

## **Damian Sclafani – Genre Analysis**

Step Up uses a dual focus syntax to show how music and dance can overcome cultural oppositions between hip-hop and ballet, between economic classes, and between races. The way that Step Up plays out, as identified by Altman, is a show musical sub-genre. In this film, Tyler's attempt to win over Nora, who is very focus on getting a spot at the dancing company, merges the two styles of dancing, hip-hop and traditional ballet, together. This results in a spectacular show that exemplifies how the relaxed nature of hip-hop can be mixed with the stiff ballet style of dance. However, in the male protagonist's pursuit to win over the girl, he has less agency, showing the difference in ethnicities and economic class between the two protagonists.

Step Up strongly resembles the classic Hollywood musical due to the way it presents itself as a show musical subgenre. This film lives up to being a show musical subgenre for two reasons: the setting the movie takes place and the show produced at the end. The film takes place in a local town that has an art school. The two main protagonists, Tyler and Nora, practice their dance in that art school in order to prepare for the big performance at the end of the film. Therefore, it does live up to the classic Hollywood style by checking off the big points of this subgenre type. This musical subgenre is hit due to there being two forms of dance being brought together, traditional ballet and hip-hop. This is shown to be strongly correlated to the classic Hollywood style because of how the final performance showcases how these two styles can be brought together. This is also shown throughout the film as both protagonists must alter the way they dance to flow better with the other, Tyler stiffening up while Nora loosens up. Due to the setting, the events, and the final show at the end, this film closely identifies as a show musical subgenre.

This film directly conforms with the plot syntactic arrangement since the coming together of Tyler and Nora is tied to the non-romantic goals each of these characters have. These two character's romantic goals are fairly straightforward. Tyler is trying to get with Nora and vice versa. The main point of these romantic goals is that they bring their non-romantic goals to life, which drives the plot of the film. For example, in Tyler's pursuit of winning over Nora, he must learn the traditional style of dance if he wants to help her practice for the big performance. In doing so, Tyler sees that he has potential and asks if he would be able to enroll at the art school to further enhance his potential. Tyler is then told that he needs to show that he can take this seriously if he wants to be enrolled into the school. This is the first point in the film where Tyler's non-romantic goal is revealed. This is also the first big obstacle in Tyler's non-romantic goal. By this point in the film, we know all the non-romantic goals and we can guess what the romantic goals are even though they are not directly revealed. The romantic goals become more obvious at the beginning of the film due to how classic Hollywood musicals handle that.

However, Step Up does not strongly influence these goals throughout the film. Rather, Tyler and Nora's romantic goals are what makes their non-romantic goals succeed. Whenever an obstacle appears that blocks Tyler and Nora from being with each other, their non-romantic goals suffer from that same barrier as well. For example, Tyler is only working with Nora because her previous partner can no longer do the dances required for the show. This is what starts the romantic goals of each of the protagonists. However, once the previous partner thinks he is healed and joins back up with Nora, Tyler becomes distraught and leaves in anger. This puts an obstacle between Tyler and Nora that slows down all goals. It slows the romantic goals because Tyler and Nora become distant and it slows the non-romantic goals since the protagonists are not getting good practice for the show, especially since it turns out that the original partner still can

not do the proper dances. However, this gives Tyler the chance to go back and perform with Nora at the show. With Tyler back, Nora can go through with her original plan that they planned for the show, signifying that their goals are finally getting to a steady pace again. Their goals conclude with Tyler and Nora getting together, Nora getting recognized by the company and being asked to join them, and Tyler getting accepted into the art school.

There is more to be said about the plot syntactic arrangement now that the goals are shown. For instance, the main character driving the plot is Nora. Therefore, she has the most agency throughout the entire film. The reason that this is true is because Nora's non-romantic goal is the first goal that is distinctly revealed to the audience. There are hints that Tyler likes Nora, but this is not as explicitly stated as Nora's goal is. Another huge reason why Nora has the most agency is because all the other goals surround Nora's goal of getting recognized by the dancing company. The romantic goals between the two characters function to help the non-romantic goals succeed, and Tyler's non-romantic goal comes later when he realizes that he wants to get accepted into the school. A possibility for the reason why Nora has the most agency could be because she is a higher economic class than Tyler.

Step Up plays with cultural values a lot through its characters. These two protagonists often do not parallel in aspects of their character. They differ in economic class and common setting. These differences are also reflected in their preferred style of dance. Nora's economic class is high while Tyler's is low. This is clear to the viewer from the beginning of the film. This is reflected by the people Tyler is friends with, and how Tyler and his friends are stereotyped throughout the film, and Tyler's dance style. Tyler's good friends as shown in the film are Mac and Skinny. This is to show that Tyler has the same racial stereotypes that African Americans are given normally in film. These stereotypes are shown directly in the film because it has all those

characters commit a crime when the film starts. Along with that, Tyler is often mistrusted because he “doesn’t show that he cares enough”. An example of this is when Tyler tries to get into the art school, the principle states something very similar to the previous quote. Furthermore, Tyler’s preferred dance style reflects these as well. Hip-hop in this film is seen as a looked down upon dance form, possibly due to this style being more of a newer generation style. Yet the film also describes it as being more loose than traditional ballet. The film takes on a strong sense of the classic Hollywood musical style by having the protagonist’s style of music reflect their character. Nora’s character is very different from Tyler’s. Nora is part of the high economic class, which is shown due to where she lives, to her being stereotyped as such, and to her dance style. When looking through the scenes where Nora is seen at her house, it is easy to tell that she lives more comfortably than Tyler does. Nora’s house is very big compared to Tyler’s small house, the family life at Nora’s house looked better, and Tyler makes a comment about it during the scene where he visits Nora’s house. When seeing Tyler’s point of view, his friends, Mac and Skinny, frequently mention that the people who go to the art school are all rich kids, which is a huge stereotype that is assumed by these characters. Along with all of that, Nora’s dance style resembles her character by being more on the traditional side. Her style of dance is looked up to and is classified as art, unlike Tyler’s style. Due to these comparisons, the film manages to strongly use classic Hollywood musical style by having these characters come together to create something never seen before in the eyes of the rest of the cast.

In conclusion, Step Up manages to strongly use dual focused syntax to show how music and dance can overcome the cultural oppositions. This is done through the choice of subgenre, the goals of each protagonist, and the cultural differences between Tyler and Nora.