media convergence.

1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Study Subjects

The world of musical theatre has witnessed the emergence of timeless classics, and among them stands *The Phantom of the Opera*, the masterpiece of renowned British composer Andrew Lloyd Webber. Premiering at the Palace Theatre in London in 1986 and subsequently conquering Broadway in 1988, this iconic production has left an indelible mark on the history of musical theatre with its suspenseful narrative and emotionally charged love story. In 2004, director Joel Schumacher undertook the formidable task of adapting this stage masterpiece into a cinematic experience, bringing to the forefront the intriguing dynamics between musical theatre and film.

The selection of *The Phantom of the Opera* as the research subject stems from its position as a quintessential work in the musical theatre repertoire. Its global acclaim, spanning from the West End to Broadway and beyond, highlights its cultural significance and enduring popularity. Due to the differences in media forms between musicals and films, musicals are usually presented as stage performances while films rely on

images and visual effects to show the storyline on screen (Zatlin, 2007).^[15] Similarly, as McHugh (2019) said that, “the difficulties in bringing filmic reality into balance with other elements within musicals that were created with the dynamic and standards of stage-based stylization in mind” (p.2).^[8] So this choice is grounded in the recognition of the need to explore how this theatrical undergoes a transformation when transposed from the stage to the screen.

According to Knapp (2019), in the process of transforming a stage musical into a film, the differences between the two mediums in terms of presenting realism include not only the viewer's perception of 'reality', but also the different methods used to establish this sense of reality.^[7] Accordingly, understanding the differences in structural music, content remediation, and mise-en-scène becomes crucial for appreciating the complexities inherent in the adaptation process. These differences not only impact the artistic interpretation of the narrative but also influence how audiences perceive and engage with the work in two distinct mediums.

1.2 Literature Review

The adaptation of *The Phantom of the Opera* has a continuous influence on a global scale, adapting it to different social and historical conditions and cultural backgrounds. As Biancorosso (2018) mentions: "one reason for the grip the story has held on generations of image makers and their audiences: its ability to adapt to radically different sociohistorical conditions, cultural agendas, and mediascapes".^[2] Therefore, the story of *the Phantom of the Opera* thrives in cinematic form because of its potential to explore the possibilities of the medium.

Previous scholarship on *The Phantom of the Opera* has primarily focused on various aspects of its narrative structure, music, and visual representation in both musical theatre and film. However, there remains a gap in understanding how specific elements are adapted and represented differently across these mediums. Scholars such as Knapp (2019) and Rajewsky (2005) have highlighted the importance of recognizing the differences between musical theatre and film in terms of presenting realism and establishing narrative continuity. Yet, there is a need to delve deeper into these differences and explore how they impact the adaptation process. One area that previous research has not fully addressed is the nuanced portrayal of characters, settings, and themes in the adaptation of "The Phantom of the Opera" from stage to screen. This study seeks to fill this gap by conducting a comparative analysis of structural music, content remediation, and mise-en-scène in both mediums.

1.3 Research Objectives and Significance

The importance of this research lies in understanding the unique challenges posed by the transition from musical theatre to film. By examining differences in structural music, content remediation, and mise-en-scène, this study aims to shed light on the complexities inherent in the adaptation process. Furthermore, by uncovering the transposition of "The Phantom of the Opera," this research seeks to illuminate broader insights into the dynamic interplay between musical theatre and film.

Overall, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the evolving relationship between these two expressive forms and highlights the need for further research in this area. Through a comparative analytical approach, this research aims to provide valuable insights into the adaptation of theatrical works to the cinematic medium, offering new perspectives on the evolving landscape of artistic expression across different media.

2 Comparison of the use of Structural Music in Musicals and Films

2.1 Structural Characteristics of Musicals and Movies

Musicals and films have their structural features. With the shift from stage art to film art, music plays a supporting role in the adjustment of the structural differences of both. Musical theatre often takes the three-act (or multiple-act) form because of stage constraints and the need for long performances by the audience and actors, while intermissions are also common (Trottier, 2014).^[14] In addition, Deer and Vera (2021) think that in the musical, not only the rhythm of the song drives the characters and the audience to physically express and dance, but also the performance of the song shows the transformation between the characters, deepening the emotional expression of the characters' inner conflicts and choices.^[6] By contrast, films present a coherent structure where the storytelling is continuous, with only relevant information being attached to the opening and closing credits. According to Chion (2021), he argues that the relationship between music and cinema is complex and multifaceted, as highlighted in various contexts.^[5] The use of music in films is not solely about the complete musical work but can involve fragments or passages that punctuate scenes. For *The Phantom of the Opera*, the structural shift between the two media forms can be seen in the use of music. The music which was originally used in musical theatre for the transition and articulation between acts is used in the film to set the tone in the opening credits and to sum up the film in the closing credits. This section will analyze the use of overtures and interludes in musicals and opening and closing credits in films to explain how the music reflects the transitions between the different structural forms.

