



THOUSANDS CHEER is a May, 2014 LVCA dvd donation to the Hugh Stoupe Memorial Library of the Heritage United Methodist Church of Ligonier, Pennsylvania. It's reviewed below by Kino Ken.

12 of a possible 20 points

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

Key: \*indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance

United States 1943 Technicolor 125 minutes live action feature musical romance  
Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Producer: Joseph Pasternak

#### Points:

- 1 Direction: George Sidney
- 1 Editing: George Boemler
- 2 Cinematography: George Folsey
- 2 Lighting: Natalie Kalmus, Henri Jaffa
- 0 Screenplay: Paul Jarrico and Richard Collins based on their story "Private Miss Jones"
- 2 Music: Herbert Stothart and George Bassman Orchestrators: Murray Cutter, Roger Edens, Paul Marquardt Vocal Arrangements: Roger Edens  
Choreography: Fred Kelly\*
- 1 Art Direction: Cedric Gibbons, Daniel Cathcart
- 1 Sound: Norwood Fenton Recording Director: Douglas Shearer
- 1 Acting
- 1 Creativity

12 total points

CAST: Kathryn Grayson\* (Kathryn Jones), Gene Kelly (\* for dancing only) (Private Eddie Marsh), Mary Astor (Hyllary Jones), John Boles (Colonel Bill Jones), Ben Blue (Chuck Polansky), Frances Rafferty (Marie Corbino), Mary Elliott (Helen Corbino), Frank Jenks (Sergeant Koslack), Frank Sully (Alan), Dick Simmons (Captain Fred Avery), Ben Lessy (Silent Monk), Mickey Rooney\* (Emcee at the show), Judy Garland (Judy Garland), Red Skelton (Red Skelton), Eleanor Powell (Eleanor Powell), Ann Sothern (Ann Sothern), Lucille Ball (Lucille Ball), Virginia O'Brien (Virginia O'Brien), Frank Morgan (Dr. Frank Morgan), Lena Horne\* (Lena Horne), Marsha Hunt

(Marsha Hunt), Marilyn Maxwell (Drug Store Clerk in Red Skelton Skit), Donna Reed, Margaret O'Brien (j)\* (Customers in Red Skelton Skit), June Allyson (June Allyson), Gloria DeHaven (Gloria DeHaven), John Conte (Dr. Conte in Frank Morgan Skit), Sara Haden (Second Nurse in Frank Morgan Skit), Don Loper (Don Loper), Maxine Barrat (Maxine Barrat), Kay Kyser (Kay Kyser), Bob Crosby (Bob Crosby), Benny Carter (Ben Carter), Jose Iturbi\* (Jose Iturbi), Sig Arno (Uncle Algy), Cyd Charisse (Dancer), Paul Speer (Specialty Dancer), Don Taylor (Soldier at Train Station), Ray Teal (Ringmaster at Circus), Dick Winslow (Soldier), Bunny Waters (Bathing Beauty in Red Skelton Skit), others

THOUSANDS CHEER is an MGM wartime musical designed to boost morale on the home front. It showcases Metro's available roster of talent, considerably depleted by military recruitment. Disguising trite, totally unbelievable romance as all-star musical, the studio hoped for major profits.

Though many A-team crew members are credited participants, few executed superior work here. Among better achievements are Gene Kelly's choreography, possibly designed by brother Fred, musical accompaniment by Herbert Stothart and an uncredited George Bassman, richly atmospheric lighting engineered by Natalie Kalmus and Henri Jaffa, and precise cinematography by George Folsey. Less successful is mediocre sound recording of comic dialogue, undistinguished direction, merely adequate production design, and inconsistent editing. Particularly annoying are overextended dialogue scenes where nothing is truly happening. But the camera refuses to move on. Only when Kathryn Grayson shows up is there a payoff.

Songs are provided by the team of Ferde Grofe and Harold Adamson, a trio comprised of Lew Brown, Ralph Freed, and Burton Lane, and even a troika of Dmitri Shostakovich, Harold Rome, and E. Y. Harburg. Mr. Harburg joins forces with Earl Brent to create "Let There Be Music," arguably best of five credited music numbers in this show. Walter Jurmann and Paul Francis Webster deliver "Three Letters in the Mail Box," plainly revealing Webster's dependence on superior tunesmith partners to attain Hit Parade status. Additional music shoveled into the film range from "Tico Tico" to "Auld Lang Syne." Judy Garland unites with Jose Iturbi for a cheerfully swinging performance of "The Joint is Really Jumpin' in Carnegie Hall," a composition by Roger Edens, Ralph Blane and Hugh Martin. Want a high-voltage encore? Try Benny Carter and His Band joining with Lena Horne in a dynamic Fats Waller number ("Honeysuckle Rose"). Bob Crosby and His Orchestra offer a rollicking Dixieland arrangement of "In a Little Spanish Town," featuring the music of Mabel Wayne, with lyrics by Sam Lewis and Joe Young. Less vigorous, perhaps intended to calm nerves of older viewers, is the Kay Kyser Band's rendition of "Should I," a tune from Nacio Herb Brown, with lyrics by Arthur Freed sung by Georgia Carroll. Carroll's not so engaging a performer as Garland and Horne, heard and seen to better advantage.

