

**HS: *Film and Hyperculture: Film & Sound*
SoSe 2010**

**Leitung: Prof. Dr. Christian Huck
Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel**

Corinna Lübben

Buffy The Vampire Slayer's "Once More, With Feeling"

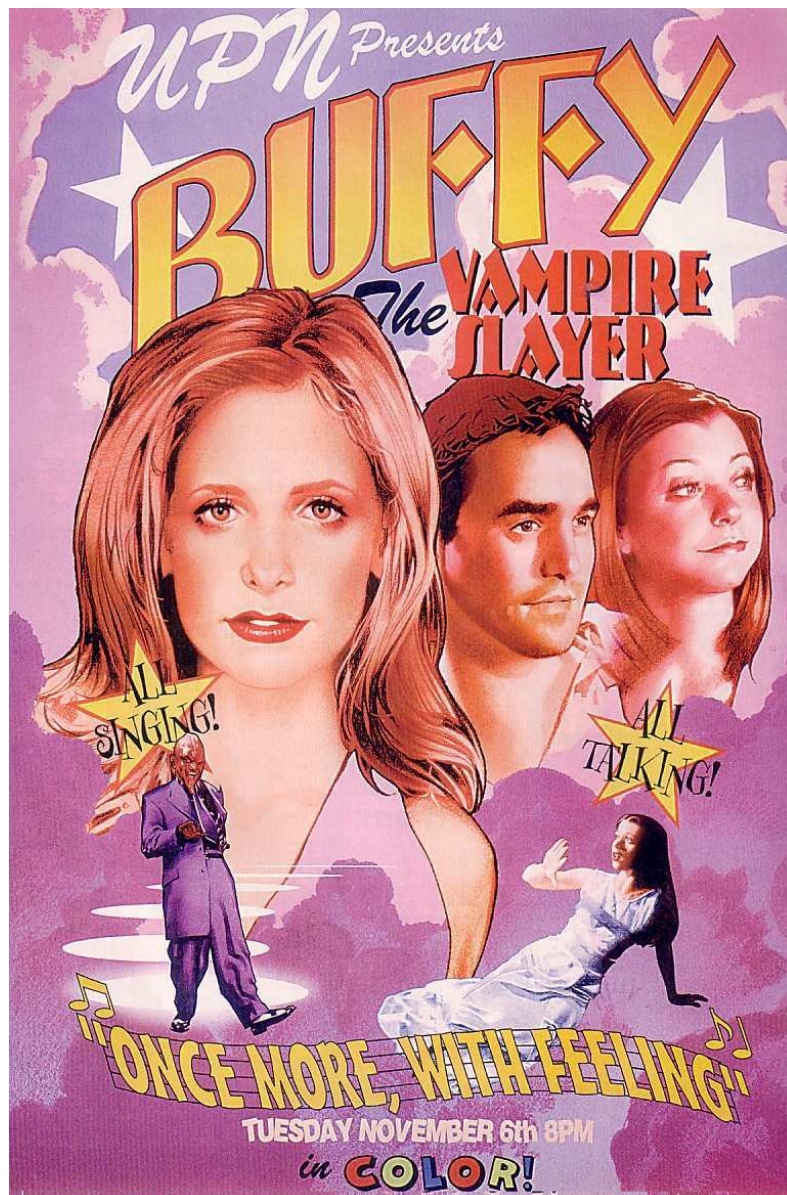


Table of Contents

<u>Chapter</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Introduction	3
2. The History of the American Musical	3
3. Buffy The Vampire Slayer: “Once More, With Feeling”	
3.1 Background information	6
3.2 Analysis of the musical	8
3.2.1 Act One	9
3.2.2 Act Two	14
3.2.3 Act Three	17
3.2.4 Act Four	20
4. Conclusion	22
5. Bibliography	23

1.0 Introduction

This paper is about the musical episode “Once More, With Feeling” of the television show “Buffy The Vampire Slayer” in the context of the course “Film and Hyperculture: Film & Sound”. In the first part I will quickly examine the history of the American musical, especially the development of the musical films in order for the reader to understand the references in the main part.. This section will also discuss the question what literary scholars define as a musical film and what the conventions of a classical Hollywood musical according to Jane Feuer are.

Then I will give an overview of the show “Buffy The Vampire Slayer”. In a short introduction I want to explain the events that have happened prior to the episode, to underline the relationship of the show to music and what its creator Joss Whedon motivated to write such an extraordinary episode of television. I will study the various numbers with regard to their content and structure, as well as the utopian elements and representational and non-representational signs according to Richard Dyer. I also want to try to answer the following questions: When do the characters start singing and why? What does this mean to the overall story? The aim is to find out if this musical episode fulfills the conventions of a classical musical and how the utopian elements are used to create a division between the “real world” and the world of the musical numbers. I have divided the analysis of the musical into four parts, drawing on the original acts of the episode. The main part will be supported by the results compiled in “*Music, Sound, and Silence in Buffy the Vampire Slayer*” by Paul Attinello, Janet K. Halfyard and Vanessa Knights as well as Joss Whedon’s audio commentary for the episode.

2.0 The History of the American (Film) Musical

The musical has its roots in Europe but only in the US it developed into an art form of its own where it was shaped by the cultural, social and political circumstances and the traditions of the immigrants. Musicals are about entertainment, meaning they are in a way about themselves, they aim to please the audience. The history of the American musical can be traced back to the 19th century when the play “The Black Crook” (1866) by Charles M. Barras premiered. This play combined “melodrama, ballet dancer, and songs” (Hischak

2008: xi), a combination that was new to the American stages back then. This new form of art was gaining interest and audiences quickly and it used elements from the traditional theater, melodrama, burlesque, opera, vaudeville and ballet. The first Broadway theater opened in 1893 in New York City; nowadays the Broadway district runs from 42nd to 53rd Street and from 6th to 8th Avenue. Other important theaters, where musicals are produced and shown, are the West End in London and the theaters in Las Vegas as well as the Off-Broadway and Off-Off-Broadway locations in New York City.

