

'So Long, Farewell':
The Sound of Music and the Crisis of the American Family in the 1960s

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Abstract:

The early 1960s created the brewing of social change before the explosion of the cultural revolution of the late 1960s. In this period, Hollywood released its first family movies, *Mary Poppins* in 1964 and *The Sound of Music* in 1965, meant to be enjoyed by children and parents alike. These two movies enjoyed a wealth of surprising success, sweeping the academy awards and establishing *The Sound of Music* as the top grossing film of all time, surpassing America's beloved *Gone With The Wind*. Historians and contemporaries alike have questioned and offered answers as to why two movie musicals would capture the attention of the nation with such force. This thesis seeks to argue that *Mary Poppins* and *The Sound of Music* addressed fears concerning the breakdown of family life, feminine and maternal identity, questions of child rearing and provided wholesome family entertainment that the American family was seeking, while pioneering as the first films in the family movie movement.

Introduction

For fifty years, the sounds of 'Do-Re-Mi' have filled music classrooms, living rooms, and nursery schools. Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II's *The Sound of Music* has become enshrined as a shared intergenerational experience for American families since its initial release in 1965. As the second most financially successful movie-musical of all time, surpassed only by *Grease* in 1978 *The Sound of Music* is a cultural phenomenon engrained in the cultural experience around the world, and most securely in America.¹ It represents the ideal of wholesome, family entertainment; desperately sought after,

vainly repeated, and the pinnacle of a progression represented by nearly a decade's worth of attempts in Hollywood. In answering America's call for a family movie, *The Sound of Music* had the ability to provide entertainment to both children and adults, while also speaking to relevant issues in the lives of audience members. Owing its success partially to a connection to contemporary issues, why is a movie produced in 1965, still relevant, financially successful, and culturally viable when others like it have fallen to the wayside?

Americans were certainly not strangers to musicals in the mid-twentieth century. On the contrary, the American Musical found its

¹ "The Sound of Music (1965)." Accessed October 13, 2016. <http://www.filmsite.org/soun.html>.

golden age in the 1950s.² After enjoying success on Broadway, many musicals made their way from the stage to the silver screen. Among them are *The King and I*, *Anything Goes*, *Bye, Bye Birdie*, and other works by the famous duo Rodgers and Hammerstein like *Oklahoma!*, *South Pacific*, and *Cinderella*.³ However, most, if not all, of these productions found that their success in Hollywood was short-lived, and quickly made their way back to the haven of the stage. In the 1960's, the musical film continued to gain traction with the American people with Robert Wise's *West Side Story*; which won the Academy Award for best picture in 1961 and *The Music Man*, nominated for best picture in 1962.⁴ Even these works, however popular in the early sixties, have a much stronger legacy on the stage. This progression of movie musicals continued, and finally found notable success in 1964 with the release of Disney's *Mary Poppins*. Nominated for thirteen academy awards and winning five, *Poppins* was Disney's top-grossing film to date.⁵ However, Hollywood's vision for the family musical movie was not fully realized until 1965 with the unexpected and unprecedented release of the *The Sound of Music*.

The crown jewel of Twentieth Century Fox was released gradually across America in in order to guard against a massive loss if it failed because company was nearly bankrupt. After successful pre-screenings in the Midwest and strong audience interest from word-of-mouth advertising, *The Sound of Music* was properly released in March 1965 to thrilled audiences everywhere.⁶ Its impressive popular success came when the film was against incredible odds, namely the scathing reviews of coastal, influential, film critics.⁷ To the surprise of everyone involved in the production, *The Sound of Music* created an amazing financial success, quickly rising to become the top-grossing movie of all time, surpassing the beloved American classic *Gone With the Wind* (1939) and becoming the pinnacle of not only musical films, but of Hollywood success.

The "Sound of Success" didn't stop with the initial release of the film. One incredible rerelease and many VHS and DVD silver, gold, and platinum editions later, *The Sound of Music* settled comfortably into the top five highest grossing movies of all time, and when adjusted for inflation, is thought to have grossed about two billion dollars.⁸ In addition to its monetary success, *The Sound*

² Wolf, Stacy Ellen. *A Problem Like Maria: Gender and Sexuality in the American Musical*. University of Michigan Press, 2002.

³ "The Sound of Music (1965)."

⁴ "Academy Awards® Winners (1960 - 1969)."

Accessed October 13, 2016.

<http://www.filmsite.org/oscars60.html>.

⁵"*Mary Poppins* (1964) - Box Office Mojo."

Accessed October 13, 2016.

<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=main&id=marypoppins.htm>.

⁶ Hirsch, Julia Antopol. *The Sound of Music: The Making of America's Favorite Movie*. Contemporary Books, 1993. 174.

⁷ Santopietro, Tom. *The Sound of Music Story: How a Beguiling Young Novice, a Handsome Austrian Captain, and Ten Singing von Trapp Children Inspired the Most Beloved Film of All Time*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 2015.

⁸Hirsch, Julia Antopol. *The Sound of Music: The Making of America's Favorite Movie*. Contemporary Books, 1993.

⁸ Guinness World Records Limited. *Guinness World Records 2015.*, 2014.

of Music has received incredible cultural prestige as well. Most notably, it was selected for preservation by the Library of Congress, taking its rightful place among other “culturally significant” films.⁹ Additionally, cultural icons of today have chosen to honor *The Sound of Music* as a unique and influential work through their own means. At the 87th Annual Academy Awards in 2015, world renowned singer Lady Gaga paid tribute to the phenomenon that is Julie Andrews and *The Sound of Music* with a moving compilation of the movie’s beloved songs.¹⁰ Introduced at the awards by notable actress Scarlett Johansson, it is clear that this film still holds a prestigious place in Hollywood history and a distinct position in the hearts of the American public.

After defying the odds, smashing records, and warming hearts of people across America and the entire world, it is clear that *The Sound of Music* is a unique cultural phenomenon, never before seen, and never again repeated. In the same way that other directors surely looked at Robert Wise’s film depicting a failed novice-turned-governess-turned-wife and struggled to understand its success, historians are also left asking, “Why was *The Sound of Music* so popular?”

⁹ “Complete National Film Registry Listing - National Film Preservation Board - Programs.” Web page. *Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540 USA*. Accessed October 13, 2016.

<https://www.loc.gov/programs/national-film-preservation-board/film-registry/complete-national-film-registry-listing/>.

