



A double feature dvd set containing two feature musicals, ROYAL WEDDING and THE BELLE OF NEW YORK, is an LVCA March, 2014 dvd donation to the Hugh Stoupe Memorial Library of the Heritage United Methodist Church of Ligonier, Pennsylvania. Below is Kino Ken's review of these two films.

ROYAL WEDDING United States 1950 93 minutes Technicolor live action feature musical Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Producer: Arthur Freed

9 of a possible 20 points

\*\* of a possible \*\*\*\*\*

Key: \*indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance

#### Points

- 1 Direction: Stanley Donen
  - 0 Editing: Albert Akst
  - 1 Cinematography: Robert Planck
  - 1 Lighting: James Gooch, Henri Jaffa
  - 0 Screenplay: Alan Jay Lerner Story: Alan Jay Lerner
  - 1 Music: Burton Lane, Albert Sendrey, Conrad Salinger, Johnny Green
  - 2 Art Direction: Cedric Gibbons, Jack Martin Smith
  - 1 Sound: John Williams
  - 0 Acting
  - 2 Creativity
- 9 total points

Cast: Fred Astaire (Tom Bowen), Jane Powell (Ellen Bowen, Tom's sister), Peter Lawford (Lord John Brindale), Sarah Churchill (Anne Ashmond), Keenan Wynn (Irving Klinger / Edgar Klinger), Albert Sharpe (James Ashmond, father of Anne), Wilson Benge (Eddie), Margaret Bert (Ellen's maid), Francis Bethencourt (Charles Gordon), William Cabanne (Dick),

Andre Charisse (Steward), Jack Chefe (Ship's Officer), James Conaty (Royal Attendant), Oliver Cross (Backstage Guest), Jack Daley (Pop, stage door attendant), Herbert Evans (Royal Attendant), James Fairfax (Harry, one of Ellen's suitors), Alex Frazer (Chester, Tom's valet), Jack Gargan (Bartender), John Hedloe (Billy, one of Ellen's suitors), Henri Lotendal (Purser), Kerry O'Day (Linda), John Reilly (Pete Cumberly), Viola Roache (Sarah Ashmond, Anne's mother), Cosmo Sardo (Bartender), Pat Williams (Barbara)

Songs: "Ev'ry Night At Seven," "Sunday Jumps," "Open Your Eyes," "The Happiest Day Of My Life," "How Could You Believe Me?," "Too Late Now," "You're All The World To Me," "I Left My Hat In Haiti"

ROYAL WEDDING appears to be a royal ripoff of the then-current hot topic of Queen Elizabeth's upcoming nuptials. It lacks plot, chemistry in the leads, character credibility, and any top-notch songs. What it does include is awesome dance numbers involving Fred Astaire, including his dance all over the room to the accompaniment of "You're All The World To Me."

But a series of miscasting decisions detracts from potential charm. Peter Lawford appears more eager to travel than to woo Ellen. He seems to be in a great hurry to either a. find himself a new role, b. get to a tennis match, or c. go for a drive in a sports car, preferably a hundred miles away from either British country lanes or city traffic. Sarah Churchill, deciding to take a fling at acting, demonstrates complete lack of interest in either performance credibility or romance with the lead. Apparently MGM felt her famous name was sufficient reason to propose a major role for her. Wrong. The third misjudgment was to team a dancer of limited skill, the cute but overtaxed Jane Powell, with the grand master of terpsichorean grace. Watch closely and you'll see he frequently makes two moves in the same amount of time she completes one. This partnership was unfair to both leads.

Songs for ROYAL WEDDING appear to have been unused castoffs from older musicals, a sort of junior varsity lineup of tunes, hummable enough, but neither

striking nor memorable. Only the first heard, "Ev'ry Night at Seven" even comes close to Tin Pan Alley Gold.

Why, then, should someone take the trouble to watch this musical? For two reasons. First, the nonpareil aerial grace of Fred Astaire, here best rendered in numbers involving inorganic partners such as Indian clubs, hatstands, and ceilings. Second, the choreography of Nick Castle, particularly in the "I Left My Hat in Haiti" number. This episode screams for importation into a superior film.

