

A look inside Broadway's most exciting musical numbers



This image released by Disney Theatrical Productions shows the cast during the "Prince Ali," number in the musical, "Aladdin," in New York. — AP photos

Even in a show with plenty of magic, a special sort of it happens right after intermission at "Aladdin" on Broadway. No sooner have you settled back into your seat than a revolving door of what seems like hundreds of dancers performs the song "Prince Ali" at a hyper-caffeinated pace. They. Never. Stop. Coming. The dancers wear brilliant sequined costumes, brandishing everything from swords and banners to feather fans and parasols. They spin like dervishes and bang drums and leap on

wooden boxes. It's perhaps the most exciting 31/2 minutes on Broadway. It's also one of the most complicated musical numbers to create - some 71 looks created by only 24 actors in 47 quick changes, some lasting as little as 10 seconds. "It's really organized chaos," said stage manager Holly Coombs. What looks like a flowing, never-ending parade is actually a tightly controlled precision dance. It's so elaborate that it required the creation of a flowchart. "I have to say, it



This image released by Disney Theatricals shows Brandt Martinez from the musical, "Aladdin."

probably is the most complicated number I have ever dealt with," said costume designer Gregg Barnes, a Tony winner in 2012 for "Follies" and for "The Drowsy Chaperone" in 2006. "It's epic in a very short amount of time."

Rip their pants

Barnes and director and choreographer Casey Nicholaw sat down and worked out how they could give the illusion of dozens of performers announcing the arrival of Ali, a parade led by Tony Award winner James Monroe Iglehart, the genie who makes his own onstage quick change. Once Barnes and his team got an idea of what was being asked, they had to

match the clothes with the function of the dance. It wasn't easy, especially during one proposed move where four male dancers sit down on the floor and scoot backward. "I thought, 'Oh my god. They're going to rip their pants off right there in front of everybody. Believe me, this has happened,'" said Barnes, laughing. "So part of it then is figuring out, 'What can I make that can rip off instantly unseen by the audience but will be strong enough to be able to sit on the floor and scoot backwards?'"

One way Barnes created the feeling that the parade is never-ending was by constantly changing the color of the costumes, hoping to evoke the Silk Road energy of cultures colliding.

So "Prince Ali" begins with a gentle, Cotton Club-feel. Iglehart wears a zoot suit and the look has a turquoise-and-pink palate. Then come oranges and yellows, then deep reds, and finally white and purple. (At one point the flowing costumes even line up with the lyrics, which note "Purple peacocks, he's got 53.") As dancers continuously melt offstage, a team of 15 dressers and a hair person are backstage to help them with their next outfits. Many dancers are wearing several costumes under their top one to help in the process, like Russian nesting dolls.

Wardrobe malfunction

"We had to figure out what could the actor, while they're running, actually begin to take off and which part did they need assistance with. That came into the planning as well," said Barnes. A peek at the backstage choreography reveals dancers rushing in coordinated patterns to makeshift stations, where they wriggle out of one costume, slip into the next and are handed their next prop. Some continue to sing. It's like a NASCAR pit crew when a car comes into pit lane.

The creative team has even prepared for any potential wardrobe malfunction. In case too much gets accidentally yanked off backstage, the female dancers wear sequined bodices, while the men wear special gold underwear. The overall effect of the song is stunning, part of the reason "Aladdin" finished 2015 as the third highest-grossing show of the year. But Barnes said all the work behind "Prince Ali" may actually be too good. "Casey at one point said, 'It kills me that I don't think anybody knows what we're doing. I just think they think we have 100 people every night,'" he said. — AP



This 2013 photo provided by Disney Theatrical Productions shows Adam Jacobs as Aladdin in the new musical, "Aladdin," with music by Alan Menken, lyrics by Howard Ashman and Tim Rice, book and additional lyrics by Chad Beguelin at the Ed Mirvish Theatre in Toronto.

Review: Fox shows it can do musicals with ambitious 'Grease'

The chills were indeed multiplyin' during the "Grease: Live!" telecast on Sunday, a show that survived early rain, some tricky costume changes, a mortifying loss of audio and a cast member's heartbreak. With this hectic, ambitious and hormonal "Grease," Fox proved it could up the ante in the new mini-industry of musicals on TV, an industry so far controlled by NBC, with its "The Sound of Music Live!" "Peter Pan Live!" and "The Wiz Live." Fox intriguingly



This image released by Fox, Sam Clark and Vanessa Hudgens appear during a performance of "Grease: Live." — AP photos

didn't hide what it was doing. Jessie J opened the show singing "Grease" while cameras followed her touring the extensive backstage. There were clusters of real people in the audience in some scenes. And Mario Lopez played a sort of running anchor, showing the cast breaking character as they rushed about after their scenes ended and leapt into golf carts to go to the next. We could see the sausage being made, whereas NBC had always tried to hide it.

