



THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT!

**More Stars Than There Are In The Heavens or On Earth
...for my money MGM HAD IT ALL!**
by Nick Zegarac

Upon its release **That's Entertainment!** became the biggest and brightest money maker of 1974...and it's no wonder. For in a little over two hours one had the enchanted experience of being teleported into a world just a little over this side of the rainbow. Here was a cornucopia of magical scenes and snippets from MGM's most magnificent musicals.

Directed with adroit – if self congratulatory – wit and concision by Jack Haley Jr. (son of Oz's Tin Man), **That's Entertainment!** was the sort of spellbinding extravaganza that reinforces MGM's once galvanic mottoes of "art for art's sake" and "more stars than there are in heaven." At its gala premiere Jack Haley Sr. was heard declaring, "*This isn't nostalgia. This is art.*"

Rightly so - by 1974 the MGM musical had been dead for some time and the studio itself was on the verge of a restructuring that would ultimately reduce its holdings to garage sale status. But at least in this film such almost forgotten treasures as Bing Crosby singing *Did You E'vah?* were resurrected from oblivion and reinstated to their rightful place in film history. Variety gave **That's Entertainment!** a glowing review, trumpeting that "while many may ponder the future of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, no one can deny that it's had one heck of a past!" Here is a glimpse into that past.

KEYS TO THE KINGDOM

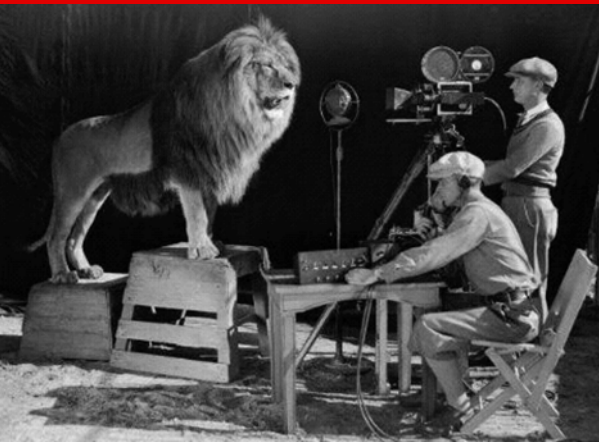
– **MGM's monarchy was a turbulent paradise**

By the mid-1970s MGM had been reduced to a holding company and insignificant producer of motion pictures. What occurred after Vegas financier, Kirk Kerkorian invaded the lion's den was nothing short of the pillage or rape of Metro's artistic legacy for pure profit.



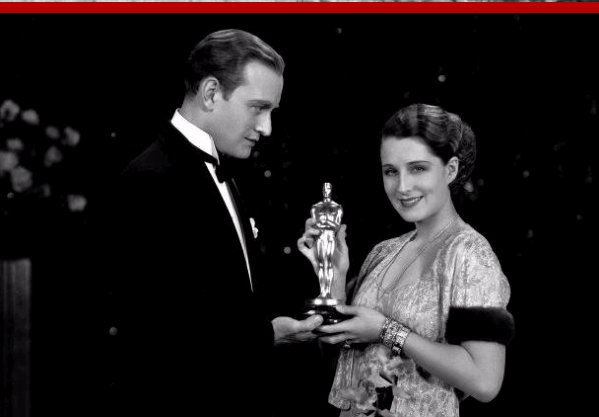


Above: Master & mate: Star maker/dream maker (left): the highest paid personage in all of Hollywood, Louis B. Mayer was actually the son of a scrap metal dealer. Installed in the most prestigious digs of any mogul - Mayer reigned supreme as the undisputed monarch until a rift with New York Loewes president Nick Schenk lead to his unceremonious firing. (centre) The Irving G. Thalberg Memorial Building. Executives dubbed it 'the iron lung.' In its day, this imposing structure housed massive offices for all the creative executives working at the studio. (right) Irving G. Thalberg – whom one critic described as “a flimsy bag of bones” held together by his creative zeal to making the greatest motion pictures in the history of the world. On most points – Thalberg succeeded.