¹⁰ An official transcript of Scarlett Johansson’s introduction could not be found, but many amateur recordings, such as this one, exist. LadyGaga4Lyf. *Lady Gaga - The Sound of Music Clips, Full Tribute with Julie Andrews [2015 Oscars]*. Accessed October

This film, having aided in the creation of the idea of the ‘family movie,’ has left a legacy on Hollywood whose effects are still presently seen. What we generally characterize as family movies are really movies for children, generally characterized by their light, oftentimes humorous themes, simple and occasionally magical plots, and age appropriate entertainment.¹¹ In the 1960s, Disney was the master of children’s movies, creating dozens of live action and animated films every year. Films for adults stood in stark contrast, characterized cerebral or mature themes and containing images, ideas, and situations that are inappropriate for children such as violence, swearing, and sexual situations. Hollywood as a whole was attempting to fill this ill-defined gap between ‘movies for children’ and ‘movies for adults’ in their film repertoire to create ‘movies for the family.’ Life Magazine reported that it was “increasingly rare [to have a] film these days a family can go see without being embarrassed” and Hollywood production studios began releasing films which over time were refined and progressed and led to the creation of the first family movies.¹²

In order to understand the reception of *The Sound of Music* it is necessary to understand the environment into which it

13, 2016.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdqYmSf6tiE>.

¹¹ For the purposes of this thesis, the term ‘family movie’ is taken to mean a film which is not only appropriate for audiences of all ages, but is marketed and entertaining to both children and adults. *The Sound of Music* is excellent example because it contains mature themes like nationalism, motherhood, romance, and the morals of war while still being appropriate for children.

¹² “A Joyous Julie and Her Sound of Music.” 52–62.

was born. It was released on the cusp of the sexual revolution which was destined to redefine, or at least question, the meaning of masculinity, femininity, love, and family life. Also, many obstacles and challenges plagued the American family and the American parent during this time. Parents began to question if they were raising their children correctly, and these fears were only compounded by a wave a literature in every magazine, newspaper, and journal imaginable.

It was under these conditions that parents began to search for goodness in wholesome family entertainment, and they turned to Hollywood to produce what they were searching for. Hollywood, however, was at a bit of a crossroads itself. Forced to change to compete with “parallel media” like television, what once worked in American movies began to fail. Hollywood was forced to attempt to create movies that were both mature and entertaining to fill the void that existed between ‘movies for adults’ and ‘movies for children.’ At this point, the movie musical began its progression to attempt to occupy this space as a film that was marketable to the entire family. Films like *The Music Man* and *West Side Story* began this trend, while *Mary Poppins* epitomized a near realization of this message, *The Sound of Music* came to fill the role as the pinnacle of family friendly entertainment.

There is no argument that *Mary Poppins* and *The Sound of Music* are culturally relevant both for the 1960s and for today. Historians have picked apart and analyzed

both films, drawing out important connections to contemporary culture that movie going audiences would certainly have connected with. In this case, to “start at the [very] beginning” means to start with Disney’s *Mary Poppins*, released in 1964. Scholars have latched on to its clear themes of gender and family. Anne McLeer identifies the changing gender roles represented in *Mary Poppins* in the characters of Mr. and Mrs. Banks. Mr. Banks represents masculinity, the patriarchal society of Victorian England, working long hours and spending time away from his children. However, her most interesting note is about Mrs. Banks. One would think that she would represent the ‘emancipated woman’ through her secret pursuits as a suffragette. However, McLeer argues that *Mary Poppins* restores Mrs. Banks to her culturally ‘appropriate’ role by bringing her back into the house and reconnecting her with her children.¹³ Instead of being a story of a progressive household, McLeer argues that *Mary Poppins* restores what was perceived as natural order.

Other historians have identified Mary’s role as a nanny as a cultural connection that children and parents alike would have identified with. During the 1960s, there was what historians describe as a “nanny craze” of sorts. This was brought on by an increase of women in the workforce and an influx of immigrants looking for work. With the rise of the middle class, many families could afford to pay for a “Guatemalan *Mary Poppins*” to look after their children.¹⁴ In opposition to this very concrete connection

¹³ McLeer, Anne. “Practical Perfection? The Nanny Negotiates Gender, Class, and Family Contradictions in 1960s Popular Culture.” *NWSA Journal* 14, no. 2 (2002): 80–101.

¹⁴ “Becoming *Mary Poppins*.” *The New Yorker*. Accessed October 13, 2016. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2005/12/19/being-mary-poppins>.

to contemporary culture, other scholars interpreted family as a metaphor to relate to contemporary social changes happening on a larger scale.¹⁵ In much the same way that some scholars identify Mrs. Banks as a character representative of larger social pressures for women, these scholars expand this lens to the entire Banks family.¹⁶

Historians have also identified many of the same themes and cultural connections from *Mary Poppins* in *The Sound of Music*. Released less than a year apart, these two movies share an audience, Academy Awards, cultural connotations, and a leading lady, Julie Andrews. A bulk of the historiography surrounding *The Sound of Music* analyzes the role that gender plays within the film. Andrews' hair is cut short, and she is removed from the grasp of a cloistered convent. In every sense, one could argue she is meant to represent the liberated woman of the 1960s. However, she also becomes a wife and a mother, adhering to 'traditional' norms of femininity. In addition to strong (and much disputed) connections to femininity, *The Sound of Music* introduces ideas about masculinity and family. Stacy Woolf argues for a reading of the work that categorizes it as a lesbian text, but most other historians have argued against or disregarded her assertions.¹⁷ However, this disagreement between historians highlights how our own experiences and identities color our

reception of certain works, just as they would have during the original release of *The Sound of Music* in 1965. Throughout this essay, I will make generalizations about Americans, American parents, and Hollywood. By taking this homogenous view, I realize that I will be unable to take a fully nuanced view of this film or give minority or non-traditional views their due credit. I seek only to use my analysis to further our historical understanding of the unprecedented success of this film and what it meant for the majority of Americans.

Scholars have broken out of traditional modes of analysis, and continue to find unique content in the themes of *The Sound of Music*. For example, Vansant identifies the film's depiction of Nazi's as unique, and argues that this tame depiction with a happy ending helps to "denazi-fy" film.¹⁸ Finally, to address the other half of the overwhelming analysis of *The Sound of Music* is to address its star, Julie Andrews. In addition to being a once in a lifetime talent, Andrews, historians argue, creates an "onscreen persona" in both *Mary Poppins* and *The Sound of Music* which provides a sense of nurture and comfort to over-parented adults and under-parented children.¹⁹ She was, and is, a phenomenon of exuberance and talent that her contemporaries noticed, dubbing her "Joyous Julie" and praising "*her* Sound of

¹⁵ McLeer, Anne. "Practical Perfection? The Nanny Negotiates Gender, Class, and Family Contradictions in 1960s Popular Culture." 80–101.

