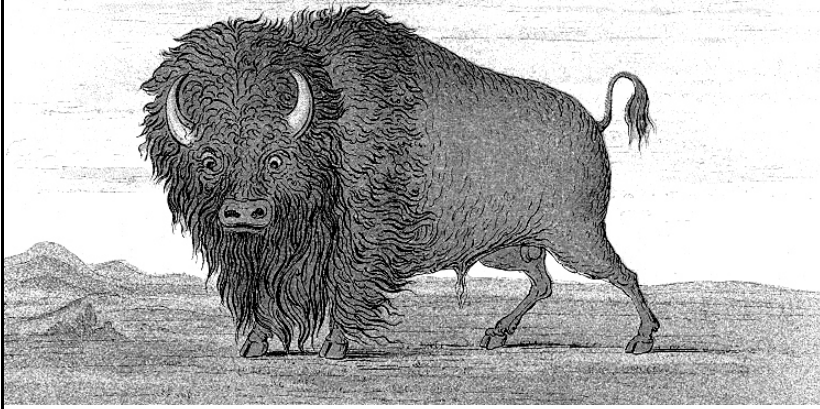


The Buffalo Film Seminars



Conversations about great films
with Diane Christian & Bruce Jackson

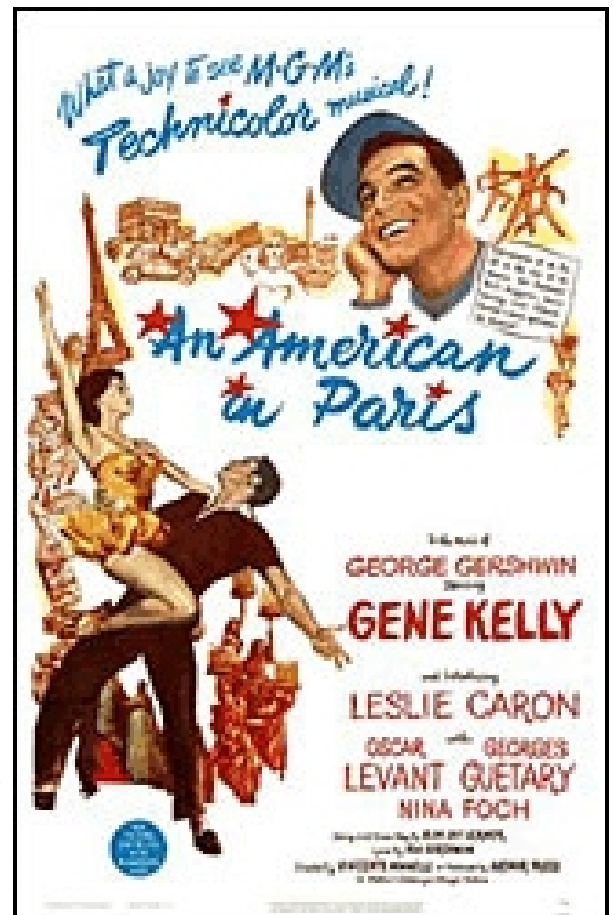
VINCENTE MINNELLI (28 February 1903, Chicago, Illinois—25 July 1986, Beverly Hills, Alzheimer's) directed 38 films, the first of which was *Panama Hattie* (1942, uncredited) and the last of which was *A Matter of Time* (1976). Some of the others were *On a Clear Day You Can See Forever* 1970, *The Sandpiper* 1965, *Two Weeks in Another Town* 1962, *Some Came Running* 1958, *Gigi* 1958 (for which he won an Oscar as best director), *Tea and Sympathy* 1956, *Lust for Life* 1956, *Brigadoon* 1954, *The Bad and the Beautiful* 1952, *Father of the Bride* 1950, *Madame Bovary* 1949, *Ziegfeld Follies* 1946, and *Meet Me in St. Louis* 1944.

JOHN ALTON (5 October 1901, Sopron, Austria-Hungary—2 June 1996, Santa Monica, California) shot 101 films. His book "Painting with Light" is still a staple for students of cinematography. Some of his films were *Elmer Gantry* 1960, *Lonelyhearts* 1958, *The Brothers Karamazov* 1958, *The Teahouse of the August Moon* 1956, *Tea and Sympathy* 1956, *Cattle Queen of Montana* 1954, *Duffy of San Quentin* 1954, *I, the Jury* 1953, *Father of the Bride* 1950, *Canon City* 1948, *T-Men* 1947, *I Was a Criminal* 1945, *Power Dive* 1941, *Dr. Christian Meets the Women* 1940, *The Courageous Dr. Christian* 1940, and *Los Tres Berretines* 1933.