That the musical has always been a genre that was subject to change, shows the following short history of it: In 1911 the musicals were influenced by the Jazz and Dance-Craze-Wave. For Jane Feuer the musical epitomizes the golden age of Hollywood's studio era in the popular imagination (cf. Feuer 1993: ix). This golden era ran from 1927 to the mid-50s. In 1927 the musical medium was no longer only confined to the stage when the first talkie and musical film was released: "The Jazz Singer" with Al Jolson presented Hollywood with a niche to be filled, movies with and about music. Movies were easier to afford by the broad crowd, and as a consequence stage musicals were massively reproduced on the screen. The years 1929 to 1933 were marked by a period of experimentation where the conventions were established (cf. Feuer 1993: 90). During that time the first real film musical "Broadway Musical" was released which was an immense success. The year of the Great Depression, 1933, marked the beginning of the socially critical musicals such as "Of Thee I Sing" and "Gold Diggers", followed by the patriotic musicals as "Oklahoma!" during the Second World War. By the end of the war the stage musical flourished with sensations like "Annie Get Your Gun" and "Kiss Me Kate". In the 1950s the still famous musicals "The Music Man", "The King and I", "My Fair Lady" and "West Side Story" premiered on stage and on screen the highly self-reflexive "Singin' in the Rain", which parodied the technical developments such as dubbing, was shown. The era was shaped by the legendary performances of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers who introduced a new style of dance and the element of comedy to the film musical. The most renowned film musicals of the 1960s were "Mary Poppins", "West Side Story" and "The Sound of Music" which were celebrated at the Academy Awards. In that decade also a lot of Rock'n'Roll movies were produced with Elvis Presley as their star. This type of musical film is viewed critically by cultural studies scholars, for example by Graham Wood who classifies these "biopics" (cf. Everett

& Laird eds. 2008: 306) as a sub genre to the film musical because they are only quasi-biographical. Rick Altman agrees with Wood's point of view, adding that those movies only have a musical plot (cf. Altman 1987: 92) but do not contain real musical numbers. In the 1970s the time of the Hollywood musicals was nearing its end and the classical musical was frowned upon but the genre still experienced commercial success with movies like "Grease" and "Footloose" in the 80s. Rick Altman is of the opinion that the classical musical "destroyed itself by losing its balance between narrative and music" (Altman 1987: 121). While the stage musical kept attracting people, the film musical was now a domain of the animated film company Disney which experienced a line of success with "The Little Mermaid" (1989), "The Lion King" (1994) and "Pocahontas" (1995) by employing famous singers to compose their soundtracks, for example Elton John. At the turn of the century the film musical experienced a comeback by turning original stage hits like "Chicago", "Hairspray", "Rent", "The Phantom of the Opera" and "Sweeney Todd" into movies. On the other hand new Broadway hits were made from movies like "The Lion King", "Tarzan" or "Wicked" which is based on "The Wizard of Oz". Disney opened the doors for the musical to the teenage world by producing the very successful "High School Musical" and "Camp Rock". The musical genre has altered with the culture that surrounds it and shares a melting-pot-like identity with its home country.

The new century has not only resurrected the genre, the musical also found its way into new mediums: Music videos and television. Television shows such as Xena: Warrior Princess (1998, 2000), an effort that was largely ignored by the critics (cf. Attinello 2010: 235), Ally McBeal (2000), Scrubs (2007), or South Park (2008) have produced musical episodes with varying success that are celebratory and reflective of the genre. This paper will analyze the musical episode of the show "Buffy The Vampire Slayer".

Thomas Hischak is of the opinion that the American musical is as diverse as the country itself; according to him the typical American musical does not exist (cf. Hischak 2008: xi). The subjects are as diverse as the musical styles they employ. Graham Wood discusses the question whether the film musical is a separate entity but comes to the conclusion that it is connected to the Broadway musical because of mutual roots (cf. Everett & Laird eds. 2008: 305): The advantage of the film musical is that it can be viewed over and over again and some people are more likely to watch a movie on DVD than on stage. Still, a musical only truly exists in

a live performance. A musical film deals in a significant manner with the subject of music and uses musical performances as a central part of the story by integrating the conventions of song and dance into the narrative (cf. Beaver 2009: 170). The music itself has to be an accepted element of the story by the audience. Graham Wood classifies two type of movies as film musicals: “Stage to screen transfers that recreate to a varying degree the original but still keep elements of the prior stage production on the one hand” (Everett & Laird 2008 306) and movies like “Walk The Line” or “Ray” about the life of a musician. A classical musical, a musical from the era between the 1930s and 1950s, “ends at that moment of perfect equilibrium when the couple is frozen into eternal embrace” (Feuer 1993: 87), meaning it typically ends on a happy note. In a classical musical the narrative usually stops for the performances (cf. Buhler et al 2010: 182). Further conventions of the classical musical will be referred to in the main part of the paper.

3.0 Buffy The Vampire Slayer: “Once More, With Feeling”

3.1 Background information

The television hit show “Buffy The Vampire Slayer” was created by Joss Whedon at the end of the 1980s. The movie was released in 1992 and four years later Whedon was approached to turn the movie into a television show. The show revolves around a teenage girl, Buffy Summers, whose destiny as the slayer is to fight the evil forces in the world such as demons and vampires in her hometown Sunnydale. She is supported by her friends Willow, a witch, and Xander. The slayer has a mentor, called a watcher, that helps her research and train. This role is filled by the Brit Giles who becomes a father figure for Buffy. Later in the show the group, nicknamed The Scoobies, is joined by the respective partners of the lead characters, Tara and Anya, an ex-demon, and the vampire Spike who is feeling an unrequited love for Buffy. At the end of season five Buffy dies saving her sister Dawn and the world from the evil god Glory, only to be resurrected by her friends at the beginning of season six.

As the seventh episode of the season, the musical “Once More, With Feeling” is a key moment in the show because the secrets the characters have been hiding, are

pushed out into the open at a time where the characters are at their most vulnerable and emotionally isolated (cf. Sandars & Wilcox 2010: 196). The revelation of those secrets develops the story arc of the season. Unbeknown to her friends, Buffy went to heaven after her death and was at peace. Since her return she has been lacking compassion and human emotions. Buffy's watcher Giles has realized that in order for Buffy to become independent, he has to leave her and return to his native England. Xander and Willow are dealing with relationship problems: Xander and his fiancée Anya are planning their wedding despite their differences, Willow has put a spell on her girlfriend Tara to make her forget a fight. A demon named Sweet (who remains unnamed in the episode itself) appears in town, compelling the residents to sing and dance their heart out and to reveal their uttermost secrets. The music intensifies their feelings and amplifies the fragmentation of the group.

