

Kelly, Astaire, and Male Musical Stardom

The Hollywood Song-and-Dance Man Reconsidered

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In *Only Entertainment*, Richard Dyer argues, “because entertainment is a common-sense, ‘obvious’ idea, what is really meant and implied by it never gets discussed” (19). The same can be said for the category of the “Hollywood-song-and-dance man”—a male performer within the classical film musical paradigm—whose true complexity is often obscured by its tautological efficiency (i.e. he is a man who sings and dances within the world of the musical). However, any attempt to discuss the category’s more complex social, historical, or cinematic dimensions

must wrestle with an inevitable obstacle – the pervasive visibility and powerful stardom of the two most well-known Hollywood song-and-dance men, Gene Kelly and Fred Astaire. Thus, in order to revitalize our definition of the cinematic category of the Hollywood-song-and-dance man and to broaden its dimensions to include other male musical stars, we must first deal with the specific discourses surrounding Kelly and Astaire’s stardom. Parallel to this is a discussion of YouTube, which allows us space to celebrate a more nuanced, inclusive, and multi-dimensional “Hollywood-song-and-dance man” and the lesser-known performers who have contributed to the category’s popularity.

Throughout this article, I rely on “The Babbitt and the Bromide” sequence from the 1946 MGM musical revue, *Ziegfeld Follies*. This self-reflexive number, directed by Vincente Minnelli and featuring Kelly and Astaire as

themselves, is a rare duet between the two stars and is largely ignored compared to their more iconic work. One reason for this is that the sequence is an extractable cameo within *Ziegfeld Follies*’ disconnected, variety show-like format and does not fit with Kelly and Astaire’s usual films, in which they play fictional characters existing in a larger, romance-driven narrative.¹ The importance of “The Babbitt and the Bromide,” however, is in this very difference, or, as Dyer argues, the fact that it “...constitute[s] inflections, exceptions to, subversions of the vehicle pattern and the star image” (“Stars” 412). Calling each other “Gene” and “Fred” and self-reflexively discussing their careers during the number, the two men are contained as themselves within the sequence and not required to have a presence as leading men outside of this musical performance (see fig. 1). The number is a celebration of Kelly and Astaire as talented dancers,

¹ This is not to suggest that all of Kelly and Astaire’s appearances are as characters within a cohesive narrative since, for example, “Slaughter on Tenth Avenue” is the only time that Kelly appears in *Words and Music* (1948). However, they are most known for their star vehicles.

choreographers, and musical stars; its dissimilarity to their other work creates the opportunity to reconsider the concept of the Hollywood song-and-dance man.

The Stardom of Kelly and Astaire

How is the Hollywood song-and-dance man affected by the discourses surrounding Kelly and Astaire? How is their centrality within film history constructed and maintained? At the most basic level, we must recognize these two men as talented dancers, prolific choreographers, and artists with tremendous control behind-the-scenes. However, skill is not the sole factor in Kelly and Astaire's ability to metonymically stand for the figure of the Hollywood song-and-dance man. In more complex ways, the issue resides in how film scholarship continually presents them as not only synonymous with the dance-heavy musicals of the 1930s to the mid-1950s, but also as the form's "ambassadors." For example, Kelly and Astaire are the go-to subjects for larger theoretical discussions of the musical's structural, aesthetic, ideological, and technological debates.² In these discussions, scholarly work on the musical and investigations of Kelly and Astaire's careers become one and the same. Additionally, the way we talk about them as scholars and fans illustrates how these two specific performers are entangled in a construction of stardom based on difference. The majority of the work published on Kelly and

Astaire concerns their opposing styles. For example, in *The World in a Frame*, Leo Braudy proposes that Kelly and Astaire's styles each resonate within their respective social and historical moments – Astaire's 1930s musicals speaking to the European

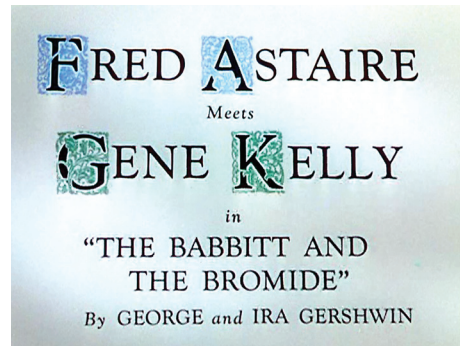


Fig. 1 "The Babbit and the Bromide" Title Card (*Ziegfeld Follies*, 1946). Screenshot.

influence of the previous decade and the Great Depression while Kelly's more optimistic, patriotic, and vernacular films are unique to the World War II context (148, 155). Through repeated emphasis on their "representative" positions as artists with consistent yet dissimilar (successful) styles, larger social functions, and control behind-the-scenes, film scholars continue to treat Kelly and Astaire as Hollywood song-and-dance men par excellence, leaving little room for other contenders.

