

Centennial Summer

In 1944, *Meet Me in St. Louis* captivated moviegoers the world over. The unbridled nostalgia for a simpler time was very appealing in the turbulent war years. Two years later, Twentieth Century-Fox made its own film to appeal to that same audience – *Centennial Summer*. With an excellent screenplay by Michael Kanin and elegant and stylish direction by Otto Preminger, *Centennial Summer* takes a colorful, fun and even touching look at the 1876 Philadelphia Exposition and one family's trials and tribulations and follies and foibles. Like *Meet Me in St. Louis*, *Centennial Summer* was a love letter to a by-gone era and like *Meet Me in St. Louis*, *Centennial Summer* was a musical.

A wonderful cast was assembled, including two stunningly beautiful young women, Linda Darnell and Jeanne Crain (both barely into their twenties), along with Cornel Wilde, Walter Brennan, Dorothy Gish and William Eythe. Over the course of its 102 minutes, we get sibling rivalry (for the affections of Frenchman Wilde), a visiting aunt from Paris (lovely Constance Bennett), a father who's a dreamer/inventor (Brennan, simply wonderful in this role as is Dorothy Gish as his wife), comedy (some of the interplay between rival sisters Darnell and Crain is really fun to watch and a costume ball with multiple Napoleans is very funny), the bumpy road to love (Wilde and Eythe are the suitors, both impossibly handsome and charming), gorgeous settings and costumes, unbelievably lush Technicolor photography (by Ernest Palmer) and, of course, some wonderful musical numbers by the brilliant composer Jerome Kern and lyricists Leo Robin, Oscar Hammerstein

and E.Y. Harburg. In the end, everyone ends up where they want to be and happy endings abound.

Centennial Summer was Jerome Kern's final score – he died in November of 1945 at sixty years of age, a great loss to the world of musical theatre and film. At the time of his death, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer was making a film loosely based on his life (*Till the Clouds Roll By*) and he'd just begun work on a new musical, *Annie Get Your Gun* (Irving Berlin would, of course, go on to write that score). Kern's contribution to musical theatre and film was extraordinary, from the game-changing, *Showboat*, to *Music in the Air*, *Roberta*, *Very Warm for May*, and his extraordinary work in Hollywood, including scores for *Swing Time*, *You Were Never Lovelier*, *Cover Girl* and *Can't Help Singing*. His list of classic songs is endless and astonishing, some of the most performed songs in the history of popular music.

In *Centennial Summer*, Kern's music could not have been in better hands than that of Fox's music director extraordinaire, Alfred Newman, who also adapted the beautiful underscore for the film. The songs are charmers and several went on to become staples of the Great American Songbook – "Up with the Lark," "All Through the Day" and "In Love in Vain." There is also a magical specialty number called "Cinderella Sue" performed by Avon Long that is one of the highlights of the movie. In a fitting tribute, Fox had the main title read: *Jerome Kern's Centennial Summer*.

At the time of its release, *Centennial Summer* was unfairly and un-

favorably compared to *Meet Me in St. Louis* by critics of the day, but *Centennial Summer* is not that film and can stand proudly on its own all these years later. It did receive two Academy Award nominations, both in the music category – for Best Music, Scoring of a Motion Picture for Alfred Newman, and Best Music, Original Song for "All Through the Day" by Kern and Hammerstein – it lost both, but it was a very competitive year.

None of the stars of *Centennial Summer* did their own singing. Jeanne Crain was dubbed by Louanne Hogan, Linda Darnell was dubbed by Kay St. Germain Wells, Cornel Wilde was dubbed by Ben Gage and William Eythe was dubbed by David Street.

This is the official world premiere release of the complete *Centennial Summer*, transferred from the 1/4" archival elements in the Twentieth Century-Fox vaults and lovingly restored by Mike Matesino. It just doesn't get better than Jerome Kern, Leo Robin, Oscar Hammerstein, E.Y. Harburg and, of course, Alfred Newman. It is a thrill to bring this underappreciated musical to CD and we hope you enjoy this delightful, tuneful and beautiful score, sounding incredible over sixty years later.

— Bruce Kimmel