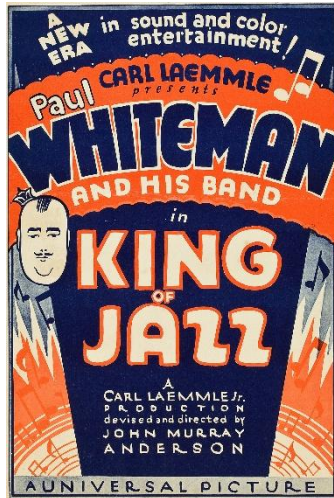




***King of Jazz* is a Summer 2026 LVCA dvd donation to the Ligonier Valley Library. Below is Kino Ken's review of that early American film musical.**

12 of a possible 20 points = * = above-average film**

United States 1930 color 100 minutes live action feature musical

Universal Pictures Producer: Carl Laemmle, Jr.

a Criterion Collection dvd release

Points:

- 1 Direction: John Murray Anderson (live action) and Walter Lantz (animation)**
- 2 Editing: Robert Carlisle and Maurice Pivar**
- 2 Cinematography: Jerome Ash*, Hal Mohr*, and Ray Rennahan***
- 1 Lighting**
Animation: Walter Lantz, William Nolan, Ray Abrams, and Manuel Moreno
- 0 Writers: Harry Ruskin, Edward Lowe, Jr., and Charles MacArthur**
- 1 Music: Alfonso Corelli, George Gershwin (pre-existing music), Milton Ager, Ferde Grofé, Sr., James Dietrich, and Mabel Wayne**
Song Lyrics: Jack Yellen and Billy Rose
Choreography: Russell Markert*
- 2 Art Direction: Herman Rosse***
Costume Design: Herman Rosse*
Makeup: Jack Pierce
- 1 Sound: C. Roy Hunter and Harold Smith**
- 0 Acting**

2 Creativity

12 total points

Cast: Paul Whiteman (Paul Whiteman), John Boles (singer of “Song of the Dawn” and “It Happened in Monterey”), Laura La Plante (editor in “Ladies of the Press” / stenographer in “In Conference” / quartet member in “Nellie”), Jeanette Loff (singer of “It Happened in Monterey,” “Bridal Veil,” and “A Bench in the Park”), Glenn Tryon (executive in “In Conference” / unmarried husband / husband in “A Dash of Spice”), William Kent (General in “All Noisy on the Eastern Front” / goldfish owner in “Oh! Forevermore!” / unmarried couple’s offspring / meek husband in “Do Things for You” / man in closet in “A Dash of Spice”), Slim Summerville (automobile owner in “Springtime” / rear end of horse / Charles), Harry Baris, Bing Crosby, Al Rinker (The Rhythm Boys), Kathryn Crawford (4th reporter in “Ladies of the Press” / wife in “A Dash of Spice”), Carla Laemmle (chorine), Stanley Smith (bridegroom in “Bridal Veil” and also appearing in “A Bench in the Park”), George Chiles (dancer in “It Happened in Monterey” and singer in “A Bench in the Park” and “Ragamuffin Romeo”), Jack White (Jack White, monologist), Frank Leslie (lead quartet singer in “Nellie”), Walter Brennan (desk sergeant in “Springtime” / soldier in “All Noisy on the Eastern Front” / waiter in “Oh! Forevermore!” / front end of horse / quartet member in “Nellie”), Churchill Ross (quartet member in “Nellie”), John Arledge (first pianist at giant piano in “Rhapsody in Blue” / quartet member in “Nellie”), Al Norman* (rubber legs dancer in “Happy Feet”), Jacques Cartier* (voodoo dancer in “Rhapsody in Blue”), Nell O’Day* (dancer with Tommy Atkins Sextette), Marion Stadler (j)* (specialty dancer in “Ragamuffin Romeo” and “Melting Pot”), Don Rose (specialty dancer in “Ragamuffin Romeo”), The Russell Markert Dancers, Tommy Atkins Sextette (Clayton Romler, Scott Jensen, Gilbert Herwood, Toby Erb, Dick Erskine, Robert Gales), Thomas Atkins (Tommy Atkins Sextette leader), Bobbe, Kathlyn and Lorayne Brox (Brox Sisters), Eleanor and Karla Gutöhrlein (Sisters G., specialty dancers), Wilbur Hall* (trombonist, violinist, air pump player), Otis Harlan (Charles’s intended father-in-law), Grace Hayes (third reporter in “Ladies of the Press” and a rough wife in “Do Things for You”),

George Beranger (comedian), Richard Cromwell (j) (chorus boy), Jack Fulton (Jack Fulton, a singer), Marcia Mae Jones (j) (flower girl in "Bridal Veil"), Otto Landau, Matty Malneck, Joe Venuti, John Bouman, Ted Bacon, and Kurt Dieterle (violin sextet), Jeanie Lang (first reporter in "Ladies of the Press" / singer in "Bridal Veil," "Ragamuffin Romeo," and "Do Things for You"), Bessie Lee (singer), Eddie Lang (guitar player), others

Best of the Roaring Twenties American musicals, *King of Jazz* retains a niche in the Musicals Preservation Hall of Fame on the bases of eye-grabbing visuals, lavish costumes, and daring close-ups with performers pacing in measured stages from background positions to placement immediately facing a camera lens. Shot in two-color Technicolor, the film lacks blues, purples, and yellows. This was a signal failure when attempting to create appropriate atmospherics for an abbreviated version of George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue," rendered here as more a "Fantasia in Green."