Video of the queenly wedding is of poor quality, further lessened in interest by the non-appearance of the royal couple, whose faces were not available for MGM broadcasting. Viewers wishing to really see the celebration must resort to the official film approved by the featured royals.

Indeed, lighting overall is only mediocre. This is also true of the sound. It's frequently difficult to make out precisely what actors are saying. This problem is further aggravated by exaggerated slang employed in conversations involving the American and British Klinger brothers. Both are played by Keenan Wynn, being characterized as twins. Why one works exclusively in Britain and the other solely in the United States is never explained.

Nor is the madcap partying of the principals, who think nothing of rehearsing all day and romancing the greater part of the night. This in no way interferes with execution of skillful choreography the next day. Right.

The best performances are not remotely subtle, but at least watchable. They are turned in by Albert Sharpe as an Irish publican agog over British aristocracy, a fascination difficult to understand given his descent, and Viola Roche as Anne's prim and aspiring mother. An oddball plot twist has these estranged partners coming back together again as a result of dressing up for the Westminster Abbey wedding. Seeing is not always believing.

ROYAL WEDDING is suitable for family viewing, but should be accepted as innocuous fluff concealing brilliant demonstrations of artistic dance by Mr. Astaire. Essential. Utterly unreal.



THE BELLE OF NEW YORK United States 1951 81 minutes Technicolor live action feature musical romantic comedy (romcom) Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer  
Producers: Arthur Freed, Roger Edens

9 of a possible 20 points

\*\* of a possible \*\*\*\*\*

Key: \*indicates outstanding performance or technical achievement

#### Points

- 1 Direction: Charles Walters
- 1 Editing: Albert Akst
- 1 Cinematography: Robert Planck
- 1 Lighting
- 0 Screenplay: Robert O'Brien and Irving Elinson adapted for the screen by Chester Erskine from the play by Hugh Morton (nee C. M. S. McLellan)
- 1 Music: Harry Warren, Alexander Courage, Adolph Deutsch, Conrad Salinger
- 2 Art Direction: Cedric Gibbons, Jack Martin Smith
- 1 Sound: Douglas Shearer
- 0 Acting
- 1 Creativity

9 total points

Cast: Fred Astaire (Charlie Hill, playboy), Vera Ellen (Angela Bonfils),

Marjorie Main (Mrs. Phineas Hill), Keenan Wynn (Max Ferris), Alice Pearce (Elsie Wilkins), Clinton Sundberg (Gilford Spivak), Gale Robbins (Dixie "Headshot" McCoy), Oliver Blake (Currier in Wedding Portrait), Roger Davis (Hills' Butler), Lisa Ferraday (Frenchie), Billy Griffith (Ives in Wedding Portrait), Henry Slate (Police Sgt. Clancy)

Songs: "Who Wants To Kiss The Bridegroom?," "Let a Little Love Come In," "Seeing's Believing," "Baby Doll," "Oops," "A Bride's Wedding Song," "Naughty But Nice," "I Wanna Be A Dancing Man"

Dance: Currier and Ives Dance

Note: Songs are generally performed in combination with dancing in this film.

THE BELLE OF NEW YORK attempts to woo audiences with a chaining together of truly special visual effects, superbly executed choreography and a wretchedly hackneyed screenplay which doesn't even strive for plausibility. The same story had previously been filmed as a silent. Its age is very much in evidence. Only viewers nostalgic for a mythical pre-World War I American Golden Age will be tempted to find the creaky plot and unengaging, stereotypical vaudeville characters of interest. Others, beware.

Once again Fred Astaire is featured as a bon vivant with a keen eye for charming available ladies. These he then courts, formally engages, and ultimately deserts on days appointed for weddings. His latest victim is sharpshooter Dixie "Deadshot" McCoy, an Annie Oakley cowgirl type with a speedy pistol draw. She can hold her own in the game, though, and recovers from a shocking letdown by blackmailing the aunt of playboy Charlie Hill for a tidy sum of compensation. An even better racket than post-divorce alimony!