Music has always played a big role in the show, the editors strived to choose songs by unsigned bands, music that would enhance the scenes (cf. Knights 2010: 7). Joss Whedon, a musical aficionado himself but untrained in musical composition, had wanted to write a musical episode for a long time and when he realized that the "Buffy" cast was very talented, he learned how to play the guitar and the piano to write this special event into the story arc of season six. Christophe Beck, who had already won an "Emmy" for scoring Buffy, arranged the music for this episode. It aired on November 6th, 2001 and consists of 36 minutes of singing out of a 48 minutes episode and thus runs approximately eight minutes longer than an usual episode of television; an average episode of the show was accentuated with 20 minutes of score, the only exception to this were the episodes "Hush" (season 4, episode 10), "The Body" (season 5, episode 16) and "Once More, With Feeling". The "Buffy" musical combines different performance styles: Solos, duets and ensemble numbers.

The show was widely denied success by the critics because it combined various cinematic genres such as horror, religious epic and comedy but had a solid fan base. Even "Once More, With Feeling" was only nominated in one category at the "Emmys" in 2002 ("Outstanding musical direction"). Just as the show unites different television genres, the musical episode merges diverse musical genres throughout the decades, for instance jazz, rock, power ballads and soft rock. According to Joss Whedon the episode was intended as an homage but also as a critique to the genre and its history by conflating "the utopian fantasy of the

musical with the dystopian fantasy of the Buffyverse” (Bauer 2010: 210). The attentive viewer realizes that Whedon does this, among other things, by incorporating jokes and other references to the genre. The demon Sweet refers to the musical “Band Wagon” with his line “That’s entertainment” (cf. Bauer 2010: 214) and Spike alludes to “The Music Man” (“seventy-six trombones”).

3.2 Analysis of the musical

The musical episode is set in the present day but uses “a musical construct from the past” (Donaruma 2004: 19), meaning different music genres were used, however the episode maintains the original horror genre of the show. The narrative is being advanced by using music because it is easier to convey complex events via the medium of song (cf. Sandars & Wilcox 2010: 194) and for the audience to identify with the problems of the characters. Every season of the show has a so-called “big bad” and the mission of the group is to defeat this evil. For season six real life and the responsibilities of growing up becomes the “big bad” and the characters struggle to find their place in the world. They all suffer from communication problems and this episode reveals their secrets. Cynthea Masson is of the opinion that the songs work both to represent the truth but also to conceal it (cf. Masson 2006: 3). While the characters truly mean what they sing, there is also a greater truth behind everything. This is correct, especially for Buffy, who sings about wanting to be alive when in fact she never wanted to be resurrected and longs for the peace she felt when she was dead. The truth in the songs is only the façade of the truth behind which lie other truths, truths which will come to pass in the following episodes (cf. Masson 2006: 9).

According to Richard Dyer musicals aim to entertain and entertainment entails escape on the one hand and wish-fulfillment on the other, which both point to its central thrust, namely utopianism (cf. Dyer 2002: 20). Entertainment offers the chance of escaping into another, an improved, world, an escape from our ordinary lives because utopia is the sense that things could be better. The utopian elements of a musical can be analyzed by paying attention to the representational (such as beauty and wealth) and non-representational signs (such as camerawork, melody and rhythm) as well as the conversion of social tension, inadequacy and absence into utopian solutions. The world of the inadequacy represents the “normal”

world, while the utopian world stands for the world in which the songs exist. I will analyze this conversion and the signs during the analysis of the numbers. It seems that “Buffy’s” musical plays with the idea of escape and wish-fulfillment. Sweet, the “dancing demon” (Giles in Act 1), is brought to town by an invocation to fulfill Xander’s wish for a happy ending. Though when the Scoobies realize they are in an utopian world, they want to find out what is causing the circumstances and they want to escape it. They recognize that utopia is dangerous because oblivion comes at a price, the death of the citizens who dance until they burn.

Staying true to the framework of the show a magical being is responsible for the extraordinary events in Sunnydale. This makes it easier for the audience to accept that, for this episode, a musical construct is part of the show. Since music speaks to people on a level that an ordinary narrative cannot accomplish, the songs in this musical work as a medium between the characters and the viewer. “Once More, With Feeling” implicates the audience by directly addressing it (“You can sing along”) and by referring to the “missing fourth wall” (Anya) thus breaking the illusion of it; the fourth wall in movies is the camera. The audience is performed to directly, turning the audience from a mere observer into a participant.

The “previously” segment at the beginning of the episode serves as a transition device; the audience is used to this procedure and only realizes after this segment, when a different version of the credits appears and the screen switches to wide screen, that this is a different episode than usual. The score of the credits does not suggest the horror genre, like the usual music by the band Nerf Herder does, only the pictures of the characters in the moon from the “Buffy The Vampire Slayer” logo hint at the usual credits. The images chosen for these credits portray the Scoobies smiling and happy in contrast to the action scenes of the usual credits. The nostalgic lettering and sound imply television themes from the 1950s or 1960s “I Love Lucy” which Paul Attinello interprets as being a satire of the genre (cf. Niebur 2010: 44).

3.2.1 Act One

The first number of the musical is the “Overture”, an instrumental medley of the songs of the episode to familiarize the audience with the melodies. The episode

starts out in the morning at the Summers' residence and the rooms are bathed in warm light. The characters move with the rhythm of the music while preparing for the day. The "Overture" and its long single takes serve as an introduction to the show so that the viewer can understand the relationships dynamics without having watched the show before (cf. Whedon 2002a, audio commentary). While the Scoobies are energized in their movements, Buffy remains exhausted in bed. Buffy's exhaustion is present throughout the entire episode and can be attributed to the resignation she feels. The magic store, the Magic Box, is the place where the group comes together and represents the community area of the show. Except for Buffy's exhaustion, the "Overture" contains three of Dyer's utopian solutions: Energy, community, as well as transparency (establishing of the couples by showing Xander and Anya plan their wedding). Buffy is the only one who seems already isolated from the group, underlining the beginning fragmentation of the friends. The characters are all dressed in bright colors to support the light character of the "Overture". This instrumental flows effortlessly into the next song "Going through the motions". The day turns into night and Buffy is in the graveyard, performing her duties as the slayer. This song, Buffy's first solo, is interpreted to be Buffy's "I Want"-Song. The "I-Want"-Song is an invention by Alan Menken for Disney movies who used this as an essential song composition device to introduce the protagonist's desires and wishes which themselves are the source of the narrative's trajectory (cf. Sandars & Wilcox 2010: 196). The heroine lets the audience know what is missing in her life and the closure of the film usually solves the protagonist's desires. "Going through the motions" hints at Ariel's song "Part of your world" of the 1989 movie. This can be seen as either an homage or a mockery of the Disney films since Buffy disrupts the status quo by performing with demons instead of Disney-typical characters (cf. Whedon 2002a, audio commentary). The interpretation as a mockery is also supported by the fairytale-like man that Buffy rescues but who she dismisses quickly. The lyrics are permeated with effective symbolism and Buffy's trademark puns and quips underline her movements; while Buffy sings "penetrate my heart" she stakes a vampire through the heart. The demons can hear Buffy and even partake in the number which breaks with the Disney convention. The song ends with an wide aerial shot of Buffy standing on a grave with dust settling around her head which again alludes to "Ariel". As mentioned before, Buffy's resignation is palpable throughout the episode and the season. This number underlines her exhaustion and

