

= Top Hat =

Top Hat is a 1935 American screwball musical comedy film in which Fred Astaire plays an American dancer named Jerry Travers , who comes to London to star in a show produced by Horace Hardwick (Edward Everett Horton) . He meets and attempts to impress Dale Tremont (Ginger Rogers) to win her affection . The film also features Eric Blore as Hardwick 's valet Bates , Erik Rhodes as Alberto Beddini , a fashion designer and rival for Dale 's affections , and Helen Broderick as Hardwick 's long @-@ suffering wife Madge .

The film was written by Allan Scott and Dwight Taylor . It was directed by Mark Sandrich . The songs were written by Irving Berlin . " Top Hat , White Tie and Tails " and " Cheek to Cheek " have become American song classics . It has been nostalgically referred to ? particularly its " Cheek to Cheek " segment ? in many films , including The Purple Rose of Cairo (1985) and The Green Mile (1999) .

Top Hat was the most successful picture of Astaire and Rogers ' partnership (and Astaire 's second most successful picture after Easter Parade) , achieving second place in worldwide box @-@ office receipts for 1935 . While some dance critics maintain that Swing Time contained a finer set of dances , Top Hat remains , to this day , the partnership 's best @-@ known work .

= = Plot = =

An American dancer , Jerry Travers (Fred Astaire) comes to London to star in a show produced by the bumbling Horace Hardwick (Edward Everett Horton) . While practicing a tap dance routine in his hotel bedroom , he awakens Dale Tremont (Ginger Rogers) on the floor below . She storms upstairs to complain , whereupon Jerry falls hopelessly in love with her and proceeds to pursue her all over London .

Dale mistakes Jerry for Horace , who is married to her friend Madge (Helen Broderick) . Following the success of Jerry 's opening night in London , Jerry follows Dale to Venice , where she is visiting Madge and modelling / promoting the gowns created by Alberto Beddini (Erik Rhodes) , a dandified Italian fashion designer with a penchant for malapropisms .

Jerry proposes to Dale , who , while still believing that Jerry is Horace , is disgusted that her friend 's husband could behave in such a manner and agrees instead to marry Alberto . Fortunately , Bates (Eric Blore) , Horace 's meddling English valet , disguises himself as a priest and conducts the ceremony ; Horace had sent Bates to keep tabs on Dale .

On a trip in a gondola , Jerry manages to convince Dale and they return to the hotel where the previous confusion is rapidly cleared up . The reconciled couple dance off into the Venetian sunset , to the tune of " The Piccolino " .

= = Cast = =

= = Production = =

Top Hat began filming on April 1 , 1935 and cost \$ 620 @, @ 000 to make . Shooting ended in June and the first public previews were held in July . These led to cuts of approximately ten minutes , mainly in the last portion of the film : the carnival sequence and the gondola parade which had been filmed to show off the huge set were heavily cut . A further four minutes were cut before its premiere at the Radio City Music Hall , where it broke all records , went on to gross \$ 3 million on its initial release , and became RKO 's most profitable film of the 1930s . After Mutiny on the Bounty , it made more money than any other film released in 1935 .

= = = Script development = = =

Dwight Taylor was the principal screenwriter in this , the first screenplay written specially for Astaire

and Rogers . Astaire reacted negatively to the first drafts , complaining that " it is patterned too closely after The Gay Divorcee " , and " I am cast as ... a sort of objectionable young man without charm or sympathy or humour " . Allan Scott , whose first major project this was , and who would go on to serve on six of the Astaire @-@ Rogers pictures , was hired by Sandrich to do the rewrites and never actually worked with Taylor , Sandrich acting as script editor and advisor throughout . The Hays Office insisted on only minor changes , including probably the most quoted line of dialogue from the film : Beddini 's motto : " For the women the kiss , for the men the sword " which originally ran : " For the men the sword , for the women the whip . " Of his role in the creation of Top Hat , Taylor recalled that with Sandrich and Berlin he shared " a kind of childlike excitement . The whole style of the picture can be summed up in the word inconsequentiality . When I left RKO a year later , Mark said to me , ' You will never again see so much of yourself on the screen . ' " On the film 's release , the script was panned by many critics , who alleged it was merely a rewrite of The Gay Divorcee .