Charlie finds this arrangement acceptable, since the money is his aunt's. But even he knows such fleecings cannot continue indefinitely. Nonetheless, within twenty-four hours he's back on the prowl, even neglecting carriage courtship of a jaded sophisticate to chase down a pretty charity worker who's caught his eye. Isn't New York wonderful?

Angela Bonfils is single, coquettish, apparently oblivious to enrichment opportunities, and initially unimpressed by Charlie's repeated donations to her cause. But when he ascends heavenward to demonstrate the genuineness of his love, her reserve begins to melt. Soon she experiences a similar aerial lightness, allowing the same degree of totally free movement, unconstrained by gravity or other physical obstructions.

With Vera-Allen playing the love interest, Astaire has a suitably adroit dance partner, one who can accompany him beat for beat and gesture for gesture. She also looks attractive enough to pass for a bachelor magnet. Once again, though, there is just not sufficient electricity passing between two leads to justify serious romance.

So a comic one is employed instead. That allows and even encourages viewers to seek amusement in the story situations, rather than involvement in character emotions. Casting Marjorie Main as Charlie's aunt, Mrs. Phineas Hill, buttresses the film's claim to be romantic comedy. Certainly no one's likely to accept the broad acting and stage bellowing of Main and comedy relief partner Keenan Wynn as either realistic or empathetic. Wynn portrays self-proclaimed lawyer Max Ferris, whose only client is Charlie. Considering he spends no time whatsoever pursuing his career, it's unlikely Max will ever expand his practice. He's simply a comic foil. Marjorie Main likewise.

Will Charlie surrender philandering ways and finally tie the knot? Can Miss Bonfils infuse enough sobriety and responsibility into him to assure he will become a fit marriage partner? Is the conclusion ever in doubt?

Yet there are some appealing features on display, particularly with regard to the art department's work. Costuming and set decorations are lavishly appropriate, a tribute to the skills and research of Jack Martin Smith, Richard Pefferle, Helen Rose, and Gile Steele. Sound is effectively recorded, though not crisp enough to call exemplary.

Mediocre songs chosen for highlighting lack elements of surprise and complication. They are quickly forgotten. Far more adventurous is this film's choreography, reinforced with imaginative special visual effects that include lovers literally dancing on air in Washington Square.

As customary with musicals, two different editing demands yield two very divergent results. Narrative scenes without music are functionally effective. Dances are cut with precision and considerably more vigor. Unfortunately, Fred and Vera-Allen are required to alternate between lifeless dialogue sprinkled with hoary quips and inspired, gracefully buoyant dance. Perhaps the book should have been shucked altogether and replaced with dance-pantomime throughout. Alas, such a revolutionary path was not adopted by Mr. Walters.

THE BELLE OF NEW YORK is suitable family film fare. It's a studio production, so look elsewhere for historic location shots of New York City. Dance mavens, don't miss the flawless synchrony of Astaire and Vera-Allen in their joint performances.

It is three bonuses offered as part of this double dvd set that provide the most accomplished filmmaking. These are magnificent short animations directed by Tex Avery: DROOPY'S DOUBLE TROUBLE, CAR OF TOMORROW, and MAGICAL MAESTRO. Kino Ken has reviewed each separately below. Also provided as supplements are an entertaining and educational long interview with director Stanley Donen, a sixteen minute featurette dealing with availability of female leads for ROYAL WEDDING, a cutesy promotional radio interview for that film featuring Fred Astaire and Jane Powell, a Pete Smith Specialty comedy short titled MUSIQUIZ with the most bizarre instruments you'll ever encounter, a four-minute alternate version of "I Wanna Be A Dancing Man," two three-minute theatrical trailers (one for each feature musical here), a totally dispensable three-minute outtake version of "Ev'ry Night At Seven," scene selections, and subtitles. There's plenty here to enjoy and inform, as well as a few duds to bypass.



