

Aus: http://www.youtube.com/artist/Fred_Astaire?gl=US#
2011-10-10

Artist Biography

Dancer, actor, and singer Fred Astaire worked steadily in various entertainment media during nine decades of the 20th century. The most celebrated dancer in the history of film, with appearances in 31 movie musicals between 1933 and 1968 (and a special Academy Award in recognition of his accomplishments in them), Astaire also danced on-stage and on television (garnering two Emmy Awards in the process), and he even treated listening audiences to his accomplished tap dancing on records and on his own radio series. He appeared in another eight non-musical feature films and on numerous television programs, resulting in an Academy Award nomination and a third Emmy Award as an actor. His light tenor voice and smooth, conversational phrasing made him an ideal interpreter for the major songwriters of his era, and he introduced dozens of pop standards, many of them written expressly for him, by such composers as Harold Arlen, Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, Jerome Kern, Burton Lane, Frank Loesser, Johnny Mercer, Cole Porter, Arthur Schwartz, Harry Warren, and Vincent Youmans. Although his efforts as a dancer necessarily overshadowed his purely musical work, he made hundreds of recordings over a period of more than 50 years, resulting in several major hits.

Astaire's long career breaks down neatly into four major phases. From 1905 to 1917, he and his sister Adele Astaire (b. Sep 10, 1897; d. Jan 25, 1981) danced and sang as the team of Fred and Adele Astaire in vaudeville. From 1917 to 1933, Astaire worked in the legitimate theater in 11 stage musicals, ten of them with his sister. From 1933 to 1957, he appeared in 30 movie musicals, ten of them teaming him with Ginger Rogers. From 1957 to 1981, he worked mostly as a character actor in films and on television. Although Fred and Adele Astaire garnered considerable critical attention and achieved stardom on Broadway and in the West End, no documentation beyond their reviews and a handful of recordings exists to preserve their legacy. On the other hand, Astaire's partnership with Rogers, immortalized on film, continued to fascinate viewers of succeeding decades much as it did those who attended the movies initially in the '30s. In those days, Astaire, gliding across polished dancefloors in his trademark "Top Hat, White Tie and Tails" (as Berlin put it in a song written for him), with Rogers beside him in a spectacular gown, served as an antidote for the Depression that gripped the country and reassured millions of filmgoers that elegance and gentility could overcome economic turmoil. This was Astaire's popular peak, when he and Rogers were among the country's biggest box-office stars, when his records topped the charts, and his radio show was listened to by millions every week. But his lengthy career was marked by a series of triumphs that made him one of the best-loved entertainers of the century.

Fred Astaire was born Frederick Austerlitz in Omaha, NE, on May 10, 1899. His father, Frederic (no "k") Austerlitz, was an Austrian immigrant who worked as a salesman for the Storz Brewing Company but was also a pianist with a strong interest in the performing arts. His mother, Johanna (Gelius) Austerlitz, shared this interest, and when his sister Adele Marie Austerlitz, who was 20 months his senior, showed a talent for dancing as a small child, she was enrolled at Chambers' Dancing Academy. The family faced a financial crisis in 1904 when a temperance movement led to the closing of the brewery, and they met it in surprising fashion by deciding that mother, daughter, and son would move to New York where Adele could be enrolled in the dancing school run by Claude Alviene with an eye toward a professional career. Johanna, Adele, and Fred Austerlitz (soon renamed Ann, Adele, and Fred Astaire) arrived in New York in January 1905, and, shortly after Adele began studying with Alviene, Fred joined her, creating the dance team of Fred and Adele Astaire, which made its professional debut in a vaudeville act created by Alviene in Keyport, NJ, in November 1905. Astaire was six-years-old; his sister was eight.

The Astaires toured in vaudeville until 1909, by which time they had outgrown their act and a disparity in their heights made dancing together difficult. They retired temporarily, settling in Highwood Park, NJ, where Astaire attended grammar school. But after two years off, he and his sister were enrolled in Ned Wayburn's dancing school in New York in the summer of 1911, intending to return to vaudeville, which they did with a Wayburn-written act that December. From then on, they toured with gradually increasing success to the point in June 1917 that they were signed by the Shubert Organization to make the leap to the legitimate stage. This occurred with the musical revue *Over the Top*, which opened on Broadway on November 28, 1917, and ran 78 performances before going on a national tour that continued into the spring of 1918. The Astaires had seventh billing in the show, and they danced in three numbers, also singing in two of them. The Shubert quickly cast them in another revue, *The Passing Show of 1918*, which opened on July 25, 1918, and ran 142 performances, followed by a tour that ran through June 1919. The Astaires had eighth billing in this show. In addition to appearing together in three numbers, each also had a solo, Astaire's being "Squab Farm" (music by Sigmund Romberg, lyrics by Jean Schwartz). After the tour, they went into rehearsals for an operetta, *Apple Blossoms*, which opened on October 7, 1919, and ran 256 performances, until April 24, 1920, followed by a tour that ran from August to April 1921. Fourth-billed in this show, they danced in three numbers, but did not have speaking parts. They had two dances and were billed separately fifth and sixth in the cast for a second operetta, *The Love Letter*. It was a failure, opening October 4, 1921, and closing 25 days and 31 performances later on October 29, followed by a tour that ran only until December. But that gave them the opportunity to have their first speaking roles in a second show in the same season, *For Goodness Sake*, which opened on February 20, 1922, for a run of 103 performances through May 20, followed by a brief tour. This show allowed them to perform the music of Astaire's friend George Gershwin, one of several songwriters who contributed to the score.