= = = Musical score and orchestration = = =

This was composer Irving Berlin 's first complete film score since 1930 and he negotiated a unique contract , retaining the copyrights to the score with a guarantee of ten per @-@ cent of the profits if the film earned in excess of \$ 1 @,@ 250 @,@ 000 . Eight songs from the original score were discarded as they were not considered to advance the film 's plot . One of these : " Get Thee Behind Me , Satan " was recycled into Follow the Fleet (1936) . All five songs eventually selected became major hits and , in the September 28 , 1935 broadcast of Your Hit Parade , all five featured in the top fifteen songs selected for that week .

Astaire recalled how this success helped restore Berlin 's flagging self @-@ confidence . Astaire had never met Berlin before this film , although he had danced on stage to some of his tunes as early as 1915 . There ensued a lifelong friendship with Berlin contributing to more Astaire films (six in total) than any other composer . Of his experience with Astaire in Top Hat Berlin wrote : " He 's a real inspiration for a writer . I 'd never have written Top Hat without him . He makes you feel so secure . "

As Berlin could not read or write music , and could only pick out tunes on a specially designed piano that transposed keys automatically , he required an assistant to make up his piano parts . Hal Borne ? Astaire 's rehearsal pianist ? performed this role in Top Hat and recalled working nights with him in the Beverly Wilshire Hotel : " Berlin went ' Heaven ... ' and I went dah dah dee ' I 'm in Heaven ' (dah @-@ dah @-@ dee) . He said , ' I love it , put it down . ' " These parts were subsequently orchestrated by a team comprising Edward Powell , Maurice de Packh , Gene Rose , Eddie Sharp , and Arthur Knowlton who worked under the overall supervision of Max Steiner .

Berlin broke a number of the conventions of American songwriting in this film , especially in the songs " Top Hat , White Tie and Tails " and " Cheek to Cheek " , and , according to Rogers , the film became the talk of Hollywood as a result of its score .

= = = Set design = = =

In an Astaire @-@ Rogers picture , the Big White Set ? as these Art Deco @-@ inspired creations were known ? took up the largest share of the film 's production costs , and Top Hat was no exception . A winding canal ? spanned by two staircase bridges at one end and a flat bridge on the other ? was built across two adjoining sound stages . Astaire and Rogers dance across this flat bridge in " Cheek to Cheek " . Around the bend from this bridge was located the main piazza , a giant stage coated in red bakelite and this was the location for " The Piccolino " . This fantasy representation of the Lido of Venice was on three levels comprising dance floors , restaurants and terraces , all decorated in candy @-@ cane colours , with the canal waters dyed black . The vast Venetian interiors were similarly inauthentic , reflecting instead the latest Hollywood tastes .

Carroll Clark , who worked under the general supervision of Van Nest Polglase , was the unit art director on all but one of the Astaire @-@ Rogers films and he managed the team of designers

responsible for the scenery and furnishings of Top Hat .

= = = Wardrobe : The " feathers " incident = = =

Although Bernard Newman was nominally in charge of dressing the stars , Rogers was keenly interested in dress design and make @-@ up . For the " Cheek to Cheek " routine , she was determined to use her own creation : " I was determined to wear this dress , come hell or high water . And why not ? It moved beautifully . Obviously , no one in the cast or crew was willing to take sides , particularly not my side . This was all right with me . I 'd had to stand alone before . At least my mother was there to support me in the confrontation with the entire front office , plus Fred Astaire and Mark Sandrich . "

Due to the enormous labor involved in sewing each ostrich feather to the dress , Astaire ? who normally approved his partner 's gowns and suggested modifications if necessary during rehearsals ? saw the dress for the first time on the day of the shoot , and was horrified at the way it shed clouds of feathers at every twist and turn , recalling later : " It was like a chicken attacked by a coyote , I never saw so many feathers in my life . " According to choreographer Hermes Pan , Astaire lost his temper and yelled at Rogers , who promptly burst into tears , whereupon her mother , Lela , " came charging at him like a mother rhinoceros protecting her young . " An additional night 's work by seamstresses resolved much of the problem , however , careful examination of the dance on film reveals feathers floating around Astaire and Rogers and lying on the dance floor . Later , Astaire and Pan presented Rogers with a gold feather for her charm bracelet , and serenaded her with a ditty parodying Berlin 's tune :

Feathers ? I hate feathers

And I hate them so that I can hardly speak

And I never find the happiness I seek

With those chicken feathers dancing

Cheek to Cheek

Thereafter , Astaire nicknamed Rogers " Feathers " ? also a title of one of the chapters in his autobiography ? and parodied his experience in a song and dance routine with Judy Garland in Easter Parade (1948) .

Astaire also chose and provided his own clothes . He is widely credited with influencing 20th Century male fashion and , according to Forbes male fashion editor , G. Bruce Boyer , the " Isn 't It a Lovely Day ? " routine : " shows Astaire dressed in the style he would make famous : soft @-@ shouldered tweed sports jacket , button @-@ down shirt , bold striped tie , easy @-@ cut gray flannels , silk paisley pocket square , and suede shoes . It 's an extraordinarily contemporary approach to nonchalant elegance , a look Ralph Lauren and a dozen other designers still rely on more than six decades later . Astaire introduced a new style of dress that broke step with the spats , celluloid collars , and homburgs worn by aristocratic European @-@ molded father @-@ figure heroes . "

= = Musical numbers and choreography = =

The choreography , in which Astaire was assisted by Hermes Pan , is principally concerned throughout with the possibilities of using taps to make as much noise as possible . In the film , Astaire suffers from what Rogers terms an " affliction " : " Every once in a while I suddenly find myself dancing . " Astaire introduces the film 's tap motif when he blasts a tap barrage at the somnolent members of a London Club . There are eight musical numbers .

In the " Opening Sequence " , after the RKO logo appears , Astaire , shown only from the waist down , dances onto a polished stage floor , backed by a male chorus sporting canes . On pausing his name appears . Rogers then follows suit and the two dance together as the picture dissolves to reveal a top hat . A similar concept was used in the opening sequence of The Barkleys of Broadway (1949) .

The second is " No Strings (I 'm Fancy Free) " . On retiring to his hotel suite , Horton advises him

to get married . Astaire declares his preference for bachelorhood and the song ? this number was the brainchild of scriptwriter Dwight Taylor and is found in his earliest drafts ? emerges naturally and in mid @-@ sentence . Astaire sings it through twice and during the last phrase leaps into a ballet jump , accompanied by leg beats , and launches into a short solo dance that builds in intensity and volume progressing from tap shuffles sur place , via traveling patterns , to rapid @-@ fire heel jabs finishing with a carefree tour of the suite during which he beats on the furniture with his hands . On his return to the center of the room , where he noisily concentrates his tap barrage , the camera cranes down to discover Rogers in bed , awake and irritated . As she makes her way upstairs , Horton fields telephone complaints from hotel management . Astaire incorporates this into his routine , first startling him with a tap burst then escorting him ostentatiously to the telephone . As Horton leaves to investigate , Astaire continues to hammer his way around the suite , during which he feigns horror at seeing his image in a mirror ? a reference to his belief that the camera was never kind to his face . The routine ends as Astaire , now dancing with a statue , is interrupted by Rogers ' entrance , a scene which , as in *The Gay Divorcee* and *Roberta* , typifies the way in which Astaire inadvertently incurs the hostility of Rogers , only to find her attractive and wear down her resistance .

