

Miss Congeniality Analysis.

For my analysis of mise-en-scene and sound of a seven-minute sequence, I chose one of the final scenes from Miss Congeniality (Sandra Bullock, Benjamin Bratt, Michael Caine and Denise Burgen).

The film is about The Miss United States pageant – a scholarship programme seeking beauty and grace from all its contestants. That is until tomboy Gracie Hart (Bullock) enters the running. Forced to go undercover as to investigate a threat from one of the country's most infamous criminals 'The Citizen', Gracie has to change her image from rough and tough agent to exquisite beauty queen. In such desperation, the head of the FBI operation Eric Matthews (Bratt) hires Victor Melling (Caine) to transform Gracie into a beautifully convincing Miss New Jersey. When the killer is suddenly captured, Gracie suspects that there is more to The Citizen's threat and insists on staying at the competition as an anonymous guardian to the contestants.

The sequence begins when the Miss United States beauty pageant starts. The music 'One in a Million' sang by Busson starts to play, and the curtain rises to reveal all the contestants except Gracie aka Gracie-Lou Freebush who is waiting at the side to run into her position as the girls walk onto the stage from the stairs. The sequence I am analysing ends when Gracie finds out that Matthews a fellow FBI agent, and Melling, her make-up man have agreed with her that the Miss United States pageant is going to be the victim of an attack. The FBI, whom both Gracie and Eric are agents for pulled out of the investigation.

The sequence begins with the curtain on stage rising to reveal the contestants from each of America's 50 states on the steps. The curtain rising would not only mark the start of the show, but also signifies that the hopes of the contestants are being raised by going on stage, because their dream of being on the stage of the beauty pageant is becoming a reality. The music being played is 'One in a Million', this to me is supposed to indicate Gracie as being 'One in a Million'. Just before Gracie rushes onto the stage, we see a worried look on her face; this could be about whether she will actually win the pageant, or the worry that there could be a death, bombing or explosion. She then rushes to her place in the stream of contestants. The rushing onto stage mirrors parts of the whole movie where she has been rushing to become a pageant star in the hopes of becoming Miss United States. She joins the girls coming from the stairs and wears a fake smile; this is to remind us that the whole set up of her presence in the pageant is fake.

Once all the girls are on the stage, the music changed from soft and gentle, and hits a remix version of the same song. The remix is fast paced, and comes with its own energetic dance routine. This signifies how fast she has become involved in the contest. Five days before, the idea of 'The Citizen' wanting to target the pageant wasn't even thought of. While the dancing is going on, the stage is covered with smoke, partially hiding the bottom of the girls. This mirrors the fact that Gracie is also hiding her real identity from the other girls.

Once the dance has finished, the two hosts, Stan and Kathy (Burgen) come on stage and announce the top ten finalists. When Stan introduces Kathy, she corrects him on "Incredible Intelligence" this keeps the object of the presence of the FBI in our minds. Their presence is what separates this movie from "Drop Dead Gorgeous", another American Beauty Pageant film starring Kirsty Alley. When Kathy and Stan announce the ten finalists, the first is Hawaii, a small isolated island in the Pacific Ocean. This signifies how isolated the

Charlie Hearn

contestants are. Even though face to face, the girls are friendly and civil, behind each others backs, the bitch about each other and this is what makes them isolated, because any acts of friendship are false. When New Jersey is announced and Gracie makes her way from the back of the stage, where she is seen as the tallest, therefore superior because of her position, not only on-stage, but also her un-known higher position with the FBI, to the front of the stage, she trips and lands on her face. This mirrors that her hopes of having full support from the FBI who have deserted her are crashing down around her.

She gets to the front of the stage, and then we see the FBI Agents packing up the plane at the airport ready to fly back to their headquarters. Matthews is talking to Melling about Kathy Morningside, and Melling mentions her son, who we already know is Frank, her assistant, they then see a connection with 'The Citizen' case and return to San Antonio, Texas, where the contest is being held.

The contestants are then seen off stage and Michelle (the Rhode Island finalist) is getting ready to perform her 'talent' for the show in the evening. Gracie appears from the other side of a clothing rail and hands Michelle a bag that contains flaming batons for her baton twirling performance. The fact that the batons light up with flames is only a sign of what is to come, and they pave the way for the big explosion and the fire at the end when the crown explodes and burns the big Statue of Liberty at the back of the stage from which the contestants appeared from at the beginning of the pageant. At the end of Michelle's performance, Gracie rushes backstage to find Matthews and Melling waiting for her. Matthews fills her in about the situation with Kathy and Frank Morningside, while Melling hurries around trying to dress her for her 'talent' performance. This is the point where Gracie realises that she isn't alone, and what she thought was going to happen, is more of a possibility, which is why Matthews has rushed back to her side.

The soundtrack to this seven minute sequence is very fast paced and rolls right the way through the actual pageant, however, when there are scenes at the airport with Matthews and Melling, the music disappears, and we hear the information that leads Matthews to rush back to Gracie's side. The title track of the movie also features in this sequence. 'One in a Million' is what all 50 contestants have to dance to when opening the show. Other pieces of music are played when Michelle is on stage twirling her batons, and the title and credits music to The Miss United States pageant. As there is not much talking, the volume of the music has been placed higher than it would be if there was speech involved. But as there is no dialogue, the volume gives the viewer more of a real perspective and they are being invited to feel as if they are in the 'Alamodome' watching the final of the pageant live.

The balanced sound levels ensure that when the scenes cut from San Antonio 'Alamodome' to the airport, the difference isn't too noticeable with abrupt endings in the music or dialogue in the film.