Hampered by inability to choose decisively between outdated Victorian sentimental ballads or Machine Age snappy pop, songwriters opted to pit one style against another, letting audiences determine their preference, if any. So the first half of the film offers what might be termed musica antiqua and the second half musica nova.

Older pieces are presented in one of three styles: comically overplayed barbershop quartet, majestically semi-operatic, or lispingly infantile. To each his own taste. Newer tunes are offered through crooning pop (The Rhythm Boys) or syncopated jazz (The Whiteman Orchestra pounding its way through "Happy Feet.")

Highlights throughout are dance episodes, such as Jacques Cartier's voodoo dance on a drum introducing "Rhapsody in Blue" and synchronized line dances of the Russell Markert Dancers. Al Norman's solo in "Happy Feet" also proves an electrifying knockout.

Lowlights are comedy blackouts featuring Slim Summerville, William Kent, Laura La Plante, Glenn Tryon, Walter Brennan, and Grace Hayes. All are mired in vaudeville hyperbole and most center on adulterous situations. A few years after *King of Jazz's* initial release such material would be outlawed by the Production Code.

Mabel Wayne's "Ragamuffin Romeo" receives two settings. The first, a vocal pairing of Jeanie Lang and George Chiles, is rendered in an aggravatingly coy, Betty Boop style. Much more attractive is the second, a knockabout gymnastic routine not recommended for home amateur reenactment.

Particularly notable experiments abound, such as the introduction of The Paul Whiteman Orchestra by means of a succession of band members climbing out of a miniature piano and then descending to a diminutive tiered stage which dissolves into a standard-size one. Equally striking is the musical's opening, a short animation of caricatured Paul Whiteman encountering a cartoon lion while driving across the Sahara. This supposedly signals African origins of "jazz." Enlargements of the lion's gaping jaws each time it springs forward still astonish.

"My Bridal Veil" permits feminine viewers a fashion show. Wedding gowns from various historic periods appear on models descending a grand staircase before posing beside a ghostly partial incarnation of the latter-day bride recalling her fondest moment. There's nothing special about the song itself. However, the episode concludes with nostalgic bride trailing a one hundred ten foot long veil behind her as she mounts a grand staircase to the sky. That's not something observed every day.

Herman Rosse designed both sets and costumes, seemingly unconcerned about expenses for materials. Size and glamour were what counted. *King of Jazz* boasts excesses of both.

Jazzbos will exult upon hearing Eddie Lang on guitar and Joe Venuti playing violin in an early scene. Which more than compensates for the agony of listening to Jack White's monologue later. That chaotic rehash of an unfocussed vaudeville routine may have included audience participation originally. Here it's simply a time-wasting interlude.

Though music recording is first-rate, dialogue is not always optimally miked.

Lighting is erratic, at its worst in blackout sketches and special effects scenes.

Because some footage has been lost over time, a few scenes intermingle connected action with still photos. These tend to appear exclusively in brief comedy interludes.

Besides the music of George Gershwin, this extravaganza showcases songs written by Mabel Wayne and Milton Ager. Orchestrations arrive courtesy of

Ferde Grofe and several uncredited others, with Jack Yellen and Billy Rose contributing lyrics.

Don't miss the concluding "Melting Pot" number. It begins with a rousing rendition of "D'ye Ken John Peel?" from England and segues through tunes from Italy, Spain, Germany, Scotland, Ireland, Russia, France, and the United States, none of which even remotely link to jazz.

DVD Special Features in this double disc release consist of a seventeen-minute Introduction to the Film by critic Garry Giddins, a nineteen-minute interview with Michael Feinstein from 2017 focusing on Paul Whiteman and his recording activities, four video essays totaling approximately forty-four minutes supplying background information about the Laemmles and the film's production process, a two-minute alternate opening title sequence, three deleted scenes totaling roughly two and one-quarter minutes, a nineteen-minute live action short from 1929 titled "All Americans" that was directed by Joseph Santley and served as a prototype for *King of Jazz's* "Melting Pot" number, a 1933 live action short titled "I Know Everybody and Everybody's Racket" that was directed by Monte Brice and featured Walter Winchell and the Paul Whiteman Band. Also two 1930 Oswald the Lucky Rabbit cartoons: "My Pal Paul," a seven-minute short comedy directed by Walter Lantz co-starring a caricatured Paul Whiteman along with Oswald and "Africa," co-directed by Lantz and William Nolan, with delightfully inventive car parts transformed into musical instruments as Oswald demolishes Paul's automobile.

