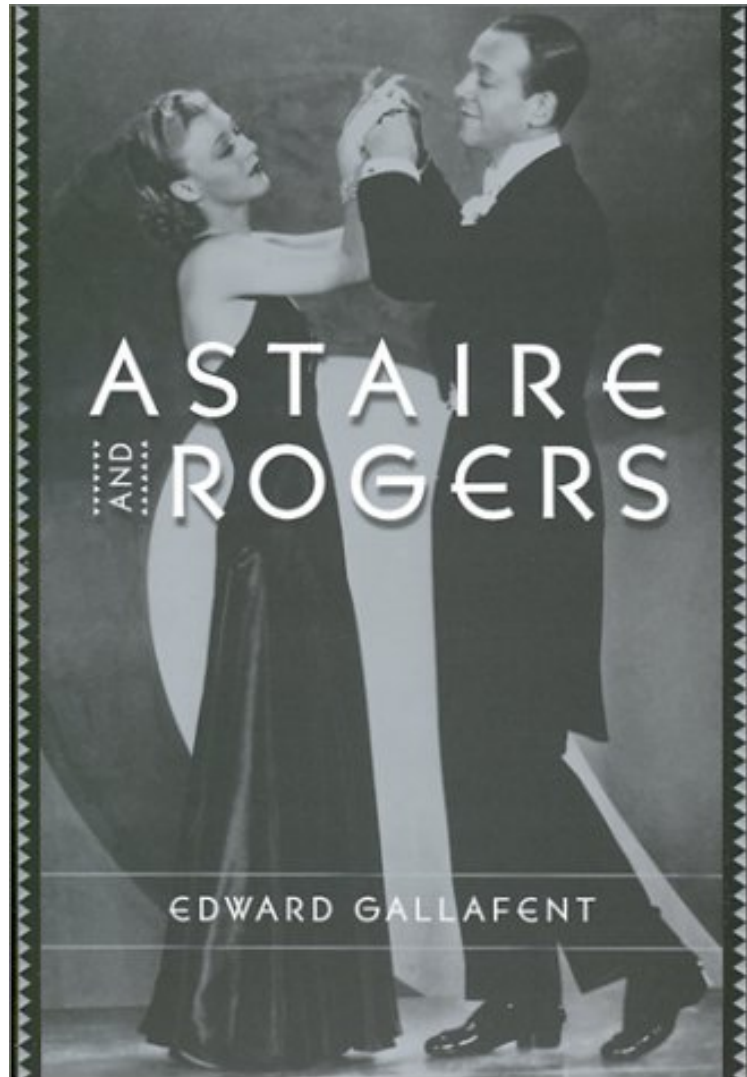


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## Astaire and Rogers

*Edward Gallafent*

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**Edward Gallafent : Astaire and Rogers** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Astaire and Rogers:

41 of 42 people found the following review helpful. AN IRREPLACEABLE TEAMBy MOVIE MAVENWhen I first moved to New York City, there was a theatre in the West 80's (now demolished, alas) called The New Yorker which was a revival house, pure and simple. To my knowledge, no new movies were ever shown at The New Yorker. I saw my first Depression age films there. Barbara Stanwyck, Carole Lombard, Henry Fonda, Dick Powell, Clark Gable, Claudette Colbert and Preston Sturges were some of my heroes. But it was after a retrospective of all the black and white musicals that Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers did from 1933 ("Flying Down To Rio") til 1939 ("The Story of

Vernon and Irene Castle") that I was hooked. I couldn't get enough of Astaire and Rogers. I think I saw "Top Hat" ten times over a period of that many years. It is still one of my favorite movies, as is "Follow the Fleet" in which Rogers, surprisingly, sings one of her only two solos in all of their films...Irving Berlin's delightful "Let Yourself Go." I always laugh when I see "Shall We Dance" and, to this day, I don't really understand the plot of "Carefree." Nor do I care. There have been many wonderful books about this dancing, singing, sweetly romantic comic couple who were obviously a big antidote to the sad, penny-pinching days in the 1930's when most women could not afford a gown seemingly made entirely of feathers nor did most men walk around in tails each night. Floors in most homes were not black and white shellacked diamonds, nor did most people pilot their private airplanes in order to dance the night away in Venice. Astaire and Rogers brought glamour and happiness and sexiness to their public. And they were fun. Edward Gallefant's relatively brief but thoroughly researched book does not so much put emphasis on the miraculous musical numbers written by the best in the business (besides Berlin, there were scores written by the Gershwins and Jerome Kern and Cole Porter.) nor the choreography by Astaire and his collaborator, Hermes Pan, which has, in my mind, never been bettered. Instead of concentrating on these numbers, Gallefant has written a scholarly, academic book about the "hidden" symbolic meanings in the gestures, character names, dance steps, etc. which, in his mind, makes this irreplaceable team, "important." Well, they already were "important" before Gallefant examined their every minute move. They were important because they were two of the best entertainers movie nuts like me ever saw and, luckily, we can still see them on videotape and DVD's and, hopefully one day, in a new or renovated theatre devoted to movies of the first half of the twentieth century. If you are looking for books on Astaire and Rogers, I suggest you try *ASTAIRE DANCING* by John Mueller or *STARRING FRED ASTAIRE* by Stanley Green and Burt Goldblatt or, best of all, Arlene Croce's *THE FRED ASTAIRE AND GINGER ROGERS BOOK* which comes complete with one of those clever "flip-the-pages-quickly-and-watch-them-DANCE." Their like will never pass this way again. 7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. An Unusual Premise By Judith C. Kinney Gallefant reviews the films of Astaire and Rogers, both those they made separately and those they made together, from their first pairing through the late forties. Gallefant makes a plausible case for continuity and development from one musical to another. Even as you find his arguments logical and believable, you know Hollywood doesn't work that way. Few people expect or want anything more from an A R movie than the unalloyed pleasure of the singing and dancing. Gallefant even manages to connect the films Rogers did without Astaire (of which there were many more than I had realized). In spite of his quirky premise, Gallefant is interesting and entertaining throughout, and the book is chock full of stills from the films. 8 of 9 people found the following review helpful. A Look at Two Careers and Images By Michael Samerdyke This book is more about the careers and images of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers from 1934-49 than it is a study of their movies together and their dancing. If you are a dance enthusiast and want to read a detailed account of their dances, this is NOT the book for you. However, I am not a dance person, but I like classic Hollywood films, and I found this book interesting. It shows how the FredGinger films share some concerns with screwball comedy, how World War II affected the images of both stars, and how stars age in the public eye. Gallefant isn't the most graceful of writers, and I got confused in his discussion of "Once Upon a Honeymoon," but I thought he did a good job connecting the FredGinger phenomenon to other developments and careers in classic Hollywood.

This is the first book to pay tribute to the genuine cinematic contribution of these magnificent performers. Gallefant traces the development of Astaire and Rogers' star personas both together and apart and how the narratives of their films were designed around those personas.

From Publishers Weekly Gallefant (Clint Eastwood) offers here a dry, densely meticulous closeup of the careers of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. The first third covers nine black-and-white RKO musicals, from 1933's *Flying Down to Rio* through 1939's *The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle*. Gallefant claims that the pair's dazzling dance routines obscured the artistic value of the films themselves. If music is his standard, judging from scores created for the series by Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern and George Gershwin, there's some validity to this premise. Similar attempts to elevate the farcical, often foolish plot lines only accentuate how lightweight they are. Portions discussing Rogers's solo dramatic career are more incisive, particularly treatments of Kitty Foyle (for which she won an Oscar), Roxie Hart and *The Major and the Minor*. Gallefant analyzes Astaire's post-Rogers pictures, too, including *Second Chorus*, two barely remembered vehicles with Rita Hayworth (*You'll Never Get Rich* and *You Were Never Lovelier*) and his triumphant *Easter Parade* with Judy Garland. Coverage of 1949's *The Barkleys of Broadway*, the only Astaire-Rogers musical in color, knowledgeably points out parallels between the film's plot and the actors' own real-life breakup. But this examination misses the Astaire-Rogers essence: Fred and Ginger weren't serious, remote icons they were light, playful and funny figures that brought joy to millions of Depression-weary moviegoers. Gallefant's detail-laden work rarely captures these soaring qualities. This volume will be of moderate interest to devoted fans, but others, seeking familiarity with their movies, will be discouraged by the book's inflated, ponderously academic tone. (Mar.) Forecast: Diehard devotees of Astaire and Rogers may want to add this book to their collection, but even they will be disappointed by the lack of clarity, wit and warmth. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. From Library

JournalGallafent contends that the films of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers were more than merely vehicles for their stars' extraordinary talents; in fact, they constitute a cycle worthy of critique. The first part of his book looks at films made by the couple at RKO in 1933-39. The second (and more hefty) part which less successfully propels the thesis examines some of the films that Rogers and Astaire made separately before reuniting in their last film, *The Barkleys of Broadway* (1949). These interim films depended on the personas of their stars as developed in their previous work together, building on Rogers's democratic appeal as working-class heroine and Astaire's cavalierism. Gallafent, a lecturer in film studies, provides close readings of the films and shows that a critique of even "frothy" products of popular culture is possible. Although this method of analysis occasionally proves pedestrian, his book nevertheless helps enhance our appreciation of the work of two relatively overlooked stars. Recommended for film studies collections. Jayne Plymale, Univ. of Georgia, Athens Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. From Booklist Most studies of the Astaire-Rogers movies focus, not surprisingly, on the dances. Gallafent chooses to attend equally to what takes place between the musical numbers. This somewhat contrarian approach offers a fresh perspective on these familiar films, considering the contexts of the musical numbers and providing insight on how the A-R films relate to each other. The A-R movies are usually seen as formulaic and repetitive, but Gallafent persuasively argues that, when all 10 are regarded comparatively, each film deepens the others, for each treats such themes as partnership and marriage differently. Although the duo films are his central concern, Gallafent devotes slightly more space to the movies Astaire and Rogers made separately during the same period; this adds little to his main thesis, but the attention he pays to those underappreciated films is welcome. His scholarly, occasionally ponderous tone seems somewhat incongruous for these soufflé-light movies, and his interpretations sometimes overreach; but by convincingly championing their nonmusical passages, Gallafent makes these film perennials seem even better than we already thought they were. Gordon Flagg Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved