

Rock 'n' roll romance



By [Daniel Derksen](#)

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Films like *Rock Of Ages* not only catch you by surprise (and never let go), but also totally bowl you over with their robust power, breathtaking spectacle and sensational music.

The original score is by executive music producer Adam Anders and Peer Astrom (TV's *Glee*), based on the blockbuster Broadway musical by Chris D'Arienz, who co-wrote the screenplay with Justin Theroux (*Iron Man 2*) and Allan Loeb (*Things we Lost in the Fire*).

Rock Of Ages tells the story of small-town girl Sherrie and city boy Drew, who meet on Sunset Strip while pursuing their Hollywood dreams. Their rock 'n' roll romance is told through the heart-pounding hits of Def Leppard, Foreigner, Journey, Poison, REO Speedwagon, Twisted Sister and more.





The crème of top performers

Besides its star power - and, wow, it has the crème of top performers, the A-list of the who's who - with Tom Cruise, Catherine Zeta-Jones, Alec Baldwin, Russell Brand, Paul Giamatti, and Mary J. Blige flexing their musical muscle and Hairspray director Adam Shankman displaying his visual flair. Rock Of Ages reaffirms the magic and enjoyable impact of the musical that quickly turns frowns upside down.

Julianne Hough and Diego Boneta are equally sensational as the young couple with stars in their eyes at the centre of the story; being gorgeous and talented makes these young performers lethal on the entertainment front.

It's equally refreshing to discover a new musical, one that has not been reheated, reinvented and revamped, but has unique voice that took Broadway and the West End by storm on stage and is guaranteed to blow the minds of musical fans locally on the big screen.

Everything you can ask for and more

To say it "rocks" might sound like a cliché, but is an understatement; from the fun opening sequence in the Greyhound bus (where an ordinary trip is turned into an interesting musical ensemble) to its explosive finale (a combination of all live rock concerts at stadiums and at the Queen's Palace thrown together in a blender of unashamed indulgence), Rock Of Ages has everything you can ask for in entertainment and more, much more (in fact, you actually feel like booking another seat for the next screening).

In all fairness, this review is written by someone who has been a fan of musicals since growing up in a city hall in Benoni where weddings, musicals and fanfare became the norm, but Rock Of Ages is not only a musical, it also has a great story and life force that transcends our likes and dislikes, and unites its audience in a communal spirit of total bliss.

Filled with colourful characters, humour that is funny (don't assume that all comedies are funny), and some great musical numbers that showcase Mia Michaels' astonishing choreography. Cinematographer Bojan Bazelli (Hairspray) perfectly captures the glitz and the grime of showbiz, the sets by production designer Jon Hutman (It's Complicated) are awesome and the sensual and practical costumes by designer Rita Ryack (Hairspray) will definitely impact on your own wardrobe.

Cruise, topless and tattooed

Rock Of Ages is also super-sexy: Cruise dares to parade around topless and tattooed in a bejewelled G-string, Zeta-Jones can make formal and conservative garb sizzle, and Blige turns from African Queen to the stylish Empress of a strip club.

It also has some unforgettable moments: watching Russell Brand and Alec Baldwin singing and performing a love duet is most definitely not something you will ever forget.

Rock Of Ages does not shy away from taking the musical genre to the extreme, making the most of every musical number that builds to a climax that will leave you breathless and on a high long after you have left the cinema (don't be surprised to suddenly do a few moves when you're pushing your shopping trolley!).

Perfect escapism

Musicals have the ability to turn ordinary life into an enchanting adventure. They allow for perfect escapism and, like the magic realism instilled by Bollywood, allow audiences to see life differently and realise that in every moment of the worst scenario, a great song can let the sun shine in.

We can all change our world if only we allow ourselves the freedom of expression to express the joy and sadness that make

life what it is, and allow for our own unique ability to be guided by our imagination, which knows no boundaries and cannot be imprisoned by conventional rules.

It is also highly entertaining to watch the ensemble having the time of their lives and turning it into one of the most amusing and fun-filled films of the year, one you will revisit and watch again.

If you are looking for escapism that is vibrant, colourful and offers a perfect opportunity to share with friends and loved one, make sure to see *Rock Of Ages*. It will blow you away, totally!

Rating 5/5

Behind the scenes

For Shankman, the journey began when he went to see *Rock Of Ages* on the stage. He recalled: "The audience was having the best time I'd ever seen at a show. Everybody knew the lyrics to all the songs and was out of their seats and singing along and having the time of their lives. That enthusiasm, that sheer emotion, convinced me to make the movie."

It wasn't his only reason for revisiting the era, however. "I thought it would be an interesting challenge to make a movie musical that guys would drag their girlfriends to for a change."

Said Shankman: "What's often the most difficult and compelling thing about a musical like *Rock Of Ages* is that half of a song is played as performance and the other half as dialogue or inner monologue. I think the writers did a great job of turning a terrific stage show into a real cinematic experience. I'd like to see the movie-going audiences jumping out of their seats just like the theatre audience did, and I think this story and these characters and this rockin' music, performed by our unexpected and unbelievably talented cast, just might get them on their feet."

The casting of Stacey Jaxx turned out to be somewhat serendipitous. "I was thinking to myself, 'Wouldn't it be cool if we got one of the biggest movie stars in the world to play one of the biggest rock stars in the world?'" Shankman reflected. "And, as luck would have it, I ran into Tom Cruise, told him I was directing this movie, that it was a musical, and that I was going to offer him this part. He said: 'Are you serious?'" I said that I was. Then I described Stacey to him and he laughed really hard. The next thing I knew, he was in, and I was making a musical with Tom Cruise.

To play the role, Cruise underwent a complete transformation and Shankman admired his diligence. "From the moment he signed on, Tom started training his voice with an incredible vocal coach Ron Anderson. I remember the first time we heard him sing. He's got this outrageous, four-octave range - turns out he has opera singers in his ancestry, so he's probably genetically predisposed to sing, but no one's ever asked him to before. I'm just the lucky recipient of this revelation, I suppose," he smiled.

Catherine Zeta-Jones, who, as Shankman pointed out, is the only actress in decades to win an Oscar for a performance in a movie musical, was equally thrilled to work with Michaels. "Dancers have a special language," she said "and building a close bond with someone of her calibre is so extraordinary. She's very specific in her dance moves, and when you open yourself up and let yourself into her vibe, it's almost cathartic. I enjoyed every minute working with her."

Read more at www.writingstudio.co.za/page4095.html

ABOUT DANIEL DERCKSEN

Daniel Dercksen has been a contributor for Lifestyle since 2012. As the driving force behind the successful independent training initiative The Writing Studio and a published film and theatre journalist of 40 years, teaching workshops in creative writing, playwriting and screenwriting throughout South Africa and internationally the past 22 years. Visit www.writingstudio.co.za
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