

Looking at Hollywood with Ed Sullivan

Fred Astaire, the Million Dollar Dancer

By ED SULLIVAN

WHEN Fred Astaire, the Omaha, Neb., dancing star, appeared on the screen in his first R-K-O picture, "Flying Down to Rio," the people of show business conceded that he was a pleasant change from the regular celluloid fare, but guessed he wouldn't last very long, because of the very nature of his act—tap dancing. "Damsel in Distress," his latest, however, is Astaire's eighth picture, and in the meantime his dancing feet have revolutionized the picture business. Now there are at last thirty great tap-dancing stars out here, all of whom owe a debt to Astaire. He was the pioneer who proved that tap dancing had a rightful place in motion pictures.

Throughout all of this success—and it has been considerable both from the standpoint of international prestige and money—Fred Astaire has remained one of the really nice persons of this curious colony. The reason is, in all probability, that from 1922 to 1933 Fred tasted all of the fruits of success which the Broadway smash hits had evoked huzzas, and after a performer has smash-clicked on the stage there is little left in the way of acclaim that can intoxicate him.

crude on the screen. I was awkward, gawky. I went to Pandro Berman and begged him to re-shoot my scenes, and he refused, on the grounds that they were all right, so I packed up and left for England, convinced that my screen future had ended before it really started.

"I never thought I'd see the coast again when I left. While I felt bad about flopping in pictures, it was as if a tremendous load had been lifted from me. I'd always wanted to take a flyer at the screen, never would have been content if I hadn't, so at least I'd had the satisfaction of making the attempt. When the cables started arriving in London telling me that the critics liked my dancing I thought at first some of my pals were ribbing me. If ever success came unexpectedly it came that way to me, and that's no false modesty. It's strictly on the level."

He's traveled a long way, this Nebraskan, since the days when I used to go backstage to the New Amsterdam theater during the run of "Band Wagon." I have a very clear picture of that

Fred Astaire, the Omaha boy who has made good, in a manner of speaking, on his own feet.



At right: Astaire has starred in eight pictures, in seven of which the nimble-footed Ginger Rogers has appeared as his dancing partner. Here are the two in a romping informal number from the picture "Roberta."



In his newest picture, "Damsel in Distress." The girl is Joan Fontaine.

dressing room. Generally the mirrors of the dressing table were crowded with cables from England telling him how his racing stable was performing. His pet nag was named

Nick the Greek. As a matter of coincidence, Nick the Greek, the famous gambler, was keeping steady company with one of the showgirls in "Band Wagon," so Astaire was vastly excited one night when the gambler came backstage. He didn't tell Nick about the horse, not knowing at the time whether the original would be flattered.

Like Gene Tunney, Astaire always drank a bottle of cold milk after each performance. The rest of us—Bob Benchley, Jock Whitney, and others who frequented his dressing room at the New Amsterdam—preferred more stimulating potions, but

Fred's colored valet always had the milk on tap for him.

It was fortunate for him that his sister Adele married Lord Cavendish at the very moment she did, giving him the opportunity to enter the movies as a single personality. The movies might have rejected a team. The comradeship of brother and sister, however, is as firm as though they were not separated by 3,000 miles of country and an additional 3,000 miles of ocean. He writes voluminous letters to Adele in London before each picture, telling her in detail each new step he works out, with diagrams of the full routine. Adele



Fred and his sister Adele, now Lady Cavendish, as they appeared 'way back in 1926 in a stage production called "Lady Be Good."

in return sends him ideas for new steps and new dancing situations, together with minute criticism of each picture as she sees it. This is one of the nicer partnerships of show business, this brother-and-sister attachment which has not relaxed.

The drum dance, which is the finale and the dancing highlight of this newest Astaire picture,

was closely guarded before it was filmed. The only one who knew every step in it was Adele Astaire. Fred sent her the diagrams of it almost a month before it was shot. You'll enjoy it when you see it on the screen, and he believes (and so does Irving Berlin) that it is the greatest thing he has ever accomplished.

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There is one point that Fred would like cleared up. If you will recall, his first screen appearance was in the Joan Crawford picture, "Dancing Lady," made by M-G-M, which, by the way, is not included in the aforementioned eight pictures in which Astaire had leading rôles. This studio has been panned unmercifully for permitting Astaire to get away from it, but Fred says this criticism was unfounded.

"R-K-O only loaned me out for that one picture," he explains. "M-G-M didn't turn me loose; they just returned me to the studio from which they'd borrowed me. Joan Crawford was so darn nice that I'd hate to let the impression grow that there was any unpleasantness attached to the incident."

If Astaire has hung up screen records, he's hung up social records, too. He is the only stage professional ever admitted to full membership in the exclusive Racquet and Tennis club of New York. Jock Whitney proposed him for membership, and Fred was voted in. Bob Montgomery is a nonresident member.