¹⁶ Ibid. 80–101.

¹⁷ Wolf, Stacy Ellen. *A Problem Like Maria: Gender and Sexuality in the American Musical*. 2-8.

¹⁸ Vansant, Jacqueline. "Robert Wise's *The Sound of Music* and the 'Denazification' of Austria in American Cinema." In *From World War to*

Waldheim, 1st ed., 165–86. Culture and Politics in Austria and the United States. Berghahn Books, 1999.

¹⁹ Kemp, Peter. "How Do You Solve a 'Problem' Like Maria von Poppins." In *Musicals: Hollywood and Beyond*, edited by Bill Marshall and Robynn Stilwell, 55–61. Exeter and Portland: Intellect Books, 2000. (emphasis mine)

Music."²⁰ Building upon these arguments, I will contend that Andrews' off-screen persona was just as integral to the initial and continuing success of both films.

In short, historians and contemporaries alike have offered their explanations about why *The Sound of Music* was, and continues to be, a worldwide success. They have put forth answers involving gender, love, sexuality, nannies, Julie Andrews, and Nazis. Some have even thrown up their hands and simply said that it is none of these things, but rather that it was a quintessentially sixties story of peace and love.²¹ However, these theories insufficiently explain the level of success attributed to *The Sound of Music* or to recognize the role of its predecessors in creating the genre of family movies. For the purpose of this discussion, the term 'family movie' is meant to imply not simply a film appropriate for viewers of all ages, but a movie specifically produced and marketed to be enjoyed by the whole family, containing mature stories that engage an older audience, while remaining appropriate and entertaining for younger viewers.

I will argue that *The Sound of Music* represents a specific and unique moment in Hollywood history which appealed to the hopes and fears of American parents, spoke to the rapidly changing family, and represented the goodness that families sought and Hollywood lacked. While there is a long list of musical and non-musical films which represent a progression of the family movie movement in Hollywood that was nearly articulated with *Mary Poppins* but not fully realized until *The Sound of*

Music was released, I am unable to pay each film in this progression the respect it deserves. Instead, I have elected to analyze *Mary Poppins*, the direct predecessor of *The Sound of Music*. As I have mentioned, these two films share a purpose, a message, a leading actress, an audience, and many, many Academy Award nominations. In addition, they were both connected with social and cultural themes in an unconventional way, providing commentary on the family dynamic and filling the void in Americans' lives for wholesome family entertainment.

Parents, Nannies, and Families in Crisis

While *The Sound of Music* and *Mary Poppins* share many key elements, most notably they both begin with a similar story: a family in crisis. Within the Banks and Von Trapp families, each member is adding to the dysfunction of the family which is ultimately corrected by the character of a nanny. Each character, by deviating from and eventually adhering to their expected societal role reinforces the ideas of what a father, mother, or children are supposed to act like. In the following section, I will provide an analysis of characters within each film and highlight the particular strengths of the characters in *The Sound of Music* in communicating a message of the changing American family which ultimately led to the film's success.

Mary Poppins opens on an exasperated Katie Nanna, the Banks children's nanny, moving purposefully down the stairs of a well-decorated Victorian home in London, England. She is being pursued by one of the

²⁰ "A Joyous Julie and Her Sound of Music." *Life* 58, no. 10 (March 12, 1965): 52–62.

²¹ Gorsky, Martin. "'Raindrops on Roses': *The Sound of Music* and the Political Psyche of the Sixties." *The Sixties* 6, no. 2 (December 1, 2013): 199–224.

Banks' maids, who pleads with her to stay. With the arrival of Mrs. Banks, Katie Nanna is unable to make her escape as planned. Instead the audience is introduced to the energetic and impassioned Mrs. Banks, who bursts into the house singing and shouting stories from her day spent with other suffragettes protesting, and even "chaining (themselves) to the wheel of the prime minister's carriage."²² Unable to get a word in edgewise, the irritated nanny is forced to interrupt Mrs. Banks' zealous musical number to inform her that the children have run off for the fourth time this week, and that she will be leaving. Mrs. Banks begs her to stay, as to not anger her husband, Mr. Banks, but Katie Nanna has had enough and storms out the front door. The Banks family is left with two (missing) unruly children, a physically absent mother, an emotionally absent father, and now, no nanny. Enter: *Mary Poppins*. Floating from her home amongst the clouds, *Mary Poppins* magically descends via her umbrella to bring order to the dysfunctional Banks family.

Even from this first scene the audience is able to discern that Mr. Banks is emotionally distant, and to a certain extent, absent, as a husband and father. As Katie Nanna flees the Banks' household, Mrs. Banks is most concerned, not for her missing children, but with the potential reaction of her husband. Shortly after Katie Nanna's departure, Mr. Banks enters singing his song "The Life I Lead." In stark contrast to his (secretly) suffragette wife, Mr. Banks sings about his "pleasant" life, ignoring his wife as she tries to interject to tell him about their missing children. He instead sings about the glories

of his perfectly scheduled life and household. "*It's grand to be an Englishman in 1910*"²³ he exclaims, as he likens himself to a king, even saying "*I treat my subjects: servants, children, wife with a firm and gentle hand.*"²⁴ This solidifies the notion that Mr. and Mrs. Banks do not share a relationship based on equality, but on clearly patriarchal values.

With his sherry in one hand and his pipe in the other, Mr. Banks stands in front of the fireplace in his elegantly decorated study, ignoring his flustered wife as she tries to get his attention. The irony builds as he continues to sing about his carefully measured evening routine, oblivious to his wife trying to speak, his missing children, and his nanny who has just walked out. Not only does this scene point out Mr. Banks' shortcomings as a father, but it also openly mocks him, setting his character up as a joke rather than a character to be developed. As he continues singing he describes his usual interactions with his children as:

*It's 6:03 and the heirs to my dominion
Are scrubbed and tubbed and adequately
fed
And so I'll pat them on the head
And send them off to bed
Ah! Lordly is the life I lead!*

Mr. Banks' approach to family life is that of a business man. He says:

*"A British bank is run with precision
A British home requires nothing
less!"*²⁵

After his children are found and returned to the home, Mr. Banks' interactions with them are cold. When the children try and

²² *Mary Poppins*

²³ The Life I Lead, Sherman Bros

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Stevenson, Robert. *Mary Poppins*. Comedy, Family, Fantasy, 1964.

assist their mother and father in finding a new nanny by writing an advertisement, their father laughs at them, rips it up, and throws it in the fire. The cold, distant, and emotionless Mr. Banks fulfills his duty as a traditional father in many ways; he is the breadwinner, the disciplinarian, and the patriarch. However, he lacks many of the qualities of a modern father. He makes no effort to show his children love, and instead settles for defining their relationship based on business. He seems perfectly happy to see the “heirs” to his empire at 6:03 everyday before they leave him to pursue his own evening routine without them.