"The Babbit and the Bromide" provides a visualization of how the concept of the Hollywood song-and-dance man has become tethered to this romantic reading of Kelly and Astaire. The continual emphasis on the two performers' differences often frames

them in a competition of sorts. Viewers are encouraged to choose a side – picking Kelly's muscular athleticism or Astaire's theatrical elegance. Of course, this was more of an imaginary rivalry – a myth guiding our construction and reception of the musical genre. According to Kelly, "the public insisted on thinking of us as rivals... Well nothing could have been further from the truth" (qtd. in Hirschhorn 200). This assumed rivalry is playfully commented upon from the start of "The Babbit and the Bromide," as we are introduced to Kelly and Astaire in a way that mirrors their perceived relationship. The sequence begins with Kelly's heavy taps interrupting Astaire's light and ephemeral steps – an aural and visual parallel to the former's presumed disruptive presence as the "new boy" in Hollywood in opposition to the latter's more established career. The choreography that comprises "The Babbit and the Bromide" revolves around the competitive sparring between the two men, as they playfully kick, trip, and bump into each other. The number suggests – by good-humouredly giving the audience the rivalry they crave – that these two men are the opposing poles of the genre's artistic spectrum (see fig. 2).

As a result of its association with Kelly and Astaire, the category of the Hollywood song-and-dance man has become inscribed within the larger paradigm of the integrated musical and its em-

³ The integrated musical can be understood as a film (most commonly from MGM) with "musical numbers that are 'integral' to the plot—either by revealing important character traits or by furthering the narrative itself" (Griffin 22). Integrated musicals are films that stress a tight, "natural" relationship between musical number and non-musical portions of the story (the opposite of a backstage musical, for example). Integrated musicals are not specific to film and have a long theatrical history. See Jerome Delamater's *Dance in the Hollywood Musical* (1988) and Dyer's "Entertainment and Utopia" chapter from *Only Entertainment* (2002) for more on this complex form.

² By no means exhaustive, some sources that use Kelly and Astaire to investigate the musical: Structure: "Fred Astaire and the Integrated Musical" by John Mueller (1984), "Narrative and Spectacle in the Hollywood Musical: Contrasting the Choreography of Busby Berkeley and Gene Kelly" by Lauren Pattullo (2007), and Jane Feuer's *The Hollywood Musical* (1978); Cultural/Political: "Feminizing' the Song-and-Dance Man: Fred Astaire and the Spectacle of Masculinity in the Hollywood Musical" (1993) and "Dancing with Balls in the 1940s: Sissies, Sailors and the Camp Masculinity of Gene Kelly" (2004) both by Steven Cohan, as well as Brett Farmer's *Spectacular Passions: Cinema, Fantasy, Gay Male Spectatorship* (2000) and Beth Genné's essay "Freedom Incarnate: Jerome Robbins, Gene Kelly and The Dancing Sailor as an Icon of American Values in World War II" (2001); Aesthetic/Technological: Jerome Delamater's *Dance in the Hollywood Musical* (1988); Social significance: Leo Braudy's chapter on the musical in his book *The World in a Frame* (1976), as well as Thomas Schatz's section on the genre in his book *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (1981).

phasis on structural and romantic cohesion. In a 1976 interview, Kelly argued that to be a Hollywood song-and-dance man, “you need to sing, you need to dance, and you need to act – and you’ve got to be able to convince the audience that you’re the guy to get the girl in the end” (Lippman A20). In this statement, Kelly counter-intuitively presents a vision of the Hollywood song-and-dance man that he and Astaire helped to construct. He is not only a singer and a dancer, but also a presence that exists outside of a musical sequence as a romantic hero and a capable actor. Not only is he integral to the transition from non-musical scenes to dance breaks, but he is also a fundamental part of the film’s larger romantic structure.

In this idealized vision of the importance of the (white) dancer/choreographer leading man, what happens to other male musical performers who do not fit this exact definition? What about Ray Bolger who did not possess as much control behind-the-scenes as a choreographer? How do we situate James Cagney who, in his oscillation between the musical genre and the gangster film, is not as central as Kelly and Astaire? Finally, what about the Nicholas Brothers who were neither leading men nor white?