So I give you, ladies and gentlemen, Astaire, the Omaha boy who made good, in a manner of speaking, on his own feet. He had a birthday on Nov. 26, and the birthday cake is the only thing in Hollywood that could hold a candle to him.

Voice of the Movie Fan

Letters published in this department should be written on one side of the paper. If you wish a personal reply please inclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Dear Miss Tinée: Although I read your column every Sunday and enjoy reading

what others have to say, I have never put in my opinion.

Now I want to toss a bouquet to that very new and interesting actress, Lana Turner.

Will you please print me her biography and also put in a picture of her?

Thanks!

ANNE KOIVISTO, Rock Island, Ill.

Editor's note: Please keep right on enjoying the column. Lana'll think—and maybe say, "Thank you, Anne, for your bouquet!"

Miss Turner was born in Wallace, Idaho, Feb. 8, 1920. She has red hair and hazel eyes. Her hobbies are tennis and horseback riding. She went to high school in Hollywood.

You're welcome.

Dear Miss Tinée: I have always read and enjoyed your column, have agreed with most of the opinions of the writers in the fan column, but was certainly flabbergasted when a letter appeared badly criticizing the Mauch twins. It's too bad the

writer couldn't tell it in a nicer way. Do you mind if I use the rest of this letter in defense of the twins? Thank you.

Will the writer of that letter please read carefully and take notice?

You say the twins make you sick. You no doubt had that in mind before you saw the picture and let it ruin the picture and your opinion of it. So do a lot of stars make me sick, but I never let that ruin the story. . . . What do you mean by "natural acting"? A person to speak his lines as if reciting poetry or as if it is too hard to say? Act in the awkward way of being "just perfect," like one sees in school plays?

My idea of natural acting is when the actor acts the character he is supposed to portray as realistically and naturally as if he were the person himself. This is exactly what the twins did, and for that one reason alone the critics rang another bell on their first starring picture, "The Prince and the Pauper."

I'll admit there were some flaws—only two. Bill had some difficulty in his speech when giving Errol Flynn the permission to sit before the king. Bobby jerking his head down at the book in the coronation scene when he was only to glance at it. The reason the pauper didn't gawk when first invited into the castle was that he had his mind on the jewelry the other boy wore, and the fear of being caught by more guards. He didn't drool at the mouth at the fruit bowl because fruit was unknown to the poorer class in the sixteenth century. Why the king didn't run home when his father died? My dear writer, holler at Mark Twain; he wrote the story, the boys didn't. Sincerely, ED LARSON.

Dear Miss Tinée: Would you please answer this letter in your "Voice of the Movie Fan" column? Can you give me the biography of Ray Milland? I thank you. M. N.

Editor's note: Can. Mr. Milland's real name is Jack Millane. He was born in Drogheda, Ireland, Jan. 3, 1905. He's 6 feet 1 inch tall and has black hair and brown eyes. He appeared on the stage before going into pictures. You're welcome.

Dear Miss Tinée: I'd like to raise the skies in praise of that small but dynamic picture, "Big City." Together with its story, director, and stars it could easily be called a second "Seventh Heaven."

Every piece of work that Spencer Tracy has ever turned in has been a masterpiece in acting. And couldn't you call that plea to the mayor for his wife a miniature masterpiece, or more? He was swell! There's no other word that suits him better. He's just a swell guy who happens to be a wonderful actor. Here's more power to Spencer Tracy.



SPENCER TRACY A swell guy who happens to be a wonderful actor.

He'll probably be playing character parts and lovers long after the Taylors and the Gables and the Powers have lost their luster.

Thank you very much, Miss Tinée, for your great help among us folk.

Ever your fan, R. C. ANDERSON.

Editor's note: This ought to make Mr. Tracy throw back his shoulders and look the world in the face with a smile.

Dear Miss Tinée: I've been a constant reader of your columns for the last three years, but I enjoy your question box on Sunday morning most of all. I hope you will be able to help me with my question.

I should like to know who the soldier was who fell in love with Simon Simone in "Seventh Heaven." He is tall and dark and handsome. In this picture he wore a mustache. His first appearance in this picture showed him coming out of either in a hospital, and he thought Diane was an angel. Diane visited him in the hospital, and later on he accompanied her to the church, where she rebuked the priests when they told her Chico was dead. He was in uniform, I believe, during his short part on the screen, and I think when he accompanied Diane to the church he used a cane. Of this, the last fact, I cannot be sure. Do you recognize the actor in question? Also, did he have a part (a very small one) in "Under Two Flags"?

Gratefully yours, A SATISFIED READER.

Editor's note: That's etching oneself on memory! His name is Thomas Beck, and he also appeared in "Under Two Flags."