

7. Palaces Of Entertainment

Escapism coupled with fantasy

In 1919 cinema audiences reached a million a week with many “going to the pictures’ twice a week. Attendances rocketed with 987 million tickets sold in 1938. At one billion attendances, cinema was 25 times more popular than association football. The survey showed that 50% of the population went at least once a week; some went two, three or even four times. Only 12% of twelve year olds had never been to a cinema that by now had a magnetic attraction. An imposing façade, opulent interior, main film, giants of screen with their good looks, sex-appeal and humour, a B movie and newsreel interspersed – guaranteed a great night out, or better still two or even more. By 1939 weekly cinema audiences exceeded 23 million.

Whilst the government regulated hours of opening for adults and juveniles, content was left to the British Board of Film Censors, established in 1912. Saturday morning children’s shows took hold. Sunday opening was a thorny issue and a closing time of 4.30 pm was common. The Board’s obligation was to “respect good taste and decency” with self-imposed limitations about extremes or excess, and films which might deprave, offend or corrupt. The Board set out 43 rules, of which all but ten concerned morality, defined as reference to bodily functions, coarse language and sex. Subjects dealing with ‘capitalist’ and labour, including strikes and poverty, were banned as being too political and controversial.

Going to the theatre was a social event with evening dress expected in the stalls and dress circle. A concern was those with ambitions of a higher class, especially lower classes that “might drag theatre production, etiquette and ambience down to their level.” These same people were now an integral part of cinema audiences. Just post war, a few hundred at best saw silent films in a church hall, drill hall or ‘assembly room’ rented at weekends. The flea-pit and bug-hut had real meaning, given basic surroundings and poor hygiene. This was about to change profoundly. So were silent films and those with disconnected speech and music.

In 1906 the British Gaumont company was formed, the year in which the first cinema opened in Bishopgate, close to Liverpool Street Station. Called the *Daily Bioscope* it had 120 seats, priced 2p and 4p and ran reels between 12:00 and 9:00 pm with a special show between 1:00 pm and 2:00 pm. Whilst producing films, Gaumont decided to expand their cinema network and by 1929 had 96 prestige cinemas, synonymous with elegance, style and comfort. Each auditorium was architecturally designed to reflect various periods from Neo-classical and Art Deco to Italian Renaissance, complete with floral surroundings and corporate red hue. Most cinemas had stage facilities, a theatre organ and a café.

Provincial Cinematograph Theatres soon followed. The Regent at Brighton (1921) seated over 1,000 patrons and had a restaurant and café plus huge ballroom above the auditorium. The Majestic in Leeds and Piccadilly at Manchester opened in 1922 and Pavilion, Shepherd’s Bush the next year. Most had full orchestras to accompany silent films. Soon Paramount and MGM weighed in with the Plaza and Empire respectively. Associated British Cinemas (ABC) had, at its maximum, 460 cinemas with a variety of names, Regal, Rex and Savoy being favourites. The Odeon opened in 1933 and by 1939 had 255 cinemas. With a more streamlined and modern look, the Odeon showed little enthusiasm for organ interludes, shows, restaurants and ballrooms.

Beguiling architecture and the setting were all-important with mock Moorish palaces, ersatz Egyptian temples and replica Spanish haciendas. Tiered, comfortable seats and improved

picture production and content were alluring. Middle and working classes were separated only by seat position and quality, determined by the price of a ticket. Cinemas had a hypnotic hold on the British public in going out at night, dating, having fun and being able to relax after the grind of a working day and week. "Cinemas became escapist fantasies with their décor and accoutrements: sweeping marble staircases, silvery fountains, uniformed staff and glittering chandeliers - providing a real life extension of the glittering world on the screen."

Fantasy combined with escapism as George Orwell observed. "You may have three halfpence in your pocket, not a prospect in the world and only the corner of a leaky bedroom to go home to, but you can stand at the street corner, indulging in a private daydream of yourself as Clark Gable or Greta Garbo which compensates for a great deal." Fashion played its part too, a new suit on hire purchase, a new dress and maybe stylish shoes to match.

A night with the stars

Most of those out of work went to the cheaper matinee performances. During the Depression years nearly 50% of seats cost sixpence or less, and almost 40% no more than a bob. What fantastic value!

