

# When Get Home, I'll Have to Stay: Gender and Domesticity in Post-World War II Musical Westerns



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Abstract

Immediately after World War II, Hollywood's major studios released a series of films that can be defined as both musicals and Westerns. Although the Western is a decidedly male-oriented genre, it opens up unprecedented space for female performance when it becomes a musical. In doing so, these musical Western films expose deep anxieties around gender performance in the immediate postwar period. Most crucially, each film responds to these anxieties with the same answer for women and for men, the same imperative that was being felt across American society in the late 1940s and 1950s: The need to establish a domestic space to achieve stability in the postwar era. The introductory chapter of this thesis examines the musical genre and the Western genre, and the relevance of each within American culture. The second chapter looks closely at two films, *Annie Get Your Gun* (1950) and *Calamity Jane* (1953), examining the ways in which they alternately celebrate female independence and seek to restrict it. Chapter Three looks at *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* (1954), which proscribes a domestic ideal for men that incorporates male authority over women. Chapter 4 looks at the last film in this trend, *Oklahoma!* (1955), and how it reveals the precariousness of the domestic ideal. The final chapter describes musical Westerns in the context of the decline of the classical Hollywood studio system.

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