Fayard and Harold Nicholas, the “Nicholas Brothers,” embody

*4 A discussion of race and the musical deserves more attention than this space affords. The histories of tap and minstrelsy are completely intertwined with discussions of race and cultural appropriation. Even a concept like the “integrated musical,” which stresses cohesion and effacement of difference is weighted in relation to its larger context of segregated twentieth-century America. See Arthur Knight, *Disintegrating the Musical: Black Performance and American Musical Film* (2002) or Constance Valis Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History* (2010) for more lengthy discussions of American vernacular dance, the American film musical, and the racial, cultural, and social dimensions of each. For the purposes of this article, the Nicholas Brothers remind us of this history and highlight how the term has become entangled in problematic racial boundaries.*



Fig. 2. Kelly and Astaire’s Competitive Sparring-as-Choreography in “The Babbitt and the Bromide” (Ziegfeld Follies, 1946). Screenshot.

the antithesis of the traditional Hollywood song-and-dance man⁴, making them crucial to a revised discussion of the category’s historical prominence. Not only do they highlight how the concept has become whitewashed due to its association with Kelly and Astaire (which then excludes the complex history of American vernacular dance and its connections to racial and social formations and cultural appropriation), but they also remind us how the musical form itself prevented them from becoming “Hollywood song-and-dance men.” Like many other non-white performers, the Nicholas Brothers were constantly marked as different within the Hollywood musical genre. According to Dyer, “blackness is contained in the musical, ghettoized, stereotyped, trapped in the category of ‘only entertainment’” (Only Entertainment 39).

Excluding the few all-black musicals, African-American performers often played minor roles such as servants, slaves, or entertainers. Down Argentine Way (1940)

is exemplary of Fayard and Harold’s usual limited visibility as a cameo or “specialty act” within the musical genre. In the film, they are only an act in a nightclub that the white characters attend. These extractable numbers could easily be cut for Southern audiences, and contained the duo’s black bodies, cinematically controlling and subduing them while mirroring the segregated world outside the darkened movie theatre. Additionally, rather than ever being called “Hollywood song-and-dance men,” Fayard and Harold are most often identified as simply the “Nicholas Brothers,” a succinct shorthand that not only conflates them into one entity, but also signals a popular (black) entertainment act rather than individuated romantic heroes who sing, dance, and

5 In my research, the Nicholas Brothers are rarely even given the label “song-and-dance men.” Frequently, their work is described (by both twentieth-century Hollywood and contemporary film scholars) through terms that evoke vaudeville, such as an extractable “specialty act” or “eccentric dancers” (Stearns and Stearns 232, 282).

“get the girl.”⁵

This position of cinematic marginality directly opposes a more utopian vision of white freedom. As Dyer argues, “musicals typically show us space entirely occupied by white people, dancing wherever they want, singing as loudly or intimately as they need” (Only Entertainment 40). For instance, in “I Like Myself” from *It’s Always Fair Weather* (1955), Kelly’s Ted presents himself as a self-conscious spectacle in public, attracting crowds and stopping traffic. In *Royal Wedding* (1951), Astaire’s Tom occupies the entire space of his room, singing and dancing on the ceiling because he is in love. Unlike the Nicholas Brothers’ contained cameos, Kelly and Astaire not only play identifiable characters, but also possess a wide mastery over the space of their performances, as they are able to creatively sing and dance in parks, streets, cafes, and animated dreamworlds, to name just a few of the locations where the white musical presence is felt.

To broaden the associations of the Hollywood song-and-dance man to include marginalized and oft-forgotten performers like the Nicholas Brothers, it becomes important to privilege the extractable specialty act over the integrated musical for a change. This is where “The Babbitt and the Bromide” and its difference from Kelly and Astaire’s usual work proves useful. In fact, “The Babbitt and the Bromide” is similar to the Nicholas Brothers’ extractable routines and does not correspond to Kelly’s discussion of the Hollywood-song-and-dance man as a character who “gets the girl.” Rather than trying to make the Nicholas Brothers match the vision of the Hollywood song-and-dance man as leading man, we can relate Kelly and Astaire’s performances in “The Babbitt and the Bromide” to the specialty number. This celebration of the “extractable” sequence invites us

to think about the current ways many viewers consume musical numbers today – namely through YouTube, where song-and-dance clips from musical films, rather than the non-musical scenes, are most common. This reorients our attention from broader discussions of integration, character, and narrative (all key to understanding Kelly and Astaire) to a focus on the Hollywood song-and-dance man in terms of a performative presence (content) that encompasses both the (black) specialty act and the (white) integrated musical.