The Regal Cinema, (later Odeon), Marble Arch opened on 29 November 1928 with Al Jolson in *The Singing Fool*. The auditorium was a riot of Romanesque motifs and faux décor, complete with a Christie organ, the largest outside the USA. The film included a synchronized musical score and talking sequences that complemented *The Jazz Singer*, released the previous year, and the first with synchronized dialogue to go on general release.

By the 1930s cinema had taken giant leaps technically, and in popularity too, with productions such as *The Blue Angel* (1930), starring Marlene Dietrich, *M*, directed by Fritz Lang (1931); *42nd Street* (1933) with Bebe Daniels and Ginger Rogers; *It Happened One Night* (1934), directed by Frank Capra; *The Thirty Nine Steps*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock and starring Robert Donat (1935); *Modern Times* (1936) with Charlie Chaplin and Paulette Goddard, and *Grand Illusion* (1937), directed by Jean Renoir. A clutch of 1939 successes followed: *The Rules of the Game*, likewise directed by Jean Renoir, *The Wizard of Oz*, starring Judy Garland and *Stagecoach*, with a young John Wayne.

The BFI Screen-online website hails the 1940s as the golden age of British cinema in contrast to the 1930s, often viewed with disdain. That Alfred Hitchcock and Alexander Korda offered "sporadic oases of cinematic quality in a desert of mediocrity" is not a complete impression, or accurate. A reason for this prejudice is the so-called 'quickie quota.' Distributors and cinemas were required to fulfil quota obligations under the Cinematograph Films Act of 1927 but this meant reduced production costs and low film budgets. A replacement Act in 1938 sought to overcome this unforeseen consequence, but by this time Hollywood had virtually taken over.

Admittedly cheap and quickly shot, some popular films were produced such as *Murder in the Red Barn* (1935), *Doss House* (1933) and *The Last Journey* (1935). Most lacking was glitz and glamour but this came with Hitchcock's productions and rising stars such as Anna Neagle, Jessie Matthews, Robert Donat, John Mills, James Mason and Jack Hawkins, with comedy in demand too. Alexander Korda pitched his films at both British and USA markets, helped by American finance in the phenomenally successful *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933). A spate of films followed, including: *Things to Come* (1936), *Knight Without Armour* (1937) and *The Four Feathers* (1939).

Some films slipped through the Board's self-imposed censor, often those with happy endings. Gracie Fields starred as the ebullient mill girl in *Sing As We Go* based on the screenplay by J. B. Priestley. He intended to show a long-serving female employee, tearfully accepting her cards on closure of Greybeck Mill. On the film's release in 1934, the Mill closed without a murmur as a new spinning technique would soon enable all Mill workers to be re-employed. In her role, Gracie Fields persuades a wealthy businessman to back the new venture and led the returning workers in a chorus of the title song. The film was a huge box-office success.

Metro-Goldwyn Mayer (MGM) began to make its presence felt. *Gone with the Wind* (1939), with Clark Gable and Vivien Leigh as the fiery Scarlett O'Hara, was the top earner and most expensive at \$4.25 million dollars. Equally feisty was producer David Selznick who resigned from MGM in 1935. He insisted on the audacious words of Rhett Butler's farewell: "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn," and was allegedly fined \$5,000 dollars for using the word 'damn.'

Whilst Selznick won eight Academy Awards, MGM which called itself "The Home of Stars" was pre-eminent, promising "more stars than there are in heaven." In having Judy Garland, Jean Harlow, Greta Garbo, Myrna Loy, Joan Crawford, Katherine Hepburn, Jeanette MacDonald, Nelson Eddy, Spencer Tracy, James Stewart, Mickey Rooney, the Barrymores and Clark Gable – MGM was unrivalled. An early hit was *Grand Hotel* (1932), set in an opulent Berlin hotel. Apart from blockbuster movies, MGM also produced *Tarzan*, and *Tom and Jerry* cartoons.

The emerging 20th Century Fox was best known for musicals and prestige biographies such as *The Young Mr Lincoln* (1939), and capitalized on the talents of Shirley Temple. As with RKO, creator of the monster movie, *King Kong*, far greater success came in the 1940s. Universal focused on the sinister, with hits such as *Dracula* (1931) and *Frankenstein*, released the same year. Columbia's best director was Frank Capra who also directed *Mr Deeds Goes to Town* (1936). For sophistication and a European flavour, Paramount took some beating. It could boast: Marlene Dietrich, Carole Lombard, Claudette Colbert, Mae West and Gary Cooper. For those seeking humour, they had to look no further than W.C. Fields, the Marx Brothers and Bob Hope & Bing Crosby.