2.2 Music in Theatre Performance

In *The Phantom of the Opera*, the overture and interludes play a key role in connecting the development of the plot and transitions, as well as providing the necessary support for temporal and spatial shifts and changes in the tone of the play. Baston (2015) points out that music can be used for scene transformation and provide continuity in theatre performances, which helps to provide a smooth transition between different scenes and maintain the fluidity of the narrative.^[1] For example, the overture in a musical theatre functions as a link between the prologue and the first act. The overture is set in the Paris Opera House in 1919, and the audience is taken back to the past of the Opera House in 1870 when the chandelier rises at the auction and then crosses into the first act. Due to

the limitations of the stage setting, musical theatre can use music only as the main approach to realize the time shift. Then, the focus shifts to Phantom, who plays the organ, and the ensemble orchestra, allowing the audience to focus on the music itself and enter into the situation shaped by the sound. Afterward, interludes in the musical are used to connect Act I and Act II. Between the two acts not only is a time shift occurring, but the tone of the play changes dramatically from the Phantom's painful solo to a joyful masquerade ball. The musical handles this transition naturally through the intermission. At the opening of Act II of the musical, the orchestra reproduces the musical themes of *Angel of Music*, *The Music of the Night*, *All I ask of You*, and Overture. The interlude connects the two acts and serves as a bridge between the first and the second.

2.3 Musical Structure Changes in the Film

In contrast, the overture and interlude in the film version of *The Phantom of the Opera* exhibit different structural features from the musical. The overture is shown as a soundtrack in the film, which complements the images and creates the grand audio-visual effect. This treatment weakens the overture's role in structural transitions and makes it integrated with the overall narrative. Meanwhile, the interlude loses its structural function in the musical theatre with the disappearance of the act break, and only *Angel of Music* is retained in the string of musical themes, which is played through the alternation between orchestral music to accentuate the grandeur and magnificence of the masquerade ball. The film's opening and closing music are new additional parts, where the opening music is often presented along with the title of the film, and the closing music is usually accompanied by the closing credits such as the list of the cast and crew. During the ending credits, Webber also composed a song called *Learn to be Lonely* as a specially composed ending song for the film version. Additionally, he reviewed and wrapped up the film's plot with instrumental themes from *Wishing You Were Somehow Here Again*, *Angel of Music*, *Prima Donna*, *Learn to be Lonely* and Overture.

Consequently, the treatment of the overture and interludes in the movie presents structural features that are different from musicals, as well as its distinctive function and narrative function in the film through the variations of the musical themes.

3 Exploring the Role of Remediation in Media Shift

3.1 Definition of Remediation

Rajewsky (2005) argues that remediation involves one medium mediating another, and the changes, adjustments, or reinterpretations that arise as one medium attempts to reconfigure or represent another medium in this interactive process.^[9] Indeed, as Rippl (2020) said “intermedial category such as adaptation, which is characterized by endless intertextual and intermedial citation, can easily be aligned with remediation, especially when something is adapted to a different medium” (p.213).^[10] Therefore, during the process of adapting the musical *The Phantom of the Opera* into a film, content reme-

diation involves the transfer of the story, music, and characters from the opera to the movie. This section illustrates the mediating role of remediation in media transposition by analyzing the alteration of the musical narrative, the supplementary narrative gaps, and the substitution of character shots in the film adaptation.

3.2 Musical Narration in Film Adaptation

Firstly, in the process of cinematic adaptation, the over-dramatic presentation of musicals needs to be routinized to make the music more natural and fluent in the narrative. Knapp (2019) points out that the difference between stage musical narratives and cinematic musical narratives is primarily in the mode of presentation of music and its integration with the overall storyline.^[7] The realism of musicals is mainly expressed in the songs, whereas films normally create situations with the help of soundtracks. For example, in the movie adaptation of *The Phantom of the Opera*, the modification of the music is mainly manifested in the variation of the form of some songs, which change from the original singing form to background music or dialogue. The adjustment is roughly divided into three categories: The first is to keep the original singing form, but the sound source is not in the screen, which is used as the background music outside, such as the scenes where Vicomte gets the music box at the auction, and Christian to leave the basement with Vicomte. The second is to use the tune originally sung by the actors in the form of instrumental music as the background music, at the same time the words are changed to dialogue, like in the episode in which Meg points out that the Phantom is present after the stage accident. The third is to change the original recitative singing to dialogue without melody to express the storyline. For instance, the duet between Christian and the Vicomte's engagement at the masquerade, and the episode in which Christian Christine and the Vicomte remember their childhood.

