

BAZ LUHRMANN'S
REVOLUTIONARY FILM COMES TO LIFE

TRUTH | BEAUTY | FREEDOM | LOVE

MOULIN ROUGE!

THE MUSICAL!



DEEP DIVE GUIDE

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WELCOME ALL TO THE WORLD OF



This Deep Dive brings you into the world and behind the scenes of *Moulin Rouge! The Musical*, based on the 2001 film, “Moulin Rouge!” directed by Baz Luhrmann and co-written by Craig Pearce. The musical, like the film, is set in Paris, France, at the turn of the 20th century during the Belle Epoque era (1871 – 1914). It is a celebration of truth, beauty, freedom, and love amidst the glamorous, garish, and gaudy underworld of the Moulin Rouge, Paris’s infamous Bohemian nightclub.

Jump into this world at any point in the deep dive and explore. We hope you enjoy immersing yourself in the world itself as well as all the artistry it took to bring it to the stage.

Jump [here](#) to share your own visions of this world, where it exists today, what music speaks to you about truth, beauty, freedom, and love — and more.

THE STORY

Set in Paris, 1899, a world of indulgent beauty and unparalleled extravagance, of bohemians and aristocrats, of boulevardiers and reprobates, *Moulin Rouge! The Musical* is the story of a lovesick American writer, Christian, and Satine, the dazzling star of the Moulin Rouge nightclub. When their lives collide at the Moulin Rouge, they fall hopelessly in love, only to be thwarted by the nightclub’s host and impresario, Harold Zidler, and The Duke of Monroth, the wealthy and entitled patron of the club who thinks he can buy anything he wants, including Satine. Together with his Bohemian friends — the brilliant and starving artist Toulouse-Lautrec, and the greatest tango dancer in all of Paris, Santiago — Christian stages a musical spectacular in an attempt to save the Moulin Rouge and win the heart of Satine. *Moulin Rouge! The Musical* is a celebration of Truth, Beauty, Freedom, and — above all — Love!

“MOULIN ROUGE! THE MUSICAL HOLDS NOTHING BACK.

Its characters put everything on the line for love, its director and choreographer keep the stage filled with energetic movement, and its designers turn up the color and glamour to the max. Plus, you'll hear an eclectic catalogue of pop music that will have you all but singing along the entire time.”

NEW YORK THEATRE GUIDE



SCAN TO WATCH



A NOTE TO EDUCATORS

This deep dive is designed to bring audiences of any age further into the world of *Moulin Rouge! The Musical*, both from history and as brought vividly to life through film and theater productions. We hope the materials, videos, images, stories, and insights of the artists and others connected to the production bring you and your students further into this world and inspire them to share their own ideas and creativity with us.



SECTION I:

TRUTH,
Beauty,
FREEDOM,
LOVE



HISTORY AS INSPIRATION



Here's how 19th-century French history
inspired *Moulin Rouge! The Musical*

Gillian Russo
London Theatre, 31 August, 2022

“Welcome to the Moulin Rouge!” That’s how cabaret owner Harold Zidler greets audiences arriving at *Moulin Rouge! The Musical* in London. And it’s potentially how the similarly named Charles Zidler also greeted patrons more than 100 years ago. Both *Moulin Rouge! The Musical*, and the 2001 Baz Luhrmann film, take their name from a real Parisian nightclub where can-can dance was born.

The main story of *Moulin Rouge! The Musical* is pure fiction: A writer and a showgirl fall into a forbidden romance that’s threatened by, among other things, a jealous Duke whose money keeps the club afloat. They also sing lots of contemporary pop songs that wouldn’t be written for another 100 years.

The early years at the Moulin Rouge established its renowned French Cabaret style: raucous, free-spirited, party-entertainment, which included the birth of the French can-can. Le Moulin Rouge was masterful at drawing in its customers with its setting and entertainment, attracting those who wanted to indulge in the club’s elaborate, thrilling, unabashed fun.

Along with its most distinguishable feature, the red windmill, in 1900, owners Oller and Zidler procured a gigantic wooden elephant and set it in the Moulin Rouge’s gardens. Adding to this dramatic piece, they built a staircase that brought patrons of the party to the beast’s belly where they were entertained in a more intimate setting.



But Luhrmann and the musical’s creators did borrow from some actual French history to recreate the world of the Moulin Rouge for the musical. There’s plenty of can-can in the show, and a grand display of glitzy sets, costumes, and music that reflects the real cultural renaissance of late 19th-century France. Learn more about the social, artistic, and even medical history that’s reflected in the spectacular spectacular.

TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY PARIS

The decade leading up to 1900 are known as the “fin de siècle” (literally translating to “end of the century”). These years fall smack in the middle of France’s Belle Époque (“Beautiful Epoch”), which stretched from the 1870s to the outbreak of World War I in 1914.

Those years were marked by prosperity: Lots of industrial, technological, scientific, and economic progress was made, and culture and the arts especially flourished. The year 1889 alone saw the creation of two Parisian landmarks: the Eiffel Tower and the Moulin Rouge, together representing a spirit of cultural progress and hope for Paris.

Ironically, though, the “spirit” of the fin de siècle, as history remembers it now, is marked by cynicism and boredom. A lot of people back then didn’t see the era’s new cultural advances as good; they saw them as signs of overindulgence that would lead to degeneracy. *Moulin Rouge! The Musical* captures the era in a much more positive light, remembering the fin de siècle as a time of “truth, beauty, freedom, and love” for those who chose to enjoy it.

“THE MALADY OF THE CENTURY”

On the flip side of the wonders of the fin de siècle was the mal du siècle — the malady of the century, the then-common name for tuberculosis. And you might be surprised how often this disease shows up in musicals. Tuberculosis has been around since ancient times, but it reached epidemic status in Europe in the 19th century, just before the events of *Moulin Rouge! The Musical*. It was more commonly known as consumption back then and became known as the “disease of artists” because poets would romanticize the pale and melancholy look of people, women especially, with the disease. Consumption became associated with purity, and wealthy women would pale their faces to look like they had it.

All this seems especially unthinkable to us now, having gone through a pandemic. But we can still see references to it in some modern musicals. In Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables* novel, Fantine dies from consumption, and her death is associated with ultimate purity and peace. This was replicated in the musical. Something similar happens in *Moulin Rouge! The Musical*, but we won’t spoil the plot.

THE MOULIN ROUGE CLUB

Moulin Rouge! The Musical (and the movie) takes plenty of license with its depiction of the titular club — all the events that take place in the story are fictional, and they definitely wouldn’t have been singing Elton

John’s “Your Song” there at the turn of the 20th century. But we wouldn’t have the movie or musical at all if the club wasn’t so famous in its own right.

The real Moulin Rouge opened in 1889, and the name literally translates to “red windmill,” a nod to the iconic red windmill on its roof that’s been replicated for the movie and musical. The giant elephant statue in the Moulin Rouge! adaptations is also in the real club’s garden.