Male-dominated Warner Brothers were noted for fast-moving, gritty westerns, war films and semi-documentaries, as well as cartoons, such as *Bugs Bunny*, and musicals too. Crime was popular and gangster films, especially: *The Public Enemy* (1931), *Scarface* (1932), and *The Roaring Twenties* (1939). Tough guys like James Cagney, Humphrey Bogart and Edward G. Robinson were more than matched by Bette Davis, Barbara Stanwyck and Lauren Bacall.

Invent the future might have been the strapline for Walt Disney, creator of Mickey Mouse, Minnie Mouse, Donald Duck, Goofy and Pluto. On 21 December 1937, the first full-length animated film was premiered in Los Angeles: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. It earned almost \$1.5 million and won eight Oscars.

At its peak, Britain made only 30% of films on show and by 1930 the lure of Hollywood was irresistible as the top five companies had a virtual monopoly. Author, Winifred Holtby knew why. "British films are tame. The actors are self-conscious and wooden and settings easily recognised as the work of novices. One often hears the remark, it's a British picture; let's go somewhere else." Home-grown stars crossed the Atlantic, including Charles Laughton, Diana Wynyard, Vivien Leigh, Lesley Howard, and even "Our Gracie."

Many leading British studios had their heyday in the 1940s and beyond. In 1935 millionaire J. Arthur Rank formed a partnership with building magnate Charles Boot who named the studio

Pinewood, opening in 1936. The first film was Carol Reed's *Talk of the Devil*. Founded in 1902, Ealing, long associated with comedy, was taken over by film producer, Michael Balcon. It was here that Gracie Fields, George Formby and Stanley Holloway established their fame.

Elstree, formed in 1927, produced the silent *White Shiek* and *Madame Pompadour* in their first year. Hitchcock directed *Blackmail* at Elstree, the first British talking film. The studio gained a reputation for imaginative use of use of colour and for multi-lingual films. The film *Atlantic* was shot in English, French and German. The story, based on the ill-fated Titanic voyage, attracted the wrath of the Board of Trade in choosing a sensitive subject. Elstree in the 1930s launched the careers of Charles Laughton, Googie Withers, Ray Milland, and Stewart Granger. Its enormous output included 'quickie quota' films and by 1939 the studio had produced over 200 feature films.

In theatres, audiences were drawn by names they had read on film credits. Tyrone Guthrie, the brilliant and creative director at the Old Vic in Waterloo Road, was able to attract and retain the most talented. Recruits included Athene Seyler, Flora Robson, Robert Donat and even Laurence Olivier. In 1929, John Gielgud chose to stay at the Old Vic for ten pounds a week, rather than fifty in the West End. By 1937 Olivier could command £500 in Hollywood but chose to work under Guthrie's direction for a tenth of this figure.

Theatre was more daring too. A young Noel Coward's *The Vortex* (1924) led the vogue for entertainment, tackling topics not previously discussed in polite society. Nick Lancaster, a drug addict and "up in the air effeminate" is consumed by affection for his promiscuous mother. Shock, in its own way, was thought a means of escapism and Coward had the knack, panache and ingenuity to provide imaginative settings and musical accompaniment, such as in *Bitter Sweet* (1933).

The repartee of Will Hay & Moore Marriott, the fast patter and risqué humour of Max Miller, ukulele and banter of George Formby, and larger than life Gracie Fields, filled theatres, now appealing to a much wider audience. That many cinemas had stages too meant the best of both worlds in combining film and theatre in the same premises. The bonus was some were big too, capable of seating over 1,000 patrons.

Let's face the music and dance

Rudolph Valentino, nicknamed "*The Great Latin Lover*," and one of the first male sex symbols, mesmerised cinema audiences with his own rendition of the Argentine Tango. He appeared first as Julio in *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1921). A starring role in *The Sheik* later that year then elevated him to stardom. In 1928 Joan Crawford starred in *Our Dancing Daughters*. A musical about a flapper with a heart of gold, pining after a millionaire, gave a young Joan Crawford the opportunity to showcase her dancing talents.

