



The show must *not* go on

Guy Mosel on why song-and-dance films give (straight) men the opposite of glee

Don't you reckon *Les Misérables* could have been a dude movie? Think about it: reformed crook starts new life and makes good; bad guy discovers his dark secret; a bitter rivalry begins. So far, so manly. There are hot prostitutes, pistols, a goddamn revolution. In the hands of a man-flick director, it could have been called *Baguettes and Blood*, and men would have flooded the cinemas. And there would have been no singing. Not a bar. Not a note. Not one semiquaver.

Musicals are to men what "starring Jason Statham" or "from the makers of *Jackass*" are to women. Quentin Tarantino could direct a \$10 billion film co-written by Ernest Hemingway and a tyrannosaurus rex in which Sean Connery, Clint Eastwood and the resurrected corpse of John Wayne and Paul Newman save the universe from communist-vegan aliens, and the merest hint of song would completely sink it at the box office.

Breaking into song instantly turns a blokey moment into a cringing, camp spectacle. What if Bruce Willis had warbled "Yippee ki-yay, motherf*cker" to a swelling orchestral backing at the end of *Die Hard 2*? Or if the Australian cricket

team broke into an impromptu a cappella performance after securing the Ashes? Not right.

Men fear singing. *Fear* it. It's not "just something we're not into" – it sparks a primeval terror deep in our bones, like prostate cancer and the phrase, "We need to talk". Women, I believe, love to sing. It's cute. It's fun. It shows you know how to have a good time and don't take yourself too seriously. But men *want* to be taken seriously – and breaking into song is most definitely not the behaviour of a serious person.

I blame society (it's easier that way). We learn from an early age that singing is unmanly: real men play cricket and one of several ➔



15

The percentage of single Aussie men who aren't dating because they're happy with casual encounters

SOURCE: RSVP DATE OF THE NATION REPORT 2012

hundred available codes of football; others join the choir and play theatre sports at lunchtime. Tragically, school is not like *Glee*, where bad boys and jocks can belt out a rendition of *Greased Lightning* and retain their hard-won machismo. In real life, they'd wind up pantless and taped to a bubbler, prodded with sticks by the dweebs from the chess club.

This upbringing breeds a suspicion that singing has a feminine quality, a wariness that renders men anxious in the face of an office rendition of *Happy Birthday*. Have you heard what *Happy Birthday* sounds like when performed by a largely male workplace? It's more funereal than celebratory. It's a tuneless, soulless dirge murmured by shoe-gazing buffoons who are, to a man, mentally kicking themselves for not having the presence of mind to have made a hasty exit.

(Before I continue, I should probably acknowledge that there

is a sporting-match exception to the singing rule. Provided they're singing tunelessly and hoarsely and in support of the on-field success of their team, men may sing as much as they like with no fear of derisive commentary.)

But it's not just the jarring silliness of breaking into song that makes men musical-averse. Their narratives, traditionally, are soapy affairs, long on whimsy and cliché, and short on blood-curdling violence and exploding explodables. You know, stories about magical cars and flying nannies or melodramatic romances set in far-flung locales. A simple glance down the list of longest-playing Broadway shows will demonstrate what I mean... *Phantom of the Opera*: freaky-deaky Parisian-theatre denizen lusts after wide-eyed whimsical beauty; complains a lot. *The Lion King*: baby lion unfeasibly beats superior lion in battle to the death while singing Elton John songs. *Mamma Mia!*: shoddy story set in Greece about getting married or something as an excuse to perform songs by the band reviled by men like no other.

I consider myself a pretty open-minded guy, culturally, but you would need to tie me down with packing wire and force matchsticks under my eyelids to get me to watch former Spice Girl Mel C as Mary Magdalene in *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

In its defence, the musical-making industry has had a stab at producing "edgy" musicals. And while their attempts to get dudes all excited about an evening of song is laudable, it's also a little insulting. *We Will Rock You* is probably the best example of that. You can imagine someone thinking, "Hey, I've seen *Wayne's World* – men love Queen songs!" And yes, we do. What we don't like is a bunch of hairless NIDA waifs taking the songs we like and adding spirit-finger dancing to them.

Men like their culture to be tough and no-nonsense. Violence, for want of a better word, is good. We could get into a whole thing here about why men think that, but let's not. It's easier if you just remember that it wasn't long ago that, when men settled their differences, someone usually ended up with something pointy in their chest.

That's why we read crime novels and watch movies with titles beginning with "The" and containing words like "hard" and "kill". (Interestingly, no one's yet made a movie called *The Hard Kill* – this seems almost unfathomable to me.) Our heroes are morally dubious rebels who defeat the bad guy with a wry smile, a devastating quip and a roundhouse kick, then bed the grateful damsel. But the heroes and heroines in musicals are cellar-dwelling circus freaks (*Phantom*), starry-eyed dancers with dreams in their hearts (*A Chorus Line*; *Fame*), miserable bohemians (*Rent*) and Cockney flower sellers on the make (*My Fair Lady*).

And look, maybe it's OK to have a little chirp when you're pining for your unrequited love in a soggy dungeon or getting pumped about jazz-ballet auditions. But it's hard enough to hold off an army of zombies with a sharpened spoon while defusing a nuclear warhead and pleasuring Cat Woman without also trying to hit a high C. **wh**

Guy Mosel is a Sydney-based writer who would be happy if all musicals were more South Park than South Pacific.

Your mind on sex

Sex guru Tracey Cox on why you fantasise about certain things, from her latest book *Dare: What Happens When Fantasies Come True**

Spanking
Aggression is common in animals (some only ovulate if the male bites them) and humans have long linked pain and pleasure. Arousal is about increased blood flow, and spanking increases blood flow to erogenous zones.

Threesomes
A heady blend of exhibitionism, voyeurism, bi-curiosity and humans' longing for excess (if one person makes you feel good, more must feel even better).

Forbidden people
It's often a replay of what happened with a desirable ex; or, if someone new, the grass-is-greener philosophy. The more forbidden, the more powerful the fantasy.

*THIS IS AN EDITED EXCERPT OF DARE: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN FANTASIES COME TRUE, BY TRACEY COX (916.99), HODDER & STOUGHTON. PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES