

Singin' in the Rain

Article

Historical context/Importance of the development of the genre.

['Singin' in the Rain'] represents the pinnacle of studio movie making – where *every* phase of the production was controlled by seasoned experts with great skill and obvious love for the final product.

In addition to its stunning artistic success, “Singin’ in the Rain” is also a tremendously important part of American popular culture history.

The silent film era of the 1920s produced some of the greatest masterpieces in the history of film. **Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, and Charlie Chaplin** created films which can still mesmerize, enthrall, and entertain us. Although the silent film era was quickly overshadowed by the talkies, leading to the Golden Age of American movies, their influence was enormous.

By the 1950s, as the studio system was on the wane, motion pictures had become bigger, more powerful, and more influential than even the early visionaries of silent film could've anticipated. However, as the silent film era receded into the mists of memory, film critics, historians, and educators began to realize that we were losing an important part of our cultural heritage.

Due to the deterioration of the physical film on which the silents were made, and the negligence with which



they were handled and stored, many are irretrievably lost to us. We know from studio records that there are Charlie Chaplin films that simply no longer exist ... By the 1950s, the movie industry itself became acutely aware of its own history.



['Singin' in the Rain'] centres around the difficulties of the transition from silent films to talking films. At all points during the production, the silent era is treated with respect and warmth. After establishing that Don Lockwood (Gene Kelly) had been a burlesque performer, working his way up through the sticks alongside his buddy Cosmo Brown (Donald O'Connor), the film follows his rise in the new silent film industry. Although his story is fictional, parallels can be found in the careers of many film stars who more or less wandered into Hollywood. *The early scenes in “Singin’ in the Rain” depicting the wildly innovative, almost anarchic beginnings of the modern film industry are actually very accurate to that innovative and improvisational time. Significantly, they are also shown with a warm nostalgia that indicated the great respect of the filmmakers for their predecessors in the silent era.*

Lina Lamont, played by the sublime Jean Hagen, is not a figure of fun because she's a silent film star; she is ridiculous because of her own pretentiousness and lack of self-awareness. I'm sure that many in Hollywood today could identify more than a few movie stars with those qualities! “Singin' in the Rain” then re-creates – both hilariously and accurately – the difficulties of transitioning from silent films to talkies. The significance of this is that Hollywood was acknowledging its own creation story. Not only is ‘Singin' in the Rain’ a breath-taking example



of 1950s studio filmmaking, and one of the greatest musicals ever filmed, it is also one of the greatest movies ever made about the history of the movies.



That is important. *Although 'Singin' in the Rain' is certainly not designed to be a pretentious piece of history, it winds up serving as both a heartfelt acknowledgment of a generation of filmmakers which were passing from the scene and an introduction to the silent era for a new generation of film-goers.*

By lovingly re-creating that bygone era, 'Singin' in the Rain' serves as both a wonderful history and a charming introduction to the age of silent films. It is also a reminder that cultural history is an important part of the larger history of our nation.

In 2012, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of its release of 'Singing In the Rain' was re-released in theatres for one night. Although I own a copy of the film on Blu-ray and can actually recite every line of dialogue from memory, I couldn't have been more anxious to see the film on the big screen, as it was intended. The effect was startling! To see "Singin' in the Rain" on the big screen was a revelation – providing an understanding on a much deeper level of the complete brilliance of the film makers and performers involved. I brought with me my then 10-year-old daughter and her best friend, and my eight-year-old son. Other than promising them they would love the film, I had told them very little about Singin' In The Rain. Growing up in the house with a father who is obsessed with classic films, they were game for the experience. When we got to the theater I was delighted to see how many parents and grandparents had brought children to see it. The applause and cheering and laughter and whooping went on throughout the film as the children were absolutely delighted by scene after scene, laugh after laugh, song after song. It was clear to me that the film had lost none of its original impact – even when viewed by children who had been born 40 years after that first appearance in theaters.

Afterwards my children, and I'm sure many of the other children in the theatre, began asking a lot of questions about silent movies. They really didn't know anything about them beforehand. 'Singin' in the Rain' had opened their eyes to two different eras in film history, both delightful and both capable of entertaining children who have grown up with IMAX and 3-D and computer-generated imagery as their starting point for enjoying movies.

Barry Bradford 2016

<http://barrybradford.com/why-singin-in-the-rain-matters/> (some parts omitted)