Directed by Lloyd Bacon
Dance Ensembles designed by Busby Berkeley
Written by Rian James, James Seymour, Bradford Ropes (novel)
Produced by Darryl F. Zanuck
Cinematography by Sol Polito
Costume Design by Orry-Kelly
Music Composed by Harry Warren
Lyrics by Al Dubin

Warner Baxter...Julian Marsh
Bebe Daniels...Dorothy Brock
George Brent...Pat Denning
Ruby Keeler...Peggy Sawyer
Guy Kibbee...Abner Dillon
Una Merkel...Lorraine Fleming
Ginger Rogers...Ann 'Anytime Annie' Lowell
Ned Sparks...Barry
Dick Powell...Billy Lawler

National Film Registry (1998)

LLOYD BACON (December 4, 1889, San Jose, California – November 15, 1955, Burbank, California) has 130 director credits, some of which are 1954 She Couldn't Say No, 1953 The French Line, 1953 Walking My Baby Back Home, 1953 The Great Sioux Uprising, 1951 Call Me Mister, 1950 Kill the Umpire, 1950 The Good Humor Man, 1949 It Happens Every Spring, 1948 Give My Regards to Broadway, 1948 You Were Meant for Me, 1944 The Sullivans, 1943 Action, the North Atlantic, 1940 Knute Rockne All American, 1939 Espionage Agent, 1937 San Quentin, 1936 Gold Diggers of 1933, 1935 Devil Dogs of the Air, 1933 Footlight Parade, 1933 Mary Stevens, M.D., 1933 42nd Street, 1932 Fireman, Save My Child, 1931 Manhattan Parade, 1931 Gold Dust Gertie, 1930 Moby Dick, 1930 A Notorious Affair, 1930 She Couldn't Say No, 1927 Brass Knuckles, 1926 Private Izzy Murphy, 1924 Don't Fail, 1922 The Educator, and 1922 The Speeder. He also acted, 74 films, the last of which was 1935 Broadway Gondolier and the first of which was 1914 His Taking Ways.

BUSBY BERKELEY (William Berkeley Enos, 29 November 1895, Los Angeles—14 March 1976, Palm Springs, California) was arguably the greatest choreographer in film. He invented the camera as a character in the dance. Scott M. Keir wrote in the 1997-1998 Edinburgh University Film Society program, “Berkeley was a choreographer who did not just choreograph the dancing, but also the cameras and the audiences, in a host of grand, outlandish musicals. His sweeping, novel style was his hallmark, with the fine set pieces in Gold Diggers of 1933 a fine example...Busby always experimented with unusual camera angles and editing to liven up the proceedings. The films tried to go one better than the stage musicals by going one bigger, with huge set pieces and opulent surroundings. This was where many who arrived in Hollywood seeking stardom found their dream. The set pieces of many a Berkeley musical would call for a cast of hundreds of dancing girls in a kaleidoscopic, co-ordinated extravaganza. Gold Diggers of 1933 has some of the most outlandish of these, as does one of the later remakes, Gold Diggers of 1935 (not to mention Gold Diggers of 1937).” Before Berkeley, the choreographer or dance director would design the dances and train the dancers, then the film’s director would control the actual filming. Berkeley talked producer Sam Goldwyn into letting him direct the entire dance sequences. Not only did he bring his own genius to the dances but he changed the way they were filmed—using only one camera (which meant the shots became part of the choreography rather than merely a documentation of it) and doing closeups of the dancers. "Well, we've got all the beautiful girls in the picture, why not let the public see them?" he said. Darryl Zanuck at Warner Brothers hired him to direct the musical segments of 42nd Street 1932, after which his style and position were solidly established and he and his team

Take Me Out to the Ball Game 1949, For Me and My Gal (Gene Kelly’s first film) 1942, Babes in Arms 1939, and They Made Me a Criminal 1939. The famous neon violin “Shadow Waltz” sequence in Gold Diggers of 1933 had an afterlife: the song was included in the 1970s stage version of 42nd Street on Broadway and the violins themselves are on display in the Warner’s Studio museum. Nicole Armour’s interesting Images article, “The Machine Art of Dziga Vertov and Busby Berkeley,” is on-line at http://www.imagesjournal.com/issue05/features/berkeley-vertov.htm.

