



SIGHT AND SOUND GREATEST FILMS OF ALL TIME 2022: 10=

Singin' in the Rain

It would be hard to find a more enjoyable, durable musical than this homage to Hollywood's bumpy transition from silent to talking pictures. Gene Kelly is at his charismatic best, especially during the euphoric title number, while Donald O'Connor uses every trick in his repertoire for 'Make 'em Laugh' and Debbie Reynolds captures a sweet innocence as an ingénue star on the rise. Then there's Jean Hagen, who pretty much steals all her scenes with that hilarious, screechy delivery. Simply joyous.

Heather Osborn, bfi.org.uk

The most enduring of the four MGM collaborations between Gene Kelly and his director and co-choreographer Stanley Donen, *Singin' in the Rain* rises ten places [in 2022's *Sight and Sound* poll] from 20th in 2012 to land in the top ten again. The film's ascent almost feels like a given, due to the effervescence that may be its defining characteristic and the scarcity of that quality in our trying times.

Yet, typically for anything that seems so effortless, Kelly and Donen's achievement was in fact the product of an enormous amount of toil and trouble. At the project's outset, the legendary writing team of Betty Comden and Adolph Green tried and failed to get out of the gig when MGM musical head Arthur Freed ordered them to build a new movie on top of a batch of tunes by Freed and his partner Nacio Herb Brown that were gathering dust. (Indeed, 'Singin' in the Rain' itself had made its screen debut in *The Hollywood Revue of 1929*.) Debbie Reynolds' ordeal filming the 'Good Morning' tap-dance number famously left her with bloody feet. As for the title song, six months of rehearsal culminated in Gene Kelly gamely splashing about while running a high fever.

None of that suffering is discernible on screen, which is one of the many delightful ironies about Hollywood's most deeply cherished movie about the making of a Hollywood movie. Pulling back the curtain to show yet more dazzling drapery, Comden and Green celebrate an earlier era of Tinseltown chancers and hustlers with a tale of a production caught between the silent and sound eras. Kelly's plucky hooper and stuntman-turned-star Don Lockwood leads the charge to retrofit a swashbuckler picture named *The Duelling Cavalier* to take advantage of the new vogue for sound, with his new sweetie Kathy (Reynolds) being his best means of disguising the squawky voice of his leading lady Lina (a hilarious Jean Hagen).

There are several movies besides Don's latest somehow contained within the text of *Singin' in the Rain* (including, if we are to believe the deliciously meta billboard in the final shot, *Singin' in the Rain*). Cheekily purporting to reveal its own means of production while still delivering one unabashedly theatrical showstopper after another, Kelly and Donen's masterwork anticipates the brassy postmodernism of *Moulin Rouge!* (2001). But like such fellow homage-payers as *The Artist* (2011) and *La La Land* (2016), Baz Luhrmann's rendition feels meagre compared to the original and its seemingly inexhaustible bounty of ingenuity, bravado and sheer unabashed joy.

Jason Anderson, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 2022-23

Gene Kelly's very best dances are the ones he does by himself, for at heart he is a solitary figure, unable or unwilling to let go of the idea that he is a tough guy you don't want to mess with.

Kelly had a temperature of 103 degrees when he shot the song and dance in a downpour in *Singin' in the Rain* (1951) that became his signature number. It took a while to make sure the puddles splashed as much as he wanted them to, and the work was slow, but everyone involved knew they had created something special. I interviewed Betsy Blair when her memoir *The Memory of All That* came out in 2003, and she vividly remembered the filming of this classic sequence, which she referred to as 'the famous one, the really great one', with a little physical shiver that was partly reverential and partly mocking.

Kelly is alone for much of the title song number in *Singin' in the Rain*, which is one of the most unalloyed expressions of joy on film, especially when Kelly takes off his hat, and the camera moves in as he closes his eyes and sings, 'C'mon with the rain... I've a smile on my face,' with his light, high voice.

Dan Callahan, *Sight & Sound*, January 2017

Terence Davies on 'Singin' in the Rain'

I have a very clear memory of seeing *Singin' in the Rain* because it was the first time I was taken to the cinema, when I was seven years old. It was just after my father died, in 1952. I'm in the process of writing my autobiography, and it begins with that visit. It's one of those things in your life you never forget.