In " No Strings (reprise) " , Rogers , after storming upstairs to complain , returns to her room at which point Astaire , still intent on dancing , nominates himself her " sandman " , sprinkling sand from a cuspidor and lulling her , Horton and eventually himself to sleep with a soft and gentle sand dance , to a diminuendo reprise of the melody , in a scene which has drawn considerable admiration from dance commentators , and has been the subject of affectionate screen parodies .

In " Isn 't This a Lovely Day (to be Caught in the Rain) " , while Rogers is out riding , a thunderstorm breaks and she takes shelter in a bandstand . Astaire follows her and a conversation about clouds and rainfall soon gives way to Astaire 's rendering of this , one of Berlin 's most prized creations . Astaire sings to Rogers ' back , but the audience can see that Rogers ' attitude towards him softens during the song , and the purpose of the ensuing dance is for her to communicate this change to her partner . The dance is one of flirtation and , according to Mueller , deploys two choreographic devices common to the classical minuet : sequential imitation (one dancer performs a step and the other responds) and touching . Initially , the imitation is mocking in character , then becomes more of a casual exchange , and ends in a spirit of true cooperation . Until the last thirty seconds of this two and a half minute dance the pair appear to pull back from touching , then with a crook of her elbow Rogers invites Astaire in . The routine , at once comic and romantic , incorporates hopping steps , tap spins with barrages , loping and dragging steps among its many innovative devices . The spirit of equality which pervades the dance is reflected in the masculinity of Rogers ' clothes and in the friendly handshake they exchange at the end .

For " Top Hat , White Tie and Tails " , probably Astaire 's most celebrated tap solo , the idea for the title song came from Astaire who described to Berlin a routine he had created for the 1930 Ziegfeld Broadway flop *Smiles* called " Say , Young Man of Manhattan , " in which he gunned down a chorus of men ? which included teenagers Bob Hope and Larry Adler ? with his cane . Berlin duly produced the song from his trunk and the concept of the film was then built around it . In this number Astaire had to compromise on his one @-@ take philosophy , as Sandrich acknowledged : " We went to huge lengths to make the ' Top Hat ' number look like one take , but actually it 's several . " Astaire 's remarkable ability to change the tempo within a single dance phrase is extensively featured throughout this routine and taken to extremes ? as when he explodes into activity from a pose of complete quiet and vice versa . This routine also marks Astaire 's first use of a cane as a prop in one of his filmed dances . The number opens with a chorus strutting and lunging in front of a backdrop of a Parisian street scene . They make way for Astaire who strides confidently to the front of the stage and delivers the song , which features the famous line : " I 'm stepping out , my dear , to breathe an atmosphere that simply reeks with class , " trading the occasional tap barrage with the chorus as he sings. The dance begins with Astaire and chorus moving in step . Astaire soon lashes out with a swirling tap step and the chorus responds timidly before leaving the stage in a sequence of overlapping , direction @-@ shifting , hitch steps and walks . In the first part of the solo which follows , Astaire embarks on a circular tap movement , embellished with cane taps into which he

mixes a series of unpredictable pauses . As the camera retreats the lights dim and , in the misterioso passage which follows , Astaire mimes a series of stances , ranging from overt friendliness , wariness , surprise to watchful readiness and jaunty confidence . Jimmy Cagney attended the shooting of this scene and advised Astaire , who claims to have ad @-@ libbed much of this section . The chorus then returns in a threatening posture , and Astaire proceeds to dispatch them all , using an inventive series of actions miming the cane 's use as a gun , a submachine gun , a rifle and , finally , a bow and arrow .