Rian James (October 3, 1899, Eagle Pass, Texas – April 26, 1953, Newport Beach, California) wrote the screenplay, story or original dialogue for 42 titles, some of which were 1947 Whispering City, 1947 The Fortresses, 1942 Parachute Nurse, 1942 Not a Ladies’ Man, 1942 This Time for Keeps, 1941 Broadway Limited, 1940 Turnabout, 1939 The Gorilla, 1938 Submarine Patrol, 1935 To Beat the Band, 1935 Redheads on Parade, 1934 The White Parade, 1934 The Big Shakedown, 1933 Mary Stevens, M.D., 1933 Private Detective 62, 1933 42nd Street, 1933 Parachute Jumper, 1932 Lawyer Man, and 1932 Love Is a Racket.


**AL DUBIN** (June 10, 1891, Zurich, Switzerland – February 11, 1945, New York City, New York) wrote the lyrics for many Broadway standards, some of which are “I Only Have Eyes for You,” “Lullaby of Broadway,” “Forty-Second Street,” “You’re Getting to Be a Habit with Me,” “The Boulevard of Broken Dreams,” “The Gold Diggers’ Song We’re in the Money,” “Shuffle Off to Buffalo,” and “Tip-Toe thru the Tulips with Me.”


**RUBY KEELER...Peggy Sawyer** (August 25, 1910, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada – February 28, 1993, Rancho Mirage, California) was in only 15 films, some of which were 1964 “The Greatest Show on Earth”, 1937 Ready, Willing and Able, 1935 Go Into Your Dance, 1934 Flirtation Walk, 1934 Dames, 1933 Footlight Parade, 1933 Gold Diggers of 1933,and 1933 42nd Street. She had a long career on Broadway and was, from 1928 through 1940, married to singer Al Jolson.


NED SPARKS...Barry (November 19, 1883, Guelph, Ontario, Canada – April 3, 1957, Victorville, California) appeared in 86 films, some of which were 1947 Magic Town, 1941 For Beauty's Sake, 1939 The Star Maker, 1936 One, a Million, 1935 George White's '35 Scandals, 1934 Sweet Adeline, 1934 Imitation of Life, 1934 Sing and Like It, 1933 Alice, Wonderland, 1933 Gold Diggers of 1933, 1933 Secrets, 1933 42nd Street, 1931 Corsair, 1931 Iron Man, 1928 On to Reno, 1927 Alias the Lone Wolf, 1927 Alias the Deacon, 1925 Seven Keys to Baldpate, 1920 Nothing But the Truth, and 1915 The Little Miss Brown.


Lloyd Bacon (from IMdB)
As one of the work horses in Warner Brothers stable of 1930s directors, Lloyd Bacon's career isn't comparatively loaded with classic films as many of his more famous contemporaries. What few he had his hand in (42nd Street 1933, and Footlight Parade 1933) are so overshadowed by the dazzling surrealistic choreography of Busby Berkeley to the extent that casual film buffs today often forget they were directed by him. While his resume lacks the drama of failed productions and tales of an unbridled ego, he consistently enriched the studio's coffers, directing a handful of their biggest hits of the late 1920s and 30s. Lloyd Bacon's career amounts to that of a competent — at times brilliant -- director who did the best with the material handed to him in assembly line fashion. Lloyd Bacon was born in San Jose, California on January 16, 1890 into a theatrical family (his father was Frank Bacon, a playwright and legitimate actor). His parents enlisted all the Bacon children onto the stage. Despite having a strong interest in law as a student at Santa Clara College, Lloyd opted for an acting career after appearing in a student production of "The Passion Play." In 1911 he joined David Belasco's Los Angeles Stock Company (with fellow actor Lewis Stone), touring the country and gaining good notices in a Broadway run of the hit, "Cinderella Man" and gaining further experience during a season of vaudeville. Lloyd switched gears in 1915 and took a stab at silent Hollywood, playing the heavy in 'Gilbert M. 'Broncho Billy' Anderson' shorts and pulling duty as a stunt double. With America's entry into WWI in 1917, Lloyd enlisted in the Navy and was assigned to the Photo Department. This began a lifelong admiration for the service and might explain the Navy being a favorite reoccurring theme in many of his films.

After the Armistice, Lloyd moved from Mutual (Charles Chaplin's studio at the time) to Triangle as a comedy actor. It was at this point that he got his first taste of directing -- Bacon had let everyone at the studio know he had an interest in helming a picture and when the director of a now forgotten Lloyd Hamilton comedy short fell ill, he was given his chance. Constantly moving, Bacon joined tightwad producer Mack Sennett as a gag writer, who, sensing a bargain, happily accommodated Lloyd's desire to become a full time director by early 1921. The Sennett studio was already in an irreversible decline during Bacon's tenure there but it allowed the novice director to gain a wealth of experience. He apprenticed for Sennett until joining Warner Brothers in 1925, an association that would last a remarkable 18 years and begin when the working man's studio was building a strong stable of contract directors that included Michael Curtiz, Alan Crosland, John G. Adolphi and Mervyn LeRoy.