ALAN JAY LERNER (31 August 1918, New York, New York—14 June 1986, New York, New York, lung cancer) wrote the lyrics for *On a Clear Day You Can See Forever* 1970, *Paint Your Wagon* 1969, *Camelot* 1967, *My Fair Lady* 1964, *Gigi* 1958, *Brigadoon* 1954 and *Royal Wedding* 1951.

CEDRIC GIBBONS (23 March 1893, Dublin, Ireland—26 July 1960, Hollywood) did art direction on 1022 films. In 1956, the last year he worked, he did 15 films, in 1953, he did 38. He was nominated for 39 Oscars and won 11 of them; many of the years he didn't win he was competing with himself and lost because votes for him were split. His wins were for *Somebody Up There Likes Me* 1956, *Julius Caesar* 1953, *The Bad and the Beautiful* 1952, *An American in Paris* 1951, *Little Women* 1949, *The Yearling* 1946, *Gaslight* 1944, *Blossoms in the Dust* 1941, *Pride and Prejudice* 1940, *The Merry Widow* 1934, and *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* 1929.

GENE KELLY (23 August 1912, Pittsburgh—2 February 1996, Beverly Hills, complications from two strokes) acted in 47 films and directed 12. **Bio from Leonard Maltin's Film Encyclopedia:** "The enduring image of this handsome, robust performer gaily dancing to and crooning "Singin' in the Rain" (in the classic 1952 film of the same name), one of the most frequently repeated sequences in movie history, shouldn't obscure the other impressive achievements in his lengthy, generally distinguished career. A dancer since childhood, Kelly studied economics at Penn State and the University of Pittsburgh, but had the misfortune of graduating during the Depression and was forced to take menial jobs to support himself. At one time a dancing teacher, he finally parlayed his natural ability into a chorus-boy assignment on the Broadway stage. In 1940 he won the leading role in Rodgers and Hart's "Pal Joey," which catapulted him to stardom. During this period he also choreographed several hit plays, including the 1941 production of "Best Foot Forward." It was probably inevitable that Kelly should wind up in Hollywood, where the film musical had produced some of the screen's most popular players. Kelly's good looks, brawny physique, and vigorous, athletic dancing style set him apart from most male dancers, and while he lacked Fred Astaire's stylish elegance, he more than made up for it with his own ebullience and winning personality. Paired with Judy Garland in *For Me and My Gal* (1942), he got off to a fine start, making a hit with audiences and eliciting favorable reviews. Kelly spent most of his film career at MGM, home of the fabled Arthur Freed unit, which produced Hollywood's finest musicals....In *Anchors Aweigh* (1945) he and choreographic partner Stanley Donen concocted a brilliant and innovative dance sequence with the animated Jerry the Mouse. (The musical also earned Kelly a Best Actor Oscar nomination, and marked the first of three screen teamings with Frank Sinatra, whom he taught to dance.) *Ziegfeld Follies* (1946) teamed him with Fred Astaire for the amusing "Babbitt and the Bromide" number. *Words*



and *Music* (1948), a dubious biography of songwriters Rodgers and Hart, enabled him to make a guest appearance performing an impressive rendition of Rodgers' "Slaughter on 10th Avenue" ballet. *The Pirate* (1948) teamed him with Judy Garland in a particularly exuberant musical, and *The Three Musketeers* (also 1948) allowed Kelly, as D'Artagnan, to use his graceful body movements in a nonmusical swashbuckler. *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* (1949), a modestly entertaining baseball musical, gave Kelly and Donen screen credit for contributing the picture's storyline. Only *Living in a Big Way* (1947), a notorious flop about postwar reacclimation, marred Kelly's late 1940s winning streak. Kelly and Donen earned their director's stripes with *On the Town* (1949), the wonderful Betty Comden-Adolph Green-Leonard Bernstein musical about sailors on leave in New York, New York, in which Kelly also starred. Among its other distinctions was the fact that this musical left the confines of a Hollywood studio and filmed its exteriors on location. After making *Summer Stock* (1950) with former costar Judy Garland, Kelly took a dramatic role in that year's *Black Hand* which cast the dark-haired performer as an Italian-American crimebuster. Although directed by Vincente Minnelli, *An American in Paris* (1951) bore Kelly's mark just as strongly. (He is a lifelong Francophile.) His singing and dancing were never better showcased, and the lengthy Gershwin ballet that climaxes the film is one of the highpoints of Kelly's career. It earned him a special Academy Award that year. He took a supporting part in an all-star, picaresque drama, *It's a Big Country* (also 1951) before joining forces with Donen for *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), arguably the finest movie musical of all time, and a delightful spoof of Hollywood's chaotic transition from silent films to sound. Supported by Donald O'Connor and Debbie Reynolds, Kelly the Actor turned in one of his best performances, while Kelly the Dancer/Choreographer provided inventive terpsichore and Kelly the Codirector contributed dynamic staging. With this one film he reached the apogee of his career. Kelly went dramatic again in *The Devil Makes Three* (1952), and then had to face the fact that MGM was scaling back on the production of lavish musicals. Lerner and Loewe's *Brigadoon* (1954), directed by Minnelli, was supposed to have been filmed in Scotland, but budget cutbacks kept it on a soundstage instead. Although quite entertaining it was not the film Kelly had hoped for. He persuaded MGM to let him make *Invitation to the Dance* (1957, but filmed years earlier), but this earnest, ambitious episodic dance musical was not a great success artistically or financially. *Les Girls* (also 1957) was Kelly's last starring musical, a pleasant soufflé with Cole Porter songs and George Cukor direction. (Kelly did make an amusing cameo as Yves Montand's dancing coach in 1960's *Let's Make Love* and appeared in Jacques Demy's French-made homage to the Hollywood musical, *The Young Girls of Rochefort* in 1968, though his singing voice was—incredibly—dubbed in the French-language version. But his singing and dancing, for the most part, was confined to television from the 1960s on.) Acting had never been Kelly's strongest suit, but he was tailor-made for the part of a charming heel in *Marjorie Morningstar* (1958). He was less ideal in the role of a cynical reporter, inspired by H. L. Mencken, in *Inherit the Wind* (1960). By this time Kelly was content to spend most of his time behind the camera. He directed *The Happy Road* (1957, in which he also starred), *The Tunnel of Love* (1958), Jackie Gleason's pantomime vehicle *Gigot* (1962), a 1965 telefilm remake of *Woman of the Year* the all-star comedy *A Guide for the Married Man* (1967), the overstuffed musical *Hello, Dolly!* (1969), and *The Cheyenne Social Club* (1970)...” He won an Honorary Academy in 1952, and in 1985 the American Film Institute gave him its Life Achievement Award.

LESLIE CARON (1 July 1931, Paris) acted in 59 films and in the television series “Falconcrest.. Some of her other films are *Le Divorce* 2003, *Chocolat* 2000, *The Genius* 1993, *Valentino* 1977, *Is Paris Burning?* 1966, *The L-Shaped Room* 1962, *Gigi* 1958, and *Daddy Long Legs* 1955. **OSCAR LEVANT** (27 December 1906, Pittsburgh—14 August 1972, Beverly Hills, heart attack) acted in 16 films and composed original scores for 23. **NINA FOCH** (20 April 1924, Leiden, Zuid-Holland, Netherlands) has acted in 73 films and has appeared frequently on television. Some of her films are *How to Deal* 2003, *Sliver* 1993, *Rich and Famous* 1981, *Spartacus* 1960, *Ten Little Indians* 1959, *Executive Suite* 1954, *Johnny Allegro* 1949, *Johnny O’Clock* 1947, and *Wagon Wheels West* 1943.

from *World Film Directors, V. I. Ed. John Wakeman. H.W. Wilson Co. NY 1987. Entry by Douglas McVay.*

[Minnelli's] Italian-born father and uncle ran the Minnelli Brothers' Dramatic Tent Show, which toured the Midwest presenting plays and concerts. His father served as orchestrator and pianist, his mother as director and leading lady. Minnelli himself made his debut with the troupe in *East Lynne* at the age of three, but

FEBRUARY 22, 2005 (X:6)
AN AMERICAN IN PARIS (1951) 113 min

Gene Kelly...Jerry Mulligan
 Leslie Caron...Lise Bouvier
 Oscar Levant...Adam Cook
 Georges Guétary...Henri Baurel
 Nina Foch...Milo Roberts