Reconsidering the Hollywood Song-and-Dance Man

In its presentation of seemingly endless clips of musical numbers ripe for instantaneous comparison, YouTube democratizes the concept of the Hollywood song-and-dance man. We can find a clip of the Nicholas Brothers, followed by a clip of Kelly, then Gower Champion, then the Berry Brothers, and then Astaire. That it is mostly the musical numbers that get uploaded to YouTube allows us to extend the concept of the Hollywood song-and-dance man by focusing on these skilled moments of spectacle. As a result, we can think about the Hollywood song-and-dance man as a cinematic visual and aural presence, which allows us to concentrate on a physicality

and a corporeality that is shared by Kelly, Astaire, the Nicholas Brothers, and other male musical stars. It is the expressive presence of all of these men that is not only definitive of the genre, but also expected by audiences and a natural part of their identities as Hollywood performers and, in the case of the white dancers, characters (Chumo 46). Thus, in stressing the Hollywood song-and-dance man’s compulsory spectacular energy, we can situate the figure as an action performer, defined not by his narrative location, appearance, or status as a character, but, instead, by his very skilled presence in motion.⁶

From the perspective of contemporary dance studies, this emphasis on these equal bodies in action has underdeveloped potential. For example, dance scholarship stresses the body in motion as a text, something that can both unconsciously and consciously reconfirm, resist, and transform larger political and cultural formations (McLean 2002). This is not to say that meanings pre-exist or that there is a direct relationship between a dancer’s intention and the spectator’s interpretation. It merely points to a similar way to study all of these men. For example, watching “The Worry Song” from *Anchors Aweigh* (1945) on YouTube immediately followed by the clip of “The Pirate Ballet” from *The Pirate* (1948) gives us an instantaneous comparison of two ways that Kelly’s hyper-masculine body and athletic style perform and challenge discourses of gender. Similarly, after watching “Jumpin’ Jive,” “Down Argentine Way,” and “Chattanooga Choo Choo” in quick succession on YouTube, we can interpret the Nicholas Brothers’ elastic and expansive bodies and style as a reaction to their containment – both cinematically and socially – as African-American performers in the twentieth century. That is, the arrangement of their bod-

⁶ While this essay only looks at film clips on YouTube, an important parallel discussion involves user-generated content. For example, video mash-ups, like Nerd Fest UK’s 2015 “Uptown Funk” video, where various classic musical numbers are edited together against a new soundtrack, similarly democratizes all of the performers included in it. By using a single song like “Uptown Funk,” this video emphasizes the centrality of the musical sequence (and the dancer within it) and presents all of the stars – from the Nicholas Brothers to Rita Hayworth – as equally skilled dancers, regardless of gender, race, or narrative placement. As a side note, this video mash-up reproduces Kelly and Astaire’s guiding presence in the genre by concluding with clips of the two stars shaking hands at the end of “The Babbitt and the Bromide” and *That’s Entertainment, Part II* (1976).



Fig. 3. The Expansive Style of the Nicholas Brothers in “Chattanooga Choo Choo” (Sun Valley Serenade, 1941). Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library. “Nicholas Brothers” The New York Public Library Digital Collections. 1941.

<http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/866a1b8d-0ede-da02-e040-e00a18061699>

ies, from their leaps and no-hand splits to the way that their arms never hang limply at their sides, is always one of outward propulsion, even as they stay trapped in their cameo space (see fig. 3).

YouTube is not the only way to view and analyze these different numbers and performances. However, in its accessibility, it allows us to move quickly between different films and sequences, inviting this close textual reading and appreciation of these skilled moments of visual and aural spectacle. Of course, YouTube should not be thought of as a permanent moving image archive, as its clips – many uploaded with low-resolution (Lundemo 317) – are transient, and can disappear at any moment due to copyright or other issues. YouTube may present an illusion of completeness (Lundemo 316), but not everything is uploaded and accounted for – one can assume that more musical numbers featuring Kelly and Astaire are put online than other, lesser-known performers. Additionally, in only uploading

and circulating the musical numbers from these films, we do lose the larger narrative context for the sequence.

