

# 'That's Dancing!' honors past, present and future of Hollywood dance films

MGM always has had a knack for extravaganzas. "More stars than there are in the heavens," L.B. Mayer's publicists once said in describing the studio's back lot. *That's Dancing!*, the studio's latest release, firmly continues the studio's stellar tradition, offering fun for both movie buffs and dance enthusiasts.

*That's Dancing!* is a compilation film, composed primarily of clips from existing movies, mostly musicals, that documents the history of dance on film. Newly shot footage provides narration.

Unlike its predecessors, *That's Entertainment* and *That's Entertainment 2*, *That's Dancing!* does not limit itself to MGM's vaults. Containing footage from Paramount, RKO, 20th Century-Fox, Universal and Warner Brothers films as well as the MGM standards, the film is more comprehensive than could be expected.

Gene Kelly introduces the film with a short history of dance from primitive times to the invention of the motion picture camera, then moves into a segment called "The Berkeley Years" that focuses on Warner's 1930s "backstage musicals" directed by Busby Berkeley.

All the Berkeley classics are trotted out here, including the title number from *42nd Street* and "Lullaby of Broadway" from *Gold Diggers of 1935*. The central focus, however, is on an unusually elaborate sequence from *Dames*, featuring Ruby Keeler and Dick Powell, inevitable co-stars of the Berkeley musicals.

Sammy Davis Jr. takes over for a look at "The Great Stylists," dancers whose individual styles made them famous. Certain sequences, such as the classic scene of Shirley Temple and Bill "Bojangles" Robinson dancing to amuse a crowd of onlookers in *The Littlest Rebel*, could not have been omitted.

The most intriguing element of this portion of *That's Dancing!*, however, had never been shown before the film was released. In researching the film, director/co-producer Jack Haley Jr. and co-producer David Niven Jr. discovered at MGM an extended dance sequence Ray Bolger performed during the number "If I Only Had a Brain" from *The Wizard of Oz* — a dance studio execs scrapped. The dance displays Bolger's amazing acrobatic talents, and it explains the deep,

## Jeff Grove

### Review

instant friendship Dorothy and the Scarecrow develop, so it's hard to imagine why the studio found it expendable.

The third part of the film deals with "The World of Ballet." Mikhail Baryshnikov narrates this look at how ballet has been used in dramatic films, illustrated by his own appearance in *The Turning Point*, and in musicals, with unforgettable ballet scenes from *On Your Toes* and *The Red Shoes*. There are also, inexplicably, some dull scenes, especially a part of the ballet from *Carousel* that loses all meaning out of context, while the spectacular barn-raising ballet staged for *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*, arguably the best ballet scene ever filmed, is nowhere to be found.

Liza Minnelli introduces "The Best of Broadway," a sequence of dances from film musicals that originated on Broadway. There's little arguing with the selection here — big, exciting production numbers from *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, *Kiss Me, Kate*, *Sweet Charity* and *West Side Story* — but the attempt to showcase Cyd Charisse would be better served with any of her numbers from *Brigadoon* than with the stupefyingly dull "The Red Blues" from *Silk Stockings*.

The last part of the film brings Gene Kelly back for a look at "The Future," rising young dance stars who promise to alter the use of dance on film and bring it into a new golden age. Here are the street dance to the title song from *Fame*, Marine Jahan doubling for Jennifer Beals in the audition scene from *Flashdance*, and Michael Jackson in the "Beat It!" video.

Haley and Niven, with Kelly's assistance, have assembled a rousing tribute to the Hollywood dancer. Fred Astaire probably had a hand in selection, too, since he gets a special credit and is represented by more clips than any other individual in the film. All credit then, to these men, who have produced one of the rare films that *deserves* the exclamation point in its title.



Paula Kelly, Shirley MacLaine and Chita Rivera in a scene from 'Sweet Charity,' shown in MGM's 'That's Dancing!'



Members of Hanoi Rocks, a Scandinavian group with 'an Alice Cooper fixation and a sense of humor.'

# Huffman looks at the good, the bad and the ugly

First of two parts

Given space limitations, it's hard sometimes to find enough room to review deserving new albums. It's also a waste to spend a lot of time explaining how bad certain popular or noteworthy new records are. Nonetheless, albums in both of the above categories deserve attention, so the following capsule reviews are offered to remedy the problem.

•**LOS LOBOS: *How Will the Wolf Survive?***

A fine new album from some of the best Latin-American rockers since Ritchie Valens. Steve Winwood sound-alike "Will the Wolf Survive?" is a terrific single.