Directed by Vincente Minnelli
 Written by Alan Jay Lerner
 Produced by Arthur Freed
 Original Music by Saul Chaplin (uncredited)
 Non-Original Music by George Gershwin
 Cinematography by John Alton (ballet photography), Alfred Gilks
 Art Direction by Preston Ames, Cedric Gibbons
 Costume Design by Orry-Kelly, Walter Plunkett (beaux arts ball costumes), Irene Sharaff (ballet costumes)
 Gene Kelly's paintings by Gene Grant
 Gene Kelly...choreographer

Oscars for Best Art Direction-Set Decoration, Color (Cedric Gibbons, E. Preston Ames, Edwin B. Willis, F. Keogh Gleason), Best Cinematography, Color (Alfred Gilks, John Alton), Best Costume Design, Color (Orry-Kelly, Walter Plunkett, Irene Sharaff), Best Music, Scoring of a Musical Picture (Johnny Green, Saul Chaplin), Best Picture (Arthur Freed), Best Writing, Story and Screenplay (Alan Jay Lerner), and Oscar nominations for Best Director (Vincente Minnelli) and Best Film Editing (Adrienne Fazan)

Selected by the National Film Preservation Board for the National Film Registry, 1993

“retired” five years later when the show folded.

In 1931 Minnelli went to New York as set and costume designer at the Paramount Theatre. He designed the sets for Earl Carroll's *Vanities* that year and the sets and costumes for the *Vanities* of 1932, as well as Grace Moore's costumes for *DuBarry*. In 1933 Minnelli moved on to Radio City Music Hall. Initially a costume designer there, he was soon art director and

producer, turning out a new show every month, including the ballet “El Amor Brujo: and the song-and-dance spectacle “Scheherazade.” His debut as a Broadway director came in 1935 with the revue *At Home Abroad*, for which he also designed sets and costumes: his flair for staging dance was demonstrated in a much-praised bullfight number.

Established as one of Broadway’s most promising young directors and designers Minnelli began to receive offers from Hollywood. He went there first in 1937, engaged by Paramount not as a director but as a producer....Minnelli’s time at Paramount was unproductive and frustrating. He said, “I prepared several projects, one for Marlene Dietrich, but they weren’t willing to support the kind of musicals I wanted to do, only bad ideas, like the *Big Broadcast* pictures.”

After six months Minnelli bought himself out of his Paramount contract and returned to Broadway. He directed and designed the sets for the popular musical *Hooray for What!* (1937), then for Jerome Kern’s less successful *Very Warm for May* (1939). The following year he was invited to MGM by the innovative producer Arthur Freed, with whom he made his greatest screen musicals.

Recalling his attitudes at that time, Minnelli wrote that “though I liked the idea of musical films, I wasn’t impressed by the quality of the early ones.” An exception was Rouben Mamoulian’s *Love Me Tonight*, “a marvel of sophistication”; and “if there was one picture that embodied my fascination in art and my attitude toward style it was Jacques Feyder’s *Carnival in Flanders*. He’d taken the story of a Spanish general bringing his troops north and told it with the artful detail and luminosity of the Flemish masters....Perhaps I could bring a similar perspective to American films.”

Freed had offered him a no-strings, no-contract arrangement: MGM would pay his living expenses, and he would be free to return to New York whenever he wished. He spent his first months at MGM studying all aspects of filmmaking there while advising on scripts and musical numbers, and providing ideas like the use of fruit as “musicians” in Busby Berkeley’s *Strike Up the Band* (1940). Minnelli confessed that Berkeley’s “large-scale numbers never moved me,” and he showed his own capacity for visual elegance in the handling of Judy Garland’s numbers in the “Ghost Theatre” section of Berkeley’s *Babes on Broadway* (1941).

His appetite whetted, Minnelli then embarked on his first film as director, *Cabin in the Sky*, released in 1943. Adapted from the all-black Broadway musical. . . *Cabin in the Sky* had a generally enthusiastic reception. Minnelli himself was proudest of touches that “involved an inquisitive, restless camera”; Max Ophuls, whose films “swirled with movement,” had become his spiritual leader.” Minnelli next took over the direction of *I Dood It* (1943), a farce about a pantspresser (Red Skelton) infatuated with a stage star (Eleanor Powell)—in fact a scrappy remake of Buster Keaton’s silent *Spite Marriage*.