YouTube should never replace watching a full musical. Rather, its alternative mode of viewing should co-exist with a more traditional theatrical movie-going experience. However, in de-emphasizing the importance of the surrounding story, YouTube encourages us to study the musical number – and the performer within it – more closely as a stand-alone phenomenon. It presents a space where dance, music, film, and performance studies converge. We can trace commonalities and differences between these male performers in terms of style and choreography, building new understandings of the Hollywood song-and-dance man based on individual technique as well as shared characteristics. We can ask questions about how these men work with a partner and how each performing body necessitates the transition from talking to singing and walking to

dancing. Finding non-canonical performances and lesser-known dancers gives us new examples to use in our scholarship and highlights the different ways, beyond Kelly and Astaire, to approach the male musical star.

Beyond the “Common-sense, ‘Obvious’ Idea”

The alternative mode of scholarship and analysis that the YouTube viewing experience necessitates demands a reevaluation of the Hollywood song-and-dance man. What does it mean to be a visual and aural expressive presence at a specific time and within a particular genre? For one thing, we must follow Dyer’s model and begin to investigate the more complex elements of these on-screen skilled bodies – be they a Kelly, an Astaire, or a Nicholas – and their historical, social, cultural, and aesthetic dimensions. In all of these discussions, we can see the emphasis on the body has always been there, just hiding behind the term’s misleading simplicity.

For example, as far back as the mid-1800s, the broader term, “song-and-dance man,” was used to describe minstrels and vaudevillians in newspaper ads about various shows (“Classified Ad 1” 1; “Jack’ Haverly Is Dead” 9), denoting a professional label within the American theatrical landscape that functioned as a signifier of a performer’s specific skill-set. What is being emphasized is the role of the body, as singing and dancing signifies a skilled and spectacular use of the performer’s corporeality as the instrument in producing capitalist

*7 Of course, there were many different types of performing bodies in nineteenth- and twentieth-century American entertainment. While I cannot fully investigate race in relation to vaudeville and minstrelsy, many sources – like Eric Lott’s *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (1993) – focus on this. For now, I simply want to break down a term like “song-and-dance man” and what it signifies broadly for all performing bodies.*

entertainment for an audience.⁷ This directly opposes a label like “variety performer,” for example, which foregrounds the novelty of the presentation – regardless of whether it is acrobatics, a song-and-dance act, or an animal routine.

The Hollywood song-and-dance man still bears traces of this theatrical history and its emphasis on the skilled body as entertainment. However, it also refers to and is an element of a specific moment in film history. The “Hollywood” portion signifies the studio system and the classical mode of production, with its emphasis on the star system as a means to generate spectacle. In this way, the Hollywood song-and-dance man, typified in the onscreen work of professional dancers such as Kelly, Astaire, Bolger, Donald O'Connor, and others, denotes the skilled use of a specific type of star's body. This body is a key element in the construction of a particular affective and aesthetic experience, communicating through commercially successful songs by Cole Porter and the Gershwins and executing choreography from popular dance trends like tap and ballroom. Today, these same popular formations link the Hollywood song-and-dance man to the studio era and the classical musical genre, situating him as a skilled body within a particular economic and cultural institution.

In his association with the studio system, the Hollywood-song-and-dance man is also inherently rooted in and shaped by the cinematic technology. He is, to use dance scholar Sherril Dodds' terminology, a “screen body,” as opposed to a “live body” (29). Not only does Dodds stress a sense of distortion as a three-dimensional body becomes a flattened two-dimensional one, but she proposes the idea of an added “skin,” as the live body is “unavoidably transformed when it becomes a ‘screen body’” (29). The screen

body is always produced and exists behind a mediated layer created out of external functions, equipment, and operations such as editing and camera movement. Even at his most basic level, the Hollywood song-and-dance man exists as a screen body due to the fact that the sounds produced by the tap-shoes – so clear in the final product – were often dubbed in by the performers during post-production (Clover 727; Hill 289). Thus, the Hollywood song-and-dance man is a technologically enhanced body and a different conceptual and aesthetic animal than his live counterpart.

