



SEVEN BRIDES FOR SEVEN BROTHERS is an LVCA dvd donation to the Ligonier Valley Library. Below is Kino Ken's review of that dvd film.

**United States 1954 color 102 minutes widescreen live action feature musical
Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Producer: Jack Cummings**

6 of a possible 20 points

1/2 of a possible ****

Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance

(j) indicates juvenile performer

Points:

- 0 Direction: Stanley Donen**
- 1 Editing: Ralph Winter (though dance scenes are superbly edited)**
- 1 Cinematography: George Folsey**
- 0 Lighting: Alvord Eiseman**
- Special Visual Effects: A. Arnold Gillespie*, Warren Newcombe*, Franklyn Soldo*, Matthew Yuricich***
- 0 Screenplay: Albert Hackett, Frances Goodrich (Mrs. Albert Hackett), Dorothy Kingsley, based on Stephen Vincent Benet's story "The Sobbing Women"**
- 1 Music: Gene de Paul, Adolph Deutsch, Conrad Salinger**
Orchestrators: Leo Arnaud, Alexander Courage, Conrad Salinger, Robert Franklyn
Music Supervisor: Saul Chaplin Music Director: Adolph Deutsch
Choreographer: Michael Kidd*
Songs: "Goin' Courtin'," "Bless Yore Beautiful Hide," "Wonderful, Wonderful Day," "When You're in Love," "Sobbin' Women," "Lonesome Polecat," "June Bride," "Spring, Spring, Spring" Lyrics: Johnny Mercer
- 1 Art Direction: Cedric Gibbons, Urie McCleary**
Set Decorations: Hugh Hunt, Edwin Willis
Costume Designers: Walter Plunkett and Charles Arrico
Makeup: William Tuttle

1 **Sound: Douglas Shearer (Recording Supervisor), Van Allen Jones (Sound Editor),
Stewart Walden**
0 **Acting**
1 **Creativity**
6 total points

Cast: Howard Keel (Adam Pontipee), Jeff Richards (Benjamin Pontipee), Russ Tamblyn (Gideon Pontipee), Tommy Rall (Frank Pontipee), Marc Platt (Daniel Pontipee), Matt Mattox (Caleb Pontipee), Jacques d'Amboise (Ephraim Pontipee), Jane Powell (Milly), Julie Newmar (Dorcas), Nancy Kilgas (Alice), Betty Carr (Sarah), Virginia Gibson (Liza), Ruta Lee (Ruth), Norma Doggett (Martha), Ian Wolfe (Rev. Elcott), Howard Petrie (Pete Perkins), Earl Barton (Harry), Dante Di Paolo (Matt), Kelly Brown (Carl), Matt Moore (Ruth's uncle), Dick Rich (Dorcas's father), Marjorie Wood (Mrs. Bixby), Russell Simpson (Mr. Bixby), Walter Beaver (Lem), Paul Bradley (Storekeeper), Sheila James Kuehl (j) (Jenny, sister to Dorcas), Bill Lee (Singing Voice of Caleb), Jarma Lewis (Lem's girlfriend), Anna Nilsson (Mrs. Elcott), Phil Rich (Prospector), Gene Roth (Tom), others

One of the most energetic of all Hollywood musicals, **SEVEN BRIDES FOR SEVEN BROTHERS** is a socially incorrect dinosaur from the mid-1950s, based on an extremely chauvinistic story by Stephen Vincent Benet. Apparently thinking Plutarch's account of how ancient Roman bachelors solved mating problems was a real knee-slapper, American author Benet recast an appalling Rape of the Sabine Women as folksy comedy. Feminists will find plenty here to deplore.

The story begins with one Adam Pontipee, an Oregon Territory backwoodsman, coming to the closest settlement to obtain farm supplies, these apparently including a wife. He needs her housekeeping and cooking skills at the lodge he shares with his six brothers. His problem is more or less lucidly stated in the song "Bless Your Beautiful Hide," one of eight numbers with lyrics provided by Johnny Mercer. Howard Keel plays Adam, eldest of seven redheaded brothers with no apparent ancestors. Well, this is an M-G-M musical. So don't expect logic to be a factor.

Very rapidly, Adam settles on Milly, a town girl who chops wood and cooks. These two skills he deems essential for potential spouse. Milly, acted by Jane Powell, is smitten just as deeply on first sight. So the two hastily marry, more or less on the spot. Adam avoids informing his new bride of six other Pontipee siblings awaiting their return to the back country. Milly, believing herself about to enjoy a cozy private honeymoon, rhapsodizes about their blissful union in the number "Wonderful, Wonderful Day." Its sung to a painted backdrop of mountain pastures in flowery bloom. Director Donen, in the accompanying audio

commentary, deplores employment of optical print mountain scenery, occasioned by studio demands for budget economies. He favored shooting on location, but was overruled.

Arriving at the Pontipee homestead, Milly's overwhelmed to discover she will be sharing the residence with Adam's six unmarried brothers. Table manners, personal hygiene, clothes washing, even devotions are absent from their daily rituals. Milly's job is to "civilize" them, teach them how to behave in polite society, indoctrinate them into the meaning of the word "share." Obviously, these seven brothers are based on the seven dwarfs of Walt Disney. Both sets of characters sport beards, live in the woods, and are remarkably sloppy housekeepers.

Milly, a nineteenth-century version of Snow White, is certainly no princess in disguise. Her fairly unambitious goal is to marry a hard-working farmer infatuated with her cooking and pretty face.

Adam fits that role perfectly. Why, he even reads Plutarch in translation during long winter nights. As if frontiersmen in 1850s Oregon stocked a portable Roman History set in their home libraries.