Then, with *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944), Minnelli achieved one of his most enduringly popular musicals. ...One highlight was evoked by James Agee, when, eulogizing the remarkable child actress Margaret O’Brien, he wrote: “Her walk on Halloween, away from the bonfire into the deepening dark of the street, her fear and excitement intensifying as she approaches her destination (the insulting of the most frightening man in the

neighborhood) and follows the camera (which withdraws a few feet ahead of her in a long soft curve) are a piece of acting, of lovely, simple camera movement, and of color control which combined, while they lasted, to make my hair stand on end.”

Garland and Minnelli were married in 1945, and Liza Minnelli was born the following year.

In between [*Father of the Bride* and *Father’s Little Dividend*] came another major musical, *An American in Paris* (1951). This won five Academy Awards, including Best Picture, and remains one of Minnelli’s best-known films, though the Oscar-winning script by Alan Jay Lerner has not worn well. It centers on the relationship between Jerry, an aspiring expatriate painter (Gene Kelly) and the *gamine* (Leslie Caron). Complications are provided by a voracious socialite (Nina Foch) and a charming singer (Georges Guetary), and Oscar Levant plays Jerry’s wise-cracking buddy Adam, a concert pianist whose only performance is in a dream sequence in which he plays all of the instruments of the orchestra and makes up the audience as well. The songs are by George and Ira Gershwin, the choreography by Gene Kelly, and the art direction by Preston Ames.

The number most generally admired today is the Kelly-Caron “Love is Here to Stay.” The couple stroll through a crowd at dusk, the hubbub fading as they reach a deserted spot beside the Seine, all muted blue except for the dim glow of the bronze streetlights. Kelly’s delivery of the ballad has a tenderness which is echoed in the grave beauty of the intimate sauntering *pas-de-deux*.

Critical opinion is nowadays less unanimous as to the merits of the climactic “American in Paris” ballet, danced to Gershwin’s tone poem. Evoking Jerry’s loss of Lise and her return to him, this seventeen-minute tour de force is one of the most famous dance sequences in the history of the cinema. It employs all the resources of the dance, from ballet to tap, and draws on the styles of impressionist and postimpressionist French painters to depict various parts of Paris and various moods. For Coursodon this remains “the greatest set-piece not only in Minnelli’s career but in the entire history of the film musical”; other modern critics find it undistinguished in its choreography and dancing, and tedious in its cultural pretensions.

Minnelli and Judy Garland were divorced in 1951. Minnelli went on to direct the fashion show sequence in Mervyn LeRoy’s *Lovely to Look At* (1952); it bears his signature in its fast tracking shots, dramatic shifts of color and light, bizarre costumes, and formalized groupings. His trademarks were less apparent in “Mademoiselle,” the episode he contributed to the omnibus film *The Story of Three Loves* (1953).

One of the most admired of Minnelli’s nonmusical films followed, *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1953), produced by John Houseman and scripted by Charles Schnee. It centers on a demonic Hollywood producer, Jonathan Shields (Kirk Douglas), who will sacrifice anything and anyone (including himself) to the cause of art. We see Shields from the points of view of three of his victims: a director (Barry Sullivan), an actress (Lana Turner, in what was perhaps her best performance), and a writer (Dick Powell). Each of these people is manipulated by Shields in his quest for artistic greatness; each is damaged emotionally but enlarged creatively.

Shot in black and white by Robert Surtees, the film is full of memorable moments, like the Beverly Hills party in which an

impression of rampant egotism is underlined by the cacophony of overlapping conversations (a device often attributed to Robert Altman who used it in *M*A*S*H* seventeen years later). There is a brilliantly visualized scene in which Shields explains that horror is most effectively achieved in film by suggestion, illustrating the point with a hand sinisterly outlined in light (the reference is to *Cat People*, produced by Val Lewton, on whom Shields is partly modeled). Another justly famous sequence is the frenzied one in which Lana Turner, arriving to celebrate her new film's premiere, finds Shields with another woman; watched by an immobile camera, she hurls herself into her car and hurtles out into the night and the pelting rain, her suicidal acceleration keeping pace with her mounting hysteria until the car skids to a halt and she collapses weeping over the wheel.

Thomas Elsaesser, in Rich Altman's *Genre: The Musical*, writes that Minnelli habitually presents psychological conflict "as a clash of settings, an imbalance of stylistic elements, such as a contrast of movements or a disharmony of colours or objects....when Barry Sullivan in one of the opening scenes of *The Bad and the Beautiful* slams down the telephone, an incongruous but highly dramatic contrast is created in opposition to the dream-like setting in which Lana Turner is being filmed by the camera-crew. Minnelli constantly reduces his stories to their moments of visual intensity, where he can project the dramatic conflicts into the decor." Coursodon sees the film as the clearest exposition of one of Minnelli's central themes, the choice that must be made between "art" and "love." It is widely regarded as one of the best of all Hollywood self-examinations.