Although Lloyd never became known for a particular style other than a well-placed close up, his ability to bring an entertaining film in on time and within budget earned him such enormous respect from five Warner Brothers that he was soon handed control over important projects, including The Singing Fool (1928), an Al Jolson follow up to The Jazz Singer (1927) which grossed an unheard of (for Warner's at least) $4,000,000 in domestic receipts alone — the studio's #1 hit for 1928. Bacon was rewarded by becoming the highest paid director on the studio's payroll, earning
over $200,000.00 a year throughout the Depression. He was called upon to direct their big budget production of Moby Dick (1930) which gained good notices, but it's a version that's barely remembered today.

The 1930s saw Bacon assigned to the assembly line; aside from the 'Busby Berkeley' choreographed films, he directed many of James Cagney's crowd pleasing 2-week wonders, including Picture Snatcher (1933), and The Irish in Us (1935), occasionally being afforded more time and money on productions such as, Here Comes the Navy (1934), and Devil Dogs of the Air (1935). He also directed Cagney's return effort, miscast in the frenetic Boy Meets Girl (1938) after the actor's ill-advised move to Grand National while engaging in a legal war with Jack L. Warner. This was one of Cagney's least critically popular Warner Brothers films of 1930s, but a smash hit for the studio.

During his years at Warner's, Bacon gained a reputation as a clothes horse, the dapper director, arriving on the set dressed to the nines, wearing expensive hats, that he would toss around the set when expressing his dissatisfaction (he ruined a lot of hats) at an actor's performance or missed cue. Bacon continued to grind out profitable films for the studio until moving to 20th Century Fox from 1944-49 (a logical move, since the recently discharged Darryl F. Zanuck knew Bacon from his early days at Warner's), then bounced between Columbia, Fox, Universal and the chaotically-ran RKO in 1954. Lloyd worked virtually until his death from a cerebral hemorrhage at age 65.

Berkeley’s main contribution to the film musical was the staging of dances especially for the camera, using all the cinematic resources at his command. He is famous for the moving camera (which roved through, around, under, and over his dancers rather than remaining fixed in one position), and is particularly known for the overhead shot in which the camera peers down at the dancers as they form everchanging patterns. Using dancers as elements in an abstract design to create his effects rather than as individuals who perform dance routines is one of his trademarks…

The musical numbers in 42nd Street are not as opulent or dazzling as those in later Berkeley films, but their comparative restraint and their vitality more than compensate for that.

The film musical was never quite the same after 42nd Street. It confirmed the emergence of a major new talent—Busby Berkeley—and the emergence of the musical as a new art form. It was one of the top-grossing films of the year and is credited with rescuing Warner Bros. from bankruptcy.

42nd Street. Edited with an introduction by Rocco Fumento. Published for the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research by The University of Wisconsin Press. Madison, Wisconsin, 1980.

Tino Balio, General Editor: “Our goal in publishing these Warner Brothers screenplays is to explicate the art of screenwriting during the thirties and forties, the so-called Golden Age of Hollywood.”

Introduction From Bastards and Bitches to Heroes and Heroines

If the movie version of 42nd Street had been as frank and as gritty as the novel, it would have been a genuine first for American Musicals. The novel is too busy and certainly some of the subplots…could have been omitted. Yet a daring, but honest, movie based on the novel could have been made back in those days, before Mae West awakened the censors with her second film, She Done Him Wrong, and with such lines as “Are you packin’ a rod or are you just glad to see me?”…

Official censorship first came to Hollywood in 1922, after a series of scandals that made the headlines and brought the film business to the attention of the U.S. Congress. To avoid federal censorship, the film industry decided to be its own watchdog. As its white knight and master, the industry chose Will H. Hays to be president of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, which came to be known as the Hays Office. Hays seemed the perfect choice. He was a Presbyterian elder, he was postmaster general of the United States, he had been President Harding’s campaign manager, and he was a non-smoker, a teetotaler, and a conservative small-town boy from the conservative state of Indiana. The Hays Office’s first list of thou-shalt-nots was published in 1927; in 1930 the list was recast into what came to be known as the Production Code. But the Hays Office did little to enforce its Code until, in 1934, it was forced to do so by a public
outcry, spearheaded by the newly formed Catholic Legion of Decency, against excessive violence and sex in films. Joseph Breen, a Catholic layman, was hired by the Hays Office to be the stern enforcer of the Code.

