



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Dance, Girl, Dance

Dance, Girl, Dance, a glorious and subversively feminist film from the Golden Age of Hollywood, had inauspicious beginnings. In 1940, RKO had a film in production that was going off the rails – a romantic comedy, with a handful of musical numbers, about two young hoofers dreaming of fame, fortune and fabulous love affairs. It was exactly the kind of story Hollywood doled out by the dozen, but no one was happy with how it was progressing, so producer Erich Pommer pulled Roy Del Ruth, one of the industry's heavyweights, and a master of the musical from the director's chair. Dorothy Arzner, who was freelancing at that time, picked it up instead. Although shooting had started, she went back to script stage and reworked the movie from the feet up.

At this point Arzner had been making movies for more than a decade, and she was the only female director of any prominence in Hollywood. Given a dance movie, she seized the chance to make something entirely more singular. *Dance, Girl, Dance* is about what happens when men look at women and, more importantly, what happens when women confront that dynamic, take ownership of it or call it out.

Two fantastic lead performances anchor the film, from a delicate Maureen O'Hara and a wickedly funny Lucille Ball. Judy O'Brien (O'Hara) has firm morals, a rigorous work ethic and artistic aspirations; Bubbles (Ball) has what her agent calls 'oomph', as well as what she calls 'brains', which is the savvy to make the most of the former. The two women are friends, but while Judy is the better dancer, Bubbles gets all the gigs, and all the dates. Those dates are mostly with wealthy men who pay for her furs and taxicabs, but also with Jimmy (Louis Hayward), a Manhattanite drinking his way through a protracted divorce, who spots the girls doing a shimmy when he's slumming it in Akron, Ohio. It's Judy who catches his eye, but it's Bubbles who glides out of the club on his arm. The film isn't really about the competition between the two women, though, but how they negotiate their job, which isn't just to dance, but to display themselves for a male audience. Bubbles knows how to make this work for her. When she dances a hula in an audition, close-ups of the man appraising her reveal his sweaty face and boggling eyes – he practically drools, and she gets the job. When she becomes successful, she renames herself Tiger Lily White, and writes the captions for her own paparazzi photographs. She may be performing in a burlesque hall to crowds of men who have come to admire her figure rather than her dancing, but she sets the terms of the deal.

Judy is a lot harder to look at. She dances in private, she runs from an audition. When Jimmy first sees her in Ohio, he is dazzled by the reflection from her sequins. It's the first time in the film we see a man looking at a woman, and Arzner makes it awkward. Eventually Judy will take a demeaning dance job as Bubbles's warm-up act, which will make her seethe until she delivers the film's most famous speech, a righteous demolition of the male gaze: 'I know you want me to tear my clothes off so you can look your 50 cents' worth. Fifty cents for the privilege of staring at a girl the way your wives won't let you... So you can go home when the show's over, strut before your wives and sweethearts and play at being the stronger sex for a minute? I'm sure they see through you. I'm sure they see through you just like we do!'

Dance, Girl, Dance lands this blow smartly, not just because the whole story has been leading up to this outburst, but because endless characters in any number of Hollywood backstage musicals might have voiced the same opinion, but they didn't. It's a small film with big ideas.

Pamela Hutchinson, *Sight & Sound*, Summer 2020

DANCE, GIRL, DANCE

Directed by: Dorothy Arzner

©: RKO Radio Pictures

Presented by: RKO Radio Pictures

Executive Producer: Harry E. Edington

Produced by: Erich Pommer

Assistant Director: James H. Anderson

Screenplay by: Tess Slesinger, Frank Davis

Story by: Vicki Baum

Director of Photography: Russell Metty

Special Effects by: Vernon L. Walker

Edited by: Robert Wise

Art Director: Van Nest Polglase

Associate: Al Herman

Set Decorations by: Darrell Silvera

Gowns by: Edward Stevenson

Musical Director: Edward Ward

Dances staged by: Ernst Matray

Recorded by: Hugh McDowell Jr

uncredited

Director of Photography: Joseph August

Cast

Maureen O'Hara (*Judy O'Brien*)

Louis Hayward (*Jaes 'Jimmy' Harris Jr*)

Lucille Ball (*Bubbles/Tiger Lily White*)

Virginia Field (*Elinor Harris*)

Ralph Bellamy (*Steve Adams*)

Mary Carlisle (*Sally*)

Katharine Alexander (*Miss Olmstead*)

Edward Brophy (*Dwarfie Humblewinger*)

Walter Abel (*judge*)

Harold Huber (*Hoboken gent*)