her yearning for change. This also reflects dreariness because Buffy is incapable of experiencing emotions fully. Buffy's solo numbers in the episode all take place during the night, which, along with the lyrics and her colorless choice of clothing, emphasizes her isolation from her friends. The slayer has lost sight of the meaning of her calling, even the demons notice that. The music though seems to give Buffy the energy to speak her fears and to try to change, however, she also realizes that "nothing here is real, nothing here is right".

The next day the group is gathered in the Magic Box which is floated with warm daylight. The contrast from night to day and from the darkness to the warm light, highlights the separation of Buffy from the group. When she is alone, she is usually outside in the dark while the group scenes take place in the Magic Box, which is, as mentioned before, the place of community in the show. Here the colors are bright and support the feeling of togetherness and happiness. Buffy brings up the subject of suddenly "bursting into song" and the Scoobies all excitedly relay their experiences from the previous day ¹; the volume of their voices is reduced in the background, the focus of the camera stays on Buffy and Giles. The characters seem just as confused as the audience as to why they are singing, making the musical more believable for the viewer; classical musicals do not attempt to do that. The group tries to find out where the music is coming from and they all state their theories in the song "I've got theory / Bunnies / If we're together". The color does not change to hint at the launch of the number; the camera only shifts from Xander to focus on Giles' profile who states his theory ("I've got a theory that it's a demon, a dancing demon") which turns out to be the truth of the problem. They state their theories sitting down at the table as they would usually do when trying to find a solution to a problem. The melody and the recitative character support this. Tara is interrupted from stating her theory by Anya who launches into the "Bunnies" interlude which reflects her dramatic character and also the pseudo dramatic property of musicals (cf. Attinello 2010: 244). The interlude is infused with heavy metal guitars and a light show, with the spot light on Anya. Bar the spotlight the Magic Box has turned dark for this part to underline the dramatic moment which does not correlate with Anya's lyrics. Her fear of bunnies has been a point of discussion throughout the show and the lyrics thus make her theory seem very unlikely and silly. The lyrics and the short

¹ A revisit to the musical in the Season 7 episode 5 "Selfless" reveals Anya's joy of becoming Xander's wife ("I'm the Mrs) and the incident that caused the "Mustard" song.

break between “Bunnies” and “If we’re together”, where the other characters stare at Anya, work as a comic relief. Anya’s melody is discordant with the current melody which might refer to her being different from the other characters, seeing as she is an ex-demon. At the end of her part, the smokes clears and daylight returns. Buffy is the only one who does not state a theory, she remains out of the frame until “If we’re together” where she offers a solution to the events: They can only defeat this new evil if they stay together. This turns out to be the answer to the problem, in the end they need to work together to defeat Sweet. Buffy’s apathy during her part is again overt. Albright states that the range of singing of the actors and their inability to always hit the right notes, only adds to the credibility of the songs and of them singing involuntarily (cf. Albright 2005: 5). The music seems to intensify the emotions of the characters but also to amplify their fragmentation (cf. Sandars & Wilcox 2010: 196). They keep eye-contact during the number but also address the camera directly. The song closes on an ironic note with the camera first on the group and then focusing on Anya.

The “recognition of musical and lyrics style [in diegetic song] (...) become an issue in the plot” (Bauer 2010: 222). The characters wonder about and refer to the genre of the musical; especially Anya is concerned with the quality of the songs (e.g. “Clearly our number is a retro pastiche that’s never going to be a breakaway pop hit.”). At the beginning of the song the posture of the characters indicate exhaustion; they sit down at the table. Buffy’s part “If we’re together” evokes the energy in the group and they all stand up and join into her song. They find the correct approach to the solution which is research and regain their energy. Buffy’s expression and the tone of her voice suggest exhaustion but she still takes part in helping out. The utopian solution to the fragmentation of the group, namely community, is also noticeable in their postures. Willow and Tara stay close to each other which also suggests the transparency of the nature of their relationship. Anya’s “Bunnies” makes the song rise in intensity in accordance to her feelings, which turn at the sight of a solution away from dreariness.

Buffy takes a look outside of the Magic Box to see if the other residents are also compelled to sing. She opens the door to a classical production number which is an ironic pastiche because the number has been kept very short and is not an important part of the musical as pastiches usually are. Producer David Fury sings a song with a dry cleaning crew who was able to clean his shirt of “Mustard”. According to Joss Whedon this bit is a “nod to the past” of the musical and is