The Criterion release also provides an informative essay about the film by critic Farran Smith Nehme.

King of Jazz is adult viewing due to its cover art and adultery gags.

Below are ratings and credits for the bonus short films cited above.

All Americans United States 1929 black-and-white 19 minutes

Paramount Pictures live action musical short

Producer: John Murray Anderson

12 of a possible 20 points = *** stars = above-average film

Points:

- 1 Direction: Joseph Santley
- 1 Editing
- 1 Cinematography

- 1 Lighting
- 2 Special Visual Effects
- 1 Story
 - Music: "Yankee Doodle" and "Santa Lucia"
- 1 Art Direction
- 1 Sound
- 1 Acting
- 2 Creativity
- 12 total points

Cast: Arthur Van Slyke (Uncle Sam), Mimi Lehmann (German girl), John Herman, Max Seidl (Swiss slappers), Kathryn Reece, Ottabio Valentini (Italian singers), Willard Fry (French soldier), Cardell Twins (French dancers), Martinoff (Cossack), Edward O'Rourke (Irish singer), Scott Sisters (Irish dancers), Dolores Alba (Spanish singer), Dorothy Berke and Jose Alvarez (tango dancers), Torres Accordionists suitable viewing for all ages

I Know Everybody and Everybody's Racket United States 1933
 black-and-white 20 minutes live action short comedy
 Universal Pictures Producers: Monte Brice and William Rowland

9 of a possible 20 points = **1/2 = sub-par movie

Points:

- 1 Direction: Monte Brice
- 1 Editing: Robert Snody
- 1 Cinematography: William Steiner and George Webber
- 1 Lighting
- 1 Screenplay: Sig Herzig adapting a story by Mark Hellinger
- 1 Music
- 1 Art Direction
- 1 Sound
- 0 Acting
- 1 Creativity
- 9 total points

Cast: Walter Winchell (Walter Winchell), Paul Whiteman (Paul Whiteman), Ruth Etting (Ruth Etting), Arthur Tracy (The Street Singer), Arthur Jarrett (Arthur Jarrett), Irene Taylor (singer Irene Taylor), Jack Fulton (singer Jack Fulton), The Rhythm Boys, Joan Castle (Lancaster Lil), Sidney Easton (doorman), Harry Goldfield (trumpeter), Nick Kenny (Nick Kenny), Freddy Martin (Freddy Martin)

Walter Winchell plays a world-weary New York sophisticate who hangs out at a night club featuring the Paul Whiteman Orchestra while attempting to obtain gossip about celebrities for his next column. A presumed rube from Lancaster, Pennsylvania enters and recognizes him. She quickly begins gushing over the renowned columnist and asks him to introduce her to a local gangster. He obliges, believing himself merely humoring the uninformed out-of-towner. Boy, is he in for a surprise!

Acting is hammy in this short. But the story has a neat ending twist and accompanying music is tolerable. Suitable viewing for teens and adults. Of no interest to preteens.

***My Pal Paul* United States 1930 black-and-white 7 minutes**

Walter Lantz Productions for Universal Pictures animation comedy short

Producer: Walter Lantz

15 of a possible 20 points = *1/2 = excellent film**

Points:

1 Direction: Walter Lantz

2 Editing

1 Lighting

2 Animation

1 Screenplay: Walter Lantz, Manuel Moreno, William Nolan

1 Production Design

2 Music: James Dietrich

2 Sound

1 Voices Cast: Pinto Colvig (Oswald the Lucky Rabbit), Walter Lantz (Baby Dog), Paul Whiteman (Paul Whiteman)

2 Creativity

15 total points

A humorous and clever introduction to both Oswald the Lucky Rabbit and Paul Whiteman for teen and adult viewers.

Africa United States 1930 black-and-white 10 minutes
short musical animation Note: beware of racial stereotyping
Universal Pictures Producer: Carl Laemmle

14 of a possible 20 points = ***1/2 = excellent film

Points:

- Direction: Walter Lantz and William Nolan
- 2 Editing
- 1 Animation Camera
- 1 Lighting
- 1 Screenplay: Fred "Tex" Avery, Pinto Colvig, Walter Lantz, Manuel Moreno
and William Nolan
- 2 Music: James Dietrich
- 2 Animation: Ray Abrams, Fred "Tex" Avery, Pinto Colvig, Clyde Geronimi,
Les Kline, Manuel Moreno, and William Nolan
- 1 Production Design
- 1 Sound
- 1 Voices Acting: Pinto Colvig (Oswald the Lucky Rabbit)
- 2 Creativity
- 14 total points

A highly imaginative cartoon with an African setting and a medley of tunes from *King of Jazz*, *Africa* purports to humorously explain the origins of Whiteman's interest in jazz music. Much better fun than the somewhat queasy action of *My Pal Paul*. Some viewers may find certain Dark Continent clichés repelling. Suitable for teen and adult viewers.