Secondly, cinematic adaptations fill in narrative gaps that exist in the opera and enhance story coherence. Bordwell (2008) notes that in cinematic adaptations, there are often additional plot points that may not be present in the source, and filmmakers may make creative choices to expand the story or introduce new elements to enhance the viewing experience.^[3] For instance, the exploration of the Phantom's identity is launched with the addition of Christine's childhood memories (Figure 1) to the plot of the film, remembering her father's words to her before he died, that she would be guarded by an angel of music, and beginning to sing *Angel of music*. In addition, the episode of Madame Giry's revelation of the Phantom's tragic life is joined by clips of the bullied Phantom's childhood (Figure 2). The inclusion of scenes involving the past, growth experiences, mental states, or emotional struggles of the male and female protagonists enriches the personalities of the characters and gives the audience a deeper understanding of the roles.



Fig. 1. Christine's recollection of her father's deathbed scene.



Fig. 2. Scenes from Madame Giry's account of the Phantom's tragic childhood encounters.

3.3 Visual Elements Externalize Emotion

Moreover, the incorporation of performers' facial close-ups and audience group shots in the adaptation externalized the characters' emotions and increased the sense of immersion in the storyline. Cohen (2012) suggests that close-ups of the performers' faces convey the emotional power of the music better than the sound itself, and the audience's camera can capture their emotional response to the music.^[4] For example, in the episode where the Phantom leads Christine to the basement, the audience in the Opera can only see a distant view of the actors on the stage, while the film uses close-ups of Christine's and the Phantom's faces several times. The image of the Phantom is shown in close-up from Christine's subjective point of view (Figure 3), and it can be sensed that the Phantom at this time is full of mystery, his heart is filled with extreme ambition and controls, and expresses Christine's complex emotions of both curiosity and fear towards the Phantom. Through close-ups, the audience can better understand the character traits and emotional state of the character, thus getting closer to the character. Meanwhile, the grand performance scenes in the film create a feeling like a live concert. For example, in the clip of *Prima Donna*, there are several crowd shots (Figure 4), in which the audience has various expressions and movements, and by showing the emotional expression of a large number of people, the crowd shots reinforce the emo-

tional resonance between the audience and the performers. In short, through the transformation of musical narratives, the filling of narrative gaps, and the use of character lenses, the storyline is enriched, and the emotional experience is enhanced in film adaptations, which highlights the mediating role of remediation in the transposition of different media.



Fig. 3. The Phantom in Christine's Subjective Perspective.



Fig. 4. Images of the audience onstage during the performance are shown.

4 Media Disparity in Mise-en-scène

Mise-en-scène refers to the arrangement of visual elements on stage or in a film scene, which includes various elements such as set design, lighting, costumes, props, and the positioning and movement of actors (Sabot, 2018). As Senici (2019) points out, the visual elements of scene placement in opera help to complement and enhance the musical aspects of a performance, providing a meaningful connection between sound and sight and reactivating the theatrical experience for the audience.^[12] In addition, in the view of Skjerseth (2020), music and sound play a vital role in the set of a film, beyond visual elements such as background and lighting, they help to create audio-visual contours that immerse the audience in the world of the film, shaping space, time and emotion.^[13] Therefore, the transformation of *The Phantom of the Opera* from a musical to a film has made some significant differences in the presentation of scene

content between the two. This section provides an insight into the different designs of musical theatre and the cinema in *Mise-en-scène* by analyzing the differences between the two media in terms of narrative techniques, visual presentation, and symbolic design.

4.1 Different Space-time Construction of Media

On the one hand, the different designs of scenes between the two media derive from their different constructions of time and space. As Bordwell (2008) puts it, the stage is performed by living people (actors) in real space (the space of the stage), whereas on the screen are just images, just images of space and characters.^[3] Therefore, musical theatre as a stage performing art, the opening of the stage allows the audience to choose any character or corner of the stage to watch. However, due to the limitations of the seats, everyone watches the performance from a fixed perspective, distance, and within a single space and time, and the perception of the narrative is rather one-sided and rough, making it difficult to capture the details. Due to the limitation of the venue, it is not suitable for some motion narratives, such as the fragment in which Phantom leads Christine into the basement. In contrast, during film shooting, the camera can move flexibly, and the director is free to choose different scenes to expand the scope of framing, and to show the whole picture from a macroscopic point of view, such as the bustling scene outside the Opera House (Figure 5) or a full house during the performance (Figure 4). Specific character shots can also be used to portray narrative details from a micro perspective, such as the Phantom's creation of the stage accident (Figure 6) or Christine's subjective view of the Phantom as mentioned above (Figure 3). The film presents the various shots and scenes in continuous editing, which does not interrupt the audience's viewing process due to scene changes, and ensures the visual effects are rich. This contributes to the emotional expression and narrative process.