This was the decade of new-found freedom and rebellious spirits. The jazz age had taken off in the USA amidst prosperity, with dancing on table tops to celebrate the good times. Even the Wall Street Crash of 1929 didn't stifle film output with a string of successes, notably *The Hollywood Revue* in the same year, *Dance, Fools, Dance* (1931) and *The Dancing Lady* (1933), a story of rags to riches. F. Scott Fitzgerald was mightily impressed. "Joan Crawford is doubtless the best example of the flapper, the girl you see in smart night clubs, gowned to the apex of sophistication, toying iced glasses with a remote, bitter expression, dancing deliciously, laughing a great deal with wide hurt eyes; young things with a talent for living."

Dancing now involved the upper body more actively and women began shaking their torsos in a dance called the Shimmy. Young people took to it, throwing their arms and legs in the air with reckless abandon, and hopping or "toddling" every step in the Foxtrot. Soon, students were doing a new dance which became known as the Toddle. The Broadway show, *Runnin' Wild* (1923) popularised the Charleston, helped by a song by that name in the musical. The Charleston was especially popular with Flappers, a precursor to the Lindy Hop in the 1930s. Banned by some dance halls for being too provocative and exuberant, if not scandalous and decadent, the Charleston was danced to ragtime music: solo, as a couple or in groups. With only four basic steps the dance was quickly learned with much gaiety, fun and frivolity.

In the early 1920s a common comment was "men won't dance with you if you wear a corset." The answer was 'corset check rooms' where young women would discard their corsets before hitting the dance floor, only to wear them home to appease unsuspecting parents. Flappers were distinguished by short bobbed hairstyles, close fitting hats, knee-length straight dresses with dropped waistlines, sleeveless chemises, silk or rayon stockings with garters, and heavy make-up, incomplete without a chique cigarette case. Long earrings and even longer beaded necklaces were de-rigueur. "Flapper Shoes" or "Sally Shoes" had Single Mary Jane or T-straps with cutouts and sparkling trims. Young men, called Sheiks, dressed in bell-bottom trousers and wore racoon coats that were all the rage. The more adventurous sported a ukulele.

The Black Bottom originated in New Orleans but had Detroit and Jacksonville connections too. It became popular in the 1920s. The theatrical show *Dinah* brought the Black Bottom dance to New York in 1924 and the Apollo Theatre in Harlem in particular. Jelly Roll Morton, jazz player and composer, wrote the 'Black Bottom Stomp.' It was a sensation and overtook the popularity of the Charleston, becoming the number one social dance. Along with the Samba and Rumba it was popular in British dance halls too.

After the Stock Market Crash this hectic and frenetic gaiety subsided into a mood of mature sophistication, immortalized in the lyrics and melodies of Noel Coward, Irving Berlin and Cole Porter. *Sophisticated Lady* by Duke Ellington (words by Irving Mills) was first played in 1933. The dancing of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers was in much more refined taste, in contrast to the frantic dances of earlier years. They made a lasting impression in the 1934 Film, *The Gay Divorcee*. The original title was *The Gay Divorce* but the Hays Office, a moral censor, insisted on the name change. They conceded celebration for a divorcee but it would be unseemly to apply this to the act of divorce itself.

The Regent Dance Hall in Brighton opened in December 1923. Constructed on the roof of the Regent Cinema, with an imposing arched superstructure, it was originally intended to house a roof garden. It was decorated in a 'jazz' style. Zigzag and square patterns, painted in strong primary colours, were illuminated by giant lanterns in a variety of shapes with multi-coloured lights. The dance hall made a vivid impression. The Brighton Herald described it as "jazz in its highest development." On entering it gave the "effect of a rocket bursting in one's face. The hall is like an explosion of all the primary and secondary colours, flung hither and thither in a restless, intersecting criss-cross of blazing light."

The dance hall could accommodate 1,500 dancers on a special sprung floor, reputed by the promoters to be the finest in the world. The Regent hosted afternoon tea dances, evening dances, cabaret, dancing competitions and special balls. One could also learn to dance at the Regent which had a staff of "expert professional dancing partners for both sexes."

The Astoria in Charing Cross Road, converted from an old pickle factory, opened its doors on 12th January 1927 with the film, *Triumph of the Rat*. The auditorium comprised stalls and one circle and could seat 2,000 people. The basement housed a large octagonal shaped ballroom with a central ballroom and gallery that could accommodate 1,000 people. One year later the Astoria was taken over by Gaumont, along with 15 other theatres.