People of all backgrounds mingled at the Moulin Rouge — the surrounding Montmartre district was populated with fashionable yet middle-class bohemians, but the very rich would also come there to see, essentially, how the other half lived. The place became famous as the birthplace of can-can dancing (more on that below) and still operates today, hosting dance revues for tourists. In 2019, the Moulin Rouge celebrated its 130th anniversary.

BECAUSE YOU CAN-CAN-CAN

You can-can do the can-can — if you have a lot of stamina! The French dance style is said to have originated in the 1800s at the actual Moulin Rouge nightclub, and though its signature high kicks certainly look fun, they’re physically demanding to perform.

But back when the can-can first came onto the dance scene, plenty of people didn’t find it fun or respectable, no matter how strong those dancers were. Those high kicks were deliberately revealing as a way of challenging the restrictive social norms placed on women at the time. Naturally, Victorian elites found the dance improper, so they coined it “can-can” after a French slang word for gossip or scandal.

Ironically, though, the can-can originated out of the quadrille, a perfectly proper dance performed by couples at balls. That dance also includes high-energy kicks, but the difference was that ladies at balls wore full-coverage undergarments beneath their ruffled skirts. At the Moulin Rouge, they did not. But nonetheless, once the Moulin Rouge popularized the dance, cabarets popped up all over Paris in the late 1800s and cemented the can-can as an international phenomenon that drew in tons of audiences.

HISTORICAL CHARACTERS

Some of the characters are loosely based on people from the real Moulin Rouge’s history. A man named Charles Zidler was one of the club’s co-founders (alongside Joseph Oller), and that’s where Harold Zidler, the club owner in the *Moulin Rouge!* musical and movie, got his name.

There’s also Toulouse-Lautrec, who in the play is one of the bohemian artists that Christian meets upon his arrival to Paris, and who helps him co-write a musical to be performed at the club. In real life, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec was an artist who created multiple Moulin Rouge-related works of art. Besides his promotional posters for the club, his most famous artwork is *At the Moulin Rouge*, a painting of patrons at the club’s cabaret tables that now hangs in the Art Institute of Chicago.

THE BOHEMIAN LIFESTYLE

In the mid-19th century, shortly before the events of *Moulin Rouge! The Musical*, the French coined the term “Bohemian” as we know it today. The term is derived from Bohemia, a region in modern-day Czechia from where the Romani people were mistakenly thought to have traveled to France.

The Romani people were outsiders in French society, though it didn’t bother them. Adherents to the Bohemian lifestyle were also outsiders — people from all walks of life who enjoyed the cultural progress of the era and didn’t live a traditional “proper” lifestyle. These perceived similarities between the groups are how the term “Bohemian” came to be associated with the writers, artists, and musicians like those in *Moulin Rouge! The Musical* — including the writer Christian, the main character. Besides focusing on unconventional artistic, literary, and spiritual pursuits, Bohemians often also held unpopular political, social, and spiritual

beliefs. They usually didn’t settle down in any one place, and many practiced voluntary poverty and lived with few possessions. In contrast, there was also a small class of Bohemians, known in French as the haute bohème, who held Bohemian beliefs and occupations but were wealthier. *Moulin Rouge! The Musical* best sums up what they all had in common, though — an appreciation for truth, beauty, freedom, and love.



AS DEFINED BY THE MERRIAM-WEBSTER DICTIONARY

BOHEMIAN noun	BOHEMIANISM noun
bo·he·mi·an \ bō-ˈhē-mē-ən \	bo·he·mi·an·ism \ bō-ˈhē-mē-ə-,ni-zəm
A person (e.g., writer or artist) living an unconventional life usually in a colony with others.	The unconventional way of life adopted by Bohemians.

FAMOUS BOHEMIANS & THE MONTMARTRE

“The art and the Bohemian lifestyle have always been akin. Fully immersed in creativity, famous bohemian artists defined art as their religion and saw themselves as non-conformists opposed to the conventions of bourgeois society — drifters, visionaries, or madmen possessed by inspiration.”

Martinique, E. (April 24, 2016). “Famous Artists of the 20th Century Who Knew How To Live.” Widewalls. Retrieved from <https://www.widewalls.ch/famous-artists-bohemians/>. Accessed 08 Oct. 2019.

Paris’ vivid, colorful, and legendary Montmartre district, the birthplace of The Moulin Rouge, was a social and artistic hub for Bohemians to socially gather in some of the city’s seedier spots such as salons, cafés, dance halls, galleries, and bars. Montmartre gave inspiration to artists like Picasso, Zola, and Renoir, who lived and worked there. Today, the Montmartre continues to retain some of its original spirit and ‘joie de vivre’ with its vibrant cafes, world-renowned restaurants, and lively entertainment venues.

The following are some of the French artists of the era who lived the Bohemian lifestyle, and whose eccentric unconventionality became synonymous with their famous careers:



PAINTER, PABLO PICASSO (1881 – 1973)

A Spanish painter, sculptor, printmaker, ceramicist, and and stage designer, Pablo Picasso is one of the greatest and most influential artists of the 20th century. Both Picasso and Georges Braque have been credited with the creation and development of Cubism. In 1899, Picasso fell in with a crowd of artists and intellectuals in Barcelona at the famous tavern and brothel, El Quatre Gats (“The Four Cats”). His real bohemian life began as a teenager (circa. 1900) in Montmartre, the rustic quarter of Paris where many artisans, factory workers, tradesmen, petty criminals, performers, and courtesans communed. Inspired by the anarchists and radicals he met from the café culture, Picasso made a pivotal change in his work by letting go of his training in the classical methods and adopting a lifelong process of innovation and experimentation with his art.



ACTRESS, SARAH BERNHARDT (1844 – 1923)

A most beloved actress who gained great popularity and success during Paris’s Belle Epoque era [1871 – 1914], Sarah Bernhardt became known as “The Divine Sarah,” a nickname expressing her fans’ admiration. She starred in some of the earliest films ever produced, which garnered her great attention as she introduced the world to the grandeur of theatrical arts. She established her own travel company and traveled widely. She became well-known internationally as a famous star and idol. Bernhardt’s successful career and influence helped pave the paths of many professional actresses after her. Her contribution to the performing arts is forever lasting.



ARTIST/WRITER, FRANCIS PICABIA (1879 – 1953)

A French painter, illustrator, designer, writer, and editor, Picabia was deeply involved with the art movements of Cubism, Dadaism, and Surrealism. In the late teens and early 1920s, he became a leading figure of the Dada movement, where he produced fun-filled works with double meanings, hidden messages, and cryptic puzzles. After studying at the École des Arts Décoratifs (1895 – 1897), his work remained rooted, for approximately six years, in the impressionist tradition. 1909 marked his departure from impressionism to a Cubist style, and, with fellow artist Marcel Duchamp, in 1911, he helped establish the Section d’Or, a group of Cubist artists. Picabia went on to combine the Cubist style with its more lyrical variation known as Orphism, which portrayed collections of tightly mounted, metallic-like abstract shapes. As Picabia moved away from Cubism to Orphism, his colors and shapes became softer.

