

CULTURE MONSTER

latimes.com/culturemonster

5 DAYS OUT

Highlights of the week ahead in arts, music and performance

MUSEUMS

'Cleopatra: The Exhibition'
California Science Center
Closes Sunday
\$12.75-\$26

THEATER

'The Mother ... With the Hat'
South Coast Repertory,
Julianne Argyros Stage
Previews at 2 p.m. Sunday,
7:45 p.m. Tuesday-
Thursday; regular
performances Jan. 12-27
\$20-\$70

MUSIC

Organ recital:
Nathan Laube
Walt Disney Concert Hall
7:30 p.m. Sunday
\$43-\$65

MUSIC

Esenbach conducts
Tchaikovsky
Walt Disney Concert Hall
8 p.m. Friday and Saturday,
2 p.m. Sunday
\$23.75-\$187

THEATER

Cheek By Jowl:
'Tis Pity She's a Whore'
Ralph Freud Playhouse
at UCLA
Opens 8 p.m. Jan. 9
Ends Jan. 12
\$40-\$65

Song and dance men

BY LIESL BRADNER >>> Tough guys do dance and sing. With two of Hollywood's biggest manly men now starring in the same film, there's a good chance that some of their male fans secretly wish they were seeing Wolverine versus Maximus. Instead, Hugh Jackman and Russell Crowe are foes in a battle of song in the musical "Les Misérables." While both actors have made their mark playing heroes boasting super strength and bravado, plenty of moviegoers were surprised to see them singing operatic style with equal passion and grandeur.

While a triple threat nowadays means writer-actor-director, back in the Golden Age of Hollywood, movie performers were expected to be able to sing, dance and act with equal ability. If you look west of Broadway, such multifaceted talents are now few and far between.

What better time to take a look at our top five actors who can shoot 'em up, step it up and belt it out. Our criteria: males who can portray a bona-fide tough guy with panache and undeniable believability but who have been known to sing or dance proficiently, preferably in the style that would fit on the stage of musical theater.



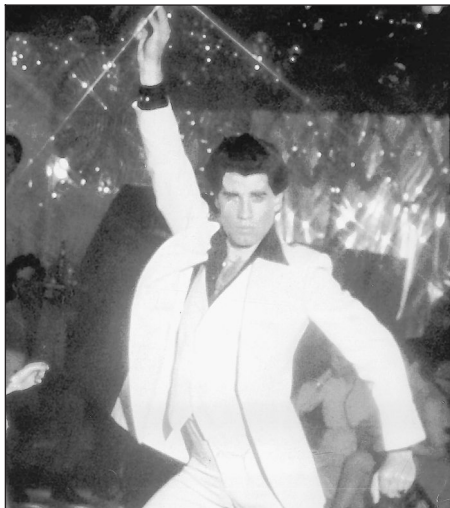
LINDA R. CHEN Miramax Films

5. John Travolta

Musical: "Grease," "Saturday Night Fever," "Hairspray"

Tough guy: "Pulp Fiction," "Get Shorty," "Broken Arrow," "Face/Off"

Travolta was already a household name with a string of hit films such as "Carrie" and the sitcom "Welcome Back, Kotter," and his performances as Danny Zuko in "Grease" and disco dancing Tony Manero in "Saturday Night Fever" made him a superstar. It wasn't until the '90s, after Quentin Tarantino revived Travolta's career with "Pulp Fiction," did he show he could switch gears and shine as a drug dealer, gangster and criminal. Then in 2007 when he showed up in drag as Edna Turnblad in "Hairspray," a new generation was reminded that the actor was a song and dance man.



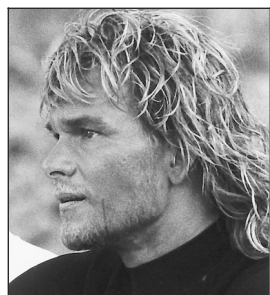
Paramount Pictures

JOHN Travolta in "Pulp Fiction," top, and "Saturday Night Fever."



Vestron Pictures

PATRICK Swayze, shown with Jennifer Grey, in "Dirty Dancing," above, and in "Point Break."



20th Century Fox

3. Patrick Swayze

Musical: "Dirty Dancing," Broadway productions of "Grease" and "Chicago"

Tough guy: "Road House," "Point Break," "Red Dawn," "Outsiders"

Growing up around his mother's dance studio in Houston, Swayze was destined to strut. His big break came when he was cast as Danny Zuko in the original Broadway production of "Grease." And long before burley athletes began hoofing it up on "Dancing With the Stars," Swayze was pulling Baby out of a corner and into movie history in his memorable performance as the Catskills resort dance instructor, Johnny Castle, in "Dirty Dancing." Through the '80s, he played the strong and responsible older brother fighting gangs and Russians in "The Outsiders" and "Red Dawn," respectively. It was his back-to-back roles as a rough and rugged bouncer in "Road House" and a surfing bank robber in "Point Break" that earned him some tough guy street cred.



Warner Bros. Pictures

4. Gerard Butler

Musical: "The Phantom of the Opera"

Tough guy: "300," "Dracula 2000," "Attila the Hun"

Butler makes our list for his extreme choices and intense approach to both genres with astonishing results. In between playing ruthless rulers Attila the Hun and Spartan King Leonidas in Zack Snyder's groundbreaking "300," Butler tackled the coveted title role in the film adaptation of Andrew Lloyd Webber's "The Phantom of the Opera." His brilliant rendition of "The Music of the Night" showed audiences he had the chops to make us (almost) forget Michael Crawford.



ALEX BAILEY Warner Bros. Pictures

GERARD Butler in "The Phantom of the Opera," above, and "300."



JAMES FISHER 20th Century Fox

2. Hugh Jackman

Musical: "Les Misérables," Tony Awards host, stage productions of "Oklahoma!," "Beauty and the Beast" and "The Boy From Oz"

Tough guy: "X-Men," "X-Men Origins: Wolverine," "Van Helsing"

The opening scene of "Les Misérables" reveals a barely recognizable Jackman shackled in chains pulling a ship into dock with a rope during a monsoon, all while singing with untethered emotion and depth. The performer has become the epitome of the modern-day triple threat: He won a Tony Award in 2004 as best actor in a musical for his portrayal of Australian singer-songwriter Peter Allen in "The Boy From Oz" and he's the focus of Oscar talk for his performance as Jean Valjean in "Les Misérables." He gained a huge fanboy base as the gruff and brooding Wolverine in the "X-Men" film franchise. He'll next reprise the popular role in "The Wolverine," due out this year. All that and a journalism degree to boot.



LAURIE SPARHAM Universal Pictures

HUGH Jackman in "X-Men Origins: Wolverine," far left, and in "Les Misérables."



Turner Entertainment



Warner Bros. Entertainment

JAMES Cagney in "Yankee Doodle Dandy," left, and "The Public Enemy."

1. James Cagney

Musical: vaudeville tap dancer, "Yankee Doodle Dandy"

Tough guy: "The Public Enemy," "Angels With Dirty Faces"

Despite his first job in a revue as a female dancer in a chorus line and an early resume of light comedies, Cagney set the standard as the quintessential tough guy. He gained notoriety for his gangster characters beginning with Tom Powers in "The Public Enemy" in 1931. His style has been imitated yet never replicated. Even Tony Soprano idolized him. In the 1930s and '40s, he co-starred

alongside other bad guys such as Humphrey Bogart and Edward G. Robinson, further cementing his gangster persona. So it was rather ironic that he won his only Oscar for his remarkable portrayal of the musical composer-dancer-actor George M. Cohan in "Yankee Doodle Dandy" in 1942.

calendar@latimes.com