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## Meet Me in St. Louis (BFI Film Classics)

*Gerald Kaufman*

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#1972522 in Books British Film Institute 1994-12-27 2008-01-22Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 7.50 x .25 x 5.251, .31 #File Name: 085170501471 pages | File size: 52.Mb

**Gerald Kaufman : Meet Me in St. Louis (BFI Film Classics)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Meet Me in St. Louis (BFI Film Classics):

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Great film...By Mark D. Wood... and the book is nice to have as a companion piece. Really??? 8 more words needed for this too... I wont do any more reviews if I have to be edited!0 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Great Guide To Minnelli's Classic Musical!By Thomas MbertaA must have for "Meet Me In St. Louis" fans! Unusually satisfying in its text and presentation. GERALD KAUFMAN GETS IT!21 of 25 people found the following review helpful. Lovers of Minnelli, Judy and this film: look elsewhere.By darragh o'donoghueRarely has a book made me so HOT with ANGER. Gerald Kaufman's monograph on Vincente

Minnelli's extraordinary 1944 musical purports to be a celebration of a great film and its multi-talented director. Not so. Despite proving a lifelong familiarity with Minnelli's work, despite his intimate knowledge of Minnelli's idiosyncratic style, his mastery of decor, camerawork and choreography, Kaufman can still write: 'I never deluded myself that he was a great director, up in the pantheon with Eisenstein and Renoir'. And why, may we ask, does Minnelli merit less regard than a Stalinist stooge? 'Minnelli was not a great director because he had nothing to say'. WHAT????!! Kaufman either believes this, and so shouldn't be writing this book; or he doesn't, but has an inferiority complex about the relative cultural worth of the musical, and definitely shouldn't be writing it. I don't know what he expects his cinema to 'say' - presumably deal with heavyweight subjects such as social deprivation, war crimes or factory life. When it comes to movies 'saying' anything, I'm with Sam Goldwyn; 'If you have a message, use Western Union'. Minnelli's style - which Kaufman recognises but misunderstands, characterising it as 'ostentatious' and 'glossy' - is so meticulously orchestrated because it expresses the characters' inner lives, their joys, dreams, desires, fantasies, fears (Minnelli himself said his mises-en-scenes were purposely designed to invade the unconscious of the audience, which Kaufman notes but doesn't seem to understand). He accuses the film of feel-good escapism, excising any of the less utopian aspects of the source material. But it is in Minnelli's style that these repressed elements are visualised. Kaufman doesn't seem to have read Thomas Elsaesser's or Geoffrey Nowell-Smith's pioneering articles on Minnelli's use of melodrama, the way he used his style of 'excess' (of colour, decor, music etc.) to give expression to those darker elements euphemised in the scripts. How can a film, even one glowing with cheer as 'Meet Me in St. Louis', with the terrifying Hallowe'en sequence, in which a young girl in a happy family spies on a chilly, loveless marriage; with repeated references to death and the possibilities of sexual unfulfilment; with its undermining the security of unchanging family life with the intrusions of modernity; with its father who must repress his professional (in a sense, 'creative') capabilities; how can such a film be called simply 'feel-good', untrue to life? As Oscar Wilde suggested: 'behind the perfection of a man's style, must lie the passion of a man's soul'. Minnelli's soul BURNS. Kaufman's wilful blindness is of a piece with the whole book. He deliberately misinterprets the auteur theory, before going on to prove it by noting the continuities throughout Minnelli's career, despite working in different genres and as a director-for-hire. He fails to recognise 'A Star Is Born' as one of the most overpowering experiences in cinema (sacrilege!!). There is a distastefully censorious tone in his account of Judy Garland's 'erratic behaviour' on set, like a disapproving headmaster correcting an errant schoolgirl, failing to note the minor fact that MGM had pumped her full of drugs since she was a child to maximise her utility value. He concludes with a hectoring speech about society's modern ills (Kaufman's day-job is as Member of Parliament for the ruling New Labour government). Students will find this book interesting enough in a plodding way, as Kaufman laboriously and pompously recounts the film's troubled production from his undigested study of MGM records (dull reams of which are quoted verbatim). But there is one paragraph in this book quoted from Joseph Andrew Casper's 'Vincente Minnelli and the Film Musical', which contains more critical insight and empathy than the whole of this 70-page monograph. For Minnelli fans and lovers of the musical THAT sounds like the book to get.

In "Meet Me in St Louis", one of the most popular MGM musicals, Judy Garland stars as the classic American teenager. For this book, Gerald Kaufman interviewed many of the stars. This text captures the essence of Miss Garland's performance and the machinations of the legendary MGM studios.

About the Author Gerald Kaufman is Member of Parliament for Manchester Gorton. He is a film critic and writes extensively on cinema, theater, television, and politics. He is the author of My Life in the Silver Screen.