THE COST OF THE BOHEMIAN LIFESTYLE

While throughout this theme we’ve explored the colorful, vigorous, and artistic nature of the Bohemian culture, we have not yet acknowledged that this type of lifestyle often comes at a cost. The Bohemian way of life is, by its very existence, risky. Just as the “fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars,” are consumed by the very fire that first gave them ignition, so too have many of our brightest Bohemian artists succumbed to mental and physical ailments. The well-known archetype of the “tortured artist” – or the artist who has to suffer for his/her art in order to find inspiration and creativity – exists for a reason.

Just as Satine, trapped in her gilded-elephant lair, fights consumption and Zidler struggles with money woes as the producer of Moulin Rouge, other real-life creative geniuses – such as Jackson Pollock, Goya, Sylvia Plath, Georgia O’Keefe, Kurt Cobain, Jack Kerouac, Amy Winehouse, and Vincent Van Gogh to name a few – also faced similar battles. The phrase, “turn your pain into art” is something most of us have heard before and indeed, buy into. Most people know the struggle of a self-employed actor in New York City or have heard of the crippling effects of “writer’s block.” Sacrifice is often considered a given – with the belief that only through crisis and challenge do we grow. Professor Victoria Tischler, an expert in art and health at the University of West London claims that while “creativity or creative careers do not, in themselves, cause health problems, working in a creative environment can certainly affect [one’s] health and lead to the spreading of the tortured artist ideal” (Banymadhub 2018).

With its excessive and flashy patina, the Moulin Rouge presents a pretty façade, and yet, behind the curtain, we see evidence of great strain in this environment. Eventually, the truth is revealed to us: Satine, our leading lady succumbs to illness; her lover Christian is devastated. A rich duke finds that money cannot buy him love, and he is left to stand alone. Lautrec and Santiago (our writers and creators) rely on producer Harold Zidler, and at the same time, Zidler is beholden to his primary financier, the Duke. In this way, *Moulin Rouge! The Musical* is very much a cautionary tale – yes, you “can-can-can” but at what price?



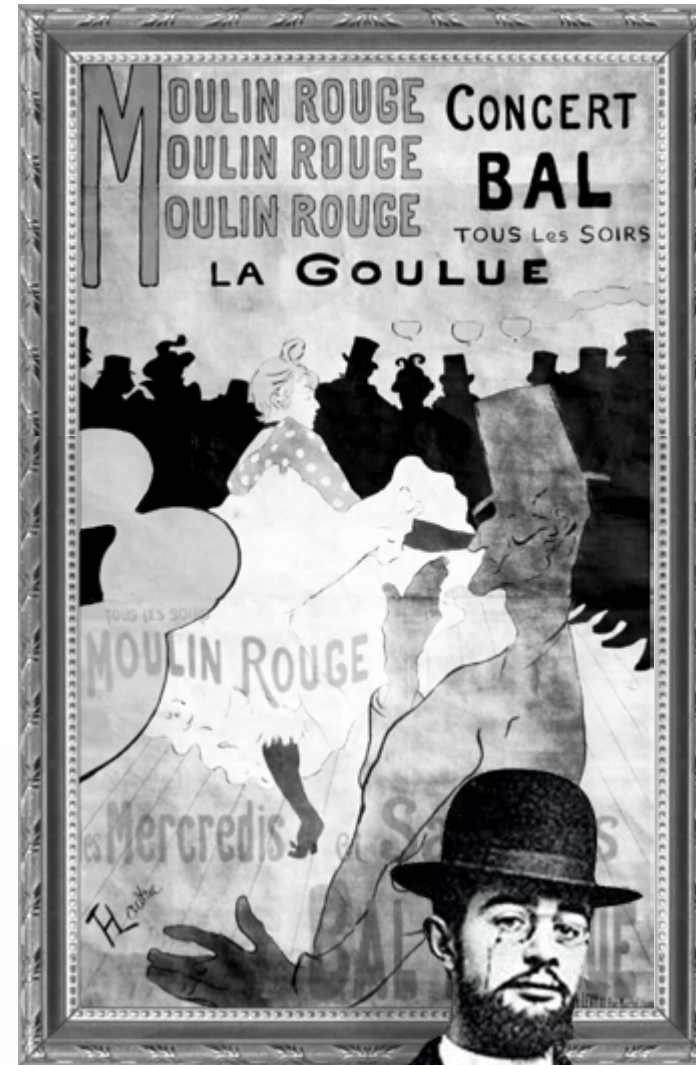
BOBBY WOOTEN III

ORIGINAL MEMBER OF
THE MOULIN ROUGE!
THE MUSICAL ORCHESTRA

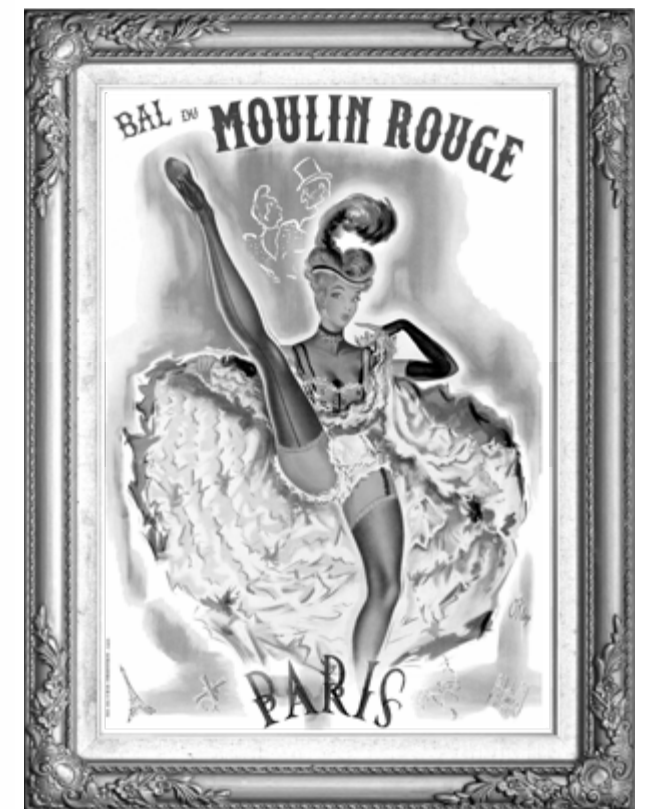


In 1951, Richard Wright wrote “Why have I decided to live beyond the shores of my native land? It is because I love freedom and there is more freedom in one square block of Paris than there is in the entire United States!” – from Bobby Wooten’s American Learn Your History on Instagram.