CAR OF TOMORROW is a bonus short animation that can be found in the double feature musicals ROYAL WEDDING / BELLE OF NEW YORK dvd set being donated by the LVCA in March, 2014 to the Hugh Stoupe Memorial Library of the Heritage United Methodist Church. MAGICAL MAESTRO and DROOPY'S DOUBLE TROUBLE are additional short animation bonuses that come with the set.

Here is Kino Ken's review of CAR OF TOMORROW.

19 of a possible 20 points

\*\*\*\*\* of a possible \*\*\*\*\*

United States 1951 Technicolor 6 minutes short comedy animation  
Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Producer: Fred Quimby

Key: \*indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance

Points

- 2 Direction: Fred "Tex" Avery\*
  - 2 Editing
  - 2 Photography
  - 2 Story: Roy Williams\* and Rich Hogan\*
  - 2 Music: Scott Bradley (incidental music), Jimmy McHugh\* ("Lovely Lady"),  
Bronislau Kaper\* and Walter Jurmann\* ("All God's Chillun Got Rhythm"),  
Gioachino Rossini\* (William Tell Overture), H. P. Danks\*  
("Silver Threads Among the Gold"), Daniel Butterfield\* ("Taps")
  - 2 Production Design / Art Direction
  - 2 Animation: Walt Clinton\*, Michael Lah\*, Grant Simmons\*
  - 1 Lighting
  - 2 Sound
  - 2 Creativity
- 19 total points

Voice Cast: June Foray\* (Fashion Announcer / Talking Turn Signal)

Part of the futuristic parodies Fred "Tex" Avery created for MGM during the later 1940s and early 1950s, CAR OF TOMORROW features the same

tongue-in-cheek sturdily upbeat narration as its HOUSE OF TOMORROW forerunner. Here the humor is grounded chiefly on the totally ridiculous accompanying drawings, for the text is announced with dry directness. Opening the film is a pan forward down a street leading into a colossal showroom currently occupied by a car display. Searchlights converge on the site, drawing customer attention from every quarter. All the newest models are present, offering a truly incredible range of styles and luxury features, often with price tags to match. June Foray provided the voice you hear introducing each novelty. Additionally, she was speech source for the audio turn signal special feature car.

Welcome to Tex Avery's bizarre imaginings of what people would be driving in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There's an ideal car here suited to every budget and inclination. Candidates include a model you can drive sideways, one with actual bugs in the motor for the entomology buff, an ultrawide stretch type accommodating the entire family in a single front seat, the counterintuitive step-down car with immediate direct pavement contact, a decorative delight for the fashion-conscious direct from Paris in gorgeous seashell pink with Louis XIV crisscross curtains and a flattering bustle on its rear bumper, a life-of-the-party noisemaker with chromatic horn, the microcompact which folds down into a convenient wallet-size carrying case, an Oriental import complete with rickshaw boy traction, the manual peddling special of particular attractiveness to exercise fanatics, a superextended aviation fanatic's favorite with horizontal wing attachments, the marine spectacular complete with enlarged fishtail, a rear seat dashboard prototype perfect for the backseat driver, a car with enlarged dome capacity permitting the family fathead maximum headroom, the hole-in-top open air model assuring easy transport of ostrich or giraffe passengers, a hillclimber special guaranteed to get everyone safely to the top without backsliding, the wildly popular irresistible attraction model with adjustable horizontal pull to draw bashful dates closer to the driver, and --- unrivalled for clear identification of flattened pedestrians --- the one and only glass-bottomed auto. Among other wacky creations only observable in this crazy cartoon.

Even a literal foolproof garage is supplied by animators, though reserved chiefly for female parkers. Beware, feminists.

There's plenty of mobility in the animation camera, which staves off boredom and gives a deceptive impression of travelling sizable distances. Lighting shows indications of erosion, nearly always a problem with 1950s Technicolor productions. Sound recording evidences occasional hops, a sure sign soundtrack restoration is due. There's creativity to burn in the animation, with trademark Avery elongations and squeezings of limbs prominent.