supposed to be “silly” (Whedon 2002a, audio commentary). The center of focus are the colorful shirts that the group waves in the air while a sweeping crane shot catches their choreographed dance. This crane shot is an allusion to the 1950 (cf. Donaruma 2004: 21). The obvious joy of the community comes at a price, which the Scoobies will learn about in the second act. There are utopian elements present in this number: Intensity (the joy), abundance (David Fury is surrounded by many workers) and community. The mundane problem of cleaning a shirt of mustard is interpreted by Attinello as a mockery of the genre itself (cf. Attinello 2010: 244). Willow and Tara leave the Magic Box under the pretense of researching the matter at home. The light takes on a softer note, hinting, together with the old-fashioned long take and their dresses, at the romance of the oncoming number. The couple walks through a park and a conversation about their relationship cues the beginning of Tara’s love ballad to Willow. Once again a character’s movements emphasize the lyrics (a spot light shines on Tara’s face while she sings “now I’m bathed in light”). The location change from the park to their bedroom is done via them twirling as they dance with each other. The background harmonies from the park continue on while the camera focus on Tara lying on the bed, floating. The song is the central love song of the musical but also talks about Tara’s dark past which does not diminish the romantic content. The lyrics are supported by visual aids serving as metaphors, such as the pixie dust which represents Tara’s infatuation with Willow and the floating which is a metaphor for sexual union (cf. Bauer 2010: 217). The song is filled with sea imagery, supporting the dreamy melody. Tara intends to be metaphoric but the content also states the truth about what Willow has done to her since she has literally put a spell on Tara. Alyson Hannigan’s (Willow) reluctance to sing in the musical fits well into the storyline because Willow’s silence can be seen as an unwillingness to share her feelings. Even though Willow can hear Tara’s song, she does not seem to listen to its content and realize the truth behind it. In prior episodes Tara was seemingly only an extension of Willow but during “Once More, With Feeling” she expresses her own authority and individualism through her songs. In contrast to Xander and Anya and Buffy and Spike, Willow and Tara, as a couple, do not share a duet. This might be foreshadowing to the next episode in which the pair breaks up. The number is cut abruptly off by a cut to the Magic Box, effectively destroying the romantic mood (cf. Whedon 2002a, audio commentary). Dawn’s line “What’s gonna be wrong with that [the singing and dancing]” cues

the horror element of the show and the audience is shown what happens to the residents of Sunnydale under Sweet's spell. A man tap-dances until he spontaneously combusts and dies. The shift from the Magic Box at daylight to the streets of the night supports the horror element.

Before the song Willow talks about the beautiful weather ("Who wants to be cooped up on a day like this?"), her words hinting at the exhaustion they felt during research. The energy returns in the utopian world of song through dancing and singing. In the truth of the lyrics lies the manipulation in the relationship: Tara sings "It's magic I can tell" when she actually cannot see what is happening. While the melody suggests community and the transparency of the bond, the depth of the lyrics reveal that the utopia of this number is only superficial.

3.2.2 Act Two

The second act begins the next morning in Xander's and Anya's apartment. The shift from nighttime to daytime once again suggests that the seemingly positive numbers happen in broad daylight. The decoration of the apartment and the silk pajamas are reminiscent of the era their song is going to imitate (1930s) while the song itself represents the 1960s (swing music). Subconsciously, the characters choose the genre their song will be in themselves (cf. Sandars & Wilcox 2010: 202); it represents the way they see the world. According to this, Xander and Anya have a different ideology than the other characters on the show. They are also the only ones who share a melody, indicating that, despite their troubles, their bond is not broken yet. This might also be because, while they hear what the other is singing, they do not acknowledge it fully. Xander's talk about breakfast fades into the voice-off and the song starts out with Anya addressing the camera, relaying in a recitative way her feelings about Xander to the audience. By informing the audience intimately another classical Hollywood musical convention is fulfilled. The song alternates between harmonic ballad in a jazz influenced style and spoken rhymes with comedic banter. The pair addresses the camera throughout the number; when they look at each other it's with fake smiles on their faces to reassure each other, but the content destroys the myth. The number is a pastiche of the time of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers who "stand for a significant shift in the American song writing convention" (Sandars &

Wilcox 2010: 201) by moving effortlessly from talking to singing. Joss Whedon describes himself as a fan of Astaire and wanted to reproduce the Astaire-partnered comedy dance. The final verse of the song revolves the tension but it returns in the coda which the couple ignores by falling down onto the couch smiling. This is another moment of mimicking Astaire and Rogers while it also mirrors the final moment of “Good morning” from the musical “Singin’ in the rain” (cf. Sandars & Wilcox 2010: 204).

According to Jane Feuer classical musicals reinforce heterosexuality (cf. Feuer 1993: xii). Xander represents the stereotypical male by expressing his reluctance and uneasiness at the singing and dancing (“It was disturbing”). The imminent sanctification of their union through marriage (cf. Sandars & Wilcox 2010: 202) supports the heterosexual courtship myth. That the sanctification will never come to pass, is also hinted at in the lyrics: “There’s wedding and betrayal”. Xander will leave Anya on their wedding day as he cannot hide his fears from her any longer. Their promise to never tell negates the possibility of a happily ever after (cf. Sandars & Wilcox 2010: 202). The utopian elements are noticeable in this number: The couple is feeling the exhaustion after waking up but display their energy during the number, especially with the choreographed dance. When the melody of the song slows down and they sit down at the table, the exhaustion returns only to be turned into energy again when the melody returns to the comedic banter. The out-of-character clothes display the abundance of the number. The melody supports the alternation between dreariness and intensity: During the slower parts of the song, the voices partly take on a monotonous tone with the lyrics underlining the intensity of the feelings. Despite the unity and synchronicity in their dance and harmonic duet, the lyrics suggest this is only superficial, as it was with Willow and Tara. The couple is fragmented and not as perfectly matched as the melody implies. Their duet destroys the conventions of a classical duet because it is marked by hopelessness. The utopian world of “Once More, With Feeling” cannot be truly blissful since the musical was created by black magic and their songs are the source of the pain. Sandars and Wilcox interpret this as an inability for an utopian space to be created because it is defined by “anxiety, disunity and deception” (Sandars & Wilcox 2010: 200). This fragmentation is also illustrated when the couple walks down the street after the number with Giles in between them. The retro pastiche cliché continues on after the song when Xander and Anya meet up with Giles with a classical broom dance

number in the background, as well as the number “The Parking Ticket”, sung by Executive Producer Marti Noxon. The three though are oblivious to the swelling music around them and continue their conversation. The music playing while the street cleaners dance is an instrumental, jazz-infused version of “Where do we go from here?”. The scene was filmed in one long take to make it more credible (cf. Whedon 2002a, audio commentary).