Gene Kelly's acrobatics and dancing are buoyant, rhythmically propulsive, gloriously graceful. But there's no evident romantic chemistry between him and Grayson, resulting in dialogue scenes together that border on unrelieved tedium. Despite persistent efforts by Grayson to spice up proceedings with delightful sidelong glances and lip crinklings. Margaret O'Brien's cantankerously unsatisfied ice cream customer outshines Red Skelton's apathetic soda jerk in a schizophrenic skit where the pantomime master is hampered by dull corny lines forcing him to operate at half-capacity. Completely wasted is Lucille Ball, given bland dialogue and deprived any opportunity for slapstick. Yet Frank Morgan's draggy vaudeville skit is overextended and treated as a showstopper, which it might be in a negative fashion. Equally misjudged is Virginia O'Brien's scowling act which obliterates whatever message she's trying to

communicate with her singing. In striking contrast is the consistent elegance, vivacity, manual dexterity, and charisma of pianist / conductor Jose Iturbi. Kathryn Grayson's heartfelt singing, with rich tonality and fidelity to pitches high and low, makes him a splendid accompaniment.

As to the plot, stiffly dutiful Colonel Bill Jones and his snobbish estranged wife are at film's opening determined not to encounter again. Daughter Kitty, who lives with Mom but idolizes Dad, has been granted a chance to publicly salute the latter in a concert for departing enlistees and their officers. With Iturbi both on podium and piano bench, she achieves a smashing success. This is followed by training off to camp with her father. But not before being bussed by a brazen private, one who for plot reasons only has no current romantic partner. Naturally, both parties are headed for the same post. Dad discovers a romantic undertow developing. He tries unsuccessfully to squash it through pulling rank. This fails, partly because he can't bring himself to truly discipline his child. Isn't that her mother's job?

Mom's out of the picture at this point. So in lieu of marital discord, the film alternates between youthful officers trying to score with their superior by courting his daughter and a nebbish private with fickle taste in girlfriends and hopelessly inept timing. Since the nebbish is also a schlemiel, he cannot possibly promote beyond a comic relief role, one he handles gracelessly throughout.

Meanwhile, Gene Kelly, eventually identified as a former circus aerialist, is attempting to obtain a transfer from boring Army to more glamorous Air Force. A common wish in 1943, apparently. If he can succeed in making utility girlfriend Kathryn Jones state his case to Dad, then goodbye grunts, hello wings. Just when that plan is about to triumph, he inexplicably loses his nerve, confessing to Kitty he's just been using her, intent on wallowing in self-destruct mode. As compensation, the young lady is brought to see his adoptive parents in action, confirming a far-fetched tale of pre-enlistment fame. Simultaneously this visit introduces a key theme of cooperation, as no member of the flying Corbino family can execute their entire act alone. Something Private Eddie Marsh forgets when he neglects assignments and shoves his way defiantly past a commanding officer while afflicted with a temporary case of the sulks. This condition is brought on by obstruction of his courtship by Kathryn's mom, Hyllary, who despite her name is anything but inclined to jest. No underfunded private is going to sweep her daughter off into the sunset.

Dad vacillates between acquiescence and dumping everything back onto Kathryn to decide. With Eddie facing prospective court martial for insubordination, Kitty succumbs to Mom's interference and hands back her fiance's ring. Dad opts to retreat for reflection. No one looks disposed to advance a beleaguered engagement.

However, Colonel Jones has a soft spot for Eddie. He's inclined to keep him around. Can a few more days suffice to make a proper soldier of the lad? All the young man lacks is self-discipline. Which apparently neither the Colonel nor his sweetheart can provide. So father approves a scheme to bring the Corbinos to camp, nominally as part of a premium farewell extravaganza for troops scheduled to soon enter combat. Star of Stars Eddie is dragooned into performing as well, though how a prisoner facing court-martial proceedings can be permitted a pass during wartime surpasses human understanding. Leaping from one incredulity to another, the story further proposes Eddie, who cannot possibly be furtively practicing in jail, is set to perform a double somersault anyway. Without a net, even. Rehearsal would only presumably overprime the artist.

Everything subsequently falls into its predictable happy place. But not before music and comedy interludes which vary in quality from sublime to ridiculous. Most musical stagings are excellent; the majority of comic skits misfire. Had more bands been employed and fewer comedians, THOUSANDS CHEER might have ended up a small masterpiece. Instead, the movie attains nostalgic survivor status.

THOUSANDS CHEER is a modestly entertaining musical suitable for family viewing. If planning to employ it for educational purposes with younger viewers, be advised Lucille Ball, Red Skelton, and Gene Kelly are better spotlighted in other films. Margaret O'Brien is her usual formidable self. Jose Iturbi is at his debonair best. So reminisce or discover while enjoying some rare musical gems from the heyday of boogie-woogie.