SCAN TO WATCH



HENRI DE TOULOUSE LAUTREC



SECTION II:

THE MAKING

OF

MOULIN ROUGE!

THE MUSICAL



“THE THING I LOVE ABOUT MOULIN ROUGE!” IS IT FEELS INHERENTLY THEATRICAL.

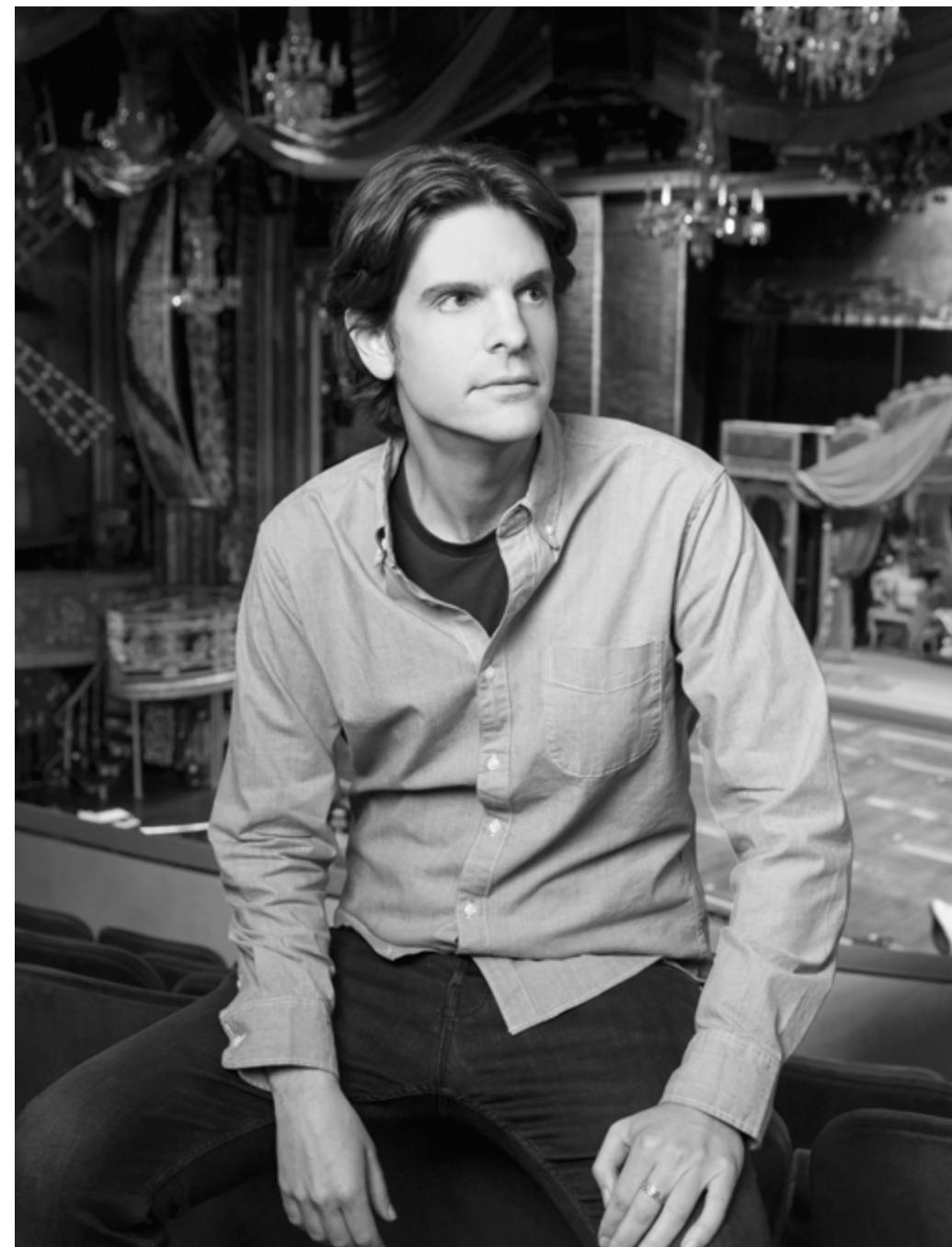
The film is one of the few films that feels actually immersive,” Timbers explains. “There’s world-creation, and one of [my] first impulses was thinking, I hope you’re transported to 1899 Paris when you step into the theatre.” And despite the film’s theatricality, that required some tweaks for the Broadway stage, which, Timbers adds, Luhrmann fully embraced. “He said, ‘I don’t want you to feel like you’re making a carbon copy of the movie.’ So we were able to look at things in brand-new ways.

ALEX TIMBERS, PLAYBILL

MAKING THE MUSICAL WITH ALEX TIMBERS & SONYA TAYEH



SCAN TO WATCH



120 YEARS IN THE MAKING

Mash-up and remix are the origin story of the Broadway musical. Take 19th-century European operetta, add jazz, toss in chorus girls and clowns; you’ve got yourself a show. Next, take this newfangled vaudeville musical, add a book with tears and suspense; you’ve got Show Boat. Weave score and book more tightly; you’ve got *Oklahoma!* An ecstatic, knowing embrace of mash-up and remix are also at the heart of *Moulin Rouge! The Musical*. The hit show currently playing at the Al Hirschfeld Theatre honors and celebrates 120 years of Broadway musical storytelling and popular song. It represents the missing link from 1899 Paris to 2020 Broadway, from operetta to the mega-jukebox musical.

An absinthe-streaked love letter to Broadway, *Moulin Rouge!* is more than a stunning achievement in theatrical craft and producing muscle. It’s a piece of intensely emotional, deeply integrated musical storytelling that boldly diverges from its source to forge a visceral connection with fans hungry for mythic pop spectacle that delivers more passion, more drama, more everything.

Every season on Broadway, new musicals get sorted and shoved into boxes: The Future of Broadway. The Classic Broadway. The Commercial Hit. The Artistic Innovation. *Moulin Rouge!*, through the alchemy of diverse talents with a singular vision, explodes those boxes — it can-cans outside them and grafittis the borders with a blood-red kiss. *Moulin Rouge!* does not repurpose a catalogue from a single artist or era. One hundred and twenty years of popular song, from Offenbach to Lady Gaga: That’s the raw material the creative team has taken and mashed-up and remixed into a singular, dramatic voice, into something utterly gorgeous and new.

Moulin Rouge! began, of course, with Baz Luhrmann and Catherine Martin’s groundbreaking 2001 film. The Australian auteur had made his name with the beloved dance biopic *Strictly Ballroom* and the Shakespeare-disrupting *Romeo + Juliet*; now he planned his most ambitious cinematic statement to date. Inspired by Greek myth, Luhrmann needed to find a milieu for his romantic vision of artistic striving and doomed love, a maximalist homage to Hollywood movie musicals. He hit upon fin-de-siècle Paris, the seedy yet glamorous neighborhood of Montmartre, where artists and aristocratic patrons rubbed shoulders — among other parts.



