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Disney Screencerts: A Video Essay

Sureshkumar P. Sekar

Abstract: *In this video essay, I establish, discuss, and illustrate different types of Disney screencerts—events where the performance of music on stage is accompanied by the projection of the associated audiovisual on screen. Focusing on the audience experience, I use concepts from intermedial and multimodal studies to illustrate the experiential difference in each of the different forms of Disney screencerts—Film-with-Live-Orchestra Concert; Film-with-Live-Theatre-and-Orchestra Concert; Excerpt/Montage-with-Live-Orchestra Concert; and Shorts-with-Live-Orchestra concert. In the 100th anniversary of Disney, the event that truly celebrated the innovative spirit of Disney was not the one literary titled "Disney 100: The Concert" but the one titled "Encanto at the Hollywood Bowl", which is a Film-with-Live-Theatre-and-Orchestra concert—a super-hybrid screencert form in which only Disney films have been presented so far.*

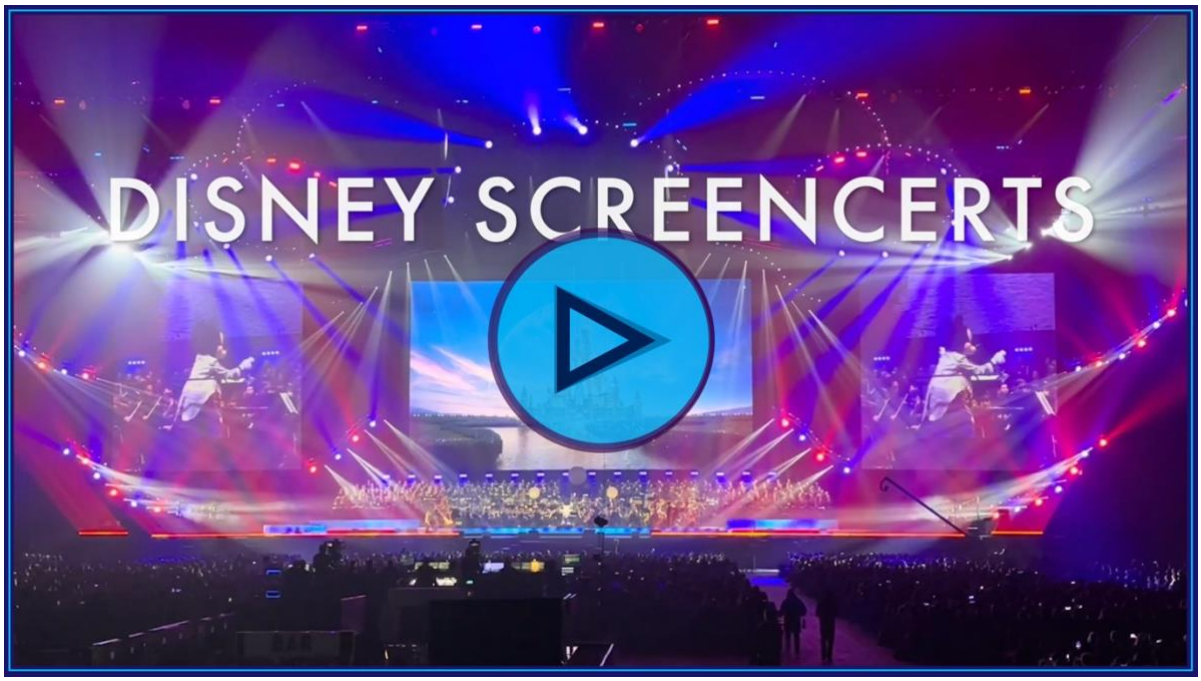

Figure 1: *Disney Screencerts* (Sureshkumar P. Sekar, 2024). Screenshot and link to video essay.