But there was no Breen when 42nd Street was made and released. In such films as Red Dust, A Free Soul, Rain, Little Caesar, The Public Enemy, and Scarface, Hollywood did not shy away from either sex or violence. Like the prostitute with the heart of Gold, 42nd Street is tough on the outside and soft on the inside. It is a good film that could have been better if Warners had dared to stick more closely to Bradford Ropes’s novel.

Not that the Ropes novel is a great novel. It is, in fact, a bad one. The characters are either stereotypes (Dorothy Brock, the aging bitchy Broadway star) or caricatures (Mrs. Blair, the stridently ambitious backstage mother) or merely flat.

The novel comes alive only in the hard-as-nails, off-color, often amusing wisecracks. None of these wisecracks is in the film. Just one such line from the novel is recognizable in the film. A gossipy, homosexual chorus boy says, “Sophie only said no once an’ then she didn’t understand what the man asked her.” In the film, Andy Lee offers a more compact and cutting version: “She only said no once, and then she didn’t hear the question!”...Hollywood’s major concern is not whether a book is good or bad, but whether it can be made into a money-making movie.

The question becomes, Why not make a movie of 42nd Street? Its title alone would bring in all those starry-eyed youngsters who dreamed of going to New York and to Forty-second Street, perhaps the most glamorous street in the world to starry-eyed youngsters back in 1933. Its multiple-plot story offered variety and the opportunity to use an all-star cast; its backstage setting offered excitement and pretty chorus girls; and if the characters were too tough and the wisecracks too rough, Warners’ scriptwriters could soften the toughness and smooth the roughness and still retain enough of both to please the customers without offending them.

A musical hailed as the first talkie (The Jazz Singer) rescued Warner Brothers from bankruptcy in 1927 and, in the midst of the Great Depression, another musical (42nd Street) did the same. So said the sentimental myth-makers of Hollywood. Before The Jazz Singer, Warners already had a pair of star money-makers in their two handsome profiles John Barrymore and Rin-Tin-Tin. In those pre-talkie days, however, Warners was still a small Hollywood studio and its future was far from bright. It had neither a national distribution system nor access to a steady supply of money to permit the company to grow. How was it possible for this studio to compete with the Big Three, Famous Players- Lasky (later Paramount), Loew’s (later MGM), and First National?

It was a man named Waddill Catchings, the head of the investment division of the great Wall Street firm of Goldman Sachs, who helped put Warners into the big leagues. Through New York’s National Bank of Commerce, Catchings set up a $3 million revolving credit fund. Then he went to the Colony Tryst Company of Boston and to four other banks. Through them, Catchings provided Warners with a permanent method of financing future productions. Meanwhile, Warners acquired the Vitaphone Corporation with its nearly fifty exchanges throughout the world, plus two studios, a processing lab, and a film library. With a $4 million debenture issue, Warners established a worldwide distribution system, acquired ten theaters, and was well on its way to competing with the majors. Its final expansionary move led to the coming of sound.

Contrary to popular belief, it was not really The Jazz Singer that broke the sound barrier. There had been experimentations with sound almost since film making began. But no studio, with the exception of Warners and Fox, was particularly interested in bringing sound to the screen. Numerous people were working on sound systems, but Warners formed an alliance with Western Electric, and out of this alliance the Vitaphone Corporation emerged. Vitaphone, through contracts with the Victor Talking Machine Company, with the Metropolitan Opera Company, and with individual vaudeville stars, soon had enough talent for the making of short subjects. At about the same time Vitaphone engaged the New York Philharmonic to record background music for the big-budgeted John Barrymore film, Don Juan. On August 6, 1926, eight “Vitaphone Preludes” and Don Juan opened at the Warner theater in New York. In the following year, on October 6, The Jazz Singer, a part-talkie, opened at the same theater and Warners was on its way to the top of the American film industry.

The public’s love affair with sound ushered in a boom period for the entire motion picture industry. Between 1928 and 1929 profits from all the studios jumped considerably. But Warners made the biggest leap, with its profits soaring from $2 million to over $4 million. It was time for consolidation. And Warner Brothers, with its early gamble on sound paying off so handsomely,
led the way. First it acquired the Stanley Company, which owned a chain of three hundred theaters along the East Coast and a one-third interest in First National. Then it bought out First National’s remaining stockholders. In 1925, Warners’ assets were a little over $5 million; in 1930 they were valued at $230 million. In only five years Warners had become one of the biggest and most profitable companies in the entire film industry.

