

The End of The Tour: It's Always Fair Weather

Chuck Pickerill



Kid Mariacchi: Where do you have to go?

Ted Riley: Tim's Bar on Third Avenue. It's a long way from here.

Kid Mariacchi: You're nuts. Its ten minutes.

Ted Riley: No, it's ten years.

In September 1955 America was at the apex of Mid-Century culture. The end of World War II was a decade old and had given way to the Cold War with communism. Teens were hooked on Rock N' Roll spinning records of Bill Hayley & His Comets, Chuck Berry, and Fats Domino. The Dodgers were on their way to winning their only World Series for their adoring fans in Brooklyn. Three years later along with their cross town rival Giants they would leave New York for the West Coast. Opening in theatres around this time was another New York story. One that would touch on the optimism at the end of the war and how three of its soldiers who would be forever linked yet changed in its aftermath.

"It's Always Fair Weather" is considered one of the last of MGM's dance oriented musicals. It was also the final project that Gene Kelly would work with one of his long time collaborators Stanley Donen, Originally conceived as a sequel to "On the Town" the creative team aimed to reunite Kelly with his co-stars from the film. However, the chief of MGM production Dore

Schary saw it differently. Schary viewed Frank Sinatra as too difficult to work with and thought Jules Munshin unpopular with current audiences. As production head, Schary favored more social conscious dramas as opposed to musicals and heartwarming family pictures that had been the studio's trademark in the past. Dancer Dan Dailey along with choreographer Michael Kidd would end up being cast in the two roles opposite Kelly.



The story centered on three ex-GIs at the end of their World War II duties. The men celebrate by knocking back a few at their favorite New York watering hole Tim's Bar. Having survived the war their future is ahead of them and the optimism flows as easy as the drinks go down. They pledge eternal friendship to each other

by making a pact to reunite at the same bar in ten years. A brilliant montage sequence shows the passing of the ten years in the lives of the soldiers and predictably their lives go in different directions than they expected. Ted Riley (Kelly) has visions of becoming a lawyer, but is now working with various underworld characters as a boxing promoter and gambler. Doug Hallerton (Dailey) dreamed of being a painter, but works a high stress career in advertising while his neglected marriage is crumbling. Angie Valentine's (Kidd) goal of becoming a gourmet chef has devolved into running a hamburger stand upstate which he calls "The Cordon Bleu". Angie has been just as busy in the bedroom as the kitchen building a large family with his wife.

The soldiers keep their promise and the reunion happens, but it is quickly clear that much has changed over those ten years. The men realize they have little in common as well as little tolerance for each



other's company. These feelings are expressed in each character's mind during the "I Shouldn't Have Come" musical number set over lunch at an upscale New York restaurant. The number is sung to the tune of "The Blue Danube". At lunch the group runs into some of Hallerton's advertising people that includes the alluring Jackie Leighton (Cyd Charisse) who Riley takes an

immediate interest in. Leighton sees an opportunity in the reunion of the soldiers and comes up with the idea of reuniting the three men on an evening TV show. The men are not informed of this scheme and Leighton is oblivious to the presence of dislike between the three of them.



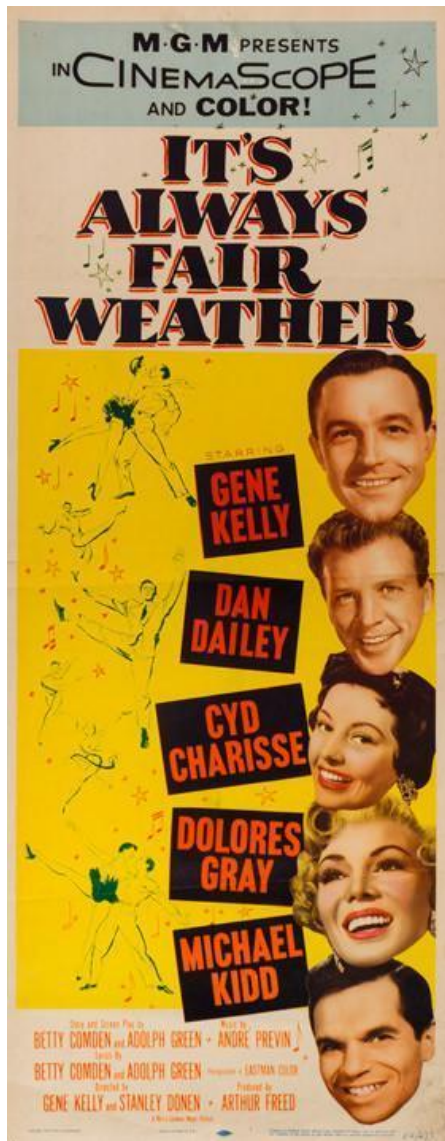
Musicals made during this era generally focused on upbeat themes with any conflict happily resolved by the closing credits. “It’s Always Fair Weather” flips the

script on this convention by emphasizing a downbeat aspect of the post war period. The joy and optimism the soldiers feel at the end of the war is immediately wiped away as their lives unfold quite different than they imagined. When they reunite at Tim’s Bar they can’t recapture that moment in time as well as the emotions they felt on that special night. Their lives have moved on and there is a sense of loss embodied in each character. This may have been a situation familiar to many a veteran during the time period. For many Americans the war was a distant memory with the country moving on to a post war boom. Some vets would find success in this boom while others would have to settle for a little less. Like in the film, the only thing that bonded these individuals were those service years when survival was considered success and tomorrow was never promised.

Offsetting this more down beat theme are spectacular and some even joyful musical sequences. The happiness of the soldiers for the end of their service is expressed in “The Binge” musical number. Riley, Hallerton and Valentine joyfully dance through the streets of New York on taxi cabs and use trash can lids for tap shoes on their way to Tim’s Bar. Jackie Leighton impresses Riley with her boxing knowledge at Stillman’s Gym in the musical number



“Baby You Knock Me Out”. While Charisse’s singing voice is dubbed by Carol Richards, her dancing skills are on full display. As good as any sequence Charisse ever filmed for MGM. Hallerton drunkenly laments his regret for his corporate life with the “Situation-Wise” number while Riley after refusing to fix a fight evades gangsters on roller skates. His self-esteem has been lifted by Leighton’s affection and he taps dances as he skates in “I Like Myself”.



All of this leads up to the big TV reunion at the Fontainbleu which all three men attend unaware they are to be called up on stage as the main attraction. The segment bombs as the men do not share the enthusiasm of the perky host. As the men are walking off the stage the gangsters that were chasing Riley enter the club. The head racketeer Charles Culloran admits his plan to fix the fight on live television. Realizing what has happened Culloran takes a swing at Riley and a brawl ensues. Hallerton & Valentine jump in to help their old war buddy and the trio is able to hold off Culloran’s thugs until the police arrives. To celebrate the men adjourn to Tim’s Bar and happily reminisce. The triumphant brawl has brought the three men back together, but as they depart no plans are made for a future reunion.

Will the men ever see each other again? The viewer is left to ponder this, but the melancholy feeling is they will not. Despite receiving good reviews the film failed to make its money back. Kelly and Donen’s friendship also ended as a result of creative differences during filming. However, looking back today its themes remain interesting and still resonate today. The stress of corporate life remains high, the future is not certain, and love can redeem our self-esteem. However, as different people come into and go out of our lives we may still find ourselves looking back nostalgically on a certain time or place. Moments and feelings we will never recapture no matter how many times we try. Like in “It’s Always Fair Weather” you can go back to Tim’s Bar again, but you will find a different reflection of yourself in the bottom of the glass.