Astaire 's first seduction of Rogers in " Isn 't This a Lovely Day , " falls foul of the mistaken @-@ identity theme of the plot , so he makes a second attempt , encouraged by Broderick , in the number " Cheek to Cheek " . As in " No Strings , " the song emerges from Astaire 's mid @-@ sentence as he dances with the hesitant Rogers on a crowded floor . Berlin wrote the words and music to this enduring classic in one day , and , at 72 measures , it is the longest song he ever wrote . He was very appreciative of Astaire 's treatment of the song : " The melody keeps going up and up . He crept up there . It didn 't make a damned bit of difference . He made it . " As he navigates through this difficult material , Rogers looks attracted and receptive and , at the end of the song , they dance cheek to cheek across a bridge to a deserted ballroom area nearby . According to Mueller 's analysis , the duet that follows ? easily the most famous of all the Astaire @-@ Rogers partnered dances ? reflects the complexity of the emotional situation in which the pair find themselves . No longer flirting , as in " Isn 't This a Lovely Day ? , " the pair are now in love . But Rogers feels guilty and deceived and would prefer to avoid Astaire 's advances ? in effect , fall out of love with him . Therefore , Astaire 's purpose here is to make her put aside her misgivings (which are a mystery to him) and surrender completely to him . The choreographic device introduced to reflect the progress of this seduction is the supported backbend , exploiting Rogers ' exceptionally flexible back . The main dance begins with the first of two brief passages which reuse the device of sequential imitation introduced in " Isn 't This a Lovely Day ? " . The pair spin and lean , dodging back and forth past each other before moving into a standard ballroom position where the first hints of the supported backbend are introduced . The first backbend occurs at the end of a sequence where Astaire sends Rogers into a spin , collects her upstage and maneuvers her into a linked @-@ arm stroll forward , repeats the spin but this time encircles her while she turns and then takes her in his arms . As the music becomes more energetic , the dancers flow across the floor and Rogers , moving against the music , suddenly falls into a deeper backbend , which is then repeated , only deeper still . The music now transitions to a quiet recapitulation of the main melody during which the pair engage in a muted and tender partnering , and here the second passage involving sequential imitation appears . With the music reaching its grand climax Astaire and Rogers rush toward the camera , then away in a series of bold , dramatic manoeuvres culminating in three ballroom lifts which showcase Rogers ' dress before abruptly coming to a halt in a final , deepest backbend , maintained as the music approaches its closing bars . They rise , and after a couple of turns dancing cheek to cheek for the first time since the dance began , come to rest next to a wall . Rogers , having conducted the dance in a state of dreamlike abandon now glances uneasily at Astaire before walking away , as if reminded that their relationship cannot proceed .

By now , Rogers has learned Astaire 's true identity although neither of them yet know that her impulsive marriage to Rhodes is null and void . Dining together during carnival night in Venice , and to help assuage her guilt , Astaire declares : " Let 's eat , drink and be merry , for tomorrow we have to face him , " which serves as the cue for the music of " The Piccolino " , the film 's big production number . A gondola parade is followed by the entry of a dancing chorus who perform a series of ballroom poses and rippling @-@ pattern routines choreographed by Hermes Pan . Berlin , who lavished a great deal of effort on the song designed it as a pastiche of " The Carioca " from Flying Down to Rio (1933) and " The Continental " from The Gay Divorcee (1934) , and the lyric communicates its fake origin : " It was written by a Latin / A gondolier who sat in / his home out in Brooklyn / and gazed at the stars . " It is a song about a song and Rogers sings it to Astaire after which an off @-@ camera chorus repeats it while the dance ensemble is photographed , Busby Berkeley @-@ style , from above . The camera then switches to Rogers and Astaire who bound down to the stage to perform a two @-@ minute dance , all shot in one take , with the Astaire @-@

Pan choreography separately referencing the basic melody and the Latin vamp in the accompaniment . They dance to the accompaniment as they descend the steps and glide along the dance floor , then , when the melody enters , they halt and perform the Piccolino step , which involves the feet darting out to the side of the body . The rest of the dance involves repetitions and variations of the Piccolino step and the hopping steps associated with the vamp , leading to some complex amalgamations of the two . On the vamp melody 's final appearance , the dancers perform a highly embellished form of the Piccolino step as they travel sideways back to their table , sinking back into their chairs and lifting their glasses in a toast .