With her encyclopedic knowledge of historical dress, architecture, and interior design, Catherine Martin helped Luhrmann (her partner in life and cinema) realize this glittering universe of Belle Époque glitter and greasepaint. When Luhrmann and co-screenwriter Craig Pearce needed a device to tear through the veil of history to convey the genius of poet Christian and his tragic beloved, Moulin Rouge star Satine, they said to hell with chronology: Elton John and a universe of rock and pop stars have written the love songs for past, present, and future.

Hyperkinetic, wildly hybrid, instantly iconic, the movie was a global hit. Its breezy, postmodern flair would be imitated for years to come. But would *Moulin Rouge!* live only on celluloid, or were other media beckoning? Everyone agreed that its mix of glamour and grit made the dance-filled backstage drama perfect for Broadway. But who would be the alchemist-magicians to adapt it? The answer would have to wait, until history was ready to roll and repeat.

Of course, everything was dependent on fearless producers who could secure the four-way underlying rights, and rights to dozens of songs that would make up the once-in-a-lifetime score. Carmen Pavlovic and business partner Gerry Ryan were up for it. The Australian-born co-founders of Global Creatures first met Luhrmann and Martin in 2009, eager to throw their hats in the ring as producers of the stage version of *Moulin Rouge!* In addition to securing the rights held by Luhrmann, it would take them nearly a decade to secure the rights to the movie (including those held by Fox, Craig Pearce and the French family who owns the actual Moulin Rouge establishment).

Equally crucial, Pavlovic assembled an international producing team that included longtime friend and collaborator Bill Damaschke, a 20-year veteran of DreamWorks Animation and founder of StoryKey Entertainment. Then there were the songs, so many songs. How to get rights to scores of high-charting tunes that would be woven into the unique songscape?

IN THE END, THE SCORE FOR
MOULIN ROUGE! WOULD ENCOMPASS

160 COMPOSERS, 70 SONGS,
AND 30 PUBLISHERS.

THERE HAS NEVER BEEN ANYTHING LIKE IT
BEFORE ON BROADWAY.

Running parallel to the painstaking, decade-long rights process was the quest to find the optimal creative team to usher *Moulin Rouge!* to the stage.

Luhrmann and Timbers happened to be at a dinner party thrown by a mutual friend. Luhrmann had seen and admired two of Timbers’ shows: *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson* and *Here Lies Love*. The two critically

acclaimed musicals were exuberant, irreverent riffs on history — the disastrous populism of America’s seventh president and the gaudy, dictatorial reign of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos of the Philippines. Both shows mashed up and remixed pop tunes and surreal, eye-popping visuals. The day after the party, Luhrmann emailed Timbers: *Want to meet and talk about Moulin Rouge?*



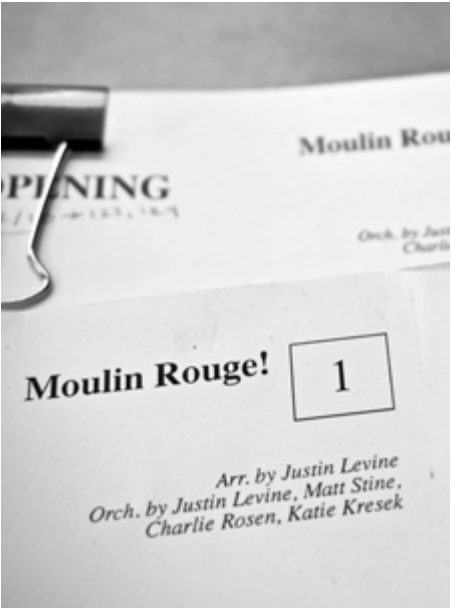
Alex Timbers, Sonya Tayeh, Justin Levine, and John Logan

Knowing that he didn’t want to direct the stage version himself, and that *Moulin Rouge!* wouldn’t succeed if it were just a slavish recreation of the movie, Luhrmann gave Timbers his blessing to re-envision the world. Timbers and the producers quickly assembled a dream team, a cadre of 21st century New Bohemians. Logan was appointed to write the book; the award-winning writer had long proved his genius at infusing distant times with contemporary relevance, from imperial Rome (*Gladiator*) to gothic Victoriana (*Penny Dreadful*). As music supervisor, Timbers needed someone to curate and weave together pop hits of the past decade and more. He chose Justin Levine, a frequent collaborator and song savant whose taste in music bridged centuries. And to get the world on its feet, bumping and grinding to “Lady Marmalade” or strutting to a Rolling Stones medley, the fearless Sonya Tayeh was picked, a newcomer to Broadway but already an experienced choreographer who had designed steps for Madonna, Kylie Minogue, and Miley Cyrus.

About his core team, director Alex Timbers notes: “John Logan is brilliant at elevating genre, at world creation. We knew we wanted to lean in to the grit and authenticity of the characters. We were immediately on the same page. Having worked with Justin before, I knew he had the ideal sensibility to blend old and new songs. I knew we needed the movement to draw equally on the worlds of musical theater and contemporary pop videos, choreography that would be surprising, sexy, witty, inventive, and that could push story as well as the boundaries of the audience’s imagination. Sonya Tayeh immediately leapt to mind. I got excited about John and Justin and Sonya working together. They all come from different worlds, but those worlds would inform different aspects of the range and patina that we wanted *Moulin Rouge!* to possess.”



Baz Luhrmann and Carmen Pavlovic



To craft the visual and sonic design of *Moulin Rouge!*, Timbers and the producers were just as meticulous, assembling a team of Broadway veterans with multiple Tony Awards among them. Derek McLane was recruited to transform the Al Hirschfeld Theatre into the Moulin Rouge, “part nightclub, part dance hall, part theatre, part dreamscape,” as the script calls for. Costume designer Catherine Zuber poured the gorgeous cast into a series of bespoke, epoch-hopping costumes, mixing Parisian silhouettes, contemporary fashion, and a discreet dash of BDSM. For lighting, Justin Townsend came aboard to carve zones and moods out of the immersive environment, plunging us into a tantalizing and arousing spectrum of reds, purples and blues. One cannot underestimate the importance of sound design balancing dialogue and a score woven from dozens of different song fragments, and Peter Hylenski did heroic work, turning it into a seamless sonic whole.

