



FILM: **THE BAND WAGON**

FDG RATING: 3.3 😊😊😊😊😊

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Vincent Minnelli: *director*
Fred Astair: *actor, Tony*
Cyd Charisse: *actress, Gabrielle*
Nanette Fabray: *actress, Lily*

DATE: October 24, 2021

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **THE BAND WAGON**

Widely considered one of the greatest movie musicals of all time, Vincent Minnelli's 1953 "The Band Wagon", was a timeless, joy to watch for most of our film discussion group. Starring Fred Astaire and Cyd Charisse, we marveled at the arguably, unequaled dance talents of these two as they glide and quick step effortlessly to wonderful choreography. And all in vibrant, saturated, technicolor. From the opening scene to the closing, we are treated to a flow of musical vignettes that include memorable songs with clever lyrics perfectly paired with creative, colorful dance routines.

The story centers on musical movie star, hoofer (tap dancer), Tony Hunter (Fred Astaire) who is getting past his prime and fears his career may be on the skids, but his friends, Lester and Lily (a fabulous, endearing performance by Nanette Fabray), have written a Broadway show to re-ignite his stardom. Unfortunately, the egotistical director they chose has his own idea and wants it to be a Faustian drama with a ballerina, Gabrielle, (Cyd Charisse) as the leading lady, all of which doesn't sit well with Tony. In fact, Tony and Gabrielle get into a furious fight the first time they meet, leading to a magical sequence as they make up riding in a horse drawn carriage under a full moon in Central Park to the music of "Dancing in the Dark".

The show goes on the road and flops causing Tony to take charge and turn it into an entertaining series of music-dance-theatrical sketches. For some discussion participants, this is where the story flails becoming just an entertainment revue. One resident reviewer called it a "juke box musical". But this is also where we have many of our favorite segments such as The Triplets, so cleverly staged as the three actors on their knees seem to be toddlers in baby outfits. Fabray really shines in this routine, radiating her cute, energetic personality. We loved the unexpected lyrics about sibling rivalry.

Another favorite was the detective vignette with vibrant, slick "thriller" choreography. Even one discussion participant who doesn't like musicals, was a convert feeling completely entertained. Another comment was that each vignette was completely enjoyable but seemed a bit thrown together.

It's a movie about show business taking a would-be musical through all the stages of writing, casting, production, choreography, rehearsals, failure on the road and eventual triumph on Broadway. We noted that the popular tune "That's Entertainment" was actually written for The Band Wagon. For a couple discussion participants, the pace seemed slightly crazed. Another didn't like the egotistical, dominating, character of the director. And another observation was the inexcusable smoking in the film, though very common at this time with Tobacco companies even paying to have their cigarettes included in as many scenes as possible. Although we relished the music and lyrics in The Band Wagon, it was pointed out that other musicals did a much better job at integrating tunes with the story such as Fiddler On The Roof, The Wizard Of Oz, Evita, Les Miserables, and others.

A flurry of middle of the road scores put a damper on a few high ratings (including an exuberant 5), leaving a bumpy 3.3 for the cumulative result on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)



See you at the movies!

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