Maria Ouspenskaya (*Madame Basilova*)

Ernest Truex (*bailey 1*)

Chester Clute (*bailey 2*)

Lorraine Krueger (*Dolly*)

Lola Jensen (*Daisy*)

Emma Dunn (*Mrs Simpson*)

Sidney Blackmer (*Puss in Boots*)

Vivian Fay (*the ballerina*)

Ludwig Stossel (*Caesar*)

Erno Verebes (*Fitch*)

uncredited cast

Stanley Blystone (*plainclothesman at Palais Royale*)

Wade Boteler (*policeman at Palais Royale*)

Paul E. Burns (*reporter calling Elinor*)

Leo Cleary (*court clerk*)

Clyde Cook (*Claude, Harris' valet*)

Ray Cooke (*reporter in hallway*)

Gino Corrado (*Gino, Club Ferdinand waiter*)

Kernan Cripps (*night court bailiff*)

Jay Eaton (*nightclub patron*)

Bess Flowers (*woman with Elinor at Club Ferdinand*)

Paul Fung (*Chinese waiter*)

Lew Harvey (*reporter at Taxi*)

Lew Hicks (*grumpy man in elevator*)

Donald Kerr (*photographer in hallway*)

Milton Kibbee (*reporter at Taxi*)

Jeanne Lafayette (*Nanette, Elinor's maid*)

Robert McKenzie (*Otto, the fat man*)

Anthony Merlo (*head waiter*)

Frank Mills (*man booing Judy*)

Bert Moorhouse (*Jimmy's friend in nightclub*)

Pat Moriarty (*night court guard*)

Philip Morris (*policeman*)

Barry Norton (*disapproving theatre patron*)

William O'Brien (*man in audience at Burlesk House*)

Robert Emmett O'Connor (*plainclothesman at Palais Royale*)

Jack O'Shea (*patron of Palais Royale*)

Lee Phelps (*plainclothesman at Palais Royale*)

Paul Phillips (*reporter*)

Paul Renay (*head waiter*)

Dewey Robinson (*Palais Royale manager*)

Ralph Sanford (*taxi driver*)

Ruth Seeley (*Dimples*)

Lee Shumway (*policeman*)

Harry Tenbrook (*night court spectator*)

Harry Tyler (*Bailey Brothers' barker*)

Lee 'Lasses' White (*Bailey Brothers' stage manager*)

Thelma Woodruff (*Mary*)

Marjorie Woodworth (*Jane*)

USA 1940©

90 mins

The screening on Wed 3 Aug will be introduced by

Pamela Hutchinson, film critic and historian

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

The Manchurian Candidate

Mon 1 Aug 14:40; Fri 5 Aug 18:00; Sun 14 Aug 14:40

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Tue 2 Aug 18:15; Wed 10 Aug 20:45; Tue 23 Aug 20:50;

Mon 29 Aug 12:00

Sweet Smell of Success

Tue 2 Aug 20:50; Sat 13 Aug 18:10; Mon 29 Aug 18:30

Dance, Girl, Dance

Wed 3 Aug 18:00 (+ intro by Pamela Hutchinson, Film Critic and Historian); Thu 18 Aug 20:45

Gaslight

Thu 4 Aug 18:15; Mon 8 Aug 20:45

Persona

Fri 5 Aug 20:50; Thu 11 Aug 21:00; Wed 31 Aug 18:20 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer at Large)

Raging Bull

Sat 6 Aug 20:30; Thu 11 Aug 20:30; Fri 26 Aug 20:30

La Haine

Sat 6 Aug 21:00; Fri 19 Aug 20:50; Wed 24 Aug 18:10 (+ intro by Ginette Vincendeau, Professor of film studies at King's College London)

Citizen Kane

Sun 7 Aug 14:30; Tue 16 Aug 18:15; Wed 24 Aug 20:40

The White Ribbon (Das weisse Band)

Tue 9 Aug 17:50; Sat 27 Aug 17:50

Kes

Tue 9 Aug 20:45; Mon 15 Aug 18:15; Tue 30 Aug 20:40

The Night of the Hunter

Wed 10 Aug 18:10 (+ intro by Jason Wood, BFI Director of Public Programme and Audiences); Mon 22 Aug 20:45; Sun 28 Aug 12:20

Notorious

Thu 11 Aug 18:10; Wed 17 Aug 20:45; Sun 21 Aug 12:20; Thu 25 Aug 18:15

Bigger Than Life

Fri 12 Aug 20:40; Wed 17 Aug 18:20 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer at Large)

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