None of this storytelling and design acumen would see the light of day without herculean feats of producing stamina. Every musical decision made by the core team would require hours of legal and contractual finessing, and every “no” they received from a composer or publisher would impact the direction and coherence of the piece. In terms of getting the rights, there were nail-biters, to be sure. “Every artist deal would be treated equally, and we would be genuinely prepared to find an alternative for any song,” was Pavlovic’s mantra. “This required management and the creative team to hold hands and commit to the philosophy from the outset. It put the onus back on rights holders to decide whether they joined the club,” she explains. “That was the only way we could steel ourselves for every challenge, because the years of licensing obstacles were relentless. If ultimately a rights denial came for commercial or artistic reasons, we reminded each other that it was an opportunity to find a stronger creative solution. This was a show being made for now and the ‘now’ of it gave us many thrilling choices.”

**MORE THAN JUST ANOTHER JUKEBOX
MUSICAL WITH EXCEPTIONAL STAYING POWER,
MOULIN ROUGE! IS THE MUSICAL
WE MUST HAVE NOW
BECAUSE IT’S WOVEN INTO
OUR CULTURAL DNA.
WE SEE ITS ARCHETYPES AND BLOOD-RED
SYMBOLISM IN OUR DREAMS.**

Rewind to 19th-century Paris, to the iconic structure that became a famed place of erotic liberation and new forms of entertainment. “Moulin Rouge” means “Red Windmill.”

Think of a windmill. Wind turns the blades, which spin and grind. A common sight in the countryside that looks surreal against a cityscape.

Its blades, always turning, symbolize revolution and progress, but also remind us that existence is circular. We live, we love, we die. Repeat.

Then there’s red. The color of blood, of life and death. The heat in your cheeks when your lover draws near. The muscle that keeps the beat in your chest as you kiss. Champagne hits your blood and makes you dance. A disease travels in the blood. Red lips, red curtains, red spots on a white handkerchief. Life, love, and the shadow of death are locked in a dance.

Moulin Rouge! the film prophesied the world that *Moulin Rouge!* the Broadway musical now inhabits: A decentralized, democratized world of artists and lovers who all belong to the same club, even as old power structures are falling apart. Everything is up for grabs, to be mixed and matched and mashed-up how we please: The music we stream, the clothes we wear, the people we love, and the identity we cultivate, all make us members. As Pavlovic says, “It felt less like we were creating a show and more like we were creating a movement.”

It’s a movement that spills beyond the theater and the city. In nearly every corner of the culture and politics, barriers are crashing down. High and low. Old Guard and Disruptor. Critic and Influencer. Artist and Amateur. Male and Female. These false dichotomies are vanishing fast. We live in a new age of open, participatory, peer-driven “new power.” In 1899 Paris or 2020 New York City, traditional authority is giving way to online crowdsourcing, radical transparency, and fan enthusiasm. The future belongs to Airbnb and Black Lives Matter, to SoundCloud and social media.

Behind the scenes and center stage, mash-up and remix are the *raison d’être* of *Moulin Rouge! The Musical*: age-old theatrical tradition and operatic storylines amplified over state-of-the-art sound technique; the can-can blended seamlessly into a fierce twerk line. Belle Époque costumes glitter under concert-like lighting. Dizzying, wraparound sets immerse you in a world that is simultaneously foreign and just around the corner.

MOULIN ROUGE! THE MUSICAL

EMBRACES

THE PAST AND PRESENT OF THE BROADWAY MUSICAL,
WHILE POINTING TOWARD THE FUTURE.

“TRUTH! BEAUTY! FREEDOM! LOVE!” — AS THE BOHEMIAN RALLYING
CRY GOES. WE REALLY CAN HAVE IT ALL.

David Cote is an arts reporter, playwright, and opera librettist based in New York City.

MAKING THE MUSICAL

WITH JOHN LOGAN
& JUSTIN LEVINE



Listen to the creative team describe how they translated the world of the film to the world of Broadway and how musical mashups translated its cinematic language to the stage.



ORCHESTRATING “BAD ROMANCE”

WITH JUSTIN LEVINE,
MATT STINE, KATIE KRESEK
& CHARLIE ROSEN



SCAN TO WATCH



“EACH CORE CREATIVE TEAM MEMBER’S
APPROACH TO STORYTELLING...
REVEALS HOW DEEPLY
COLLABORATIVE
THE PROCESS WAS.”

DAVID COTE





ANATOMY OF THE WORLD: SET DESIGN

From the beginning, Alex and I wanted to transform the interior of the theater into our own version of the Moulin Rouge. I began by amassing huge amounts of research: period photos of Montmartre, the Moulin Rouge itself, Parisian courtesans' apartments. The walls of the theater are draped in no fewer than nine different types of red fabric, each its own hue and pattern. And the audience is also confronted with a slowly whirling windmill and watchful, old elephant (who presumably has seen his share of scandalous behavior over the years). The heart-shaped portals you see upon entering are loosely inspired by Baz Luhrmann's film, and I worked hard to create a structure both densely patterned and lacy so that you see through one set of patterns into another. Because they play such an important role onstage, I aimed to maximize the detail and delicacy of these, creating countless samples before we settled on the final design.





ANATOMY OF THE WORLD: COSTUME DESIGN

There's a plethora of photographs, paintings, illustrations, and literature on the Belle Époque, and I plunged into research. Since the music is contemporary, the challenge is to introduce a modern interpretation into the design. The choreography is high-energy and contains incredible movement, requiring costumes that are not restrictive. All of these elements went into the mix. Alex Timbers kept us on track by also insisting that the design should occur now and in the past simultaneously. I sketched each costume, some many times, to arrive at the final design. We sample fabrics from many vendors to find the right choice for each detail. Many costumes are hand-painted, embroidered, and dyed to create the desired effect. We have multiple fittings with each actor to ensure that the costumes fit properly and enable movement.







ANATOMY OF THE WORLD: LIGHTING DESIGN

I had a vision that we're inside of a spinning crystal chandelier, full and ornate. I've tucked tiny, moving lights all around the theater to allow the entire stage and house to animate and sparkle. Every reliable surface holds a light bulb that can pulse and animate. This complex show is created like a Lautrec painting. I work in solid, rich colors and vibrant, kinetic strokes, and then go in and layer and create depth and detail. My hope is to create the same quality of the movie — of being on a ride with the camera being pulled and pushed into and out of the scenes with sensitivity, wonder, and joy. I'm interested in work that doesn't simply hide the lights but incorporates them into the set design. Derek McLane's work can immerse us in a period, but it is the juxtaposition of the set and costumes against the lighting and music that makes the mash-up of *Moulin Rouge! The Musical*. We combine images that shouldn't work together but have a deeper truth, a deeper beauty, when placed next to one another.