Disney 100: The Concert, the event that has been happening around the world to celebrate Disney's 100th anniversary, is in fact what I call a "screencert" (Sekar, "Film-with-Live-Orchestra Concerts"; *Liveness*). A portmanteau derived from the words "screening" and "concert", a screencert is an event where the performance of music on stage is accompanied by the projection of the associated audiovisual text on screen; music played and moving images projected have a symbiotic relationship that has already been established in an existing audiovisual media.

Screencert is one form of Disney entertainment output in the present in which the nostalgia for the past is integrated with a more distant past, that is, the sweet nostalgia for a

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film is integrated with the silent-era practice of screening films with live orchestral accompaniment. With these events, Disney is building a future based on the past through the concertisation of film screenings. Though all Disney screencerts seem similar at first glance, they offer the audiences vastly different experiences.

In this video essay, I use Lars Elleström's transmediation theory to examine the experiential differences between different types of Disney screencerts, which I identify according to the following categorisation: Film-with-Live-Orchestra Concerts, Film-with-Live-Theatre-and-Orchestra Concerts, Excerpt/Montage-with-Live-Orchestra Concerts, and Shorts-with-Live-Orchestra Concerts.

Scholars have already attempted categorising such concerts, for instance, Emilio Audissino uses the terms "multimedia concert piece", "multimedia film piece", "multimedia film", and "multimedia concert" (51), while Sarah Atkinson and Helen Kennedy use "live scored, live re-scored" (141). These categories, however, are based on the two main elements—the projected visuals and the performed score. There are also other elements that shape the aesthetic experience—the sight of a symphony orchestra, the subtitles, live dancers, choreographed lighting, audience interaction, and the size, position, and number of screens; these constituent communicative elements interact in various ways in different screencerts, creating different aesthetic experiences.

This typology does not apply only to Disney screencerts. There are several such events featuring audiovisual narratives that are not Disney's intellectual property. For example, Film-with-Live-Orchestra Concerts exist for *Harry Potter*, *Star Trek*, and *The Lord of the Rings* films, and Excerpt/Montage-with-Live-Orchestra Concerts include *Star Trek: The Ultimate Voyage* Concert, *Game of Throne*s Live Concert Experience, and Pixar in Concert.

Of the different forms of screencerts, there is one form in which only Disney films have been presented so far—Film-with-Live-Theatre-and-Orchestra Concert. Disney (and Disney-Pixar) animated films *Coco* (Lee Unkrich and Adrian Molina, 2017) and *Encanto* (Jared Bush and Byron Howard, 2021) have been presented in this format. These animated films might be adapted to stage as musical theatre in the future, as many Disney animated films have been adapted in the past; and these animated films might also be adapted into a live-action feature film in the future (as Disney has done with several live-action adaptations of the studio's most popular and beloved animated films, such as *Cinderella* (Kenneth Branagh, 2015), *Beauty and the Beast* (Bill Condon, 2017), and *Aladdin* (Guy Ritchie, 2019)). With the Film-with-Live-Theatre-and-Orchestra concert format, however, there is now a new interstitial form of adaptation. In this format, the film is partially adapted into musical theatre; while some parts of the narrative (the musical numbers) jump off the screen and on to the stage, the other parts stay on screen, and the live musicians play to support both the screen and the stage. In this video essay, I discuss the uniqueness of this screencert format.

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Sureshkumar P. Sekar is a PhD candidate from the Royal College of Music, London, investigating the experience of the audience of Film-with-Live-Orchestra concerts. His academic video essay entitled "Film-with-Live-Orchestra Concerts: A New Hope" was published in *[in]Transition* and was nominated for the *Learning on Screen* Awards 2022, polled as one of the best video essays of 2022 in BFI's *Sight and Sound* magazine, shortlisted for *Adelio Ferrero Award* 2022, and won *Andrew Goodwin Memorial Prize* 2022 (runner-up) awarded by IASPM UK/Ireland. His research interests are audiovisual culture, audience experience, and audiovisual essays.