Mary Poppins comes into the Banks household and quickly upsets the pre-existing power structure. Mr. Banks, who usually rules over his household firmly is barely able to put a coherent sentence together upon Mary Poppins’ arrival. After dominating the conversation and explaining her qualifications, she gets to work taming the unruly children without another word from the previously polished, now flabbergasted and gob-smacked, Mr. Banks. Upon her arrival, Mary Poppins finds the unruly children, a career-obsessed father, a mother absorbed in her political movement and the breakdown of family life is evident. Through her careful teaching, Mary was able to restore harmony to the family through changing specific behaviors in each family member.

Through appealing to the ‘inner-child’ in Mr. Banks, Mary helped the once emotionally distant father foster a relationship based on play and interaction with his children, while still maintaining his dedication to his work. In fact, Mr. Banks is rewarded in his career with a promotion. Additionally, she brought Mrs. Banks, who was previously caught up in her own

pursuits and work with the women’s suffrage movement, back into the house to focus on her family. Finally, Mary is able to be “firm, never cross” with the children, and help them establish a communicative and loving relationship with their parents. After she is no longer needed, Mary Poppins leaves the Banks and moves on to the next family in need of her assistance.

An incredible weight was placed on the shoulders parents in the 1960s, knowing that their child-rearing methods and family environment could have lifelong effects on their children coupled with the perceived breakdown of family life conveyed by the press, parents were without a doubt concerned about how to properly raise their children. *Mary Poppins* spoke to these fears in a variety of ways. As previously mentioned, the film reinforced the ideals of the ‘modern father’ which placed value on a child’s relationship with their father *as well* as the mother by bringing Mr. Banks from his solely authoritarian role to being able to interact with his children outside of their roles as the “heirs” to his “empire.” However, the film also clearly displayed the consequences of overly permissive parenting, an argument within the child-development community that began in the 1950s and continued into the sixties. *Mary Poppins* directly interacts with this contemporary debate in parenting, as Jane and Michael Banks were clearly permitted to do what they pleased under the supervision of a nanny while their parents pursued their own passions. By finding a middle ground, in her words “Firm, never cross,” Mary Poppins brought the parents back into the household and created a balance between permission and structure, saving the Banks family and assuaging the fears of parents in audiences across America, assuring them

that even the most dysfunction families were capable of reformation.

Mary Poppins is a story about a *British* family through and through. Why then, would this film appeal so deeply to children and parents in America? As discussed in previous sections, factors such as the height of ‘Disney-Mania’ during the early sixties certainly contributed to the success of this work. However, I argue that the familial setting of the movie is a primary factor in what allowed it to be so financially successful. As opposed to previous movies, which were either about children *or* about adults, and were marketed to their respective audiences, *Mary Poppins* contained themes about masculine and feminine roles and family life that parents could identify with, while still presenting an appropriate and entertaining story for children. In the following section, I will identify similar familial, parental, masculine and feminine themes that appear in “*The Sound of Music*.” However, I will also elaborate on how these themes are more fully articulated in a way that was resonant with the American family, which made *The Sound of Music* an incredible success and a part of larger movement in both Hollywood and the American society.

The story of *Mary Poppins* began with a family in crisis. In much the same way, *The Sound of Music* begins with a dysfunctional family and confused relationships. As the seven Von Trapp children adjust to life under the rule of their father, Maria grapples with her relationship with her heavenly father and pressure from the Abbess to leave the convent. An advertisement for governess brings these two stories together. After losing his wife, Captain Georg Von Trapp began employing a series of governesses to look after his seven children. When Maria

enters the Von Trapp household, she nearly immediately upsets the pre-existing power structures in the family dynamic.

Following her rapid and exhilarating musical number “I Have Confidence,” Maria leaves her anxiety behind as she approaches the foreboding Von Trapp mansion. After being escorted into the house by a butler, Maria meets Captain Georg Von Trapp for the first time. A decorated veteran of the Austrian Navy, Captain Von Trapp is an intimidating character, dressed formally, and moving rigidly. The house is spotlessly white, elegantly decorated, and eerily silent for supposedly containing seven young children. After blowing a whistle, the Von Trapp children rush out of various rooms on the second level of the house and line up, in age order, at the railing. Dressed in uniforms, they march down the stairs at the beat of the Captain’s whistle. Turning as precisely as a trained army, the children line up in front of Maria and the Captain, with one notable space. Brigitta slowly emerges, reading, from another room. Realizing her mistake, she hands her father her book, receives her punishment, and stands in line. The Captain proceeds to tell Maria to “listen very carefully” so that she can learn each of the children’s signals. Like clockwork, each child marches forward at the sound of their whistle signal and introduces themselves. The Captain attempts to hand a very flustered Maria her whistle, but she refuses it. Maria immediately establishes that she will not be entirely subservient as expected of an employee and a woman, and refuses to use a whistle which is “for animals” on the Von Trapp children. She eventually acquiesces to taking the whistle but, in a cheeky manner, whistles after the Captain, receiving a laugh from the children. As the Captain turns around the laughing stops, but

Maria does not apologize. As soon as the Captain leaves, the scene turns from a cold, militaristic aura to a warm environment as Maria gets to know the children.

In mourning their wife and mother, it is clear that the Von Trapp household has lost its sense family. Their father, the Captain, has turned his household into a pseudo Naval ship, and his children are reduced to soldiers. The Captain is a clear authority figure in the lives of his children, and has provided them with a home. However, he lacks the loving relationship that a modern father is meant to have with his children, leaving them to grow up in a loveless household. His family is dysfunctional, by no fault of their own, because they lack a mother. Through his own actions, the Captain has driven a wedge between himself and his family, and reduced his relationship with his children to a strictly authoritarian position.

Throughout the film the audience sees a changing Georg Von Trapp thanks to the influence of his unruly governess, Maria. She initially brings fun and warmth back into the home against the Captain's wishes, as depicted in the classic "My Favorite Things" scene, "Doe a Deer" scene, and when the Captain unknowingly sees his children climbing trees, referring to them as "local urchins." After discovering the "local urchins" are his children, the Captain is infuriated and demands that they change back into their uniforms. Maria gives a passionate plea to the Captain that he needs to get to know his children – to love them. In a fit of rage, the Captain orders Maria to pack her bags and return to abbey.