Some irksome characteristics of this film must be addressed. There are four major fight scenes, one damaging beyond salvage a shop window and a second razing a barn that was supposed to be raised. Both mindless wreckings go unfixed. They seem to be placidly accepted as necessary adjuncts of Pontipee visits. Donen appears to be aping John Ford's QUIET MAN approach to courtship here, with protagonists slugging their way to marital bliss. That's a very stupid philosophy to espouse in any time period. Aside from obstacles posed by every eligible maiden in town already having a boyfriend or fiancé, screenwriters make more patient, chivalrous wooers out to be weaker, therefore less deserving of mates than brawny country rivals. May the best scrappers win.

Viewers who can tolerate such throwback Darwinism can push on to the "Goin' Courtin'" number in which Milly instructs her brothers-in-law in proper methods of courting females. All which is promptly forgotten as soon as one of the "boys" jumps off their wagon in town. He greets a young woman with an appetizing offer of chewing tobacco, managing to simultaneously insult her and the intelligence of viewers. This instigates a brawl between thick-skulled Pontipee and the girl's male companion, a trial by combat which expands into a free-for-all involving two other townsmen. A powerless Milly's arbitration attempts fail miserably.

There are further sadistic blows administered in the Barn Dance production, which might more appropriately be labelled Barn Buffetings. For those seeking alternative fracas, Donen later stages a catfight among captives, one instantly terminated by news Milly is pregnant and needs quiet and cooperation.

Which, by the way, she is assured of. Chief belligerent Adam, still smarting from her rebukes about contemporary kidnappings, has holed up in an isolated cabin higher in the mountains.

Abduction of six unwilling bachelorettes, in imitation of a story Adam read in one of Millie's books, is intended to generate brides for six lovelorn Pontipee brothers. This sextet made themselves unwelcome at the previous barn dance by decking competitors. Though their acrobatic dancing was awesomely virile, it accomplished nothing positive for them.

In frustration, an even more tactless strategy was adopted, with senior brother Adam being its chief promoter.

To revitalize a lackadaisical work crew, depicted in a wonderfully sluggish song titled "Lonesome Polecat," Adam relates the successful Roman procurement of spouses by physical abduction. This leads into a rollicking "Sobbin' Women." He's still projected as a hero, having earlier sung the exquisite ballad "When You're In Love" as edification to last-born Gideon, who isn't sure about symptoms of lovesickness. Jane Powell's Millie reprises the tune, assuring lyrics apply equally to her.

Then off to town go bride-rustling Pontipees, gunny sacks accompanying them, just crying out to be filled with prospective fiancées. They are set on furtively obtaining targeted females and protesting parson, the latter to validate Breen Office demands to keep the picture's lofty moral tone intact. Successful escape is assured by a combination of peculiarly favorable conditions: 1. Feminine protests are feeble, easily suppressed. 2. Outcries of victims are mostly stifled during traversal of a mountain pass. 3. Shrieks are permitted and encouraged by Pontipees immediately after the pass is negotiated. 4. Reinforced by pistol shots into the skies, an avalanche is triggered, cutting off a pursuing posse. Note the commendable verisimilitude to the snowslide, a major achievement engineered by the special effects wizardry of A. Arnold Gillespie, Warren Newcombe, Franklyn Soldo, and Matthew Yuricich.

Since this is billed as musical comedy, Pontipees neglect to round up a man of the cloth, forcing wolves and lambs to dwell in mutual antagonism at their hideaway until spring thaws reopen a trail back to town. Women commandeer the main house. Men are relegated to barn dwelling.

Anyone who wishes to determine how this mismatching will turn out is welcome to borrow this dvd from the Ligonier Valley Library. It will be available soon in the Classic Cinema section.

Featuring uninspired direction, lukewarm acting, foggy lighting, and generally lackluster songs, SEVEN BRIDES FOR SEVEN BROTHERS is made worthwhile by dynamic choreography, best served by widescreen format presentation. Michael Kidd's dances are most memorable for acrobatic tumblings of Russ Tamblyn on a log, Matt Mattox's precision axe pivots during "Lonesome Polecat," and counterbalanced sextets challenging each other in the justly lauded "Barn Dance."

Sound is adequate throughout. Artificial stage scenery crafted by a misguided art department is annoying. A married duo's screenplay adds nothing but absurdity to the

proceedings. Albert Hackett and wife Frances Goodrich are signally unable to preserve either Oregonian idiom or colorful unique phrases in the manner of Davy Crockett or Cisco Kid. Cinematography and editing are uneven: briskly boisterous in musical production numbers, draggy and conventional elsewhere.

DVD bonuses include a Donen Trailer Gallery highlighting such Donen-directed musicals as **ON THE TOWN**, **ROYAL WEDDING**, **SINGIN' IN THE RAIN**, **SEVEN BRIDES FOR SEVEN BROTHERS**, **IT'S ALWAYS FAIR WEATHER**, **THE PAJAMA GAME**, and **DAMN YANKEES**, and an audio commentary by director Donen. Though a second dvd containing the pan-and-scan format version is advertised, it was not present in this purchase made for the LVCA. Frankly, widescreen format is essential for proper appreciation of spectacular dances.

Due to its sexually unappealing storyline, **SEVEN BRIDES FOR SEVEN BROTHERS**, though rated by a lax MPAA as G, is only acceptable viewing for mature adult audiences who will not be misled by its cavalier attitude towards prenuptial wooing. The film is recommended to those viewers solely for its one great song "When You're in Love" and superlatively vigorous choreography.

SEVEN BRIDES FOR SEVEN BROTHERS did receive an Academy Award™ for Best Scoring of a Musical Picture. Nominated as Best Picture, it lost to **ON THE WATERFRONT**. Justly so.