

PRIDE AND MUSICALS

A Study of Queer Musical Movies

By Arya Padhye



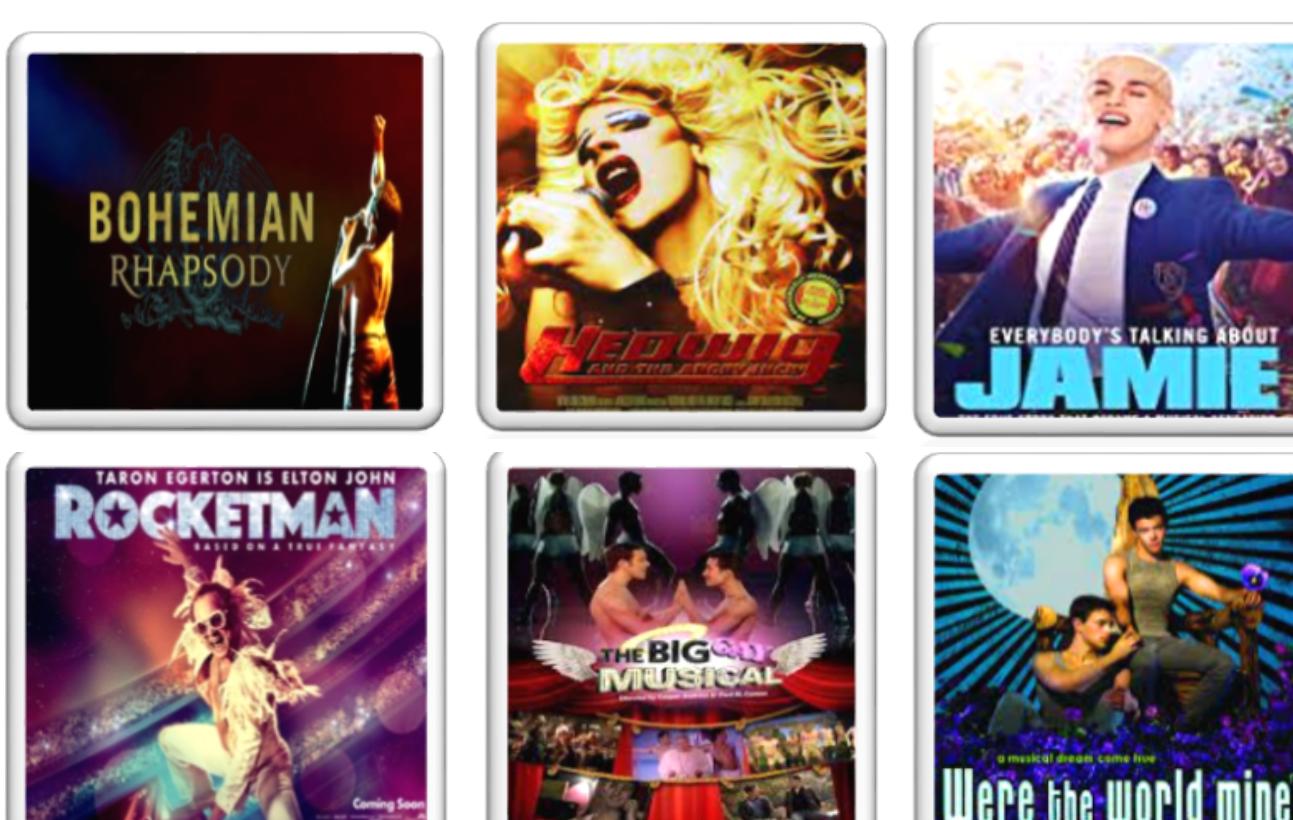
Introduction

Queer representation in media has been a topic of controversy. Hays Code in Hollywood prohibited the portrayal of queer characters.

The queer coding in many films stereotyped the queer characters as evil or comic which left the queer community searching for representation in media.

There are very few movies that portray realistic queer characters.

This thesis is aimed at the musical movies that have queer main characters with complex character sketches and that brought the queer representation to mainstream media.



Films

Theme: Comparison of biopics and lives of two queer rock icons

- a. **Bohemian Rhapsody(2018):** Bryan Singer
- b. **Rocketman(2019):** Dexter Fletcher

Theme: Symbolism in queer musicals

- a. **The Big Gay Musical(2009):** Casper Andreas and Fred Caruso
- b. **Hedwig and the Angry Inch (2001):** John Cameron Mitchell

Theme: Comparison of Reality and Fantasy in two queer student musicals

- a. **Were the World mine(2008):** Tom Gustafson
- b. **Everybody's talking about Jamie(2021):** Jonathan Butterell

Queer Representation in Musicals

From "Cabaret" to "Rent," musicals have long provided a platform for queer characters to shine.

Broadway's embrace of queer representation in shows like "Kinky Boots" and "Fun Home" marks a major milestone in the history of LGBTQ+ visibility.

From "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" to "Hedwig and the Angry Inch," musical movies have pushed boundaries and challenged stereotypes in their portrayals of queer characters.

Through shows like "Hamilton" and "The Prom," contemporary musical theater is continuing to explore and expand the possibilities of queer representation on stage.

Comparison of Biopics of two Queer Rock Icons

Bohemian Rhapsody and Rocketman are Biopics of Freddie Mercury and Elton John respectively.

Both the Queer Rock Icons were very popular and had a huge impact on public through their music

Common themes in their lives include:

1. Struggles with sexuality
2. Familial tension
3. Substance abuse
4. Toxic romantic relationships
5. Heterosexual relationships
6. Their eventual overcoming of these issues.

Both films take different approaches, where Bohemian Rhapsody focuses on musical career of Freddie downplaying his homosexual relationships, Rocketman explores more personal struggles of Elton and takes a more candid approach towards his homosexuality.

Symbolism in Queer Musicals

Symbolism refers to use of inanimate objects to convey a deeper meaning. It is a subset of coding in films which refers to use of lights, colour scheme, sounds, objects, camera angles, etc. to convey certain emotions or ideas.

The big gay musical and Hedwig and the angry inch both use symbolism heavily. Some of the most important symbols used in these films are:

1. Hedwig and the angry inch:

- a. **Wigs:** A symbol for changing identities and personas
- b. **Diary:** A symbol of Hedwig's past trauma
- c. **The Berlin Wall:** A symbol for Hedwig's internal barriers and struggle to reconcile two identities
- d. **The complementarity tattoo:**

2. The Big Gay Musical:

- a. **The stage:** A symbol of safe space
- b. **The Bible:** A symbol of conflict to criticize religious beliefs
- c. **Adam and Eve:** A symbol of heteronormative culture
- d. **Costumes:** Semi nude costumes and God's night gown style costume are symbols for gender-bending qualities of the play and rebellion.

Musicals and Life of Queer Students

Positive Queer representation in media is one of the most important source of finding inspiration and idols for queer students.

Both of these movies have queer main characters with strong character traits and struggles that can be relatable to many queer students

Everybody's talking about Jamie is a biopic taking realistic approach with elements of fantasy to amplify the emotions whereas Were the World Mine takes a fantastical approach to represent the ground reality.

There are many parallels in the personal relationships in these films:

1. **Abandonment by father:** Due to son's homosexuality
2. **Mothers:** Trying to be supportive and cope with their son's sexuality
3. **Supportive friends:** Pritti in Everybody's Talking About Jamie and Frankie and Max in Were the World Mine
4. **Toxic masculinity:** Dean Paxton in Everybody's Talking About Jamie and Rugby coach in Were the World Mine
5. **Idle Bystanders:** Principals in both the movies do not take any action against the discriminating teachers

Conclusion

This study contributes to the sparse literature available for these movies

I studied these films as they relate to different themes in Queer representation in media.

All the movies take different approaches to explore the issues faced by queer community and try to provide positive role models

Films like these need to be studied more as the effects it can have on changing the heteronormative culture are huge.

References

- Madžarević, G., & Soto-Sanfiel, M. T. (2018). Positive representation of gay characters in movies for reducing homophobia. *Sexuality & Culture*, 22(3), 909-930.
- Riley, S. M. (2008). *Becoming the wig: Mis/identifications and citationality in queer rock musicals* (Doctoral dissertation, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill).

Acknowledgement

A special thanks to my supervisor Dr. Adrene, committee members Dr. Ritajyoti Bandopadhyay and Dr Debdulal Saha and Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IISER Mohali.