



Due May 19, 11:59pm

Project #4

Celebrity & Musical Lives: Assessing Musicians' Biopics

Hi all, hopefully this is a fun, fruitful, and interesting way to consider how we assess “telling history” via mass media products such as films. Please check out the steps below carefully, and feel free to ask questions or make office hour appointments!

Learning Objectives:

- Listen analytically to film music; discuss your findings in prose
- Analyze representations of musicians in historical or contemporary mass media
- Reflect on how these representations connect to larger tropes about identity, ideologies about music, and/or celebrity

Brief Project Steps (all explained in more detail on page 2)

- 1) Select a musical biopic
- 2) Watch it!
- 3) Answer the questions below (including the short essay)
- 4) Turn it in on Brightspace!

Detailed Project Steps

- 1) Please select one full-length film biopic about a real musician
 - this should **not** be a film about a fictional musician
 - this should **not** be a documentary that's only concert footage or interviews
 - I've included a list of potential choices as an additional page for this document; you may pick something not on this list but you might want to double-check with me first.
 - Many of these films are available via Netflix, Amazon Prime, HBO, Hulu, Youtube, etc. Others I own....let me know if you're having problems about access: though I cannot promise access to any individual film, I am certainly happy to help you figure out a film to choose if you don't have streaming service access.
- 2) Watch your selected film in its entirety. You may want to look at these questions below ahead of time to know what to take notes on....and you likely will need to watch certain scenes more than once. That's the pain and joy of film studies!
- 3) In some sort of word processing document (Word, Pages, PDF, etc), please answer the following questions. Some of them will require some Internet research; please cite your sources as appropriate.

Required questions:

General Questions: for each of these 3 questions, write a short to medium paragraph (at least 3 sentences for each question).

- A. Sources: What are the sources for the biopic? Is it based on a play, book, memoir, interviews with the family? Just a screenplay based on the life of the musician? How trustworthy or biased do you think the sources are?
- B. Plot: Does this only portray certain portions of this musician's life? (or, put another way, what kinds of episodes are chosen from the long-running and eventful careers of a musician?)
- C. To the extent you can tell, what kinds of interpretations, distortions, exaggerations, or lack of truthfulness does this film use in depicting this musician's life? (You can certainly cite other people here, and bring up any controversies about the film!)

Musical questions: for each of these 3 questions, write about 1/2 page of text, single-spaced. You do not need to discuss every minute of the film, but please be thoughtful.

- D. How is music BY the subject of the biopic used in the film? Is it mostly "greatest hits" or just the best-known pieces? Only music from a specific portion of the musicians' career (early vs. late, for example)? Is the music used only diegetically, or also extra-diegetically? Is the music played in its entirety, or cut/transformed in some way?
- E. Does the film use the original recordings by the musician, or does the actor perform the pieces or songs themselves? How often do we SEE (visual) representations of the musician in question performing? And how much does the star try to replicate the physical and musical mannerisms of the musician?
- F. Is there a separate original score by some other composer? If so, how does it compare in style to the music by the musician who is the subject of the film? If there is **not** an original score, please just discuss the musical style (s) used in the film.

Short Essay: please answer this in a short essay of 1-2 single spaced pages.

- G. Please pick one scene from the film (this should be a scene somewhere in the range of 3-10 minutes). Please describe (in detail) what is going on musically in this scene (you can include descriptions of both the actual music and also filmic details such as camera angles, lighting, etc). In your essay, please include why you think this is a significant moment in the biopic (why did you choose this to discuss?) and what you think it demonstrates about the musician and the portrayal of the musician in film.

Musician Biopics:

****This is NOT a comprehensive list (and focuses largely on US products, but just to spark some thoughts)**

1. *Lady Sings the Blues* (1972)
2. *Bound for Glory* (1976)
3. *The Buddy Holly Story* (1978)
4. *Coal Miner's Daughter* (1980)
5. *Amadeus* (1984)
6. *Sweet Dreams* (1985)
7. *Sid and Nancy* (1986)
8. *Round Midnight* (1986)
9. *La Bamba* (1987)
10. *Bird* (1988)
11. *Great Balls of Fire* (1989)
12. *Tous les matins du monde* (1991)
13. *The Doors* (1991)
14. *What's Love Got to Do With It* (1993)
15. *Immortal Beloved* (1994)
16. *Farinelli* (1994)
17. *Backbeat* (1994)
18. *Shine* (1996)
19. *Selena* (1997)
20. *The Temptations* (1998)
21. *Why Do Fools Fall in Love* (1998)
22. *Hilary and Jackie* (1999)
23. *8 Mile* (2002)
24. *The Pianist* (2002)
25. *Beyond the Sea* (2004)
26. *Last Days* (2005)
27. *Walk the Line* (2005)
28. *Ray* (2005)
29. *Control* (2007)
30. *I'm Not There* (2007)
31. *La Vie en Rose* (2007)
32. *Nowhere Boy* (2009)
33. *Notorious* (2009)
34. *The Runaways* (2010)
35. *Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll* (2010)
36. *Behind the Candelabra* (2013)
37. *Jersey Boys* (2014)
38. *Get on Up* (2014)
39. *Love & Mercy* (2014)
40. *Straight Outta Compton* (2015)
41. *Nina* (2016)
42. *Miles Ahead* (2017)
43. *Blaze* (2018)
44. *Bohemian Rhapsody* (2018)
45. *Roxanne Roxanne* (2018)
46. *Rocketman* (2019)
47. *Judy* (2019)
48. *The Dirt* (2019)
49. *Tick Tick Boom* (2021)
50. *Respect* (2021)
51. *Elvis* (2022)

Select Scholarly Bibliography:

**** You don't have to consult these, but as a demonstration that people are writing about this!**

1. Altman, Rick. *The American Musical*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.
2. Bannister, Matthew. "Funny Girls and Nowhere Boys: Reversing the Gaze in the Popular Music Biopic." In *Rethinking Difference in Gender, Sexuality, and Popular Music: Theory and Politics of Ambiguity*, 111–27. Routledge Studies in Popular Music. Abingdon: Routledge, 2018.
3. Bannister, Matthew. "Pop Life: The Popular Music Biopic — Introduction," *iaspm@journal* 7, no. 1 (2017): 3–10.
4. Brown, Tom and Bélen Vidal. *The Biopic in Contemporary Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2014.
5. Corbella, Maurizio. "Live to Tell: Remediating Historical Performance in the Popular Music Biopic," *iaspm@journal* 7, no. 1 (2017): 48.
6. Curtin, Adrian. "O Body Swayed to Music: The Allure of Jacqueline du Pré as Spectacle and Drama." *Studies in Musical Theatre* 9, no. 2 (2015): 143–159.
7. Custen, George. *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992.
8. Heldt, Guido. "Playing Mozart: Biopics and the Musical (Re)Invention of a Composer." *MSMI* 3:1 (Spring 2009): 21–46, 156.
9. Inglis, Ian. "Popular Music History on Screen: The Pop/Rock Biopic." *Popular Music History* 2, no. 1 (April 2007): 77–93.
10. Joe, Jeongwon (2006) 'Reconsidering Amadeus: Mozart as Film Music', in Phil Powrie and Robynn Stilwell (eds.) *Changing Tunes: the use of pre-existing music in film*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 57–73.
11. Kooijman, Jaap. "Triumphant Black Pop Divas on the Wide Screen: *Lady Sings the Blues* and *Tina: What's Love Got to Do with It*." In *Popular Music and Film*, 178–93.
12. Marshall, Robert L. (1997) 'Film as Musicology: Amadeus', *The Musical Quarterly*, 81 (2), summer, 173–9
13. McQuiston, Kate. "Brian Wilson Reimagined: The Reparative Portrait in *Love & Mercy*." *Journal of the Society for American Music* 13, no. 3 (2019): 359–378.
14. Royster, Francesca T. "Nice and Rough: The Promise of Privacy in Tina Turner's *What's Love Got to Do with It* and *I, Tina*." *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts* 12, no. 3 (September 2007): 103–13.
15. Schlotterbeck, Jesse. "'Trying to Find a Heartbeat': Narrative Music in the Pop Performer Biopic." *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 36, 2 (2008): 82–90.
16. Spirou, Penny. "'From Death to Birth': Suicide and Stardom in the Musical Biopic." In *Death and the Rock Star*, 73–85. Ashgate Popular and Folk Music Series. Farnham: Ashgate (2015).
17. C. Tibbetts, John. *Composers in the Movies: Studies in Musical Biography*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005.