There are two scenes in which distinctive changes in Captain Von Trapp can be observed. The first happens

immediately after his angry encounter with Maria. In the distance the Captain can hear singing coming from inside the house. He storms into the house and stands just outside the parlor to see his children singing for the Baroness Von Schraeder, the Captain's love interest. It has been made very clear by the children, staff, and Captain himself that there is no singing in the Von Trapp household. The housekeeper, Frau Schmidt, told Maria that it is "too painful" for the Captain to sing, as it reminds him of his late wife. However, in a distinctive change of character, the Captain is not angry to find his children once again disobeying him. Instead, he enters the room and joins them in song. The children are so astonished, that they stop singing all together. The family ends the song together, and after a few brief seconds of sheer surprise, the Captain invites his children in for a hug. This clear show of affection for his children is uncharacteristic for the Captain and redefines his character and status as a father. He is no longer a simple authority figure, but capable of showing love. The children are finally able to gain reassurance and praise from their father.

The Captain's journey from authority figure to modern father continues in another distinctive scene, which also highlights his budding romantic feelings for Maria. In this scene the Von Trapp household is alive with music and dancing as the Captain hosts a formal event for at least one hundred guests. The children are with Maria on the outskirts of the party, and eventually make their way outside to an empty patio where the festivities inside are visible through the large windows of the house. A traditional Austrian song begins, and the party-goers inside begin to do the customary dance associated with it. The Von Trapp children

are growing up, and Kurt is interested in learning the choreography to this dance. Learning to dance is a special milestone in the process of growing up, and like many of the Von Trapp children's happy memories, Maria is there to share it. Maria teaches Kurt to dance and the two stumble along as the other children laugh along with them. Up until this point, the Captain has shared only one specific 'parent-child' moment with his family, as most of these experiences have been shared between the children and their surrogate parent, Maria. Building on the previous scene in which he joins his children in singing, the Captain leaves the party and comes out onto the terrace to aid Maria in teaching Kurt to dance. The scene takes a different direction when it becomes clear that the Captain and Maria are no longer focused on demonstrating a traditional Austrian dance, but are focused on each other. In addition to representing a dramatic change in the Captain's attitude and interaction with his children, temporarily leaving his party to share this experience with them, it also the first hint of romance between Maria and the Captain.

To solidify the full transformation of the character of Captain von Trapp from authoritarian dictator of his soldiers/children to idealistic father, the audience is given a series of scenes in which the Captain is able to fully encapsulate the ideals of a modern father while leading his family out of Austria. After the Nazis gain control of Austria, Captain von Trapp patriotically denies their offers to become an officer in their army, and instead crafts a plan to flee Austria with his family. After an openly emotional rendition of "Edelweiss," the Captain's love for his country is clear. However strong his love for Austria and the Navy is, he still chooses morality and family

first, and leaves the country and profession he adores. A modern father chooses his family over his career, and the Captain does just that. He continues to invoke more aspects of modern fatherhood by being both a leader and nurturer, leading his family in an escape from the Nazis while simultaneously comforting his youngest child, Gretl. In the final scene the family is seen climbing over the Austrian Alps to the safety of Switzerland, Captain Von Trapp, the patriarch, is leading the family with Gretl on his back. While Captain Von Trapp is still an authority and protector of his family, he has gained the ability to participate in his children's lives emotionally, finding a middle ground between permission and authority.

The drastic changes in Captain Von Trapp are very similar to those seen in Mr. Banks. Both fathers begin as emotionally distant, career men, and through the intervention of a nanny/governess are able to learn how to interact and connect with their children. However, Mr. Banks' transformation lacks the depth that Captain Von Trapp has that allowed audiences to connect with him. Mr. Banks' transformation is only followed intermittently throughout *Mary Poppins* and at the conclusion during the finale song "Let's Go Fly a Kite," he is animated and playful, displaying a transformation that represents growth, connection, and emotion, all of which a modern father should embrace. However, without the step-by-step details and connecting scenes, Mr. Banks' transformation remains as illusive and magical feeling as *Mary Poppins'* talking umbrella and expandable carpet bag. This journey to modern fatherhood is fully articulated in the character of Captain Von Trapp, mostly due to screenwriter Ernest

Lehman's purposeful choice to rewrite the role from "stock character to actual human being."²⁶ By focusing as much energy on the adult characters as on the children, the Captain's character has patriotism, loyalty, heartbreak and love. In short, his character has the depth that Mr. Banks lacks. Additionally, his journey is well-documented throughout the movie. He does not become a loving, doting father in just one scene. Instead, mothers and fathers in the audience are able to see the Captain grapple with fostering a connection between himself and his family, and when he does, it feels repeatable and transferable to modern, real-life families.

Like the Captain, Maria's parenting abilities grow closer to what audience members perceived as ideal throughout the movie. When we first meet Maria, it is hard to categorize her under the label of any typical character. At first glance, with her opening scene solidifying her connection to nature, her 'fraulein' (single) relationship status, and short hair, Maria looks like the liberated woman that many women in the 1960s aspired to be. However, Maria is also something very peculiar, a postulate at an abbey for a cloistered order of nuns. These drastically different characteristics of Maria make her a unique, but seemingly unrelatable character for many women. After all, not many American women were deeply religious yet obstinate nuns in the 1960s. However, Maria encapsulates many of the qualities and faces many of the challenges that women in the audience were able to

connect with, primarily in her interactions with the Captain and her role as mother.

In 1965, in the midst of the sexual revolution, family life was rapidly changing and so were relationships between men and women. Family life had previously revolved around the dynamic that set the father as the leader and the mother as subservient, which is clearly displayed in the opening scenes involving Mr. and Mrs. Banks, as well as Maria and the Captain. However, as this patriarchal dynamic began to change, power structures within families became more fluid, opinions about authority became more polarized, and divorce rates soared.²⁷ A woman's place in society, her family, and her marriage were ill-defined and rapidly changing. For these reasons, Maria's character was even more appealing to women in the audience.

