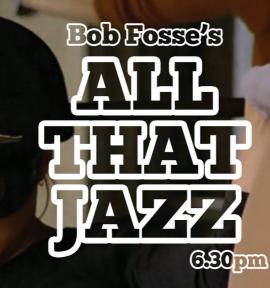
The Badlands Collective presents "Rethinking the Musical"



Francis Ford Coppelars ONE FROM HIELE HERE

A 35mm Double-Bill

REGENT STREET CINEMA Wednesday 26 August, 2015

The Badlands Collective presents "Rethinking the Musical"



All That Jazz (1979)



One from the Heart (1982)

Why do we need to rethink the musical? It is one of the most enduring genres in cinema – historically beloved by the moviegoing public and revered by critics and cinephiles. The finest examples of the genre – *The Wizard of Oz*, *Singin' in the Rain, The Band Wagon* – are staples of the cinema canon, as unshakeable as *Citizen Kane*. And yet it is a form which is wantonly dismissed time and time again by today's audiences. We're "rethinking" – or reframing the discourse – because we want to dispel prejudices of what a musical can look and sound like, and also reinforce the musical as a form that has historically allowed room for artistry beyond just showmanship.

A negative preconception of anything is, by its very nature, based on exaggerated notions of the subject's common tropes. In the context of the musical, there are connotations of wholesomeness, lavishness and flamboyance. And these can seem like extravagances of a bygone age – notable in their context, but irrelevant now.

Granted, looking back has often been part of the musical's DNA, and this preoccupation with days gone by has often been coupled with a wariness of the future. The great musicals of the pre-Code era – pictures like *Gold Diggers of 1933* – were freighted with anxiety concerning the post-Depression American landscape. Even *Singin' in the Rain*, that most evergreen of critical stalwarts, betrays a wariness of the dawn of the talkies. Add to this the auteurist obsession with cinema's history, and the musical can seem like a form mired in nostalgia. While this is also true of the Western and American noirs, the theatrical largesse of the musical makes a lot of audience members cautious.

But alongside the light fluffiness of works like *Kiss Me Kate*, you can also find a history of the cinematic musical as a revolutionary force. Busby Berkeley's pre-Code pictures – films like 42nd Street (1933) and Footlight Parade (1933) – tapped into the anxieties of their day, providing not only a tonic for audiences in their songs, dance and humour, but ruthless evisceration of the establishment during the Depression. With directors like Vincente Minnelli and Stanley Donen, MGM under producer Arthur Freed was a powerhouse, pioneering cinematic techniques and promoting social liberalisation with films as disparate as *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944) and *Cabin in the Sky* (1943).

By the late 50s and early 60s, we see a period defined by studio insecurity in the face of an emerging counterculture, which manifested itself through bloated biblical epics and, yes, some retrograde, prissy musicals. But the musical's reputation should not be defined by the decade which represented its lowest ebb. In the late 60s, the New Hollywood – a period that continues to dominate the way we think about movies to this day – blew away the cobwebs. New Hollywood didn't render the musical irrelevant – it challenged the machine, and recast its old popular genres with the tenor of the times.

This is where All that Jazz (1979) and One from the Heart (1982) come in. In the former, Bob Fosse, the legendary Broadway choreographer of shows like Chicago, used the genre which defined his life as a form of inward exploration, taking advantage of the more permissive contemporary social attitudes to dive through the darker, more carnal elements of musicals which had hitherto remained in the background. With the latter, Francis Ford Coppola looked back to the musical's heyday with a view to creating its

consummate contemporary equivalent. He had already succeeded to do this with the gangster picture in The Godfather and the war movie in Apocalypse Now, but One from the Heart failed to connect on the same popular level, even though its scrappy, neon-soaked vision of Las Vegas was soundtracked by the perfect encapsulation of Coppola's duality - counterculture lynchpin Tom Waits and disco queen Crystal Gayle.

It is apt that these films - heavily indebted to the genre's history - have gone on to become stalwart representations of their own generation. While studios remain wary of the risk of mounting expensive musicals, many modern directors - inspired by the likes of Fosse and Coppola - have found their own personal musical visions. From Tsai-Ming Liang's The Wayward Cloud to John Turturro's Romance and Cigarettes, we can see All That Jazz and One from the Heart inspire today's auteurs to push the medium in their own way.

Furthermore, when we think about musicals, we should remember they include everything from the perennially popular Disney animations to the ecstatic rock-and-roll scrapbook of Walter Hill's Streets of Fire, the camp sardony of Hedwig and the Angry Inch, the playful pop randomness of A Knight's Tale and the vulgar satire of South Park. This year, Hong Kong action master Johnnie To will bring his three-hour office politics musical Design for Living to the Toronto International Film Festival. This is a genre that keeps shifting - defying the preconceptions and recasting its own rich legacy.



All That Jazz (1979)

6.30pm / 123 mins

gaze on himself for this singing, dancing, spotlit gaze into an autobiographical abyss. Roy Scheider plays Joe Gideon, the Fosse-like director-choreographer who is struggling to come to terms with his own womanising, drinking, smoking and perfectionism while editing a movie, directing a Broadway show, undergoing open heart surgery and confessing to an angel of death played by Jessica Lange.

All That Jazz was nominated for nine Oscars including Best Picture, and won four, including Best Editing, as well as taking home the coveted Palme D'Or from the Cannes Film Festival. It divided the critics, some of whom thought it a masterpiece, while others found it indecently, obnoxiously dark and self-obsessed.

Both admirers and detractors found it to be a dazzling rush of music, imagery and time displacement, and it's certainly a key work in showbiz's depiction of itself, as well as an example of the musical used to depict an intensely personal, searching point of view. While the iconography of Cabaret makes that film Fosse's most well-remembered to this day, it's really in All That Jazz, as well as his 1974 Lenny Bruce biopic Lenny, that Fosse pushes himself furthest as a fearless storyteller.



One from the Heart (1982)

8.55pm / 107 mins

Inspired by Fellini's 8½, Bob Fosse turned his directorial Las Vegas, built from scratch on the soundstages of Zoetrope Studios. A remote bank of video screens, monitoring multiple cameras rolling at once, in an attempt to mix the filmmaking process with that of live television. Francis Ford Coppola's follow-up to Apocalypse Now was this insanely ambitious, pioneering musical - when it ran overbudget and bombed at the box office, the joke went that Coppola had taken an eight-million-dollar project and used the latest advances in technology to bring it in for twenty-threemillion.

> Teri Garr and Frederic Forrest play a couple on the rocks, trying out new partners in the form of sexy strangers Raul Julia and Nastassja Kinski. At times, they break out into song and dance numbers, radiantly realised by Vittorio Storaro's photography and Dean Tavoularis's set design, but mostly the musical commentary comes from Tom Waits and Crystal Gayle on the soundtrack - a modern Greek chorus, chiming into some kind of cross between music video, concept album and old-fashioned Hollywood extravaganza.

> At times, it's distant and languid, and seems too much like the godlike Coppola benevolently blessing the little people. It's also gorgeous, woozy, often hypnotic - a feast of aesthetics as well as a fascinating curiosity, a model of what it looks like when a Hollywood master gets to make an experimental film with unlimited resources.

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