The Astaires had received increasing critical support, which resulted in their receiving top billing in their sixth stage work, *The Bunch and Judy*, boasting a score by Jerome Kern and Anne Caldwell. Unfortunately, the show was a flop with a run of only 63

performances between November 28, 1922, and January 20, 1923. This failure again resulted in an opportunity, however, as the Astaires were invited to England to star in a re-tooled version of *For Goodness Sake*, re-christened *Stop Flirting*, which opened in the West End on May 30 and ran 418 performances, until August 1924. Its success brought the team's first chance to record, as they were contracted by HMV Records and went into a London studio on October 18, 1923, to perform two of their songs from the show, "The Whichness of the Whatness" and "Oh Gee! Oh Gosh!" (music and lyrics for both by William Daly and Paul Lannin), soon released in the U.K. only on either side of the 78 rpm (HMV B-1719), Astaire's first record release.

The Astaires returned to New York to appear in a new musical written for them with songs by George and Ira Gershwin, *Lady, Be Good!* It opened December 1, 1924, and became an enormous hit, running 330 performances, until September 12, 1925, followed by a two-month tour. Returning to England, the Astaires opened the show in the West End on April 14, 1926, resulting in a 326-performance run that lasted until January 22, 1927. Shortly after the London opening, they recorded songs from the show for the English Columbia Records label (an imprint of EMI and no relation to the American Columbia label) in what amounted to an original cast album, albeit spread across three separately released 78s. Accompanied by George Gershwin on piano, they performed "Fascinating Rhythm," "Hang on to Me," and "I'd Rather Charleston" (lyrics by Desmond Carter), and Astaire gave made his first solo recording on "The Half of It, Dearie, Blues" on April 19, 1926. At a later session, they were accompanied by an orchestra for "Swiss Miss," and Adele and cast member George Vollaire sang "So Am I."

After a British tour, the Astaires returned to the U.S. in June 1927 to prepare for another Gershwin show, *Funny Face*, which opened on Broadway on November 22, 1927, and ran 250 performances until June 23, 1928. Shortly before the opening, *The Jazz Singer*, the first sound film, had opened successfully, featuring Broadway star Al Jolson, and the Hollywood movie studios became interested in other stage stars. The Astaires did a screen test for Paramount Pictures for a proposed movie version of *Funny Face*, but nothing came of it. Instead, the Astaires took *Funny Face* to London, where it opened November 8, 1928, for a run of 263 performances, which, with a tour to follow, kept them in Great Britain until April 1930. Again, shortly after the opening, they recorded some of the songs for English Columbia, performing "The Babbitt and the Bromide" and the title song together, while Astaire recorded "High Hat" and "My One and Only" solo. Subsequently, he also cut a couple of singles not associated with the show, "Not My Girl"/"Louisiana," accompanied by Al Starita and His Boyfriends in April 1929 and "Puttin' on the Ritz" (music and lyrics by Irving Berlin)/"Crazy Feet" in March 1930.

The Astaires next appeared in producer Florenz Ziegfeld's *Smiles*, a flop that opened on November 18, 1930, and played only 63 performances through January 10, 1931. They quickly rebounded with *The Band Wagon*, a revue with songs by Arthur Schwartz and Howard Dietz, which opened June 3, 1931, and ran 260 performances, until January 16, 1932, followed by a tour that ran through May. Bandleader Leo Reisman recorded a collection of the show's songs for Victor Records, and he engaged the Astaires to sing them. As a duo, they recorded "Hoops" and a two-part medley of "Gems from the Band Wagon," while Astaire sang "I Love Louisa," "New Sun in the Sky," and "White Heat" solo. In addition to releasing 78s of the material, Victor also pressed up an experimental 33 1/3 rpm containing the medley, but the format did not catch on. (Seventeen years later, Columbia Records employed the same disc speed when it unveiled its new "LP" -- long-playing -- records.) Researchers Joel Whitburn (*Pop Memories*) and Edward Foote Gardner (*Popular Songs of the Twentieth Century*), who have estimated chart performance for this pre-chart era, both cite "I Love Louisa" as a Top Ten hit and also award chart showings to "New Sun in the Sky."