•**RAY PARKER JR.: *Chartbusters***

His second "greatest hits" album in two years. Not bad, but you'd be better off with his first anthology and the *Ghostbusters* single.

•**HANOI ROCKS: *Two Steps From the Move***

Hard rock from a Scandinavian group with an Alice Cooper fixation and a sense of humor. Great cover of CCR's "Up Around the Bend."

•**THE BANGLES: *All Over the Place***

At first listen, this album is terrific.

## Eddie Huffman

### Review

The Bangles have a wonderfully evocative '60s California sound. They don't, however, have very much substance. Maybe next time out they'll find something to say that's as good as their music.

•**THE LONG RYDERS: *Native Sons***

From the obvious reference in their name to their rocked-up country sound, the Long Ryders would like nothing better than to be an '80s answer to the Byrds. They understand none of the nuances of folk or country, however, and wind up sounding like a bad parody of the Byrds rather than a modern extension of them.

•**JULIAN LENNON: *Vallote***

A decent start, but he's got a long way to go. "Too Late for Goodbyes" and the title cut are the best songs, and they only reach the achievement level of, say, Stealer's Wheel. Producer Phil Ramone does his usual botch-up job.

•**MARTIN BRILEY: *Dangerous Moments***

Phil Ramone strikes again. Although Briley's not exactly a major talent, this set of decent pop songs is ruined by Ramone's usual wimp production, particularly in the rhythm section.

•**MADONNA: *Like a Virgin***

At Duke University's British-American Festival last summer, *Village Voice* critic Robert Christgau said something to the effect that Madonna made the most godawful pop music in America. This record does nothing to change that fact.

•**EUROGLIDERS: *This Island***

Australia's answer to Fleetwood Mac. Supple rhythm section, passionate female voices, and lots of synthesizers. Pleasant pop music, but not terribly exciting.

•**WHAM!: *Make It Big***

Two members of Duran Duran make a really bad album that... What? They aren't from Duran Duran? But listen to the record! Look at their haircuts! How could they not be?

# 'Stranger In Paradise' distinctly American

*Stranger Than Paradise* is unique in that it takes some familiar yet disparate strains of American pop culture and places them under one roof.

For one thing, *Stranger Than Paradise* picks up on the current trend in movies of depicting the plight of an alien or foreigner. Films such as *E.T.*, *Moscow on the Hudson*, and *The Brother From Another Planet* all have protagonists unversed with a culture all too familiar to the audience.

In *Stranger Than Paradise*, the first third of the film deals with the relationship between a roguish, assimilated Hungarian-American and his 16-year-old cousin fresh off the plane from Budapest.

Aptly titled "The New World," this section contains plenty of images rendering the familiar as bizarre and humorous. As Eva walks to her cousin Willie's New York apartment, she takes out a hilariously out-of-date tape deck and starts playing some music by Screamin' Jay Hawkins. In another scene, Eva and Willie watch *Forbidden Planet*, a 1950s science fiction film, as the television casts eerie shadows in the room.

The second section, titled "One Year Later," centers more on the relationship between Willie and his friend Eddie. The two travel to Cleveland to visit Eva, who lives there with her aunt.

The last section, "Paradise," follows Willie, Eddie and Eva as they travel to Miami.

A more distinctly American characteristic than the alien theme in *Stranger Than Paradise* is that it is a "road picture," and like another American independent film, *Easy Rider*, *Stranger Than Paradise* involves a subtle exploration of American mores and values.

In one scene, for instance, Willie grudgingly lives with Eva. He only begins to like her when she proves herself by shoplifting.

Later, when the three are in Florida, Willie and Eddie go to the dog races and lose all their money. In a perfect reversal of the American Dream, however, Eva is mistaken for the

## Steve Carr

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connection in a drug deal and winds up with a bundle of cash.

Director Jim Jarmusch admits Japanese directors such as Mizoguchi and Ozu have had a profound influence on his style, and this shows visually. Jarmusch's composition is balanced, and his minimal camera movement and editing create an aura of serenity.

But *Stranger Than Paradise* remains a distinctly American film. Storywise, Jarmusch owes more to the legendary American director Nicholas Ray than to the Japanese directors. Ray, under whom Jarmusch studied as a graduate student, deals with similar themes; American losers on the fringe, running away, trying to find something better.

*Stranger Than Paradise* has an incredible amount of talent behind it. Along with receiving help from Paul

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