

The hit musical "singin' in the

[Entertainment](#), [Movie](#)



The hit musical " Singin' in the Rain" may possibly be one of if not the greatest musicals of all time. With its tale of the film world of the mid 1920's and its creative underlining love story between Don Lockwood (Gene Kelly) and Kathy Selden (Debbie Reynolds), it provokes the interest of someone who would not generally be attracted to a musical. It is a classic masterpiece that set the standards that musical films of today will be judged by. It is a classic performance by the great Gene Kelly and displays outstanding performances by Debbie Reynolds and Donald O'Connor. As well as starring in this brilliant movie, Gene Kelly teams up with Stanley Donen to make their mark in film history. In my opinion, what set the stage for the level of entertainment that this movie contains is the opening scene. The opening scene set the role of sarcasm in the movie and gave the movie an immediate sense of humor. Four individual parts of movie making come together in this film to create a dynamic opening sequence. The basic principles of sound, editing, mise en scene, and cinematography collectively give this opening sequence a memorable quality that is without match. The opening of Singin' in the Rain takes place at the opening of the new movie " The Royal Rascal" starring Don Lockwood and Lena Lamont. There are famous people all around and their fans are loving every second of it. The fans' faces are full of joy and awe as their favorite actors and actresses enter the large building that will soon be showing the new movie. Soon, the two people that everyone in Hollywood is dying to see, appear in their stretched Rolls Royce and bring the crowd to its feet. As Lockwood and Lamont exit their luxurious ride they are received lovingly by everyone. They walk to the front of the building and are introduced to the crowd. Then the question is posed to Mr.

Lockwood, " How did it all begin?" The answering of this question is what my paper will explain. I will attempt to break down the opening scene and show how it all started. By using tools of film such as sound, editing, mise en scene, and cinematography, this paper will show how the scene was made as well. Mise en scene played an important role in this movie as with any other movie. The properties of mise en scene were fully effective in the beginning flashback scene. At the beginning of Don Lockwood's flashback he states that he learned everything from his mother and father and that they sent him to the best dancing schools. He flashes back to show that he actually just danced in dirty pool halls as a little kid with his friend Cosmo. The flashback is precise in terms of mise en scene. The clothes that Don wears are that of the early 1900's. The setting is a dingy pool hall with old men playing and drinking which gives the feeling that the area was poor. That gives more credit to Don because it shows he really wasn't trained in dancing schools and actually learned on his own. The room was extremely dim and Don and Cosmo were centered in the foreground of the shot. Another example of mise en scene is the second segment of the flashback. A young Don and Cosmo sneak into the movie theater to see a horror movie that they would normally not be able to see. The setting is outside an early 20th century theater. In front of the theater are large cut-outs of the movies that are playing there. They are obviously of that time because they are painted, they are not pictures as the ones of today are. The youngsters are also dressed in early 1900's style clothing. The third segment of the flashback is inside a tavern of most likely the 1920's. The place looks very low class and there are men of all ages drinking and playing cards in the

background. The costuming in this segment is very well done as well. Don and Cosmo, who now appear to be in their early twenties are wearing suspenders and playing instruments in the right side of the shot. The fourth segment shows exactly how diverse Don and Cosmo really are. In this segment they are on stage dressed as clowns and putting on a show for an unknown audience. They use props such as canes that spray water and wind up hosing each other down with there Super-Soaker like canes. They appear on center stage but the viewer can still see props that belong to the stage in the background. The final stage of the flashback before they reach Hollywood is an interesting scene. In this scene the mise en scene is constantly changing. Cosmo and Don are performing but the background is constantly changing. The background shows different cities and towns to express the fact that the two of them have traveled far and wide doing their acts. They are superimposed over this background wearing checkered suits that show up very well over the constantly changing background. Another very important part of this movie is the sound. Throughout the flashback the shots keep returning to Don Lockwood and he sets up the next scene by telling the complete opposite. For instance he says that his motto is "Dignity, always dignity." Immediately following this statement the flashback shows his actual childhood and shows him being embarrassed in numerous ways. He also talks over parts of the flashback to give details of how things were (or weren't for that matter). He also says that his parents brought him up on the " classics" (films) but in actuality he was sneaking into horror movies at a young age. He also exaggerates the truth when he says that Cosmo and himself did the best show halls when they were really dancing in