In the same scene in which the Captain is established as an authoritarian dictator of his household, Maria establishes her power within their relationship by refusing to use or answer to the whistle the captain has offered her. Similarly, after the Captain discovers her and the children playing in the lake, he begins to tell Maria off for disobeying his wishes for his children. However, Maria shoots back, demanding that the Captain listen to her and begging him to connect with his children before they are grown. In each situation, her insistence and outspoken behavior is surprising to the Captain, and goes against social norms, but is ultimately able to provoke true change within the family. It may also be expected that Maria's obstinate behavior and inability

²⁶ Baer, William. *Classic American Films: Conversations with the Screenwriters*. 111-121

²⁷ I do not mean to imply a causal relationship between the changing power dynamics between men and women within a family and rising divorce rates,

but rather want to show the stress and anxiety that these two separate facts could instill in women as they sought more independence/authority within their homes and marriages.

to be subservient as an employee would drive a wedge between her and the Captain, and in the beginning, it did. However, despite Maria's independence, a characteristic not typical of the 'ideal' housewife, she and the Captain fall in love and create a relationship based on mutuality and equality, something very desirable to the average wife and mother in the 1960s. This stands in contrast to husband and wife dynamic displayed in *Mary Poppins*. In both *Mary Poppins* and *The Sound of Music*, initial scenes establish an unequal position of power between man and woman. In *Mary Poppins* this dynamic is somewhat upset when Mary speaks with authority to Mr. Banks, and takes charge of the household. However, the inequality in the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Banks which was so clearly displayed in the beginning of the film is never resolved. However, in *The Sound of Music*, Maria regularly establishes her own authority in her relationship with Captain Von Trapp, both as a nanny and as a wife.

In a way, the character of Maria merges the authority of *Mary Poppins* and the role of wife of Mrs. Banks into a single character, making the message of equality within relationships much stronger. The character of Maria is also able to maintain an aura of independence which Mrs. Banks lacks. Part of what makes *Mary Poppins'* transformation of the Banks family effective is that she brings the parents back into the home. Mr. Banks is able to maintain, and even grow his career, but it is unlikely that Mrs. Banks continues her work with the suffrage movement. In a time when individualism was becoming more popular and women were being told to "find their

voices," the story of Mrs. Banks returning to the home was unlikely to have incredible resonance with females in the audience.²⁸ Maria, however, is a more effective character in this situation because she does not represent a 'return to the domestic,' but rather is articulating a rapidly equalizing relationship with Captain Von Trapp, has a strong and respected opinion, and does not lose independence or societal influence when assuming her role as a mother.

In summary, in both *Mary Poppins* and *The Sound of Music* the father figure experiences a change in which he becomes more emotional, experiences a reduction in his authority, and learns to connect with his children. While both Mr. Banks and Captain Von Trapp experience these changes and abide by the theme of creating a modern father, they are most fully and effectively expressed in the character of Captain Von Trapp. *Mary Poppins* focuses almost exclusively on the relationship between Mary and the Banks children, with only glimpses of the changing relationship between father and children. For this reason, Captain Von Trapp is a much more effective character because his journey from emotionally inept to forming a meaningful, loving, and non-authoritarian relationship with his children is one of the primary plot lines. In much the same way, the character of Maria was resonant with American audiences because she combined the confidence and authority exuded by *Mary Poppins* while also embodying the role of mother which was occupied by Mrs. Banks.

Additionally, she was able to maintain, and even gain, authority and independence through her role as mother and wife,

²⁸ Babington, Bruce. "Song, Narrative and the Mother's Voice: A Deepish Reading of Julie

Andrews." In *British Stars and Stardom: From Alma Taylor to Sean Connery*, 192–204, 2001. 202.

whereas Mrs. Banks experienced a return to the home and arguably forfeited much of the individualism and independence she had experienced in order to resume her role as a mother to her children. While Mrs. Banks remains subservient to her husband and has limited interactions with her children throughout the movie, Maria Von Trapp establishes her own voice within her marriage and the audience is able to see the detailed development of a parent/child relationship between Maria and the children. Finally, both families display characteristics which were reflective of the debate between authoritarian and permissive parenting. While the Banks family struggles with being too permissive, the Von Trapp family struggles with being too authoritarian. Both families are able to experience relief by finding a middle ground between structure and independence for the children. However, the story of the Von Trapp family is more clearly documented with realistic situations, while the transformation in *Mary Poppins* is filled with magic which does not feel relatable or repeatable to the average family. Overall, *The Sound of Music* was able to create an environment in which a family in crisis was restored to the ideal of a functional family. In addition, the film was both entertaining and appropriate for adults and children, creating a family experience that emulated the idyllic family dynamic which was displayed in the film.

“A Joyous Julie and her Sound of Music”

Throughout my essay I have argued that familial themes, namely parenthood and its implications on masculinity, femininity, and

the family dynamic, which were present in *Mary Poppins* and fully developed and articulated in *The Sound of Music* are the driving factors in what made these musical films so successful, popular, and resonant with the American people. Building upon this premise, it is important to acknowledge the role that leading actress Julie Andrews played in the ultimate success of these movies not only because of her incredible talent, but also because of her embodiment of these familial themes in both her future on-screen endeavors and personal life. The persona she created for herself (or perhaps, was created for her) in Hollywood continued to communicate these ideas of cohesive family life beyond the movies, and I argue this greatly impacted the longevity of the success of the films, primarily *The Sound of Music*.

Mary Poppins and *The Sound of Music* were Andrews' first two films after a lengthy and successful run on the stage, and she plays a surrogate mother in both. These roles solidified her as a maternal, nurturing figure in Hollywood, starkly contrasted by the still dark, mature films which were becoming increasingly popular. Historian Bruce Babington goes as far as to say that Julie Andrews spent her thirty-year film career portraying solely “idealized maternal traits” in a variety of roles and relationships on screen. Additionally, America's cherished “middle-class- values were securely enmeshed within Andrews” Hollywood persona. As the perception of declining values in society increased, audiences turned to the idealized mother of the silver screen for refuge.²⁹

²⁹ Babington, Bruce. “Song, Narrative and the Mother's Voice: A Deepish Reading of Julie Andrews.” 201.

Popular critics didn't treat *Poppins* or *Music* kindly, but they agreed that Julie Andrews was something special, and someone to be talked about. She was "practically perfect in every way" for many people, and was called "virginal," "an angel," by Chris Chase of *McCall's*.³⁰ *Good Housekeeping* conducted a lengthy interview with Andrews' father who described her as nothing less than the perfect daughter.³¹ Carol Burnett wrote extensively in *Good Housekeeping* about Andrews' qualities as a good friend.³² George Christy went as far as to say that Julie Andrews was the embodiment of "the girl every mother wants their daughter to grow up to be like."³³ These were the roles she assumed in her Hollywood persona, and I argue that these traits were most fully shaped and displayed in her role as Maria in *The Sound of Music*.