Hammersmith Palais was built in a Chinese style on the site of a former tram station and then ice rink. Elaborate decorations featured lacquered columns, fretwork and a pagoda roof with silk lanterns. In the centre of an expensive sprung dance floor of Canadian maple was a model mountain, with a replica Chinese village and a fountain. At each end was a low-rise bandstand encased in glass, allowing two bands to play alternate numbers. With a restaurant and café, the Palais was considered to be the largest and most luxurious establishment of its kind in Europe. What was called The Hammersmith Palais de Danse opened on 28 November 1919. During the Depression years, the Palais site was converted into an ice-rink, opening on 30 December 1929. The London Lions ice hockey team used it as their base but the skating craze proved short-lived. By late 1934 the ice-rink reverted back to a dance hall.

Dance band leaders of the day all played their part in the development of dance; none more than Victor Silvester. He formed his orchestra in 1935, after years of difficulty in trying to find records suitable for dancing. Soon he was producing his own and secured a contract with the BBC, playing on the radio for many years. Silvester invented the phrase 'strict tempo', and played popular tunes with a consistent beat, making timing much easier for modest dancers. He became a household name and popularised modern ballroom dancing as he was reaching a massive audience. By 1939 Victor Silvester was giving dancing lessons on a regular radio slot. His contribution to the development of ballroom dancing was immense.

By the 1930s, famous dance band leaders such as Jack Hylton, Billy Cotton, Harry Leader and Henry Hall (Got to Dance My Way to Heaven) were playing at the Regent. The dance hall soon became one of the leading social venues in Brighton. Other notable bands playing at premier dance halls included Geraldo and Bert Ambrose who discovered Vera Lynn. She sang with the band from 1937.

New kids on the block

The easy listening of a young conductor, composer, violinist and pianist became immensely popular with his trademark "cascading strings." Mantovani and the Tipica Orchestra toured extensively with major recordings between 1932 and 1936. "Red Sails in the Sunset" and "Serenade to the Night" were USA hits in 1935 and 1936 respectively. Columbia changed his billing to Mantovani & His Orchestra.

Meanwhile, in Kansas City in the mid-1930s, pianist Count Basie began building an all-star big band, featuring a new saxophonist, Lester Young, with a vibrant and bluesy vein of jazz in the clubs of the Midwest. Benny Goodman, with a large radio following, bought 36 arrangements by Fletcher Henderson in 1934, providing the American public with a real taste of black music. Added to this eclectic mix were Artie Shaw, Woody Herman and Charlie Parker. By the end of the 1930s, swing and improvisation were in vogue with Duke Ellington prominent, joined soon by bebop music and the lilting voice of Billie Holliday.

The archetypal cockney musical *Me and My Girl* was a big hit for Noel Gay at the end of the 1930s. Reginald Armitage was an organist at Wakefield Cathedral when he began writing for Charlot revues in 1926 and assumed the professional name Noel Gay, taken from the names

of Noël Coward and star Maisie Gay. *Me and My Girl* opened at the Victoria Place in London in 1937. It starred Lupino Lane as cockney Bill Snibson who inherits an earldom but refuses to leave his cockney girlfriend behind.

The big dance number, *The Lambeth Walk*, became the rage in dance halls across Britain as did another hit song, *The Sun has Got His Hat On*. Despite great success, Gay wrote few other musicals and concentrated on writing hit songs including '*Leaning on a Lamp Post*' for George Formby. In 1985, Gay's son Richard revived *Me and My Girl*, with Robert Lindsay and Emma Thompson in the lead roles. It was an even greater success than the original and ran for eight years.

In contrast to the slick, sophisticated American musicals of the 1930s, Britain had created the 'nostalgia' musical. In *Bitter Sweet*, Noël Coward abandoned the witty sophistication of the 1920s for a tribute to the romantic Viennese operettas of his youth. *Bitter Sweet* is the story of an 18-year-old girl who elopes to Vienna with her music teacher. The theatre production in London starred American Peggy Wood and George Metaxa whilst, on Broadway, Evelyn Laye played the leading role to much acclaim. The 1933 film was to make a star of Anna Neagle. The inventive brilliance of Coward's 1931 musical *Cavalcade* was a huge pageant celebration of major events in British history, shown through the experience of an ordinary family.