ANATOMY OF THE WORLD: SOUND DESIGN

As Harold Zidler says, “The Moulin Rouge is a state of mind. It is that part of your soul which throbs and pulses.” In creating the sound, I wanted to build on this — to grow the aural atmosphere into an experience. From the very first bass notes and finger snaps, we should understand the flavor and attitude of the evening ahead. Creating a sonic connection between the performers (cast and band) is the foundation of how we make music, but also key to how we as an audience experience it. Ultimately, it’s my responsibility to shape and sculpt the inputs from the cast, band, and sound effects to weave a sonic tapestry. To move all that energy, we need speakers. Concealed in and around the set are some 200 various-sized speakers. Some are flown in, some are built into the stage; there are even small speakers hidden within the table lampshades of the front seating area.



ANATOMY OF A SCENE

The opening of Act II, “Backstage Romance,” comes at a key point in the story of *Moulin Rouge!* — overlapping threads of desire, intrigue, and creative tension must be expressed in just a few minutes. Each core creative team member’s approach to storytelling — director Alex Timbers, choreographer Sonya Tayeh, book writer John Logan, and music supervisor and arranger Justin Levine — reveals how deeply collaborative the process was. No element was created in isolation. Here, they recall how they built the scene up, piece by piece, weaving together Lady Gaga’s “Bad Romance” and other songs in one explosive, ecstatic whole.

ALEX TIMBERS: “Backstage Romance” has two functions: First, it’s a high-octane amuse-bouche to draw the audience back into the world of the show after intermission. We took inspiration from the Act II opener of *Kiss Me, Kate*, “Too Darn Hot.” We wanted to set something backstage at the theater with a couple of company members, and then build and build until you get the full ensemble onstage and the number skyrockets through the roof.

SONYA TAYEH: It’s one of my favorite moments in the show. I wanted it to be an intense, highly physical showstopper.

JOHN LOGAN: A lot of the bones of the show came together in the sort of the classic weekend. It sounds apocryphal, but it’s completely true. I came to New York and we holed up in a Times Square hotel for the weekend. Alex and I had been working on story ideas for a few months and I came in with notecards saying: Here’s this scene, here are the characters. And we laid all those note cards out and I presented the story. Then we began to talk about music.

JUSTIN LEVINE: The scene is a meditation on bad love.

SONYA: There’s a secret affair between Christian and Satine, and they’re also in rehearsal building the show. Which is also about a secret love affair. You see Christian and Satine have a secret moment behind the dressing room. You see the garment racks, and the Duke is there, and you can feel the tension brewing. Also, there’s an affair going on with Nini and Santiago, and they thrive on sensuality and tension.

ALEX: This is the first time we’re seeing the backstage show-within-a-show rehearsals. We can tell immediately the cast is rehearsing in the empty theater we saw in Act I, with the typical Moulin Rouge scenery presumably flown into the air. And we wanted to break the fourth wall by having the actors showing up to rehearsal, as one might come to an onstage rehearsal in real life, some coming from the dressing room tower and entering onstage, others coming from behind audience and up the aisles of the theater.

JOHN: Justin came in with an electric piano. He came with of a lot of song ideas. I had song ideas. Alex had song ideas. Many of them fell out, some stayed right from the beginning. The idea of “Bad Romance” as the second-act opener was there on the very first weekend.

JUSTIN: Lady Gaga’s “Bad Romance” was a song that, when Alex first reached out to me, was probably one of the first ones I thought of, because it’s so catchy.

SONYA: You see Santiago leading the rehearsal and he has so much passion and desire for this piece to work. Inside of that, Christian and Satine perform a section about the danger behind the affair. They’re

performing their reality inside of it.

ALEX: Sonya’s very generous in the preproduction process. For a year and a half, we got together in dance studios saying, “Okay, we’re going to focus this week on ‘Chandelier.’” And we would talk a lot about it beforehand, talk about Derek’s design, and the ground plan that we were working off of, and then Sonya would put together ideas and videotape it. And I’d get invited in, and we’d just keep talking and refining.

JUSTIN: Wearing many hats on the show comes with advantages. When I am working with Sonya and the company on a dance number, I’m able to look at her work through the scope of dance arranging as well as score arrangement. So, if I’m inspired by something she’s doing with the dancers I can test out ideas in real time. Often, I’d be sitting at the piano during her preproduction and so I could literally build sections in the room on her work.

ALEX: This is the first time in the show that we are basically on an empty stage (Act I has a lot of scenery!). There’s something pure and refreshing about that, and also an exciting visual tension to have one man in a chair, in profile, in the middle of this cavernous stage.

SONYA: We pushed the highly physical movement and shifts in the music — like from “Tainted Love” to “Seven Nation Army” — to express sexual tension, secrets brewing, reckless love, and desire. We all collaborated on heat rising throughout the piece so that by the end the audience could be blanketed with that explosive tension.

JUSTIN: Since we’re creating a meditation on the pain and peril of love, I was building in other songs, in addition to “Bad Romance.” I brought in “Tainted Love” and “Sweet Dreams,” to name two. But during a particularly intense section I kept hearing the iconic guitar lick from “Seven Nation Army” by The White Stripes. So, the next time Sonya ran the section I just began playing it over the dance. The whole room lit up and we knew we were onto something.



SECTION III:

YOUR
MOULIN ROUGE!
THE MUSICAL



GET INTO THE *MOULIN ROUGE!* STATE OF MIND.



Create your own (Spotify or other) *Moulin Rouge! The Musical* playlist telling the same story using your own musical choices. Strut your stuff with the DREAM, MOVE, DRESS, & WRITE challenges. Read one of the “tales as old as time” on the next page for more ill-fated love stories. And show us your work by tagging @MoulinRougeBway on Instagram and TikTok!

SCAN TO WATCH



DREAM

like Baz Luhrmann and Alex Timbers.
If you could pick any movie to turn into a stage musical, what would you pick? Why? What music would you use? Film a musical scene and song and share it with us. you never know what might happen. Remember TikTok Ratatouille?

Read: How the Ratatouille Musical Went From TikTok Sensation to All-Star Broadway Production

MOVE

like The Bohemians — what would you select as the theme song for your musical?

TIKTOK & INSTAGRAM CHALLENGE



DRESS

like The Bohemians — then and/or now. Post your designs.

WRITE

about Truth, Beauty, Freedom, Love. Like Luhrmann and Pearce, you can use the work of other artists to inspire your own original stories. French artist Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec painted scenes he observed as a visitor to the Moulin Rouge cabaret in the late 1800s. Share an image by one of your favorite artists and the title or opening lines of the story it inspires.

MORE TALES OF TRUTH, BEAUTY, FREEDOM & LOVE

Read about these other ill-fated love stories throughout history
that have influenced *Moulin Rouge! The Musical*.

