



**Second in our  
Desert Island  
Films (Part 2)  
Season**

7:15 pm  
Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup>  
June 2019 at  
Eden Court  
Cinema

Film notes  
compiled by  
Dominic  
Thierry  
(InFiFa)

## Singin' in the Rain

Director: Stanley Donen

Starring : Gene Kelly, Donald O'Connor, Debbie Reynolds

Awards garnered at the time: Golden Globe for O'Connor as Best Actor, Screen writers Betty Comden & Adolph Green won the 'Writer's Guild Award' for Best Screenplay.

Jean Hagen won 'Best Supporting Actress.

This short list tells us that even sheer genius is not always luminously evident initially. To illustrate; Rotten Tomatoes gives this film 100% rating, and it was ranked as the 4th greatest American film. It is contained in The United States Library of Congress for the purposes of perpetuity. The British Film Institute say that it is one of the 50 films to be seen by the age of 14, so well done those of you minors in the audience for this screening; your choice is recognised by your elders. 'Sight and Sound' magazine rate this as the 20th in their listing of the 50 greatest Films of All Time. The famous critic Roger Ebert wrote that it is a 'transcendent experience and no one who loves music can afford to miss it'.

As so often when we investigate the inception of even the most iconic of films, what now seems almost inevitable, in truth almost never came to be. Comden and Green as the screenwriters had 3 possible openings for the film, a silent movie premiere, a magazine interview with a Hollywood star, and a star meets girl, star falls for girl, then loses girl. Unable to decide how to proceed they were about to return their advance to MGM when Comden's husband, back from a trip suggested combining all 3, as we shall see when the cameras roll for the opening set-up.



The delay in production also meant that Kelly, who had been shooting 'An American In Paris' was now free, which meant that the early thinking of having Howard Keel as the Western star who makes a come-back as a 'singing cowboy' was shelved. That would have been a different film! Singing In the Rain's' origins were not dissimilar to Queens' 'We Will Rock You' in that it originally was a bunch of songs in search of a story.

'Only one song 'Moses Supposes' was written for the film, several were from a back catalogue of musical numbers, notably 'Good Morning' originated in 'Broadway Melody' of 1939. Others such as 'Make 'Em Laugh' bears a striking resemblance to Cole Porter's 'Be A Clown' and others also owed something to well known tunes from elsewhere. Many of the songs came from the transitional period between silent film and the 'talkies' that the film portrays, and was a point of reference for the eventual story arc.



Fortunately when asked Kelly was most enthusiastic about the project, although he was less so about Reynolds as his co-star, despite her apparently having always been first choice for the role. He later admitted having been 'unkind' about her. Reynolds had had to transition from gymnast to dancer. It was apparently Fred Astaire who, finding Reynolds weeping beneath a piano due to slights from Kelly, who offered to give her dancing lessons, confirming Astaire's profile as an all-round gentleman. O'Connor, whose dancing in 'Make 'Em Laugh' is one of the stand-out scenes was apparently a four pack of cigarettes a day man, and had to be hospitalised after the scene due to the consequences of the level of required exertion.

Kelly himself was suffering from a high fever when he performed the title song sequence, which took many takes over several days. Kelly apparently also struggled with his wool suit which had to be readjusted continuously due to shrinkage which hampered his movements. The sequence was initially meant to feature O'Connor and Reynolds when they emerge from a restaurant, but its place in the film was made iconic by Kelly's solo dance in the rain after meeting Reynold's character. Kelly's daughter has said that her father's performance, whilst professionally immaculate, somehow conveyed a sense that we might all be able to dance as he does, if only we allowed ourselves to do so.

Reynold's dancing also gives the impression of natural effervescence, but after the 13 hours of continuous takes for 'Good Morning' her feet were bleeding and she later said that childbirth and 'Singing' were her two toughest assignments in life.

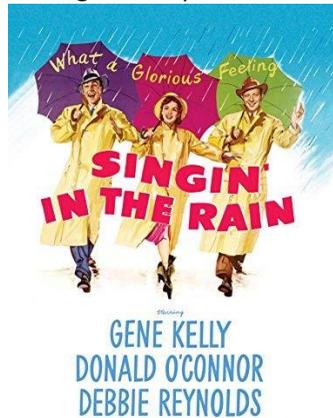
The Catholic 'League of Decency' objected to the intimacy of the dance sequence featuring Cyd Charisse and Kelly in their shared sequence in 'Broadway Ballet'. It is perhaps for this reason that you will note a dramatic cut at the end of their dance number. Some including Ebert suggest that despite this section's artistry, it serves to slow the film's vitality.

The film's influence continues. La-La Land owes a good deal to this film and apparently the Jennifer Lawrence character in 'Silver Linings Playbook'

was inspired by Kelly and O'Connor's dancing in 'Moses Supposes'.



The MGM lots were plundered for sets and props to save money; fortunately Kelly was something of a genius at employing whatever was available to create original set pieces.



Somehow, somewhat against the odds, as with one of our earlier films in this Desert Island compilation 'Casablanca', this film is one for all time. It is light-hearted yet with resonance and depth, a hymn to song and dance as an expression of our shared humanity and what makes life worth living. Astaire and Rogers in 'Top Hat' arguably provide the only challenger as the finest of Hollywood musicals. *Compiled by Dominic Thierry.*

**Concluding our Desert Island Films (Part 2) Season on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> July 2019 at 7.15 pm at Eden Court Cinema...Jaws**



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