bars. The musical segment of the flashback was also a wonderful addition. Don and Cosmo are shown giving a fabulous dance routine but unfortunately the fans didn't feel it was all that great. The cinematography in this classic was another plus although it there was not too much of it. In some movies it seems that the camera movements don't flow through the film while this one did. Throughout the flashback there were basically only long and medium shots. For instance, during the second segment of the flashback where Don and Cosmo sneak into the theater, there is some significant camera work. The shot begins with a medium shot of the billboard that is advertising the horror movie and then zooms out to welcome the entrance of the boys. Then the camera slowly pans to the right to show the kids duck under the ticket clerk's window and then into the theater. There is little to the cinematography in the third segment as well. The camera starts out with a long shot on the left side of the screen and then pans over to the right to see an older Don and Cosmo playing their instruments. The most significant part of the cinematography in this scene is that in only the scene before, Don and Cosmo were a good ten to fifteen years younger. The way the camera moves added somewhat of a surprise and welcomed the fact that the two boys had finally grown up. In the fourth scene the camera does not move at all the camera being stationary would lead one to believe that the view is of an audience member. The fifth scene has the camera staying focused on the center of the screen as a superimposed Don and Cosmo dance in front of a constantly changing background. After the background has dissolved into its final setting the camera stays in a long focus constantly. The camera now follows Cosmo and Don as they do their dance scene. The camera pans left

and right to follow their every movement and to keep them centered in the middle of the screen. Editing has an enormous effect on this classic musical. The flashback scene consists mostly of cuts and dissolves. There must not have been much film on the cutting room floor because many scenes look as if they were shot in one take. The majority of editing is done with dissolving one picture into another. Too much cutting can ruin a film but there was so little in this segment that it makes the movie flow a lot better. If the flashback scene had used cuts instead of the method of dissolve, this scene could not have been as effective as it was. The first scene starts the flashback. There is a dissolve of a close-up of Gene Kelly's face in front of the theater and into a memory of his youth at a pool hall. There is a moment of action where Don and Cosmo get escorted out and then the scene dissolves into scene two (the kids trying to sneak into the theater). The previous scene dissolves into a poster that is advertising a horror movie. We see the two boys sneak into the theater and the camera again dissolves, this time back to Gene Kelly. There is a close-up of him speaking and then another dissolve into the bar scene. The camera pans over to see Don playing a violin and Cosmo playing the piano. They play for a short time and then the camera dissolves into a sign that says "Amateur Night." This is the beginning of the fourth scene. The picture is now cut and the next shot is of Don and Cosmo dancing and performing one of their routines as clowns. After a brief time of viewing this the camera dissolves into a superimposed Cosmo and Don dancing in front of a changing background. The changing background is a series of shots of different cities. Each shot is separated by a cut. Finally the camera dissolves into the original background that the superimposed duo

were taken from. They proceed to dance for a couple of minutes and when they are finished there is no reaction. There is a cut and we see a point-of-view shot in terms of Don and Cosmo to see that the audience is booing. This is the last scene before they actually get to Hollywood. Singin' in the Rain is the musical that all other musicals should be judged by. It tells a story that only others had dreamed of telling. Donald O'Connor, Debbie Reynolds and the great Gene Kelly help give one of the greatest performances of all times in a musical. With the help of superb editing, sound, mise en scene, and cinematography, this film cannot be topped. The first scene of the movie creates an atmosphere that helps the viewer know that he/she will enjoy this wonderful classic. Throughout the movie there are surprises and fun that makes this a movie that people will want to watch again and again. Gene Kelly said it best when he said, "Dignity, always dignity." That is what this movie has from beginning to end, dignity. The best thing we could possibly do is forget about our worries and just start Singin' in the Rain. Courtesy of Chew (1995) U. of Maryland