Noël Coward was at his creative peak in the 1930s, turning out a steady stream of hit songs, revues, comedies and dramas. He made memorable appearances on Broadway in two of his finest comedies, *Private Lives* (1930) and *Design For Living* (1933). Coward's London stage spectacle *Cavalcade* (1931) was considered "too British" for Broadway, but a lavish Hollywood screen adaptation won the Academy Award for Best Picture in 1933. His songs and plays made him the only Englishman to conquer Broadway during this period. Transcontinental stage hits in this decade included three revues: *The Third Little Show* (1931), featuring "Mad Dogs and Englishmen," *Tonight at 8.30* starring Gertrude Lawrence, and *Set to Music* (1939) with Bea Lillie singing Coward's "I've Been to A Maaaaarvelous Party."

Ivor Novello composed, wrote and starred in several unashamedly popular escapist musicals with flamboyantly romantic music and stories. "Nobody walks through his own tosh with quite the confidence of Ivor Novello" one critic noted. *Glamorous Night*, *Careless Rapture* and *The Dancing Years* were big budget extravaganzas devised by Novello. To show off the technology of the Drury Lane stage, he included spectacular scenes, including earthquakes and sinking ships. Novello was an accomplished chorister and began writing songs while still at school. He was known as 'the Welsh prodigy' after his song *Keep the Home Fires Burning* became one of the most popular songs of World War 2. It eventually earned him £15,000.

In recent decades his fame has often been overshadowed by Noël Coward. They were in fact friends. In 1927 Novello played the lead in what proved to be one of Coward's few failures, *Sirocco*. With youthful good looks, Novello was a natural choice for the cinema and became Britain's first great silent film star, hailed as 'the new Valentino'. He accepted more sinister film roles too, notably as the mysterious tenant in Hitchcock's *The Lodge*.

Composers and lyricists such as Berlin, Kern, the Gershwins, Rodgers and Hart and Porter were in the right place at the right time as New York became the mecca of music publishing. Tin Pan Alley, around 28th Street, between 5th Avenue and Broadway, was the place to get noticed and where new songs were played and sold to publishers. Britain could not compete with the range, quality, exuberance and volume of what seemed to be non-stop successes.

Two new kids on the block were two prodigiously talented brothers, George and Ira Gershwin. *Strike up the Band* (1930) was a political satire that had the United States and Switzerland go to war over high chocolate tariffs. The jaunty title march and ballad "*I've Got a Crush on You*" became a favourite. *Girl Crazy*, in the same year, was about a rich New York playboy who falls in love with an Arizona cowgirl. The show, starring Ginger Rogers, was really stolen by a stenographer from Queens, Ethel Merman. With a strong, vibrant and earthy voice, she made a sensational Broadway debut, belting out "*Sam and Delilah*" and "*I Got Rhythm*."

George & Ira Gershwin teamed up with playwright DuBose Heyward to adapt *Porgy*, a novel and hit play, into the musical *Porgy and Bess*. The story of poor blacks in dockside tenements of Charleston had passion, infidelity, rape and heartbreak - all the makings of grand opera. George Gershwin's score offered a singular blend of classical, popular and jazz styles that was possible only on Broadway. Most critics and theatre goers were less than enthusiastic about this production in the depression era. *Porgy and Bess* was a financial failure but how times change. The musical had acclaimed Broadway revivals in 1942, 1952, 1976 and even 1985, becoming the first Broadway musical to be accepted by The Metropolitan Opera Company, fifty years after the first performances. Deserved recognition and fame had finally arrived!

George Gershwin was working in Hollywood when he died from a brain tumor in 1937 at the age of 36. We can only imagine what he might have contributed to musical theatre and film had he lived say into his eighties. Although heartbroken, Ira worked on many important stage productions over the next two decades.

In the early 1930s, after a song was cut, Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart arranged for it to be recorded independently. "*Blue Moon*" out-sold any song they had written for the screen. The duo returned to Broadway, writing a string of musical comedy hits, liberally sprinkled with wonderful songs and melodies. In *On Your Toes* (1936), Ray Bolger is a music professor, entangled in a world of classical ballet and dance. The musical is best remembered for the "*Slaughter On Tenth Avenue Ballet*" and score boasting, "*There's a Small Hotel*" and "*Its Got to Be Love*."