The Band Wagon, appearing the same year, is yet another candidate for the title of Minnelli's best musical.... *The Band Wagon* is Minnelli's only backstage musical, but it is a remarkably downbeat and ambiguous variation on the time-honored theme, mixing exuberance and self-questioning....

Opinions differ about *The Long, Long Trailer* (1954), a non-musical comedy adapted by Hackett and Goodrich from Clinton Twiss' novel. Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz star as newlyweds uncomfortably honeymooning in the gigantic yellow trailer of the title. ...There have also been mixed responses to Minnelli's screen version of the stage musical *Brigadoon* (1954)....All in all, most critics preferred *Brigadoon* to *Kismet* (1955), another Cinemascope adaptation of a Broadway musical—one that used musical themes from Borodin in an Arabian Nights fantasy about a wily Bagdad beggar-poet (Howard Kell), with Dolores Gray as the object of his affection. Coursodon found it "lavish and stupefyingly lifeless," pointing out that Minnelli's instinctive ploy when faced with weak material. . .was to overload the screen with production values, feeling that, at least, the audience would have something to look at."

More feverish was *Lust for Life* (1956), based on Irving Stone's novelized biography of Vincent Van Gogh, with Kirk Douglas as the tormented hero. This was Minnelli's favorite among his films, "the only time I ever asked a studio to make a picture." The Minnellian choice between art and love is central here; Van Gogh is denied the latter by the very intensity of his artistic sensibility. One of Hollywood's more serious attempts to treat the life of an artist, *Lust for Life* earned an Oscar for Anthony Quinn in the supporting role of Paul Gauguin, and an Oscar nomination for Douglas.

The French critic-director Eric Rohmer writes that "after *Designing Woman*, there is no further possibility of doubt. The

auteur of *An American in Paris* is not only an excellent director of musical comedies, but an excellent directors of comedies, period." This review was moderate indeed compared to the huge claims that were being made for Minnelli by some of Rohmer's colleagues. As Minnelli's star fell in his native country, it rose ever higher in France, where the New Wave critics had identified him as one of the greatest of *auteurist* directors.

Thomas Elsaesser called Minnelli "the virtual father of the modern musical," and not many would disagree with that. The same critic goes on to suggest that "the Minnelli musical celebrated the fulfillment of desire and identity, whose tragic absence so many of his dramatic films portray. Looked at like this, the dramas and dramatic comedies are *musicals turned inside out*, for the latter affirm all those values and urges which the former visualize as being in conflict with a radically different order of reality." Even before Minnelli sank under a deluge of bad scripts during the 1960s, his "exaltation of artifice" had put him out of favor with "realist" critics: Andrew Sarris accused him of believing "more in beauty than in art." However, as Jean-Pierre Coursodon points out, "realism being a highly relative and constantly redefined concept, artificiality. . .stands a better chance of convincing, and aging well."

from Film The International History of the Medium. Robert Sklar. Prentice-Hall & Harry Abrams, NY, 1993

The Musical

The postwar musical can almost be encapsulated in one name: Arthur Freed (1894-1973). Freed was a lyricist who became head of the musical production unit at M-G-M, and it was from that studio's Freed Unit that most of the postwar era's classic musicals emerged. Between 1946 and 1952 the Freed Unit produced eighteen musicals, highlighted by *The Pirate* (1948) and *An American in Paris* (1951), both directed by Vincente Minnelli (1903-1986), and *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), codirected by Gene Kelly (b.1912) and Stanley Donen (b.1924). Key performers in the Freed musicals included Judy Garland (1922-1969), Fred Astaire, and Kelly. All the Freed musicals were shot in Technicolor, with bright, rich, saturated hues.

Minnelli was one of the most significant directors in the genre's history, in part because he was not solely a musical specialist. Amid his postwar musicals he also directed several dramatic films, and in the 1950s he became an important director of melodramas. This experience added a depth of characterization to his musicals that was not always apparent in other works in the genre, along with an undercurrent of interest in the meaning and value of performance itself. In *The Pirate*, for example, when Judy Garland's character discovers that she can be a performer, she also learns that it is through performance that she can express her deepest feelings.

from Magill's American Film Guide V. I. Edited by Frank N. Magill. Salem Press, Englewood Cliffs NJ, 1983.