" The Piccolino (reprise) " : After the various parties confront each other in the bridal suite , with Rogers ' " marriage " to Rhodes revealed as performed by a fake clergyman , the scene is set for Astaire and Rogers to dance into the sunset , which they duly do , in this fragment of a much longer duet ? the original was cut after the July 1935 previews ? but not before they parade across the Venetian set and reprise the Piccolino step .

= = Reception = =

= = = Box Office = = =

The film earned \$ 1 @, @ 782 @, @ 000 in the US and Canada and \$ 1 @, @ 420 @, @ 000 elsewhere . RKO made a profit of \$ 1 @, @ 325 @, @ 000 , making it the studio 's most profitable film of the 1930s .

= = = Critical response = = =

Reviews for Top Hat were mainly positive . The Los Angeles Evening Herald Express praised the film , exclaiming " Top Hat is the tops ! With Fred Astaire dancing and singing Irving Berlin tunes ! Well , one (in his right mind) couldn 't ask for much more ? unless , of course , it could be a couple of encores . " The New York Times praised the film 's musical numbers , but criticized the story line , describing it as " a little on the thin side , " but also stating that " it is sprightly enough to plug those inevitable gaps between the shimmeringly gay dances . " Top Hat " is worth standing in line for . From the appearance of the lobby yesterday afternoon , you probably will have to . "

Variety also singled out the story line as well as the cast , stating " the danger sign is in the story and cast . Substitute Alice Brady for Helen Broderick and it 's the same lineup of players as was in The Gay Divorcée . Besides which the situations in the two scripts parallel each other closely " . Nevertheless , it concluded that Top Hat was a film " one can 't miss " .

= = = Awards and honors = = =

The film was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Picture , as well as Art Direction (Carroll Clark and Van Nest Polglase) , Original Song (Irving Berlin for " Cheek to Cheek ") , and Dance Direction (Hermes Pan for " Piccolino " and " Top Hat ") . In 1990 , Top Hat was selected for preservation in the United States National Film Registry by the Library of Congress as being " culturally , historically , or aesthetically significant " . The film ranked number 15 on the 2006 American Film Institute 's list of best musicals .

= = In popular culture = =

Top Hat has been nostalgically referenced ? particularly its " Cheek to Cheek " segment ? in many films , including The Purple Rose of Cairo (1985) and The Green Mile (1999) .

= = Stage adaptation = =

The film has been adapted into a stage musical that began touring the UK during late 2011 . The cast included Summer Strallen as Dale , Tom Chambers as Jerry and Martin Ball as Horace . The show opened at Milton Keynes Theatre on August 19 , 2011 before touring to other UK regional theatres including Leeds , Birmingham and Edinburgh . The production transferred to the West End 's Aldwych Theatre on April 19 , 2012 , opening on May 9 , 2012 . It won three Olivier Awards in 2013 , including for Best New Musical .

= = DVD releases = =

= = = Region 1 = = =

Since 2005 , a digitally restored version of Top Hat is available separately and as part of The Astaire & Rogers Collection , Vol.1 from Warner Home Video . In both cases , the film features a commentary by Astaire 's daughter , Ava Astaire McKenzie , and Larry Billman , author of Fred Astaire , a Bio @-@ bibliography .

= = = Region 2 = = =

Since 2003 , a digitally restored version of Top Hat (not the same as the US restoration) is available separately , and as part of The Fred and Ginger Collection , Vol . 1 from Universal Studios , which controls the rights to the RKO Astaire @-@ Rogers pictures in the UK . In both releases , the film features an introduction by Ava Astaire McKenzie .