Easily one of the best and drollest cartoons of the Atomic Age. Not to be missed by animation connoisseurs ages nine and up. Notes to parents: Oriental and Scottish stereotypes are present. CAR OF TOMORROW also contains denigrating remarks concerning female drivers.



MAGICAL MAESTRO is one of the bonus animations on the double feature musicals dvd set coming into the Hugh Stoupe Memorial Library of the Heritage United Methodist Church of Ligonier, Pennsylvania in March, 2014 as an LVCA donation. In 1993 it was selected for the National Film Registry, deemed worthy of preservation in the Library of Congress. Here is Kino Ken's review.

19 of a possible 20 points

\*\*\*\*\* of a possible \*\*\*\*\*

Key: \*indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance

United States 1952 Technicolor 6 ½ minutes short comedy animation  
Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Producer: Fred Quimby

Points:

- 2 Direction: Fred "Tex" Avery\*
- 2 Editing
- 2 Photography

- 1 Lighting
  - 2 Story: Rich Hogan\*
  - 2 Music: Scott Bradley (incidental music), "Clementine\*," Johann Strauss\* ("Kunstlerleben"\*) ("An Artist's Life"), "A-Tisket, A-Tasket," Prince Leleiohoku ("Hawaiian War Chant" a.k.a. "Ta-Hu-Wa-Hu-Wai") revamped in 1860 as "Kaua i ka Huahua'i" ("We Two in the Spray") and further updated by Johnny Noble in 1929, Jararaca\* and Vicente Paiva\* "Mamae Eu Quero" from the musical DOWN ARGENTINE WAY of 1940, Giachino Rossini\* ("Largo al Factotum" from THE BARBER OF SEVILLE), Burton Lane ("Everything I Have Is Yours") with lyrics by Harold Adamson
  - 2 Animators: Walt Clinton\*, Michael Lah\*, Grant Simmons\*
  - 2 Sound
  - 2 Voices Cast: Daws Butler\* (Mysto the Magician), Carlos Ramirez\* (Poochini)
  - 2 Creativity
- 19 total points

MAGICAL MAESTRO is a marvelously felicitous conjunction of immediately recognizable genre music and memorable antic animation. Once again, Fred "Tex" Avery stretches the boundaries of creativity, lampooning not just a stereotypical stentorian opera singer but also the transgressive prestidigitator who abuses his powers to obtain petty revenge. Mixing radically contrasting music styles with totally disconnected visual sequences like those in Buster Keaton's SHERLOCK, JR., Avery gives us a miniconcert to remember, with incongruities sabotaging viewer expectations in nearly every shot.

Rich Hogan's minimalist story starts with baritone superstar Poochini rehearsing in his dressing room backstage, being directed by a shaggy-haired conductor who looks rather like a canine version of Leopold Stokowski. Poochini himself resembles a vertically stretched pug.

In an alley outside, a travelling magician reads the poster advertisement for Poochini's upcoming recital. He decides it would be personally profitable to attach himself to the star. Leaping over a handrail on the theater steps in imitation of Gene Kelly, Mysto the Magician rushes through the entrance. With breathtaking

swiftness he arrives at the door of Poochini's dressing room and knocks clamorously, interrupting the singer's practice session. Skipping any apology, Mysto launches into glib promotion of his sleight-of-hand skills. These will obviously wow onlookers, thereby making a rewarding introduction to Poochini's songs. This hyperbole is accompanied by a few bars of Johann Strauss's "Kunstlerleben" ("The Artist's Life").

The dignified singer, unimpressed, gives his visitor a prompt toss out into the very alley from which he'd entered.

Dazed, Mysto brushes off some dust, looks disconsolately at hat and unnatural rabbit, then catches sight of his magic wand. Aha. If he can't play the wizard for entertainment purposes, he can assume the role of tyrannical supernatural avenger. Wait till Poochini feels the influence of that wand.