By 1933 the Depression had cut moviegoing attendance in half (from 110 million between 1927 and 1930 to 60 million in 1930 and Warners was seriously in debt. Like the other majors, Warners had overextended itself, mainly by having acquired those three hundred theaters. It was impossible for the studio to meet its long-term indebtedness. But the Depression wolf was at every studio’s door except MGM’s, which was under the protection of Leo the Lion and such formidable box-office stars as Dressler, Beery, Harlow, Gable, Crawford, and Shearer. Warners managed to pacify the wolf, barely, with the films of that tough guy trio of little giants, Edward G. Robinson, James Cagney, and Paul Muni, with such fluke box-office hits as the William Powell-Kay Francis sudser One Way Passage, and with the tight-budgeted comedies of loose-mouthed comedian Joe E. Brown. And if the prestige films of Ruth Chatterton and George Arliss erased not one penny of Warners’ huge debt, that was the price the studio paid in order to give it some class. They were Warners’ answer to MGM’s Garbo and Paramount’s Dietrich.

Though 42nd Street was not Warner Brothers’ salvation, it was, like Columbia’s It Happened One Night (1934), a surprise smash hit, a big money-maker, a sleeper that practically no one expected would be a front-runner, a movie that would serve as a model for dozens of subsequent films including Ken Russell’s The Boy Friend (which tried to satirize it but ended as an exercise in tedium). When 42nd Street came along, musicals were supposed to be dead. The public had had enough of posturing heroes and prissy heroines, of cramped, smothered-by-sets stagings, of witless dialogue and the preposterous plots of Dixiana, The Vagabond King, The Desert Song, and Her Majesty, Love. The only really popular musicals of 1931-32 were The Big Broadcast, featuring a large cast of radio stars including Bing Crosby and Kate Smith; the Eddie Cantor vehicles for Samuel Goldwyn, Palmy Days and The Kid from Spain (both with dances staged by Busby Berkeley); and the intimate, witty, sophisticated boudoir musicals of Ernst Lubitsch (The Smiling Lieutenant and One Hour with You) and Rouben Mamoulian (Love Me Tonight).

John Kobal makes a great deal of sense when he credits much of 42nd Street’s appeal to the lowly chorus girl; “Once a demure non-participant she now becomes a predatory calculator, deceptively soft in garters and silk. Her crude, gutsy, and very funny line of repartee made her eminently capable of coping with the wolves and sugar-daddies, swapping fast lines, outsmarting the Babbits and generally casting a caustic look at the world around her. No lost lamb she, quite aware that the best way of keeping the wolf from the door was to coax him inside, where she could fleece him in comfort. Her redeeming virtue (though she was really too much fun to need one) was her tendency to see that the sugar daddies’ money went toward financing the show, which would in turn give employment to the entire company of chorines.” This is hindsight, however; critics of the day contendted themselves mainly with heaping praise (in bad prose) upon Bacon, Berkeley, the performers, and the production in general.

After its sneak preview early in the year, Variety Bulletin (January 13, 1933) hailed the movie: “as the prelude to a possible cycle of musicals, Warners has given the other studios something to shoot at in 42nd Street. As received by the preview audiences, it is evident the public is not fed up on musicals if there is a logical reason for tunes and dance routines being inserted in the story. In 42nd Street there’s a legitimate reason for everything. It’s a back stage play, but one of the best that has hit the screen….
COMING UP IN THE SPRING 2011 BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS XXII:

Feb 1 Ernst Lubitsch NINOTCHKA 1939
Feb 8 Luchino Visconti OSSessione 1942
Feb 15 Robert Bresson AU HASARD BALTHAZAR 1966
Feb 22 Martin Ritt THE SPY WHO CAME IN FROM THE COLD 1965
Mar 1 Nicholas Roeg WALKABOUT 1971
Mar 8 John Mackenzie THE LONG GOOD FRIDAY 1980
Mar 22 Bertrand Tavernier COUPE DE TORCHON/CLEAN SLATE 1981
Mar 29 Werner Herzog FITZCARRALDO 1982
Apr 5 Nagisa Ôshima MERRY CHRISTMAS MR. LAWRENCE 1983
Apr 12 Stephen Frears THE GRIFTERS 1990
Apr 19 Jafar Panahi DAYEREH/THE CIRCLE 2000
Apr 26 Ridley Scott BLADE RUNNER 1982

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with support from the Robert and Patricia Colby Foundation and the Buffalo News

here’s the url for the original cast recording to “Shuffle Off to Buffalo”: