

Teen Musical Movies

Hairspray: The songs, performances, and outfits of *Hairspray* (2007) sparkle from start to finish. *Hairspray* is a musical romantic comedy based on the Broadway musical of the same name and takes place in Baltimore in 1962. It tells the story of sixteen-year-old high school student Tracy Turnblad who auditions and lands a spot in her favorite local TV dance show hosted by Corny Collins. While living her dream performing on this dance show, she contends with a rival dancer, Amber Von Tussle and overnight fame. This cheerful and campy movie captures the audience immediately, and throughout the movie exudes joy and fun while still taking time to explain the need for kindness and acceptance other others and focuses on deeper important issues of the decade like integration. *Hairspray* manages to feel deep and light at the same time and is truly a delight to experience. This movie has a runtime of 115 minutes and is rated PG.

High School Musical Franchise: *The High School Musical* Franchise (2006, 2007, 2008) follows the story of high schoolers Troy, Gabriella, Sharpay, and Ryan over the course of their Junior and Senior years and three musical romantic comedy/drama movies. Troy is a basketball star who wishes to go against the norm and audition for the school musical, Gabriella is a new and shy student also auditioning for the school musical. They face the contenders Sharpay and Ryan, who are the reigning stars of the school's musicals and try to sabotage Troy and Gabriella's chances of stealing 'their' roles in the play. Over time, the characters grow their relationships and perspectives, and find their ways through their experiences through song. Over the years, this film trilogy has developed a cult following, and only grew in viewership and popularity with each movie release. Additionally, the series branched out to include a couple of spin-offs, *Sharpay's Fabulous Adventure*, which focuses on the stories of the character Sharpay with some original cast members revisiting their roles, and *High School Musical: The Musical: The Series*, a mockumentary musical drama television series with an entirely new cast. These movies are rated PG and have run times of 98 minutes, 104 minutes, and 112 minutes, respectively.

The Lizzie McGuire Movie: *The Lizzie McGuire Movie* (2003): is an extension to the Disney television show *Lizzie McGuire*, which follows thirteen-year-old Lizzie as she navigates school, friendships, family, bullies, and relationships in her middle school years. The movie acts as a finale to the television series, showing Lizzie's and her friends' journeys through middle school graduation, and the following class trip to Rome, Italy. In Rome, Lizzie finds herself falling for an Italian singer, Paolo, who recruits Lizzie to pretend to be his singing partner, as she looks identical to her. The movie takes Lizzie through adventures with her friends and Paolo, and eventually she discovers the confidence to fulfil her passion to sing in front of others and learns

what really makes up meaningful friendships and relationships. This movie runs 94 minutes long and has a G rating.

Teen Beach Movie Franchise: *Teen Beach Movie* (2013) and *Teen Beach Movie 2* (2015) are Disney channel movies that follow the stories of high schoolers Brady and Mack. Brady and Mack are high school sweethearts who are doomed to break up when Mack's aunt makes her transfer to a different school when the summer is over. Before leaving, Mack decides to surf a big wave with Brady following, and a crash lands them on a different beach, somehow on the real-life set of their favorite movie, *Wet Side Story*. Inadvertently, their presence there alters the movie's plot and storyline. As they navigate a way to try to fix the plot and find a way to get home, they travel through the stories of the characters in the movie. Along the way, they get swept into the movie and find themselves immersed in song and dance, unable to stop on their own. They realize in their own journey with this world and each other that they are too important to each other to let separate schools separate them, so Mack decides to confront her aunt and make her case to stay at school with Brady. A silly story full of fun and songs, it's ultimately about relationships and realizing what is important to oneself. The second movie in the franchise continues the story of Mack and Brady as they navigate the challenges and changes that high school brings and how that affects their relationship. At the same time, the main characters from *Wet Side Story* end up in the modern real world, and it's up to Mack and Brady to help get them home and restore the original movie's plotline. The first movie in the series has a run time of 95 minutes and is rated TV-G, with the sequel at 104 minutes long with a rating of TV-G as well.

Camp Rock: *Camp Rock* (2008) is another Disney channel movie taking place at an expensive summer music camp. It follows the story of singer Mitchie, a shy teenager who is unable to afford this elite summer camp until her mom takes a job in the camp kitchen so Mitchie can attend for free. At the camp, Mitchie finds most of her fellow campers are very well off and/or very well connected, so she keeps her and her mom's situation a secret. Also at the camp is a famous teenage pop star, Shane, who falls infatuated with Mitchie's voice without ever knowing who it belongs to. The movie follows the stories and songs of Mitchie and her peers as Mitchie tries to fit in and win the final singing competition at the end of the summer. *Camp Rock* is about learning to stand up for yourself and others, being true to yourself and following your dreams despite obstacles and finding your own voice. With a run time of 99 minutes and no rating, this movie is a light watch for all audiences.