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

“Orpheus and Eurydice” is a Greek myth first documented by Virgil in 29 BC and later adapted by Ovid as a part of his narrative poem *Metamorphoses*. While there are many versions of the myth, the general story tells the tale of young Orpheus, who is blessed by the gods with an incredible musical talent. Orpheus falls in love with the beautiful Eurydice, and they live together happily for a short time before she dies tragically just after their wedding day. Orpheus, so taken with his grief at the loss of his wife, travels to the underworld, where he uses his musical talent to convince the lord of the underworld, Hades, to allow him the chance to bring Eurydice back with him to the world of the living. Hades grants Orpheus permission on the one condition that Orpheus was to never look back at Eurydice while leading her out of the underworld. In the end, Orpheus fails at this task: losing his faith just before reaching the exit, he turns back only to see Eurydice’s shadow carried away to be forever trapped among the dead.

At first, it may be unclear how this myth from ancient Greece connects to the story of *Moulin Rouge!* set in new Bohemian Paris, France. However, the connection becomes clearer when you consider the tragic love story of Christian and Satine. Screenwriter Craig Pearce explains the analogy in this way: “The Moulin Rouge becomes a symbol for the Underworld at large. Satine getting out of the Moulin Rouge becomes symbolic of her getting out of the Underworld one day. And Christian, when he comes into the Underworld, and they fall in love, he tries to help her achieve her dreams and get her out” (Muir 2005). Writer and Director Baz Luhrmann, however, was less concerned about the connection with the story of “Orpheus and Eurydice” and more focused on the structure of the “Orphean Journey” which he describes as, “the transition of youthful idealism to when you realize that there are things bigger than you – people die, some relationships cannot be – and you are destroyed by that. The scars of that experience and that loss allow you to grow internally and spiritually, and that’s the adult journey” (Luhrmann 2001). In this way you see Christian’s story as a “coming of age” journey – moving from the hyper-idealistic fantasies of youth to a more mature understanding of the world and the values he holds as an artist. It is a tragic love story to be sure, but in this case, Christian can grow from the pain of this experience and fulfill Satine’s final request that he share their story through his art.

LA BOHÈME

La Bohème is an opera by Italian composer Giacomo Puccini that premiered in 1896. The opera is based on a novel by Louis-Henri Murger titled *Scenes of Bohemian Life*; however, while Murger’s novel portrays a series of unrelated sketches, Puccini’s opera focuses on the doomed love story of Rodolfo and Mimi. As is the case in *Moulin Rouge! The Musical*, *La Bohème* centers around a community of artists living the Bohemian lifestyle in Paris, France. In both cases, the main character is a writer who befriends a group of eccentric artists. In *La Bohème* these artists are Rodolfo’s roommates: Schaunard (a musician), Colline (a philosopher), and Marcello (a painter). Rodolfo falls in love with Mimi, a seamstress, and while this may seem a far cry from *Moulin Rouge! The Musical*’s love interest – the courtesan, Satine – the reference to satin fabric in her name could be considered a possible allusion to Mimi’s position as a seamstress. In Act 1 of *La Bohème*, we further see the connection to *Moulin Rouge!* when Mimi faints, which is echoed in the introduction to the character of Satine during her performance at the Moulin Rouge. Similar to Satine and Christian’s relationship in *Moulin*



Rouge! The Musical, Rodolfo and Mimi’s love story is fraught with conflict. Rodolfo and Mimi suffer while living together in poverty, and Mimi’s illness worsens to the point where Rodolfo feels he must leave her to give Mimi that chance at a better life. Mimi seeks out the company of a wealthy gentleman, but he too eventually leaves her, and her illness worsens. She returns to find Rodolfo, only to die tragically in his arms shortly after they are reunited.

While it is not a direct adaptation of Puccini’s opera, *Moulin Rouge!* draws inspiration from *La Bohème* in the use of its setting, characters, and themes. Luhrmann was particularly attracted to *La Bohème*’s Bohemian setting and its ideals of truth, beauty, freedom, and love – as is often noted in the musical. However, Luhrmann decided to alter that setting so that, “it became not the idealistic bohemianism of 1830, but the commercialized bohemia of 1890/1900. This is a great reflection on us at this time, a time of incredible technological change, a time when the world is moving forwards and backwards (Luhrmann 2001). By translating the story of *La Bohème* to a later time period, Luhrmann was able to reimagine the story and draw upon its themes and characters without replicating it directly.

CAMILLE

Camille is the common English title for the French novel *La Dame aux Camélias* (literally translated “The Lady with the Camellias”), which was written by Alexandre Dumas fils in 1848. The novel was the inspiration for Giuseppe Verdi’s Italian opera *La Traviata* and has been adapted countless times for stage and screen. The connection to the plot of *Moulin Rouge!* is recognizable in that the novel centers on a tragic love story involving a beautiful young courtesan who is dying of consumption in Paris in the mid-18th century. In *Camille*, Armand falls in love with the courtesan Marguerite and convinces her to run away with him and leave her life as a courtesan behind. However, Armand’s father subsequently persuades Marguerite to leave Armand in an attempt to save his son’s reputation. In the end, Marguerite dies alone, with Armand still believing that she had left him for another man. As with *La Bohème*, *Camille* does not directly account for the plot of *Moulin Rouge!*; however, it is clearly represented through the use of numerous characters, events, and themes, which were borrowed or adapted by Luhrmann and Pearce in their creation of a new and original story.

THE MOULIN ROUGE

In addition to these literal sources, one of the most important inspirations for *Moulin Rouge!* came from the historical setting and the real-life people who inhabited the infamous Parisian cabaret. The original Moulin Rouge was co-founded in 1889 by Charles Zidler and Joseph Oller, who nicknamed their establishment Le Premier Palais des Femmes (the first Palace of Women). It was host to lavish stage shows featuring singers, dancers, and variety performers and catered to both the wealthy bourgeois and poor bohemian artists alike. The Moulin Rouge is known as the birthplace of the French can-can, a raucous, rhythmic dance considered scandalous in its day due to the suggestive, and often revealing, way the dancers kicked their legs up in the air. Also known for its architectural wonder, the Moulin Rouge is easily recognized by the iconic red windmill, which stood on its roof, and for which the establishment was named. It was one of the first buildings in Paris to be electrified, and both the windmill and the building’s marquee were filled with dazzling electric lights. To add to the eclectic and opulent decor, Zidler and



Oller purchased a giant stucco elephant from the Parisian Universal Fair, which they placed in the garden and in which they housed an opium den used to entertain men with private dances. The original Moulin Rouge burned down in 1915, but the cabaret was fully rebuilt six years later, reopening in 1921. Today it is still operating as a cabaret and hosts a variety of performers providing nightly entertainment to visitors from around the world. Its history has inspired numerous paintings, novels, songs, and films, including *Moulin Rouge! The Musical*. The Moulin Rouge was immortalized by the works of the French artist Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, who was a frequent visitor to the establishment in the late 1800s. Both Toulouse-Lautrec and Zidler appear as characters in *Moulin Rouge!* and were inspirations for the story created by Pearce and Luhrmann. Its history has inspired numerous novels, films, and stage productions, including *Moulin Rouge! The Musical*.



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