While Andrews' Hollywood persona certainly changed throughout her career, specific themes continued to reoccur in media coverage surrounding her in the decade following her entrance to the Hollywood spotlight. One surprising idea is that many publications label Andrews as "sexy," much in contrast to pure, innocent legacy that Mary and Maria develop later. Part of what created this aura around her was her dramatic and sudden success. Vogue attributed much of her sudden success to her ability to be "monumentally sexy and quite ladylike all at the same time." They called her "the kind of girl you could take home to mother. Providing, of course,

that you could trust dad."³⁴ Following her time as Maria, the "five-foot-seven, 126-pound Miss Andrews" began to assume roles where her 'sexy' persona could be played up. Roles like in *The Americanization of Emily* where she starred alongside "dishy leading men" in much more scandalous situation than postulate nun in the home of an Austrian captain.³⁵ *Mary Poppins* was a character devoid of sexuality, limiting Andrews' on-screen impact with adults. Maria, despite being a novitiate in an order of cloistered nuns, was a romantic and attractive character capable of capturing the attention of an adult audience. Media outlets simply took this inkling of sexuality present in Maria and expanded upon it. By encapsulating both the pure and sexy, caring and firm, devoted and independent, Julie Andrews apparently met the precedent set for modern motherhood which attracted men and created an idol for women.

While some media sources clearly characterized Andrews as another sexy Hollywood starlet, her friend Carol Burnett took a different track. Writing in *Good Housekeeping*, Burnett painted Andrews as an audacious, strong career woman, much different than the other women in Hollywood. Burnett said "nothing phases that girl" and admired her "tremendous composure and professional invincibility."³⁶ Whether this strong, independent characterization added to her sex appeal is debatable, but it certainly placed her in

³⁰ Chase, Chris. "Julie Andrews Fights Back." *McCall's* 100 (May 1973): 84.

³¹ Wells, Ted. "My Daughter, Julie Andrews." *Good Housekeeping* 166 (March 1968): 98.

³² Burnett, Carol. "My Friend Julie Andrews." *Ed. by H. Markel* 157 (November 1963): 34.

³³ Christy, George. "New Life of Julie Andrews." *Good Housekeeping* 170 (May 1970): 90.

³⁴ Steinem, Gloria. "Features/Articles/People: Julie Andrews." *Vogue*, March 15, 1965. 904291178. The Vogue Archive.

³⁵ Hano, Arnold. "Julie Andrews: Her Magic, Her Moods." *Good Housekeeping* 160 (May 1965): 90.

³⁶ Burnett, Carol. "My Friend Julie Andrews." 34.

contrast to many of the starlets in Hollywood at the time.

In an interesting juxtaposition to the detailed descriptions of her physical appearance, much news coverage also described Andrews as something akin to the Virgin Mary. She was a “superstar unspoiled by fame” and appeared to be living an idyllic life off-screen as well.³⁷ Multiple publications and interviewers took great care when describing Andrews, noting her young appearance, makeup-less face, and doe-eyed expressions.³⁸ Americans were obsessed with how the perfect on-screen mother performed in real life, and how her “cherubic” daughter Emma Kate Walton was growing up.³⁹ In addition to following her career and extracting every detail possible from Andrews’ marriage and motherhood, the press painted a picture of her as the perfect daughter as well. In an interview with *Good Housekeeping*, Andrews’ father describes his perfect, loving relationship with his daughter Julie. He recounts stories of how proud he is of Julie, how she still gives back to her small village community, and how she consults him for advice before “every major decision.”⁴⁰ This feature in *Good Housekeeping* depicts a textbook parent/child relationship and paints Andrews’ upbringing as something of a fairytale. The article creatively leaves out the fact that Andrews’ parents were separated when she was very young, and each remarried. However, future articles again reinforce her persona of perfection in

family life by saying she was the product of “two happy homes” and is extremely close with all four of her ‘parents.’⁴¹

Beyond America’s obsession with Julie Andrews as sexy, strong, pure, an actress, and the model daughter, American media was most fixated upon Julie as a wife and mother. Many interviews took great care to describe not only Andrews’ physical appearance, but also the appearance, decoration, and style of her houses, associating her with the ‘homemaker’ aspect of femininity.⁴² Carol Burnett describes Julie as two separate people, the professional “overwhelming” Julie Andrews, and her “friend, Julie Walton” who is a wife, mother, and who enjoys a “wonderfully happy marriage.” Burnett points out that Julie makes more money than “her husband and President Kennedy” but that is “doesn’t matter to either of them.” This is a clear upset of the general societal norm for the father to be the primary breadwinner, but Burnett is quick to funnel this deviation from social norms into clear evidence of the strength Andrews and Walton’s marriage.

Andrews’ happy marriage overflows into her role as mother. She describes motherhood as ‘heaven’ and Burnett says she handles Emma with “the confidence of Dr. Spock,” referencing an incredibly influential pediatrician and parenting expert of the 1960s who was at the center of many of the parenting debates at the time. Andrews’ communicated her own desire to live up to the ‘large family ideal’ of the

³⁷ Babington, Bruce. “Song, Narrative and the Mother’s Voice: A Deepish Reading of Julie Andrews.” 202

³⁸ Steinem, Gloria. “Features/Articles/People: Julie Andrews.” *Vogue*, March 15, 1965. 904291178. The Vogue Archive.

³⁹ Hano, Arnold. “Julie Andrews: Her Magic, Her Moods.” *Good Housekeeping* 160 (May 1965): 90.

⁴⁰ Wells, Ted. “My Daughter, Julie Andrews.” *Good Housekeeping* 166 (March 1968): 98.

⁴¹ Burnett, Carol. “My Friend Julie Andrews.” 34.

⁴² Hano, Arnold. “Julie Andrews: Her Magic, Her Moods.” 90.

1950s when she said “I’d like to take a year to do a picture, then have another child, then a picture, then a child, then a pic...”⁴³ Even throughout her filming of *The Sound of Music*, Andrews’ daughter Emma received the attention she needed. Newspapers, magazines, and archives are full of photos of Andrews’ costumed as Maria holding Emma, embodying the ideal of a successful working mother. Even with her successes on Broadway, Andrews’ said “Emma is my greatest achievement.” When asked about their parenting style Andrews responded that “we want her to have a free life and be independent – except for whatever discipline she needs.”⁴⁴ Andrews’ depiction in the media as a perfect wife and mother reinforced the themes set forth in her films and further solidified the relationship between her fictional roles and contemporary societal debates.

