SOFTWARE & TECH

American In Paris Gene Kelly

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The Timeless Magic of An American in Paris: Gene Kelly's Masterpiece

When we think of classic Hollywood musicals, few films shine as brightly as **An American in Paris**, starring the incomparable **Gene Kelly**. Released in 1951, this vibrant MGM production remains a landmark in cinematic history, blending breathtaking dance sequences, heartfelt romance, and George Gershwin's unforgettable music. At its heart is Gene Kelly's portrayal of Jerry Mulligan, a struggling American painter living in post-war Paris. The film not only showcased Kelly's extraordinary talents as a dancer, actor, and choreographer but also defined an era of optimism and artistic ambition. In this article, we will explore every facet of **An American in Paris**and Gene Kelly's indelible contribution, from its creation and iconic dance numbers to its enduring legacy as a cultural treasure.

The Genesis of a Classic: How An American in Paris Came to Life

The idea for **An American in Paris**originated from the Gershwin brothers' orchestral composition "An American in Paris," which George Gershwin wrote in 1928. Producer Arthur Freed of MGM saw the potential to weave a romantic story around this evocative music. He enlisted director Vincente Minnelli and choreographer Gene Kelly to transform the composition into a full-fledged musical. The film's screenplay, written by Alan Jay Lerner, follows Jerry Mulligan, a World War II veteran who stays in Paris to pursue painting. He falls for a French girl, Lise Bouvier (played by Leslie Caron in her film debut), but complications arise when a wealthy American heiress, Milo Roberts (Nina Foch), also vies for his affection. The narrative allowed Gene Kelly to blend naturalistic acting with exuberant dance, creating a character that felt both relatable and aspirational.

Gene Kelly: The Dancing Star Who Redefined Musical Cinema

Gene Kelly was already a major star by 1951, having revolutionized movie musicals with his athletic, balletic, and often acrobatic style. In **An American in Paris**, he pushed boundaries further by integrating dance into the everyday life of his character. Kelly believed that dance should not be a separate spectacle but a natural expression of emotion—and he proved it in every scene. His chemistry with Leslie Caron, a young ballerina he discovered, brought a fresh, youthful energy to the screen. Kelly's performance as Jerry is charming, vulnerable, and full of verve, making him the perfect embodiment of the American artist abroad.

One of the most remarkable aspects of Gene Kelly's contribution was his role as co-choreographer (with Carol Haney). He conceived dance sequences that told stories in themselves. The famous "I Got Rhythm" number, performed by Kelly and a group of French children, is a joyous explosion of movement, while the ballet "An American in Paris" at the film's end is a seventeen-minute tour de force of color, music, and choreography. This finale alone cost $500,000—a huge sum for its time—and featured sets inspired by French painters like Dufy, van Gogh, and Renoir. Kelly's insistence on using original locations and painted backdrops gave the film an impressionistic feel that still captivates audiences.

A Symphony of Sound and Vision: The Gershwin Score

The music in **An American in Paris** is the soul of the film. George Gershwin's compositions, with lyrics by his brother Ira, include classics such as "I Got Rhythm," "'S Wonderful," "But Not for Me," and "Love Is Here to Stay." The title instrumental piece, "An American in Paris," opens the film with a tone poem that evokes the sounds and sights of the city—car horns, bustling streets, and a sense of wanderlust. Gene Kelly's singing and dancing brought these melodies to life, but he also allowed the music to guide the narrative. For example, "'S Wonderful" is sung while Kelly and Caron walk through a Parisian park, their steps perfectly matching the rhythm—a subtle yet powerful use of music to elevate storytelling.

The orchestration, arranged by Conrad Salinger, remains one of the finest in Hollywood history. The film won an Academy Award for Best Scoring of a Musical Picture, and the original soundtrack album became a bestseller. The seamless integration of the Gershwin brothers' work into the plot proved that popular music could serve both entertainment and art. For viewers, hearing these songs in the context of **Gene Kelly**'s performance creates an unforgettable sensory experience.

Behind the Scenes: Challenges and Innovations

Making **An American in Paris** was not without its hurdles. Gene Kelly insisted on filming the ballet sequence in color, even though black-and-white was still common. MGM executives were hesitant due to cost, but Kelly's vision prevailed. The result was a visual feast that used Technicolor to its fullest. The sets, designed by Preston Ames and his team, were meant to resemble paintings, with forced perspective and stylized props. Kelly and Minnelli worked closely to choreograph camera movements, ensuring that each dance number was captured dynamically without losing the dancers' energy. One famous innovation was the use of a crane (a "dance dolly") to move the camera along with the dancers in the "I Got Rhythm" number, giving the audience a sense of floating through the scene.

Another challenge was Leslie Caron's limited experience with film acting. Gene Kelly spent hours coaching her, not only in dance but in how to express emotion for the camera. Their partnership paid off, as Caron's natural grace and innocence became central to the film's charm. The production also required careful planning of the ballet finale—Kelly and Caron rehearsed for weeks to perfect a sequence that combined classical ballet, modern dance, and tap, all while maintaining character and narrative flow. The result was a groundbreaking fusion that influenced countless future musicals.