The day turns into night again as Buffy visits Spike’s crypt to ask him for information about the events in town. Spike claims he does not know anything and that he is immune to the spell, even though the audience already knows that demons are also compelled to sing (“Going through the motions”). He expresses his annoyance at the singing (he shakes his head), emphasizing the fact that the performance is not voluntarily. The song reflects Spike’s nature: He is torn between his feelings for Buffy (reflected in the ballad part of the song) and his demonic personality (reflected in the angry rock part of the song and Spike causing a commotion on the graveyard). When he is angry, the music rises in intensity. Spike’s choice of genre of 1990s rock alludes to the fact that he idolizes Billy Idol. The lyrics are filled with anaphora (“let me rest in peace, let me get some sleep”) and ironic metaphors (“since I’m only dead to you”, seeing that he is a vampire), alluding to the fact that as a human Spike was a poet. Despite the rock quality of the song, it is the second love song of the musical, along with “Under your spell”. Both numbers are passionate solos, allowing the audience to see the inner world of the character. They also express sexuality which is usually denied in the typical narration of the show (cf. Cover 2010: 135/6), turning the audience into a voyeur. It complements “Under your spell” in the sense that Willow and Buffy are both mute during those solos; they hear the singing but Spike and Tara control the narrative which is contrary to the normal procedure of the show. The songs also display the binary oppositions between the couples: Tara sings during the day in the park and Spike sings at night in the graveyard. Spike’s crypt displays the scarcity of his life and his demeanor prior to the tune expresses his exhaustion. He tries to manipulate Buffy to make her leave but the rock number reveals the transparency of their relationship: Buffy confides in Spike but is not ready for a relationship with him. The manipulation is also clear in the lyrics as Spike means the opposite of what he sings. The intensity is reflected in the lines and his behavior. Buffy and Spike are both isolated from the group

(fragmentation) but converge during the number. As soon as it ends though, Buffy runs away.

In the next scene Dawn accidentally lets Tara know that she witnessed the fight between Willow and her about magic. Tara realizes that the herb that she found in their bed in the morning is responsible for her loss of memory. In the background a few notes of “Under your spell” play to connect the dots for the audience. With Tara in the frame dressed in bright colors the light takes on a softer glow, as soon as she leaves the light around Dawn turns darker and the camera follows Dawn’s hands to the jewelry she stole at the Magic Box in this and the past episodes. The darkness highlights Dawn’s loneliness. Dawn starts her own song in a broken voice with a longing melody about being ignored by the others (“Does anybody even care?”) when Sweet’s henchmen abduct her.

3.2.3 Act Three

The next act starts out in the Bronze, the local club and the place of the showdown of the episode. The light changes from the Summers’ residence to a lighter, more artificial atmosphere. The Bronze’s colors are kept blue in accordance to Sweet’s and Dawn’s clothes. Dawn and the henchmen, whose clothes invoke the 1950, perform a ballet dance to an instrumental number with harp, oboe and bell chimes which hint that something evil is happening; the melody is supposed to suggest a magical ambience to the audience and to imitate the work of the musician Danny Elfman who is famous for his compositions for horror films (cf. Bauer 2010: 214). The function of the song is to familiarize the audience with the Bronze as Sweet’s lair. Dawn’s and the henchmen’s movements are in accordance to the melody and can be interpreted as an “escape dance” with Dawn trying to flee from the demons and them holding her back. The song takes on a jazzy note with the infusion of blues elements, leading up to the entrance of the demon Sweet, to express a connotation of seduction (cf. Bauer 2010: 216).

“Dawn’s ballet” flows into “What you feel” which is performed by the accomplished Broadway performer Hinton Battle who portrays Sweet. The song explains how the invocation works and what the consequences of it are. Dawn wears his charm, the necklace she stole at the Magic Box earlier, making Sweet think that she summoned him and now has to become his queen. The fairytale-

theme is maintained here by Sweet magically changing his and Dawn's clothes to complement each other. Sweet's zoot suit and tap dance are reminiscent of the 1930s, the era they were created in. According to Whedon, Sweet is the "musical incarnate" (Bauer 2010: 216) and he distills the musical plague by forcing his victims to dance until the burn (cf. Bauer 2010: 214). The utopian abundance is represented in this episode by Sweet. Dawn is compelled to dance and sing with him and tells him that her sister is the slayer. Sweet sends one of his henchman to the Magic Box to inform Buffy that he has abducted her sister.

A sudden cut in the scene takes the audience back to the Magic Box where Buffy is training with Giles. She states her fear that her work out will turn into "some training montage from an 80s movie", suggesting her fear of singing because it would reveal her true feelings. The cue for this number is Buffy's utterance that she is ready to start the training with the knives. Giles' response ("You're not ready for the world outside") starts his song which articulates that he has realized that in order for Buffy to take charge of her life, he has to leave her. The acoustic guitar supports the intimacy of the situation (cf. Bauer 2010: 228). The sounds of the weapons being thrown and Buffy deflecting them become a part of the song. Buffy moves in slow-motion in order to suggest that something strange is happening and to distance her from Giles; Whedon calls this visual drama (cf. Whedon 2002a, audio commentary). The song fulfills another convention of classical musicals: Often the person that is being sung to cannot hear the singing, Buffy is oblivious to Giles' lament which is reflected in her question after the song: "Did you just say something?" As most of the other numbers, this one is also filled with irony: Giles sings that he wishes he can protect Buffy while he throws knives at her. The fragmentation in this number between Buffy and Giles is illustrated by the slow-motion which is not in accordance with the utopian aspects of Dyer. According to Dyer the number usually reflect the superficial positive aspects such as community. "Once More, With Feeling" plays with these ideals and ironizes them. Both "Standing" and "Rest in peace" express the longing the singers feel in their relationship with Buffy. The three solos of the musical all share a soliloquy-like character.

The camera shifts to Tara in the dark who is discovering that the herb is indeed responsible for her memory loss. Tara and Giles come together musically in the "Reprise" of their solos numbers; the songs come together at a moment of alike lyrics (Tara: "You made me believe" vs. Giles: "Believe me I don't want to go").

Tara moves out of the shadows and the song starts with the camera on their profiles, the same shot used for the beginning of “I’ve got a theory”. The two keep looking at Willow and Buffy who are talking to each other but once again are oblivious to the singing around them. The shots as well as the lyrics express the fragmentation in the relationships. Tara and Giles do not experience the happiness of song anymore, their lines reflect the dreariness and exhaustion as the narrative nears its climax. The utopian world is not adequate any longer. The number ends with the camera focused on Tara and Giles, standing desolate side by side, looking at Willow and Buffy. Spike appears in the Magic Box with the henchman. On Spike’s cue for the henchman to “sing” the music dramatically swells but the demon does not reply by singing his lines, he only speaks them rhythmically. This can be seen as a mockery of the dramatic properties of a classical musical. Upon hearing his reasons for looking her up, Buffy quips that it “must be Tuesday”, alluding to the fact that the show aired on Tuesdays. Buffy stands isolated from the group who stands side by side. Giles decides that the gang will not aid her in rescuing Dawn and Buffy leaves to go to the Bronze alone.

