

Melanie Martinez's K-12 Fails as a Musical

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In 2012, Melanie Martinez rose to the spotlight after making it to the top six on *The Voice*, a reality TV singing competition for undiscovered talent. After the uniqueness of her voice was revealed to audiences, Martinez went on to release her first single "Dollhouse" in 2014. She continued on her rise to fame, releasing her album *Crybaby* soon after.

By then, her artistic style was apparent, and listeners found her pairing of child-like innocence with harsh realities to be refreshing and original. Visually, she kept to pastel colors and used exaggerated elements from early youth, like frilly dresses, bows, etc. After releasing her album, Melanie Martinez gained significant popularity while still remaining a somewhat niche popstar.

Unfortunately, in early December of 2017, a sexual assault allegation came out against her. Although this claim was proven to be untrue, her reputation immediately plummeted.

After two years of silence, Martinez emerged with her new album, *K-12*. Fans were excited for her return, especially since the album was a part of a musical produced and directed by the singer herself.

Originally, the film itself would play in theaters, but Martinez decided to release the film for free on YouTube. For months, the anticipation for the musical was boosted by teasers and bus tours. But when I finally sat down to watch it, it was extremely underwhelming.

As a fan of musicals in general, before I analyze the *K-12* film, I want to explain the difference between pop songs and songs made for musicals. Pop songs are often vague enough to serve as background music but specific enough to be relatable to the listener. Most songs completely summarize a story or a feeling within a few minutes. In contrast, songs in musicals are pieces of a bigger puzzle. That is to say, none of them completely summarize the musical but instead they work together to tell a story and move the plot forward.

In terms of maintaining a visually appealing style, the musical excels greatly. With a beautiful set design and amazing costumes the film seemed promising. However, notice how these elements make a great music video instead of a great musical.

Melanie Martinez stars as the main character, *Crybaby*, and casts her friends to play side characters. *Crybaby* attends a school with her friends and they each have telekinetic powers that allow them to bond as outcasts. Whether these powers actually exist in the narrative or if they are metaphorical is never explained. We also don't learn how or why the characters attained these powers.

Along with this, the antagonists can easily be written out as their conflicts and interactions have no purpose and lead nowhere.

For example, Kelly is a character that bullies *Crybaby* as they fight over a boy. However, it seems that conflict was only added to go along with one song, Class Fight. Kelly's character fades into irrelevance after this single quarrel.

Even the main figures, including *Crybaby* herself, fail to face real character development. The songs, as nice to listen to as they are, create a domino effect of poorly done elements.

Because they're pop songs, the songs do not blend together well, and collectively, they do not tell a story. They weren't written for a musical, and the lyrics do not help progress the development of the characters or impact the story. Throughout the film, the storytelling disappears whenever a song starts. The audience is pulled away from the storyline and dragged into a music video. Even though the choreography is well done, it often doesn't involve any of the established characters, further distancing these "musical moments" from the plot.

The characters get little development because they don't have enough time to make an impact in between songs. The narrative also suffers due to this fact, which can be seen in how the audience is not privy to how *Crybaby* and her friends have these powers.

Overall, the film is more comparable to a compilation of music videos with bits of acting filmed around it. The acting itself is wooden as the lines are just stated with no emotion. Melanie Martinez is an extremely talented artist, but if she wants to improve her next film, she has to improve her writing. She has to write the songs for the musical, not the other way around.