Fig. 5. The bustling scene outside the Opera House.



Fig. 6. The Phantom prepares to create a medium shot of the characters before the stage accident.

4.2 Stylization and Symbolism in Adaptation

On the other hand, the stylization and symbolism used in cinematic adaptations are distinguished from musicals. As Sabol (2018) argues, stylization in theatre is reflected in exaggerated body movements, unnatural dialogue, or abstract set design rather than the use of photographic techniques or editing choices.^[11] For example, the creators of the film use post-production techniques to narrate the story about the two timelines of 1919 and 1870 by using black-and-white and color tones separately, which highlight the present-day disrepair of the Opera House and its past glory by switching between black-and-white and color scenes. At the beginning of the film, the use of black-and-white images reflects the reality of the time, when an auction is being held in the deserted opera house (Figure 7). As the chandelier from the once disastrous event slowly rises, the grey theatre is quickly illuminated, restoring it to its former colors. Back in 1870, the theatre's splendor and prosperity seemed like an unreal dream (Figure 5). After that, a series of treacherous and romantic events unfold, with the change of colors completely reversing the style of the film. Therefore, the use of color in the movie adaptation enhances the visual impact and makes the mise-en-scene design more stylized.



Fig. 7. In the black and white scene, the chandelier rises slowly.

4.3 Rich Symbolism in the Film Adaptation

Furthermore, the different designs of the symbolic scene "The Phantom's Rose" in the film adaptation deepen the symbolic meaning. The rose is an added clue in the film that symbolizes the Phantom's love for Christine. From the moment Christine receives the rose at the end of her successful performance (Figure 8), to the moment when Christine falls in love with the Vicomte and the rose she throws away is torn by Phantom (Figure 9), and finally when the old Vicomte comes to Christine's grave and sees the rose in full bloom once again (Figure 10). This series of details demonstrates the advantages of film compared with musicals. Small objects such as roses, which are not easily noticed by the audience on stage due to the limitation of view angle and distance, are highlighted and emphasized in the film by means of cinematography and given connotations, thus making the expression of emotions more delicate and deeper. Eventually, the film goes back to 1919 through a transition, where only the roses bloom bright red in the black and white images, showing the Phantom's unfading love, and the added plot also makes the film version get a more complete ending. Consequently, the theatre focuses on the live spectacle, while the film focuses on multiple perspectives and the use of post-production, and these differences affect the way they are presented. The use of technology in the film adaptation enriches the representation of *Mise-en-scène* by revealing the symbolic and emotional dimensions in greater depth, presenting the audience with a more exciting and richer visual experience.



Fig. 8. The Phantom sent roses after Christine's successful performance.



Fig. 9. Roses torn apart by angry phantoms.



Fig. 10. Roses blooming at Christine's grave.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study reveals the complex process of adapting a musical theatre production into a cinematic experience, with a particular focus on *The Phantom of the Opera*. Through comparative analyses of structural music, content adaptations, and scenes, we illuminate the multi-faceted challenges and creative strategies involved in this transition from stage to screen.

Our study highlights the importance of understanding the complexities inherent in the transition from musical theatre to film, particularly in terms of representing realism and ensuring narrative continuity. However, it is important to recognise that the challenges posed by this transition are not limited to these aspects. Factors such as differences in actor profiles, casting decisions, time constraints, performance art, thematic focus, line adaptations, audience demographics and commercial viability are also worth considering.

Moving forward, we need to conduct further research that delves into these areas of controversy and expectation. Exploring the complexities of actor embodiment, the impact of casting on character interpretation, the time compression inherent in film narratives, and the negotiation of artistic integrity within the context of commercial imperatives are all directions for future research. In addition, investigating the changing preferences and expectations of different audience segments, as well as the changing landscape of the entertainment industry, can provide valuable insights into the dynamics of adaptation and reception.

By filling these research gaps and proactively addressing the ever-changing challenges and opportunities in the field of film adaptations of musicals, scholars and practitioners alike can contribute to the ongoing enrichment and innovation of the dynamic interplay between these two distinct, but interrelated, art forms.

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