The last number of the act starts out as another solo number for Buffy but she is joined by Sweet and her friends as they prepare to join her in battle. For the first time in the musical, the group scene is in a shot surrounded by darkness. The group numbers before all took part in the well-lit Magic Box. Buffy’s part of the song can be interpreted as a second “I Want”-Song in which she once again speaks about her inability to experience empathy. Her apathy also determines her part and she is, as throughout the episode, isolated from the group². Spike follows Buffy to the Bronze as well, he is also separated from the Scoobies. All of the characters suffer from a different kind of despair and they are all drawn to the fire which symbolizes self-destruction. David Fury said about “Walk through the fire” that it is supposed to be an homage to “Tonight” of West Side Story. The soft rock number is filmed in a music video style. The shots shift between the current singers with a split screen of Sweet’s face to the one who he is sharing lines with. The last word of the song cues Buffy entrance into the Bronze and the beginning of the last act. When Buffy leaves the Magic Box exhaustion is present in the group; this changes into energy when “Walk through the fire” starts. They leap into action, it is as if the figurative fire restores their liveliness.

² I have purposefully ignored the shot that shows Buffy from above walking towards the Bronze. The picture’s graininess is not intentional at this point (cf. Whedon 2002a, audio commentary).

3.2.4 Act Four

Buffy proposes to Sweet to accompany him in Dawn's stead to his hell dimension. He is inclined to accept but curious about Buffy's motivation. His sarcastic remark "Isn't life a miraculous thing?" prompts the beginning of Buffy's last solo number. The melody seems happy on the surface but the ironic lyrics reveal Buffy's true thoughts. Whedon used visual choreography for this performance once more; Buffy sings "We open up our hearts" and opens and drops her coat accordingly. The sounds of fighting are integrated in the song and become part of the utopian world. The light around Buffy seems to grow softer as she starts singing and the camera only shifts away from her to capture the reactions of her friends and Sweet. Sweet's colors emphasize his relaxed nature, he is bathed in cool, blue colors. Buffy's emotional turmoil is reflected in the constant change of genre and of pace. It changes from a mid-tempo rock ballad to a polka to a hymn and back (cf. Bauer 2010: 227). The choreography keeps pace with the music and Buffy turns from a mid-tempo dance to a frantic dance in accordance with the melody. Tara and Anya serve as background dancers to the slayer and also supply the background harmonies. Buffy is forced to expose her secrets and the melody shifts to a slow, longing tune played on the piano. Her voice breaks and she repeats the word "heaven" dissonantly. Spike saves Buffy from dancing until she burns and joins the song and the instruments change to an acoustic guitar, perhaps as a hint to his earlier rock number "Rest in peace". Spike tells her why she has to go on living, alluding that the word "sing" in the song can easily be substituted for "live". Sweet praises her song ("a show stopping number") and demands for Dawn to accompany him. Finally Xander confesses that he has summoned the demon because he wanted them to have "a happy ending".

During this number Buffy is torn between exhaustion, real life, and energy, utopia. The chaotic melody and truthful lyrics represent her turmoil and fragmentation. Sweet vanishes with a magical effect into the air after a reprise of "What you feel". His disappearance into the air is supposed to suggest to the viewer that Sweet, as the musical incarnate, is music itself and thus all around us (cf. Whedon 2002a, audio commentary). Just as Sweet controlled the narrative of this episode, one of his lines titles the episode.

The camera moves from the group back to the stage where Dawn stands. She moves into the frame in front of the group and starts the questioning, final number

“Where do we go from here?”. The characters are standing separated from each other which serves as a contrast to their demeanor during “I’ve got a theory”. They break eye contact and despite them being together they “walk alone in fear”. Sandars and Wilcox interpret the choice of their clothes as a representation of the visible spectrum (cf. Sandars & Wilcox 2010: 206). The colors stand for their diversity and the couples are dressed in complementary colors. Buffy and Spike, on the other hand, are dressed in the same colors which hints at their imminent joining and accentuates their roles as outcasts. Their separation, as the central couple, from the group is unusual for the final number of a classical musical. This song is an homage to the musical “Rent” (Whedon 2002a, audio commentary). The visual choreography is again present when they sing about going “hand in hand” and joining hands. Since this song happens after Sweet has already left, it can be said that this is the most honest number of the musical because the Scoobies are not under a spell anymore. Everything the Scoobies sing about will occur at the end of the episode: The curtains will close on a kiss, the trumpets will cheer and “The End” will appear. The song does not reflect their triumph over Sweet even though they sing about sounding their victory cheer. Spike realizes that he has joined the singing and leaves the group to go out into the night. Buffy follows him where they reprise “Walk through the fire” and “Rest in peace” (“Coda”). They do not share a melody and stay in their own genres. This suggests that their union will only be temporary. As I mentioned before, a classical musical ends at a moment where the main couple is frozen in an eternal embrace (Feuer 1993: 87). Buffy and Spike might kiss at the end, fulfilling this convention, but the musical does not end on a happy note. The fragmentation in the group is bigger than at the beginning of the episode and they appear to be resigned. The end of the episode does not provide closure for Buffy as she still suffers from apathy but it is a turning point for her and the other characters. The consequences of the secrets revealed come to pass during the next episodes. The end credits, in an old-fashioned lettering, once again use the instrumental, jazz-infused version of “Where do we go from here?”. Attinello construes the use of various genres as a critique, commenting that it seems that even though the music has apparently changed through the eras, it is interchangeable; there is no progress, only change and the musical seems to be stagnant (cf. Attinello 2010: 245).

The music used in this episode seems to be diegetic, meaning the characters can hear it and it is a part of the drama, at the first look. The characters are aware of

their singing, even if they do not do so voluntarily. Halfyard argues against this because the characters do not choose to perform and because Sweet's spell suspends the normal rules. According to her the element of volition is just as important in the decision between diegetic and non-diegetic performance. The Scoobies are compelled to sing and thus she argues that all the numbers are non-diegetic. I think that the performances can be considered diegetic because they are a part of the world of the characters and while they might not sing voluntarily, they sing the truth of the secrets that overwhelm them.