Taking this a step further, the category of the Hollywood song-and-dance man is a screen body that is inherently connected to the musical by paralleling and reproducing a fundamental tension at the heart of the genre. The “paradox of the musical,” as Thomas Elsaesser labels it, is the tension between the effort and labor that goes into creating it and the finished product (86). Or as Jane Feuer articulates, “the musical, technically the most complex type of film produced in Hollywood, paradoxically has always been the genre that attempts to give the greatest illusion of spontaneity and effortlessness” (463). As a trained professional dancer, the Hollywood song-and-dance man reinforces this very effacement of effort, as it is his skilled dancing that supports the musical num-

8 It is important to note that Kelly and Astaire were both very interested in the relationship between dance and cinema. Kelly's animated numbers and Astaire's ceiling dance, for example, emphasize how they existed as screen bodies in dynamic ways. However, even though this certainly feeds into a vision of them as dancers/choreographers (and in Kelly's case, a director) with an important artistic and creative vision, it is necessary to remember that, at the most basic level, all Hollywood song-and-dance men are screen bodies by virtue of the fact that they are dealing with editing, camera movement, etc. Perhaps we should think about this cinematic layer in terms of a continuum—from Kelly and Astaire who had the means and opportunity to create these cinematic dances to the Nicholas Brothers, where editing choices and camera movement subtly enhanced their bodily capabilities as dancers onscreen.

ber's effortless aura. “The Babbitt and the Bromide” playfully comments on how Feuer's myth of effortless spontaneity actually masks an incredible amount of calculated labor, training, and knowledge of dance and film. Right before Kelly and Astaire begin the dance, the two stars joke about “whip[ping] something up right here on the spot,” only to admit that they have been rehearsing the number for two weeks. Similarly, in “What Chance Have I With Love?” from *Call Me Madam* (1953), O'Connor's drunken exploration of his surrounding environment seems to flow naturally without any pre-conceived planning. However, not only does it take an incredible amount of skill to act intoxicated, but when he finishes the number by popping balloons with his shoes, we realize just how much skill and rehearsal were required to make this number successful. Both of these examples highlight the musical's preoccupation with the tension between effort and effortlessness, as well as foreground the central role of the Hollywood song-and-dance man in this process.⁸

Finally, from the perspective of film scholarship, the Hollywood song-and-dance man implies a problematic entity that unsettles both traditional film theory and the cultural norms of twentieth-century America. In being a male, singing and dancing body on display – and the object of the spectator and the camera's gaze – the Hollywood song-and-dance man shares the same “show-stopping,” “to-be-looked-at-ness” that Laura Mulvey's famous objectified cinematic female possesses (Cohan 46-47). Film scholar Steven Cohan argues that the musical number makes “blatant spectacle of men,” their corporeal presence, and the various skills and talents associated with their bodies (46). Existing within this feminine position does not equal feminization or effeminacy, as Cohan argues these dancing

male bodies on display offer alternative visions of masculinity that revolve around grace, beauty, and exhibitionism (47). More importantly, this position is a space where the male performer can and wants to continually “insist upon his own ability to signify ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’” (47) long enough for the spectator’s look “[to turn] into a stare” (Mellencamp 10). It is his visibility before an audience that validates him as a professional performer. Just think of the many numbers, from Bolger in *Harvey Girls* (1946) to the Berry Brothers in *Lady Be Good* (1941), where the male performer is dancing for an audience in the film and seems to delight in the fact that all eyes are on him.

“The Babbitt and the Bromide” comments on the Hollywood song-and-dance man’s position of so-called “feminine spectacle.” In the prologue, Astaire pretends that he does not recognize Kelly. Kelly asks if Astaire has seen *Cover Girl* (1944). When Astaire admits that he has, Kelly asks, “Well, who did all the dancing in that?” Impressed, Astaire asks, “You’re not Rita Hayworth?” Kelly laughs, responding bitterly with, “No, I’m not...Ginger.” By calling each other by their female partners’ names, the two performers draw attention to the cultural belief that dancing is the domain of the woman and that dancing men, with their highly visible and spectacular bodies, exist within this problematic territory according to both psychoanalytic film theory and the cultural norms of twentieth-century society.

While much more can be said about the Hollywood song-and-dance man, it is important to recognize the term’s complex position as a signifier of a particular type of body, star, and performance within a specific industry and genre. By reconsidering the cultural and cinematic dimensions of the Hollywood song-and-

dance man, we are reminded that there are nuanced ways to discuss even the simplest seeming of terms. Additionally, when we start to disentangle the category of the Hollywood-song-and-dance man from Kelly and Astaire’s powerful stardom, we see the dynamic nature of the term as other examples come to light. Using YouTube, we can revitalize this term by not only redefining it as a visual and aural expressive presence, but also by broadening the various ways we discuss it (as an action performer, for example). Obviously, YouTube is not the only answer, but it certainly is a step in a productive direc-

tion. As traditional film scholars, we should celebrate the fact that we can utilize a contemporary mode of media consumption that opens up the study of the classical musical form in new ways and, in its very structure and function, emphasizes and fosters a more complex understanding of one of the basic building blocks of the genre.

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