Just five years after *The Sound of Music* was released and Julia Andrews’ persona as Hollywood’s talented, sexy yet innocent, career-woman yet doting mother and wife was fully formed, Andrews’ life was not what many had envisioned for her. She was divorcing her childhood sweetheart, wrapped up in a court case with the media, and had starred in a series of costly films which had extremely limited success. However, the media continued to reiterate the same messages about Julie Andrews as they had just a few years earlier. Articles elaborating on her new, happier marriage to Blake Edwards again focused on Julie as an incredible mother and wife much like her depictions on screen. A friend said that Edwards was a more suitable husband for

Andrews because he was “more dominating” than Walton ever was. After the failed release of her costly film *Star!* Andrews somewhat withdrew from Hollywood. Her husband said that she understood she must sacrifice for her daughter and stepchildren. He said “I want Julie to be a full-fledged wife, not a full-fledged actress and a part-time wife.”⁴⁵ Following, Andrews has a brief run in hosting a talk show, which ultimately failed after one season. She became more involved with the divisive issue of psychoanalysis, finalized her divorce, and continued her legal battles. However, throughout all of this she is still depicted as “pure,” “an angel,” and “totally good.”⁴⁶

While the “silver-throated” Julie Andrews certainly captured America’s attention with once-in-a-lifetime talent, through careful analysis of media coverage in popular magazines it is clear that she maintained America’s attention through her embodiment of the familial themes of her films in her publicized private life. Julie Andrews’ Hollywood persona spoke to many of the issues that were important to families, namely women, in the years following the release of both *Mary Poppins* and *The Sound of Music*. Beginning with her healthy and idealized relationship with her parents, and continuing to the depiction of her as a Madonna-like mother, her complete purity and her ability to be ‘monumentally sexy,’ Julie Andrews set a precedent that left men wanting more, women wondering how she managed to ‘have it all,’ and left room for the hope that the perfect family life

⁴³ Burnett, Carol. “My Friend Julie Andrews.” 34.

⁴⁴ Gordon, S. “Julie Andrews Goes to Hollywood.” *Look* 27 (November 19, 1963): 123–26.

⁴⁵ Christy, George. “New Life of Julie Andrews.” *Good Housekeeping* 170 (May 1970): 90.

⁴⁶ Chase, Chris. “Julie Andrews Fights Back.” 84.

she depicted on the silver screen may not be fictional after all.

Conclusion

Throughout this essay I have displayed both the brewing of social change within the American family dynamic on the cusp of the sexual revolution, as well as the unprecedented and enduring success of the 1965 film "*The Sound of Music*." Through my analysis I have attempted to show a progression of Hollywood films which struggled to meet the needs of an audience under such intense social pressure. Within this progression *Mary Poppins* represents a near articulation of the social and familial themes that create a family movie, while *The Sound of Music* represents a full realization of the family movie phenomenon, a film meant to be enjoyed by both children and adults, which also appealed to contemporary social issues, and filled a gap in the standard releases of Hollywood thereby leading it to incredible financial success and cementing its images, ideas, and music within American popular culture

Of course, other factors apart from the relatable familial themes which made both *Mary Poppins* and *The Sound of Music* both culturally pervasive and financially successful. Both films have literary origins, *Poppins*' in a series of children's books, and *The Sound of Music* in a memoir. Previous fame allowed for anticipation which certainly drew some members of the audiences, as well as allowing the creative teams to have a gauge of what portions of each story had been successful in the past. Additionally, the talent of each of the creative teams of both films was incredible, and these films created an opportunity for the great names of Hollywood to come

together in collaboration. Finally, I've acknowledged the role that the medium of film musical played in both making the story accessible and entertaining to children as well as the added of benefit for *The Sound of Music* of being a folk music, which scholars argue provide an extra air of authenticity. While I consider each of these factors as having contributed the overall success of both films, my own analysis proves that the familial themes in both movies are what ultimately made them relatable and successful with American audiences, and *The Sound of Music*'s specific and full articulation of these themes is what permitted it to engage so deeply with the American public and surpass nearly every other film in terms of financial success.

Building upon the work of historians before me, I identified specific instances within each film which served as models of the themes of masculinity, femininity, and parenthood which permeated each film. In *Mary Poppins*, Mr. Banks is transformed from an emotionless and distant father by way of an outspoken nanny. However, the air of magic throughout the film and the plot's focus mainly on the interactions between *Mary Poppins* and the children limit the impact of this transformation. A similar conversion occurs in Captain Georg Von Trapp in *The Sound of Music*. However, the change is well-documented throughout the film and feels less magical, more repeatable, and increasingly relatable to both men and women in the audience who were living in a time when fatherhood and marriage dynamics were changing.

Additionally, themes of motherhood and femininity were clear and at the forefront of both films. In *Mary Poppins* both Mrs. Banks and Mary play a role in expressing the themes of femininity and motherhood, Mrs.

Banks by returning to the domestic setting to raise her family and *Mary Poppins* equalizing the power dynamic between herself and Mr. Banks as well as by restoring the family to harmony. In *The Sound of Music*, however, the role of mother and nanny are combined in the character of Maria who encapsulates and most fully expresses the themes of ideal motherhood and femininity. Maria is a character who enjoys a happy marriage while remaining independent, and who ‘found her voice’ while also raising her family. In short, Maria made possible what women in the 1960s were longing to achieve. Moreover, the family setting of each film provides a commentary on the debates surrounding methods of parenting at the time, and each dysfunctional family’s restoration to a harmonious family unit provide comfort to parents in the audience. Lastly, I have argued that Julie Andrews, the leading actress in both *Mary Poppins* and *The Sound of Music* played an integral role in the success of each film not only because of her talent, but because her Hollywood persona, whether real or created, provided continuity

of the themes from each movie, but most especially from *The Sound of Music*. America’s fixation on Andrews’ own upbringing, marriage, and child solidifies my assertion that these familial themes present her films are what primarily contributed to the success of *The Sound of Music*.

In summary, it was a combination of factors including social climate, previous success in other mediums, creative teams, film studios and the talent of Julie Andrews which led both *Mary Poppins* and *The Sound of Music* to success. However, *The Sound of Music* provided a film that filled a gap between movies meant for adults and movies meant for children while simultaneously providing a story of familial love and connection which spoke to American audiences. This film occupies and place in American culture which is afforded to very few works, and continues to define the vision of family life, but perhaps most importantly, created American homes that are still “alive with *The Sound of Music*” over half a century later.

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