The risks became clear when a moment - less than a minute - of the audio during "Born to Hand Jive" dropped out. But that was the only big glitch during a three-hour show partially



This image released by Fox shows, from left, Carly Rae Jepsen, Julianne Hough, Vanessa Hudgens, Kether Donohue and Keke Palmer during a rehearsal for, 'Grease: Live.'



This image released by Fox, Juliane Hough and Aaron Tveit appear during a performance of "Grease: Live."

performed outdoors that even shrugged off rain showers. Like its recent predecessors, Fox leaned on a lot of Broadway DNA during its visit to Rydell High. "Grease: Live" was assuredly directed by Thomas Kail ("Hamilton"), with music supervision by Tom Kitt ("Next to Normal"), sets by David Korins ("Hamilton") and costume design by William Ivey Long ("Cabaret"), who must have maxed out his budget on leather jackets.

Resume booster

The show was based on the original 1971 musical "Grease," by Jim Jacobs and Warren Casey, with some songs absorbed by the 1978 film version starring John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John. Broadway writers Robert Cary and Jonathan Tolins adapted it for live TV, salting in sly jokes about the era and the actors. "Grease: Live!" a Paramount Television production, was captured by 44 cameras and performed on two massive Warner Bros. soundstages over 20 acres in Burbank, California. It took advantage of its size, with lots of big sets, full-sized cars and more complex camera angles than its predecessors. And unlike "The Wiz," it represented a turn

away from high-tech tricks and back to basic stage fundamentals.

"Dancing With the Stars" veteran Julianne Hough was a nifty Sandy, holding her own in the singing and acting department while clearly nailing the cheerleading demands and even doing well with the tricky "Hopelessly Devoted to You." A charming and generously coiffed Aaron Tveit as Danny Zuko made a great case to America to be listed among its top leading men, though he was sometimes prone to making Travolta faces. The broadcast also will be a resume booster for Jordan Fisher, a suave and beautifully voiced Doody.

Graduate school

Carly Rae Jepsen was an assured Frenchy, even if the new song she was given, "All I Need Is an Angel," seemed out of place and bland. Keke Palmer was sultry as the diva Marty. But real credit goes to Vanessa Hudgens, who was an electric, complex Rizzo. The actress lost her father to cancer on the eve of the broadcast and dedicated it to his memory. Great touches included Palmer, in a dream sequence, going from a bedroom to a full-scale USO concert while signing "Freddie, My Love" in a slinky red gown, Boys II Men stepping in for Frankie Avalon to deliver a soulful "Beauty School Dropout" and a high-energy, correctly testosterone-heavy "Greased Lightnin'." A racially integrated cast made 1959 look that much better, even if the original material didn't do much for women's liberation. Some missed opportunities included too much of the choreography and character mannerisms cribbed from the film. The drag race at the end was underwhelming, as neither car really moved. And most of the extras looked too old even for graduate school, much less high school. Fox made a nice nod to the "Grease" legacy by asking Didi Conn, who played Frenchy in the film, and Barry Pearl, who was Doody, to appear in small roles. (Travolta made his own cameo in an ad for the upcoming O.J. Simpson series.) But Fox spoiled some of that goodwill with the heavy product placement of Coke - a sponsor. Maybe a better sponsor would have been whoever made the golf carts, usually not the hip, cool transportation option. Here they were positively greased lightnin'. — AP



Nubian Culture Center in Luxor reflects deep-rooted history

The Nubian cultural center in the ancient city of Luxor conceived to preserve the cultural identity of Nubians including artifacts and drawings inspired by their environment. The center, also called "House Nubian" includes handicrafts using materials from the environment, such as reed weaving, decorative bead accessories, kilim carpets, fabric weaving, and other women's craft items of silver beads in addition to henna.

The Nubian House is considered one of the UN development projects prepared to preserve the Nubian heritage, and to turn Luxor to an open global exhibition and a cultural center. — KUNA