Descendants Franchise: The *Descendants* Franchise is a musical movie series of three fantasy movies from the Disney channel that follow the stories of teenage children of classic Disney characters as four children of the villains move from the banished villain island to the kingdom

run by the Queen Belle and King Beast. The first movie, *Descendants* (2015), shows the stories and challenges this movie incurs. Finally living a 'normal' childhood, the teenagers find themselves torn between their old and new life. The movies show how the characters grow into their own people who make their own choices, and deal with the changing and developing identities the teenagers contend with. The second movie of the franchise, *Descendants 2*, (2017) continues the musical theme, and centers on the same characters as they face a new life and new ways of living in the unknowns of the kingdom. It expands on the stories and characters of the world, introducing more from the island of the villains, and figuring out a way to trust the other children of the villains. The third and final movie, *Descendants 3*, (2019) further continues the stories of the teenagers and their lives in the kingdom, facing challenges of evil from the island and the characters' pasts. These are a fun take on the familiar, adding complexity and song to the story lines, and are appropriate for those aged eight and up. They run 112 minutes, 111 minutes, and 108 respectively.

The Cheetah Girls: *The Cheetah Girls* (2003) is Disney channel's first musical movie, setting the stage for dozens of more successful Disney channel musical movies. It takes place in Manhattan where four teenage girls in high school just hoping to win their school's talent show unexpectedly get the chance of a lifetime to sign on to a record label with their band, The Cheetah Girls. Through the growing hope of fame and success, the friends face new opportunities and challenges that threaten to tear apart the band, and more importantly, their friendship. Over the course of the movie the girls go through unique experiences to help them learn what is really important to them, not the chance of fame, but each other. This movie is ultimately a story of friendship and sisterhood, and the girls learn that through each other, they can work through anything life throws at them. *The Cheetah Girls* is rated TV-G and runs 93 minutes long.

Fame: *Fame* (1980) is the dramatic story of highschoolers auditioning and attending the High School of Performing Arts, an elite performing arts school with a demanding curriculum. The story takes place over all four years of high school, watching the characters develop their talent, themselves, and their relationships with others while navigating the challenges of high school and trying to succeed in the performing arts world after high school. With some bright and some darker plot points, we see the characters grow their talents and find great successes, while watching their challenges, struggles and failures while trying to get there. The story shows how to work hard to work towards your dreams, some dramatic moments in the characters' lives, and how to rely on friends and loved ones to help you through failures and challenges. This movie runs 133 minutes long, and is rated R, as it has some darker and more mature material that is only appropriate for older teens. It should be noted there is also a *Fame* remake (2009), that is rated PG and more appropriate for younger teens with similar, though more appropriate, story lines.

Grease: *Grease* (1978) takes place 20 years earlier in 1958 and follows the story of two high school seniors who meet at the beach over a school break in the summer before going their separate ways, and the stories and experiences of their friends they have back in their high school. When school starts, they surprisingly discover they are attending the same high school, and the movie shows the challenges of trying to find your group, yourself, and a partner, while putting all those relationships together in a way that makes sense. While this movie is somewhat problematic (very older actors playing seventeen-year-olds, less than ideal messaging, and problematic values), this movie has truly become a staple, with classic songs and characters that are remembered and repeated decades later. *Grease* is rated PG-13 and runs 110 minutes long, though this hotline suggests parental guidance, or at least some critical reflection, to talk through those problematic factors of the movie.

West Side Story: *West Side Story* (1961) is an old classic musical romantic drama based on a Broadway musical of the same name. Its story is a take on a Romeo-and-Juliet tale, with teenagers Maria and Tony from opposite gangs falling in love with each other. Throughout the movie, they contend with their friends and families who, while fighting with the opposing gang, also must be kept in the dark about their relationship. Maria begs Tony to try to end the fighting between the gangs, and while attempting to do so, a larger fight breaks out causing casualties. The rift between the gangs gets bigger, and eventually leads to more devastation for the gangs and characters involved. A classic that runs 152 minutes long, is rated PG, and is one of the first musical movies to set the stage for hundreds more to come.

Bye Bye Birdie: *Bye Bye Birdie* (1963) is another classic musical romantic movie based on a Broadway play of the same name. This light-hearted comedy takes place a bit earlier in 1958, when a rock star, Conrad Birdie, beloved by teenagers across the states is drafted to the army. This action sets into motion the storyline of the movie, where one teenager is selected to be kissed live on the Ed Sullivan show by Conrad Birdie before he departs for the army. The small local town in which this is taking place gets a boost of overnight stardom and fame, and throughout the movie we see how its citizens react to Conrad Birdie and the attention he brings with him. *Bye Bye Birdie* is a sweet snippet of time with a happy ending and delightful music to match, helping its watchers get transported back to the decade. This movie has a G rating and runs for 112 minutes.

Lemonade Mouth: *Lemonade Mouth* (2011) is a Disney channel movie based on a novel of the same name in which five high school students who meet in detention are encouraged by the music teacher to form a band after hearing them sing and play music in their detention break.

They practice throughout the movie to eventually compete in an upcoming music competition, and while learning in intricacies of being in a band, they navigate relationships, authority, and typical challenges of high school and life. Throughout their journey, they learn to stand up for themselves and their beliefs, contending with family issues and using their band and music as a support system. *Lemonade Mouth* is a light, fun take on a high school band with relatable characters, though pretty fantastical story lines. It runs 106 minutes long and is rated g.

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