My sisters loved American musicals and from that point on I did too. Obviously the only thing I remember from the first time I saw the film is the title number being sung. I was too young to appreciate Jean Hagen's wonderful performance as Lina Lamont.

Was there a point later on when I was able to look at *Singin' in the Rain* more analytically? Yes and no. There's one level at which I can appreciate the way it's been put together, particularly the writing and the performances, but it's also very difficult not to be seduced by it, because if you love something and it's had a profound effect on you, it's very hard to be objective. For the film's fiftieth anniversary I did a radio programme in which we analysed Gene Kelly's famous dance sequence. But even when you see that perhaps Kelly overdoes the smile a bit, you say, 'Oh, I'll forgive this because it's so perfect.'

The overall structure is based on a wonderful and simple idea: the end of the silent era, the beginning of sound. Basically Adolph Breen and Betty Cornden were told by Arthur Freed, 'Here are the songs I wrote [with Nacio Herb Brown] and I want to put them in a film', and this is what they came up with. Jean Hagen saying, 'Why, I make more money than Calvin Coolidge put together' –it's a joy from beginning to end.

There are some films that have magic, either in their sheer entertainment value and bravura, or from something darker, as with Laughton's *The Night of the Hunter* or Hitchcock's *Psycho*. *Singin' in the Rain* has an immense magic, and I think the title number is one of cinema's great moments, as good as anything by Eisenstein, and a lot more entertaining.

Terence Davies talking to Nick James, *Sight and Sound*, September 2002

SINGIN' IN THE RAIN

Directed by: Gene Kelly, Stanley Donen
©: Loew's Incorporated
Production Company: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer
Produced by: Arthur Freed
Story and Screen Play by: Adolph Green, Betty Comden
Suggested by the song by: Arthur Freed, Nacio Herb Brown
Director of Photography: Harold Rosson
Technicolor Colour Consultants: Henri Jaffa, James Gooch
Special Effects: Warren Newcombe, Irving G. Ries
Editor: Adrienne Fazan
Art Directors: Cedric Gibbons, Randall Duell
Set Decorations: Edwin B. Willis, Jacque Mapes
Costumes Designed by: Walter Plunkett
Make-up Created by: William Tuttle
Hair Styles Designed by: Sydney Guilaroff
Songs: Lyrics by: Arthur Freed
Songs: Music by: Nacio Herb Brown
Musical Direction: Lennie Hayton
Orchestrations by: Conrad Salinger
Vocal Arrangements by: Jeff Alexander
Orchestrations by: Wally Heglin, Skip Martin
Musical Numbers Staged/Directed by: Gene Kelly, Stanley Donen
Recording Supervisor: Douglas Shearer

uncredited

Associate Producer: Roger Edens
Director of Photography, Pre-production: John Alton
Camera Operator: Frank Phillips
Costumes: Elaine Davis Owen
Vocal Arrangements: Roger Edens
Assistants to Choreographers: Carol Haney, Jeanne Coyne

Cast

Gene Kelly (*Don Lockwood*)
Donald O'Connor (*Cosmo Brown*)
Debbie Reynolds (*Kathy Selden*)
Jean Hagen (*Lina Lamont*)
Millard Mitchell (*R.F. Simpson*)
Cyd Charisse (*dancer in ballet*)
Douglas Fowley (*Roscoe Dexter*)
Rita Moreno (*Zelda Zanders*)

