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“Moses Supposes”: The Importance of Dance in *Singin' in the Rain*

Singin' in the Rain, the beloved classic musical remembered for its contagious and dance numbers, has a serious side as well. *Singin' in the Rain* turns the camera in on itself and explores Hollywood's transition from silent films to “talkies,” giving the audience the backstage point-of-view as we follow the career of famous silent film star, Don Lockwood. In 1927, the film's temporal setting, Warner Brothers released the first talking picture entitled *The Jazz Singer* which began a shift in filmmaking as more and more studios tried to compete with this popular new film. During this transition from silent to talking, many famous actors struggled to keep their careers as they realized that they could not give satisfying performances while reciting scripted lines. In *Singin' in the Rain*, it was Don Lockwood's previous experience with Vaudeville, as well as his love of dance that saved his career during a time when sound, image, and identity seemed impossible to sync, as exhibited by the song/dance sequence, “Moses Supposes.”

The scene opens in a dialect classroom with Don Lockwood's staking elocution lessons, which “spoofs the post-sound elocutionist craze” that grew out of the panic of the shift from silent films to talkies. This setting allows for dance to be portrayed as the language of truth and honesty as it is throughout *Singin' in the Rain*. (Orlando II 11)

music, and , in its most dramatic moments, does not rely on words.” (5). He also reminds us that, “fluid movement is the key...that separates posing for silent films from dancing in a musical” (5). The scene implies that dance is a language in the way the two dancers, Don Lockwood and Cosmo Brown, dance in front of posters depicting “A,” “E,” “I,” “O,” and “U, ” at one point straddling a chair, creating an “A” shape with it and their legs, while standing in front of the “A” poster. It is also implied in the way the dancers take turns creating the diction coach in a chair and pointing to each other’s feet as they dance, as if they are teaching him to speak. At the end of the scene, the duo cover the dialect coach on random objects from the room, which, according to Chumo, is “suggesting that dance itself needs no words, that the highest communication occurs in movement, not the rigid movement of silent films but rather the fluid movement of dance” (13). It seems necessary that the dancers teach the diction coach to speak since, at the beginning of the scene, he was asking Don to spout nonsensical tongue twisters. The nonsense of the tongue twisters sharply contrasts the honesty of the dancing displayed by Don and Cosmo.

The lack of honesty and truth throughout the film which is reinforced by the nonsense Don is to

(Ewing). While many times throughout the movie, image and sound are asynchronous, the dance duet performed by Cosmo Brown and Don Lockwood in *Moses Supposes* is completely in sync. Likewise, their motions are always in sync with the tapping of their shoes. The asynchronicity of image and sound, and the honesty of dance is apparent in the title of the film *Don and Lina* are making, called *The Dueling Cavalier*, which is eventually changed to *The Dancing Cavalier* to save the film from disaster. While “dueling” implies the duel between sound and image, “dancing” allows each to appear simultaneously. To close *Moses Supposes*’s scene, Don and Cosmo pick up the poster that says, “Vowel A” and sing the same vowel, showing that with them, the dancers, sound and image are truly in sync.

Keeping dance, song, and image in sync also shows quite a bit of flexibility on the part of the performer. Dance is very much an indicator of a performer’s flexibility throughout the film. Performers who dance, such as Don, Kathy, and Cosmo, prevail at the film’s ending, while Lina, who is nothing more than a pretty face posing for the camera, is laughed out of Hollywood. “Just as dance requires physical flexibility in body movement and spontaneity, so does vital filmmaking....this versatility is linked to the talent to perform very physical dance numbers,” such as “*Moses Supposes*” (Chumoff). According to Janice La Pointe Crump in ‘Singin’ in the Rain: Dancer, Dance, and Viewer Dialogues’, each dance in *Singin’ in the Rain* draws from a different technical and aesthetic base [which] in an elaborate grammar, the breadth and mastery of which was unique to dance. This breadth shows the importance of flexibility in a performer. In the film, Don’s physicality is contrasted by characters such as Lina Lamont who is first seen lying on a board and receiving a manicure. The diction coach, as well, shows a lack of physicality, since his specialty is speaking, which requires no extraneous movement whatsoever. The diction coach remains seated throughout the scene while Don and Cosmo take control with

In "Broadway Melody," Don's character, who mirrors Don Lockwood's own Hollywood experience, sees a hooper on ~~the~~ singing the phrase, "Gotta dance," just as Don's character

Works Cited

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