4.0 Conclusion

In conclusion it can be said that while "Once More, With Feeling" breaks with the conventions of the classical musical, as it attempts to make the singing plausible for the audience and the narrative does not stop for the performances, it also affirms and confirms them. The narrative does not stop for the numbers because the numbers become the narrative, seeing as the dialogue turns into music. The heterosexual conventions of a musical are also broken, given that the central love song is being sung by a woman addressing a woman. It fulfills the conventions as the episode makes liberal use of musical numbers, choreographed dance and expressive costumes and scenery. The audience is intimately informed about the inner world of the characters, the audience is directly addressed and at times the character (Buffy and Willow) is oblivious that their opposite is trying to tell them something via the medium of song. The function of the songs are, for the most part, to gain insight into the inner world of the characters. They sing because they have been compelled to but also because they cannot hide their secrets any longer. All in all, the attempt of Joss Whedon to write a classical musical set in the present day was successful. The musical episode plays with the make-up of the classical musical ("The Mustard") but also pays homage to it ("Where do we go from here?"). It is a musical that stays in the classical tradition of the MGM musicals but also integrates modern, MTV-like aspects ("Rest in peace") thus using post-romantic ("Overture") and popular music. The Buffy musical uses the idea of a self-reflexive musical and the characters discuss and criticize their genre during the course of the episode.

In the classical musical the eruption into song is usually a sign of overwhelming, positive feelings but in “Buffy” the singing is the cause of a black magic and the source of the pain. The marginalized characters of the show Spike, Tara and Giles control the narrative via their solos and voice their fears. The musical numbers forcefully develop the story arc of the season with the lyrics dismantling the truths. Because each character suffers from a different dilemma, they each choose a different genre for their songs. It is difficult to apply Dyer’s conversion of social inadequacy to the utopian world to this episode. The obvious change in the use of non-representational signs support Dyer’s theory that they are more important to the utopian space. While the Magic Box represents the daytime and place of community where the group comes together and the night of the graveyard and town represent Buffy’s and Spike’s isolation at first, this changes during the episode when the group joins Buffy in the dark (“Walk through the fire”) to help her defeat Sweet. As soon as the group realizes that something odd is happening, they try to escape utopia because they realize it is not the real world. The lyrics reveal the underlying truth of the fragmentation of the group and destroy the notion of utopia being a better world.

6. Bibliography

Albright, Richard S. 2005. “[B]reakway pop hit or... book number?: “Once More, with Feeling” and Genre.” *Slayage* (17). Accessed 01.09.2010 at: www.slayageonline.com/essays/slayage17/albright.htm.

Altman, Rick. 1987. *The American Film Musical*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Attinello, Paul. 2010. “Rock, Television, Paper, Musicals, Scissors: Buffy, The Simpsons, and Parody.” In: Attinello, Paul, Janet K. Halfyard & Vanessa Knights (eds.). *Music, Sound, and Silence in Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Surrey & Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

Bauer, Amy. 2010. “Give Me Something to Sing About”: Intertextuality and the Audience in ‘Once More, With Feeling’.” In: Attinello, Paul, Janet K. Halfyard & Vanessa Knights (eds.). *Music, Sound, and Silence in Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Surrey & Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

Beaver, Frank Eugene. 2009⁴. *Dictionary of Film Terms. The Aesthetic companion to Film Art*. New York City: Peter Lang Publishing: 168-171.

Buhler, James, James Neumeier & Rob Deemer. 2010. *Hearing the Movies. Music and Sound in Film History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cover, Rob. 2010. “More Than a Watcher: Buffy Fans, Amateur Music Videos, Romantic Slash, and Intermdia.” In: Attinello, Paul, Janet K. Halfyard & Vanessa Knights (eds.). *Music, Sound, and Silence in Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Surrey & Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

Curtis, Darryl (ed.) 2002. *Buffy The Vampire Slayer. The Magazine. Issue 39*. London: Titan Publishing.

Donaruma, William. 2004. “Once More, With Feeling: The Hellmouth in Postmodern Heaven,” paper presented at the *Slayage* conference in Nashville. Accessed 01.09.2010 at www.slayageonline.com/SCBtVS_Archive/Talks/Donaruma.pdf

Dyer, Richard. 2002². *Only Entertainment*. London: Routledge.

Everett, William A. & Paul R. Laird (eds.). 2008². *The Cambridge Companion to the Musical*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Feuer, Jane. 1993². *The Hollywood Musical*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Hischak, Thomas. 2008. *The Oxford Companion to the American Musical. Theatre, Film, and Television*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Knights, Vanessa. 2010. “‘Bay City Rollers. Now That’s Music’”: Music as Cultural Code in *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*.” In: Attinello, Paul, Janet K. Halfyard & Vanessa Knights (eds.). *Music, Sound, and Silence in Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Surrey & Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

Lacey, Nick. 1998. *Image and Representation. Key Concepts in Media Studies*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Laing, Heather. 2000. “Emotion by Numbers: Music, Song and the Musical.” In: Marshall, Bill & Robynn Stilwell (eds.). *Musicals. Hollywood & Beyond*. Exeter & Portland: Intellect Books.

Masson, Cynthea. 2006. “‘What Did You Sing About?’: Acts of Questioning in ‘Once More, with Feeling’,” paper presented at the *Slayage 2* conference in Barnesville. Accessed 01.09.2010 at http://slayageonline.com/SCW_Archive/Masson.pdf

Muir, John K. “Cult TV Friday Flashback #9.” Accessed 01.09.2010 at <http://reflectionsonfilmmandtelevision.blogspot.com/2005/09/cult-tv-friday-flashback-9-buffy.html>

Niebur, Louis. 2010. “‘What’s My Melody?’ Music and the Development of Genre in *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*.” In: Attinello, Paul, Janet K. Halfyard & Vanessa Knights (eds.). *Music, Sound, and Silence in Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Surrey & Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

Sandars, Diana and Rhonda V. Wilcox. 2010. “Not ‘The Same Arrangement’: Breaking Utopian Promises in the *Buffy Musical*.” In: Attinello, Paul, Janet K. Halfyard & Vanessa Knights (eds.). *Music, Sound, and Silence in Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Surrey & Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

20th Century Fox Entertainment. 2002. *Buffy The Vampire Slayer. Once More, With Feeling* (CD & DVD).

Whedon, Joss. 2002a. *Once More, With Feeling. Episode Commentary*. Accessed 05.09.2010 at <http://stormwreath.livejournal.com/54050.html>

Whedon, Joss. 2002b. *Once More, With Feeling. Transcript*. Accessed 15.09.2010 at <http://www.twiztv.com/scripts/buffy/season6/buffy-607.htm>