Mysto reenters the theater and hides himself in a prompter's pit just below and to the right of the conductor's podium. From here he proceeds to direct his wand upward once the maestro is fully focussed in conducting Poochini and oblivious to his surroundings. One firm point of the stick and the music director is frozen midair. Pulling the wand back results in drawing first wig, then tails, and finally pants off the conductor and onto Mysto. A petrified musician is left aslant in the prompter's pit, clad only in thermal underwear, while Mysto ascends to the podium and begins his assault on the dignity of Poochini.

Already launched into a Rossini evergreen aria titled "Largo al factotum," Poochini doesn't miss a beat when a filled flowerpot appears from nowhere in his hand. Bare seconds later, a bunny is occupying each palm. Poochini gamely continues singing, though thoroughly confused about what is happening. A handkerchief materializes in his left sleeve. When he tugs it out, a second attached one follows. Then another. And another. It's going to be a long night!

With no warning, Mysto's baton wraps a tutu around Poochini's waist and contorts him into a pirouette posture. Suddenly the baritone transforms again, becoming a forty-niner wailing "Clementine," stooped with the weight of many years pressing down upon him. In a flash the miner is replaced by an Indian with a bomber target painted on his belly. Next he morphs into a tennis player smartly dressed in white shorts and shirt. But there's no court on stage. Perhaps a footballer would be better. No, let's try a Chinese coolie. How about a cowpoke

with guitar? And maybe a sombrero? Throughout this chaos, Poochini sings on, changing style, register, and volume to meet altering circumstances.

His situation grows more conflicted. Now he levitates as a melody rises, moving higher and higher until he can barely be seen from below. Then the notes drop suddenly --- and so does Poochini, with a crash.

Quickly recovering, or seeming to, the singing star next veers into country music repertory, dressed appropriately as a square dance caller in blue jeans. A vibrating hair pushes forward or draws back in the foreground, imitating a microphone responding to intensity of vocal attack. It's time for some light jazz, according to Mysto's magic wand. Poochini obliges with reincarnation as a sailor-suited child skipping across the stage with a red balloon in one hand, warbling "A-Tisket, A-Tasket." Another transformation occurs, making Poochini a belly dancer singing a Brazilian number with a pile of fruit balanced on his head, Carmen Miranda style. He is accompanied by two rabbit singers, with miniature matching headgear.

A disgruntled concertgoer squirts ink in Poochini's face. That failing to stop the infinitely polymorphous figure onstage from further trashing of opera conventions, a conveniently accessible anvil is dropped by the same character onto Poochini's head. Squashed into midget stature, Poochini responds with temporary descent into bass singing range. He parodies briefly Al Jolson in blackface. Then the star gets adorned with a lei, leading to a Hawaiian war dance flanked by two equally vehement rabbits.

Perhaps getting carried away by that music's violence, Mysto loses the conductor's toupee he'd appropriated. In an instant, his sham is revealed to tormented Poochini, who makes a successful grab for the wand. And then ...

Well, you'll just have to watch the film yourself to discover how it concludes.

Animation by Walt Clinton, Michael Lah, and Grant Simmons unfailingly coordinates with drastic scene jumps and flash costume changes. Long before the French new wave, Keaton, Chuck Jones ("Duck Amuck") and Tex Avery forever altered the narrative film scene, producing design leaps that defied logic and made mincemeat of normal time and space relationships.

The utterly chaotic décor is handled with absurd unconcern by the art department, who gleefully satirize both pop icons and musical standards of all sorts.

Completely perfect in vocal acrobatics is Carlos Ramirez as Poochini, who proves himself master of every conceivable style of music. Daws Butler's Mysto the Magician is sonically portrayed with convincing vanity and vindictiveness.

Yes, there are Oriental and Black stereotypes briefly apparent onscreen. But they are innocuous relics of the past. Don't cheat yourself out of enormous pleasure by using them as a pretext to bypass this inspired lunacy. Recommended for all ages, a veritable explosion of creativity representing American animation at its unrestricted best.