Vintage sets were sold to and demolished by the Multi-Levitt Housing Corp. The studio's wardrobe warehouses – containing everything from Judy Garland's ruby slippers to Greta Garbo's stylish gowns - were put on the Sotherby's auction block. Scripts, sheet music, animation cells, publicity photos (taken by renown photographers Laszlo Willinger and George Hurrell) and interoffice correspondence (some with priceless hand written notations) were all unceremoniously pitched and hauled off to the city dump, presumably because Kerkorian perceived no immediate value that could help finance his latest casino; the MGM Grand.

It was a bitter end for the studio that had once played host to the most significant and celebrated names in motion picture industry entertainment.



The good years: (top left) technicians prepare to record Leo's roar for the dawning of the sound era – the lion roars! (middle) Norma Shearer accepts her Oscar for *The Divorcee*, a scathing pre-code melodrama. Shearer became Mrs. Irving Thalberg, Metro's 'queen of the lot' and a widow all within the short span of ten years. (below) a camera set up for the 'Who?' production number featuring Judy Garland and a male chorus in *Till The Clouds Roll By* (1945).

On the surface MGM had everything: a roster of talent that boasted “*more stars than there are in the heavens,*” the biggest backlot of all the major studios, the most proficient film processing lab and largest commissary in all of Hollywood. In short, the world of MGM was a strange and turbulent kingdom; part fairytale, part business, the lion seemingly set to roar forever.



Yet, what the kingdom genuinely required and lacked in the years leading up to its demise was an absolute monarch at its helm. The unique amalgamation of Metro Pictures, Samuel Goldwyn Enterprises and Louis B. Mayer Productions into a single entity in 1924 must have seemed like a dream come true. MGM's parent company, Loewes Incorporated, would provide a nationwide hook up of theatre outlets to service the studio's product, while MGM sprinkled the pixie dust needed to fill seats and coffers. MGM's irresistible opulence raised the prestige, class, elegance and sophistication of films to a level that remains enviable to this day. But it was not to last.



Enduring Iconography – (above) Fred Astaire and Cyd Charisse perform the peerless 'Dancing in the Dark' from The Band Wagon. (left) Gene Kelly's instantly recognizable alter ego: Don Lockwood from Singin' In The Rain. (below): The last great MGM musical: Gigi. Paris' grand boulevardier Maurice Chevalier extols the virtues of little girls in this eight time Oscar winner.

There are varying speculations as to what went wrong in those last great years at MGM. Some have blamed the end on Marcus Loewe and Irving Thailberg's untimely deaths. To be sure, the void generated by their passing left MGM vulnerable to less honorable and less artistic intentions. Yet, nearly a decade passed before cracks in that galvanic façade became too great to ignore. Others have chosen to vilify Loewe's heir apparent, Nicolas Schenk, who earlier had sought to liquidate MGM to rival 20th Century Fox, and unceremoniously deposed L.B. Mayer during the 50s in favor of a weak substitute, Dory Schary. Other theories have debated the impact of television, the forced government interest to divest studios of their assets, and, the astronomical rise in production costs.

Whatever the case, there *is* no MGM any more. The studio known as Culver City is now the property of Sony Pictures. The MGM hotels and casinos are shallow reminders of a film making

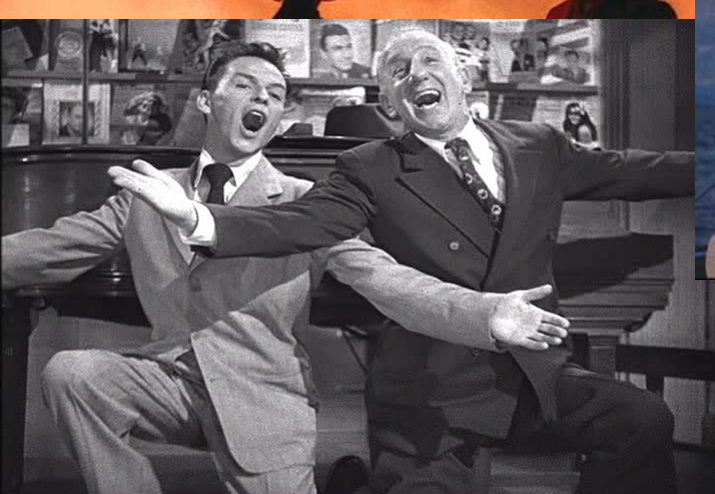




glamorous sights...quite unlike Brooklyn Heights or anything else the world has ever seen.



THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT! - the first





capital that is as much a part of the past as the ancient Rome depicted in **Ben-Hur**. And the label – that instantly recognizable trademark of a roaring lion surrounded by a spool of film – today acts as the rented forbearer to movies that other studios have produced. What we are left with then is MGM's film history; an unparalleled cornucopia of moments that continue to enthrall and captivate with their unrelenting great art. Over thirty years since its demise there is still no denying that Metro-

Goldwyn-Mayer was the grandest and most legendary of Hollywood's dream factories.

REVISITING THE PAST or SCRAPING THE BARREL?

That's Entertainment! proved to be such an overwhelming critical and financial success that naturally, MGM just had to have a sequel.

Unfortunately, by the time the powers that be got around to it, two years had elapsed. The studio was no more, the backlots had been demolished and most of the creative personnel responsible for the first film's success had departed for other projects. **That's Entertainment Part II** was a valiant attempt at a grand successor.

However, David Melnick's eager follow-up was decidedly a let down on several levels. First, it removed the star cameos that had so poignantly buttressed the original's vintage clips. Second, it presented the footage in a seemingly hap-hazard chronology. And finally, it interrupted the musical performances with a showcase of some of the studio's non-musical performers in a string of disjointed word play that neither enhanced the memory of their original performances or the film experience that was to be had.

Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly co-hosted this second compendium and tripped the light fantastic (though arguably neither as light nor as fantastic as one would have hoped) in several misguided and awkwardly choreographed sequences that reaffirmed the tragic truth; that the MGM musical was sadly a thing of the past. Though not nearly as successful as its predecessor, **That's Entertainment II** was nevertheless a box office titan.

In 1994 MGM once again revisited its vaults for **That's Entertainment III** the final installment in the series. But by now the experience was vaguely beginning to resemble grave robbing. The new film's primary selling feature was that, in addition to showcasing another round of classic performances, it also dug deep into the coffers of outtakes for a series of deleted musical numbers which, until 1994, had





either never or rarely been seen. Despite these innovations the final installment to the trilogy was the one most poorly received. It's the original that continues dazzle us all and it's the original that remains the cornerstone of this newly minted DVD box set.

THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT! – the Box Set

Warner Home Video gives us 2 ways to enjoy these films on DVD; the original theatrical cuts, and reformatted video versions. The DVD transfers of all three **That's Entertainment!** films are a welcomed delight for the most part. The theatrical cuts have masking on all four sides of the image during full frame clips and top and bottom masking for the Cinemascope clips. The video version has no masking for full frame clips – but the widescreen clips are not presented anamorphically.

After years of viewing parts one and two with poorly mastered vintage clips, these newly minted discs appear to have been the benefactors of some digital restoration. Beginning with the original film, there is a decide lack of grain and grit on this transfer that is most becoming. Colors (during the Technicolor clips) are vibrant, rich and deep. B&W images are very crisp, nicely balanced, with an often stunning gray scale and superior attention to fine details.



There is, however, slight amount of edge enhancement on the video formatted versions for a picture that is less than smooth. Part II seems to suffer from slightly lower contrast levels overall, but the same review for Part I applies. The most outstanding example of digital mastering comes in Part III – a marvelously vibrant array of clips remastered (as they were for the theatrical engagement) in high def that positively glows off the screen. The audio is 5.1 surround and is remarkably aggressive throughout. The audio has been remixed and remastered to stereo for all three films.

Extras include a bonus disc of musical outtakes, audio only catalogue of songs and dances, original footage of the LA premiere with all of the old time musical stars in attendance and a series of short subjects that collectively perform like a documentary on the series. There are also the original theatrical trailers for each film to be had. In the immortal words of George Gershwin...“who could ask for anything more?”