An American in Paris is a classic M-G-M musical based on George Gershwin's music. Besides the fine Gershwin score it boasts expert direction by Vincente Minnelli, lavish costumes and sets, dazzling color cinematography, and the dancing of Gene Kelly and Leslie Caron. All of these combine with one of the most ambitious ballets ever filmed in Hollywood to earn *An American*

in Paris an important niche in film history and an honor seldom won by a musical—the Academy Award for Best Picture.

There is great stylistic variety in the ballet. The scenery, decor, and costumes for each section are done in the style of famous painters—Van Gogh, Rousseau, Renoir, Utrillo, Dufy, and Toulouse-Lautrec. The dancing and choreography range from modern dance and tap to ballet.

The ballet's story is that of the ups and downs of the romance of Lise and Jerry. As the painter pursues his love, the settings change from a flower market in the style of Renoir to a street scene inspired by Utrillo. This quiet, lyrical mood is followed by a spirited George M. Cohan-style strut in a Rousseau setting. In the next section the mood changes again to one of longing and passion as Jerry and Lise dance around a fountain in the Place de la Concorde. In a jazz-inspired section Jerry is a famous Toulouse-Lautrec character, "Chocolat." Then the scene returns to the fountain, the music becomes frenzied, there is a final burst of color and movement, and everyone suddenly vanishes. Jerry returns to reality and finds himself alone with his rose. But Henri, who has overheard the lovers' good-byes, releases Lise from her engagement, and Jerry and Lise have an ecstatic reunion for the traditional happy ending.

The ballet is intended to dazzle and overwhelm us with its lights, movement, color, and variety of styles of costumes and decorations. There are several breathtaking crane shots (shots made by a camera mounted on a crane so it can move and rise above the action), colored lights and colored steam, and costumes and sets which are surrealistic and impressionistic—all trademarks of director Vincente Minnelli. There is so much to see and hear that the viewer cannot assimilate it all in one viewing. The ballet is

an ambitious, carefully crafted piece of work and is truly the high point of the film.

Ballets are rare in Hollywood musicals, and one of this length had not been attempted before. The artistic and commercial success of the British film *The Red Shoes* (1948), which featured a long ballet, helped to convince the studio to support the idea of a long one in *An American in Paris*.

It is the performance of Gene Kelly, however, that is crucial to the success of the film; he is its star and principal singer and dancer, as well as its choreographer, and his performance is impressive. In fact, it is obvious that the part of Jerry was written for him since the exuberant vitality of his acting and dancing style is perfect for the role of the brash, optimistic American in Paris. So impressive was his contribution that the Motion Picture Academy awarded him a special Oscar that year, because of his performance as an actor, singer, dancer, and choreographer.

Leslie Caron as Lise is the fresh young French girl with whom Jerry is in love. In her screen debut, Caron's youthful, charming screen presence and delightful dancing overshadow her inexperience as an actress. Indeed, she is one of the film's chief delights.

Some critics consider *An American in Paris* director Vincente Minnelli's greatest achievement in the handling of color, design, and movement. It is perhaps the film's attempt to life the musical to a higher plane of art and its bold conception that helped to earn it the Academy Award for Best Picture. In addition, it also won Academy Awards for Best Screenplay (original), Best Cinematography (color), and Best Costume Design.

COMING UP IN THE BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS:

March 1 Ingmar Bergman *Wild Strawberries* 1957

March 8 Andrzej Wajda *Ashes and Diamonds* 1958

March 22 David Lean *Lawrence of Arabia* 1962

March 29 John Frankenheimer *The Manchurian Candidate* 1962

April 5 Sergio Leone *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* 1966

April 12 Robert Bresson *Lancelot of the Lake* 1974

April 19 Larissa Shepitko *The Ascent* 1976

April 26 Akira Kurosawa *Ran* 1985

There will be a screening of Cecil B. DeMille's 1927 silent classic *The King of Kings* with live, improvised organ soundtrack by Andrew Cantrill on Sunday 13 March 2005, 5:30pm at St Paul's Cathedral, Buffalo, corner of Church & Pearl Streets. Tickets \$10 (\$5 students/children). Phone 842-6933. Web: www.musicatstpauls.org

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...email Diane Christian: engdc@buffalo.edu

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