Babes In Arms (1937) has stage struck teenagers putting on a show to raise money for their impoverished vaudeville parents. Memorable songs include "*My Funny Valentine*," "*Where or When*" and "*The Lady is a Tramp*." *I'd Rather Be Right*, a political satire in the same year, starred George M. Cohan as a singing and dancing President Franklin D. Roosevelt, with the instantly recognisable song "*Have You Met Miss Jones?*" The next production, *The Boys From Syracuse* (1938), was an adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*. It has two sets of long-lost identical twins caught up in hilarious identity mix-ups in ancient Greece. A superb score has "*Sing for Your Supper*" and "*Falling in Love*."

Jerome Kern had several hits in the 1930s. Otto Harbach, the mentor of Oscar Hammerstein II, provided the book and lyrics for *The Cat and the Fiddle* (1931). A romantic operetta with a contemporary setting and score, the story involves two music students (one classical and one jazz) who love each other but cannot abide each other's compositions. The sweeping passion of "*The Night Was Made for Love*" alternates with jazzier numbers like "*She Didn't Say Yes*."

Several months later, Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II came up with another modern operetta, *Music in the Air* (1932). It is about a small town school teacher confronting the cynical ways of modern show business and notable for the hit song, "*I've Told Ev'ry Little Star*." The next year, Kern collaborated with Harbach on a musical comedy *Roberta* (1933). It tells the tale of an American football player who finds love and success when he inherits his aunt's dress shop

in Paris. Most critics dismissed *Roberta* as a bore but, fuelled by the success of "*Smoke Gets in Your Eyes*," the show had a profitable run. Their last Broadway collaboration was *Very Warm for May* (1939), a backstage love story featuring the rapturous "*All the Things You Are*."

Cole Porter had more hit Broadway musicals in the 1930s than any other songwriter. His wry perspective on high society delighted theatregoers, feeding their fantasies of a carefree life in the midst of the Great Depression that included a more liberal attitude towards sex. *The New Yorkers* (1930) has Jimmy Durante as a bootlegger and nightclub owner romancing a wealthy socialite. The score includes the controversial "*Love for Sale*," in which a prostitute sings of walking the streets. Whilst banned from airplay, the song still became a popular hit.

In *Gay Divorcée* (1932) Fred Astaire, acclaimed for his dancing, possessed a flawless instinct for delivering a lyric. Radio made his recording of Porter's sensual "*Night and Day*." It was to be Astaire's last appearance on Broadway as soon he formed an iconic dance partnership with Ginger Rogers in Hollywood. In the next six years they made 10 films with RKO.

Anything Goes (1934) was the definitive 1930s musical comedy but had a rocky gestation in the Depression. Veteran producer Vinton Freedley signed up William Gaxton, Victor Moore and Ethel Merman for the cast and convinced Porter to write the score. With this strong cast, Freedley raised the finance for a tale of mistaken identities and unlikely romance aboard a luxury liner. The score includes "*I Get A Kick Out Of You*" and "*You're The Top*." *Jubilee* came next (1935), an affectionate send-up of British royalty that introduced Porter's memorable "*Begin the Beguine*."

In spite of the originality of Noël Coward and Ivor Novello, and a clutch of rising stars, Britain could not compete with Broadway for sheer entertainment and its unprecedented heights of creativity, production quality and popularity, but times were changing. Radio began to offer all-star and free variety entertainment, seven nights a week. Revenues would be hit hard so shows started to go off-Broadway. The real answer lay in making films too. When *Roberta* failed in 1933, Kern and Hammerstein sought their future in the American West. When Kern died in 1946, Hammerstein had already begun to forge a new collaboration with the highly talented Richard Rogers. The rest, as they say, is history.

Let's Face the Music and Dance, was written in 1936 by Irving Berlin for the film *Follow the Fleet*, starring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. Facing producers and show backers was a far greater issue than audience reaction and critics. The creators of these hit musicals received a fraction of box office receipts, with little say on how their material was to be used. Rogers recalls his Broadway debut in 1920 and rejection, without his knowledge, of a score he wrote with Lorenz Hart for the show, *Poor Little Ritz Girl*. It was deeply wounding and indelible. He still spoke of the "grinding pain of disappointment" fifty years later. His credo was never sell your copyright; it is like selling your birthright. It was a wise and profitable decision.

The meteoric rise of the film industry, musicals and theatre production in the 1930s, especially in the USA, had a profound effect on the popularity of entertainment and dancing too. It is of little surprise that the entire industry took off once again in spectacular style post-war. Yet memorable songs, films and productions of the 1930s stay in the mind forever, even for baby-boomers, such is their enduring appeal.