When Fox’s “Grease: Live!” reached its celebratory conclusion on Sunday, opinions about it no doubt differed, but one thing was clear: The live-musicals-on-television trend is no longer about trying to capture the magic of being in a Broadway house, if it ever was.

The “Grease” that the [director Thomas Kail](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/24/theater/grease-live-prepares-for-the-small-screen.html) (of Broadway’s “[Hamilton](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/07/theater/review-hamilton-young-rebels-changing-history-and-theater.html?_r=0)”) served up was cinematic, impressively so, with its countless cameras, its tracking shots, its zooms, its galloping from soundstage to soundstage. Executing such a production live must have required an unbelievable amount of coordination and technical expertise. But, despite the presence of a live audience for parts of it, the experience for viewers wasn’t remotely theater. Good theater is spine-tingling; “Grease: Live!” was spectacle.

That’s not a criticism; it’s just a statement of what our expectations should be as this fad continues. Live TV versions of “Hairspray,” “The Rocky Horror Picture Show” and more are in the pipeline, and Mr. Kail’s production certainly raised the bar in terms of how much razzle-dazzle, innovation and star power these extravaganzas will need to have. If there were thoughts back in 2013 when NBC began this trend with “[The Sound of Music Live!](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/07/arts/television/carrie-underwood-stars-in-nbcs-live-sound-of-music.html)” that the point was merely to bring beloved stage music to a national audience, they’re gone now. This “Grease” was in a sense a new art form: not theater; more like “Grease” the movie, but performed live.

Some of Mr. Kail’s brainstorms worked pretty well. The show began with Jessie J doing a backstage walkabout while singing “Grease Is the Word,” an attention-getting device that was reminiscent of the opening numbers of some recent Tony Awards broadcasts. The first serious sign that this was something more than a filmed stage production, though, was when Marty (Keke Palmer, who was a treat) sang a number called “Freddy My Love” that morphed from a pajama party into a lavish dream sequence featuring a runway promenade. It might be technically possible to execute such a thing onstage, but this was a concept that was greatly enhanced by television’s versatility.

And there were more such moments as the night went on. The crowd-pleasing “Greased Lightning” was nicely energized by multiple camera perspectives. Carly Rae Jepsen, playing Frenchy, was given a song written just for this production, and it blended into a gauzy “Beauty School Dropout” sung by Boyz II Men in a way that wouldn’t have been clumsy onstage. A drag race was made at least moderately convincing with some smoke, tricks of light and amusing camera angles.

What happens, though, when spectacle replaces intimacy is that characters and story disappear, too. Julianne Hough was impressive as Sandy, especially in the dance numbers; Aaron Tveit’s Danny was serviceable; and [Vanessa Hudgens](http://movies2.nytimes.com/person/355254/Vanessa-Anne-Hudgens?inline=nyt-per), whose [father had died](http://www.cnn.com/2016/01/31/entertainment/vanessa-hudgens-fathers-death-grease-feat/index.html) the night before, deserves some kind of prize for gutting through Rizzo. The actors did fine, but the characters and their arcs became secondary to executing the grand scheme.

This, in other words, was a show that was more about individual moments than about building a story. Perhaps that was deliberate, the assumption being that everyone already knew the story and would be more interested in microanalysis: Were the added songs any improvement over the omitted songs? (Answer: No.) Were the topical flourishes and meta-wisecracks worth the distraction? (Answer: No.) Did the choices between which lyrics in the rather raunchy original to clean up and which to leave unaltered make any sense? (Answer: No.)

Between small debating points like those and the show’s bigger distractions (the live audience being the biggest, and most ill-advised), what used to be the heart of “Grease” back when it was a rough-and-tumble newcomer in the early 1970s was nowhere to be found. Too bad, because that “Grease” — pre-John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John; pre-sanitization for use in high schools; pre-addition of Top-40-ready tunes — had a lot of merit. Sunday’s version did, too, but merit of a glossy, technically proficient kind. Theatrical magic is something entirely different.