The Legacy of An American in Paris and Gene Kelly's Impact

Upon its release, **An American in Paris** was hailed as a masterpiece. It won six Academy Awards, including Best Picture, and cemented Gene Kelly's status as a Hollywood legend. The film's success also helped revive interest in ballet and American musical theater. Today, it is recognized as one of the greatest musicals ever made, regularly appearing on lists of the best films of all time. The American Film Institute ranked it ninth on its list of the greatest movie musicals.

For **Gene Kelly**, **An American in Paris** represented the pinnacle of his artistic achievements. It allowed him to combine his love of dance, painting, and storytelling into a single, cohesive work. He once said, "The ballet sequence was the culmination of everything I had wanted to do in the movies." Indeed, it showcased his philosophy that dance could be as expressive as dialogue or song. The film also inspired a successful stage adaptation, which premiered in 2015 and earned multiple Tony Awards, proving that the story of the American artist in Paris remains timeless.

Why An American in Paris Still Resonates Today

In an age of quick-cut editing and digital effects, **An American in Paris** stands as a testament to the power of simplicity and human expression. The film's themes—love, ambition, cultural discovery, and the search for identity—are universal. Gene Kelly's Jerry Mulligan is an everyman who dares to dream, and his journey from struggling painter to successful artist (and lover) mirrors the aspirations of many viewers. Moreover, the film offers a romanticized but charming view of Paris in the post-war years, a city that symbolizes freedom and

creativity.

The choreography continues to inspire dancers and choreographers. The way Gene Kelly uses everyday objects—a lamppost, a curb, a newspaper—as props in his dance sequences became a signature style that influenced artists from Michael Jackson to contemporary musical theater. The film's music is still performed in concert halls worldwide. And the ballet finale, with its shifting styles and emotional crescendo, remains a technical marvel that few have attempted to replicate.

Exploring the Key Dance Numbers in Detail

- "I Got Rhythm": This high-energy number features Kelly dancing with a group of French children through the streets of Paris. The choreography is playful, using the children as partners and incorporating jumps, slides, and leaps. Kelly's tap-dancing sequence on a wooden platform in the middle of the street is iconic.
- "'S Wonderful": A duet with Leslie Caron in a park, this sequence blends ballet with casual walking steps. Kelly and Caron move in perfect sync, using the benches and tree trunks as part of the dance. The camera follows them without cutting, creating a continuous flow of motion.
- "But Not for Me": A solo number performed by Kelly after he believes he has lost Lise. He dances alone in his studio, expressing heartbreak through expansive, almost melancholy movements. This sequence shows Kelly's ability to convey emotion without words.
- "An American in Paris Ballet": The centerpiece of the film—a seventeen-minute dream ballet that tells the story of Jerry's love for Lise. The dance moves through six different visual styles, each inspired by a French painter (Dufy, Renoir, van Gogh, etc.). Kelly and Caron perform intricate lifts, spins, and partners' work, all set to Gershwin's music. The number ends with a triumphant, colorful finale.

The Cultural Significance of the American in Paris Archetype

The character of the "American in Paris" has become a cultural archetype, representing the expatriate artist seeking inspiration and freedom. Gene Kelly's Jerry Mulligan fits perfectly into this tradition, following in the footsteps of writers like Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald, who also found creative renewal in the French capital. The film capitalized on post-war America's fascination with European culture, yet it also asserted that an American could master and contribute to that culture. Kelly's own training in ballet and modern dance, combined with his American jazz and tap roots, symbolized a cultural hybrid that was uniquely hopeful.

The film also addressed themes of class and romance. Jerry chooses love over money, turning down the wealthy Milo Roberts for the more genuine, though impoverished, relationship with Lise. This moral message resonated with audiences recovering from World War II, who valued authenticity over materialism. Gene Kelly's natural charm made this choice feel not like a sacrifice but like the only sensible path—a testament to the character's integrity.

Comparing An American in Paris to Other Gene Kelly Musicals

Gene Kelly is, of course, famous for many musicals, including *Singin' in the Rain*, *On the Town*, and *Brigadoon*. However, **An American in Paris** stands apart for its artistic ambition and integration of high art with popular entertainment. While *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) is more comedic and focused on Hollywood history, An American in Paris is deeply romantic and visually experimental. The use of painted sets and the extended ballet sequence was unprecedented. Moreover, Kelly's personal investment in the project—he worked on the choreography and the overall design—made it his most personal film. In many ways, **An American in Paris**is the definitive Gene Kelly musical because it synthesizes all his talents into a single, cohesive, and stunning work of art.

Conclusion: An Enduring Love Letter to Paris and Dance

More than seventy years after its release, **An American in Paris** continues to captivate audiences with its dazzling choreography, exquisite music, and heartfelt story. At the center stands **Gene Kelly**, a performer

whose passion and creativity set a standard that few have matched. The film is a love letter not only to Paris but also to the sheer joy of movement and music. It reminds us that art can transcend boundaries

An American in Paris offers a whether you're at its long exhibrating and deeply moving—a true classic that will forever dance in our hearts.

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