uncredited

Madge Blake (*Dora Bailey*)
King Donovan (*Rod*)
Kathleen Freeman (*Phoebe Dinsmore, diction coach*)
Bobby Watson (*diction coach*)
Tommy Farrell (*Sid Phillips, assistant director*)
Jimmy Thompson (*male lead in 'Beautiful Girl' number*)
Dan Foster (*assistant director*)
Margaret Bert (*wardrobe woman*)
Mae Clarke (*hairedresser*)
Judy Landon (*Olga Mara*)
John Dodsworth (*Baron de la Bouvet de la Toulon*)
Stuart Holmes (*J.C. Spendrill III*)
Dennis Ross (*Don as a boy*)
Bill Lewin (*Bert, villain in western*)
Richard Emory (*Phil, cowboy hero*)
Julius Tannen (*man demonstrating talking pictures*)
Dawn Addams (*Teresa, lady-in-waiting*)
Elaine Stewart (*2nd lady-in-waiting*)
Carl Milletaire (*villain in 'The Duelling Cavalier'*)
Ben Strombach (*pilot in flying film*)
Tommy Walker (*footballer in film sequence*)
Jac George (*orchestra leader*)
Wilson Wood (*Rudy Vallee impersonator*)
Brick Sullivan (*cop in title number*)
Snub Pollard (*recipient of umbrella, title number*)
Paul Maxey (*sceptical party guest*)
Dorothy Patrick, William Lester, Joi Lansing (*spectators*)
Charles Evans (*irritated spectator*)
Dave Sharpe, Russ Saunders (*fencers*)
Patricia Denise, Jeanne Coyne, Joyce Horne (*dancers*)
Bill Chatham, Ernie Flatt, Don Hulbert, Robert Dayo (*male dancing quartet*)
David Kasday (*kid*)
Robert B. Williams (*traffic cop*)
Ray Teal (*employee*)

USA 1951©

103 mins

SIGHT AND SOUND GREATEST FILMS OF ALL TIME 2022

Singin' in the Rain Fri 3 Mar 20:40; Thu 9 Mar 18:10 (+ intro by Miles Eady, Film Writer and Curator); Tue 14 Mar 14:30
La Règle du jeu (The Rules of the Game)
Sat 4 Mar 13:20; Sat 11 Mar 18:05
Man With a Movie Camera (Chelovek s kino-apparatom) Sat 4 Mar 15:30; Sun 5 Mar 10:30 BFI IMAX; Thu 9 Mar 20:50
Playtime Sat 4 Mar 17:00; Sat 11 Mar 20:30
The Searchers Sat 4 Mar 17:40; Tue 7 Mar 20:35
Seven Samurai (Shichinin no samurai)
Sat 4 Mar 18:50; Tue 14 Mar 18:40
Apocalypse Now: Final Cut
Sat 4 Mar 19:40; Sun 12 Mar 20:00 BFI IMAX
Tokyo Story (Tôkyô monogatari) Sat 4 Mar 20:15; Fri 10 Mar 18:00; Wed 15 Mar 14:30
Shoah Sun 5 Mar 11:00; Sun 12 Mar 11:00
Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans Sun 5 Mar 11:45; Mon 6 Mar 14:00; Mon 13 Mar 20:35
The Passion of Joan of Arc (La passion de Jeanne d'Arc) Sun 5 Mar 14:00 (with live accompaniment); Wed 15 Mar 20:40 (with score)
Citizen Kane Sun 5 Mar 16:15; Tue 7 Mar 20:30
Cléo from 5 to 7 (Cléo de 5 à 7)
Sun 5 Mar 17:45; Wed 8 Mar 21:00

2001: A Space Odyssey

Sun 5 Mar 19:00; Thu 9 Mar 18:00
Au hasard Balthazar Mon 6 Mar 18:30
Vertigo Mon 6 Mar 20:30; Thu 9 Mar 14:30; Wed 15 Mar 18:10
In the Mood for Love (Fa yeung nin wah) Mon 6 Mar 20:40; Fri 10 Mar 21:00; Sun 12 Mar 18:30
Late Spring (Banshun) Mon 6 Mar 20:45; Tue 7 Mar 14:30; Sun 12 Mar 18:20
The Night of the Hunter
Tue 7 Mar 18:00; Sat 11 Mar 20:45
Mulholland Dr. Tue 7 Mar 20:10; Tue 14 Mar 20:15
Beau Travail Wed 8 Mar 14:30; Fri 10 Mar 20:45; Mon 13 Mar 18:20 (+ intro by Catherine Wheatley, Reader in Film Studies, King's College London)
Daisies (Sedmikrásky) + Meshes of the Afternoon Wed 8 Mar 18:20 (+ intro)
Portrait of a Lady on Fire (Portrait de la jeune fille en feu)
Wed 8 Mar 20:30
Persona Thu 9 Mar 21:05
Close-Up (Nema-ye Nazdik) Fri 10 Mar 18:30; Wed 15 Mar 20:50
The Godfather Fri 10 Mar 19:00; Sun 12 Mar 18:15
Do the Right Thing Sat 11 Mar 18:10
Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles
Sat 11 Mar 18:50
Taxi Driver Mon 13 Mar 20:40

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