Adele Astaire gave her final performance in *The Band Wagon* in Chicago on March 15, 1932. On May 9, she married Charles Cavendish, the son of the Duke of Devonshire, and went to live with him in Ireland, retiring from her performing career. Astaire carried on without her, planning his next theatrical venture, the musical *Gay Divorce*, with songs by Cole Porter, for the fall. On November 22, the day after the show opened a tryout run in New Haven, CT, and a week before it opened on Broadway, he joined Reisman to record two songs from the score, "Night and Day" and "I've Got You on My Mind," for a Victor single. Emphasizing the score, and in particular "Night and Day," turned out to be a good idea. *Gay Divorce* earned only modest reviews from critics who had often favored Astaire's sister over him and missed her, and it did only modest business at first. But it caught on along with "Night and Day," cited by both Whitburn and Gardner as a number one hit in early 1933. As a result, the show ultimately ran 248 performances on Broadway, until July 1, 1933. Astaire's growing success as a solo stage and recording artist again attracted the interest of Hollywood, and in January 1933 David O. Selznick, in charge of production for RKO Pictures, had him do another screen test. Selznick called the test "wretched," referring to Astaire's "enormous ears and bad chin line," but suggested that the performer's "charm is so tremendous" that it came through even so. He circulated the test among other executives at the company, resulting in a legend that attached itself to Astaire forever afterward. Supposedly, one person responded, "Can't act. Can't sing. Balding. Can dance a little." In her autobiography, *Debbie, My Life*, Debbie Reynolds finally named this studio official as Burt Grady, and Astaire, speaking to his biographer Bob Thomas (*Astaire: The Man, the Dancer*) clarified the remark. "It has been repeated many times, usually incorrectly," he recalled. "What the man said was: 'Can't act. Slightly bald. Also dances.'" Notwithstanding this assessment, Astaire was signed to a contract by RKO on May 27, 1933, for one film, with options for more. Meanwhile, he recorded a few additional sessions with Reisman for Victor, including a version of "The Gold Diggers' Song (We're in the Money)" (music by Harry Warren, lyrics by Al Dubin), which had been introduced by Ginger Rogers in the film *Gold Diggers of 1933*.

On July 12, 1933, Astaire married socialite Phyllis Livingston Baker Potter. They would have two children and remain married until her death from cancer on September 13, 1954. Within days of his wedding, Astaire flew to Los Angeles to begin work on his first film. But since RKO was not yet ready to begin filming, he was loaned to MGM for a featured part in *Dancing Lady*, starring Joan Crawford and Clark Gable, which became his movie debut when it opened in November. Then he took on a featured role in his first RKO picture, *Flying Down to Rio*, in which he was billed fifth behind Ginger Rogers, with whom he danced onscreen for the first time. After he finished filming, he left for England to open a British production of *Gay Divorce* on November 2, 1933, with a limited engagement of 108 performances running through April 7, 1934. This would be his final work as a stage performer.

While in London, he recorded two songs from *Flying Down to Rio*, the title song and "Music Makes Me" (which Rogers sang in the picture). Both songs are credited as chart hits by Whitburn and Gardner. *Flying Down to Rio* opened in the U.S. in December 1933 and was a hit, too, particularly because of audience reaction to Astaire and Rogers' dance of "The Carioca" (which became the first song to win an Academy Award). As a result, RKO quickly bought rights to both *Gay Divorce* and a concurrent Broadway hit, *Roberta*, as screen vehicles for the two. The former was retitled *The Gay Divorcee*, and all of Cole Porter's songs except "Night and Day" were replaced, along with much of the plot. Nevertheless, Astaire (who took on the uncredited role of choreographer, which he would maintain throughout his film career) and Rogers were a hit with audiences when the film opened in October 1934. *Roberta* retained more of Jerome Kern's original score for the show, and the composer was even brought in to write new numbers. The result, released in February 1935, was Astaire and Rogers' third hit film.

For their fourth screen pairing, *Top Hat*, RKO brought in Irving Berlin to write an original song score, and Astaire prepared for the release by signing to Brunswick Records and making studio recordings of all five of the songs: "Cheek to Cheek," "No Strings," "Isn't This a Lovely Day?," "Top Hat, White Tie and Tails," and "The Piccolino." The records were released simultaneously with the film's premiere in August 1935, and Astaire appeared several times on the popular radio show *Your Hit Parade* to promote both, with explosive results. "Cheek to Cheek," "Top Hat, White Tie and Tails," "Isn't This a Lovely Day?," and "No Strings" all made the Top Ten of the hit parade, with "Cheek to Cheek" spending five weeks at number one. The film, meanwhile, was the most successful Astaire/Rogers movie ever, registering a profit of over one million dollars according to RKO's accountants. Naturally, the two were re-teamed with Berlin for their next film, *Follow the Fleet*, for which the songwriter provided another seven songs. Astaire recorded five of them, also sneaking into the session a composition of his own, "I'm Building Up to an Awful Let-Down" (lyrics by Johnny Mercer). That song and three entries from the film, "Let's Face the Music and Dance," "Let Yourself Go," and "I'm Putting All My Eggs in One Basket," all reached the Top Five of the hit parade concurrent with the film's release in February 1936. *Follow the Fleet* showed a slight downtick in profitability, but still poured nearly one million into RKO's coffers. Those profits declined consistently for subsequent Astaire/Rogers films, but biographer Edward Gallaferri (Astaire and Rogers) has demonstrated that this was because of rising production costs for the series, not diminishing revenues at the box office.

RKO commissioned a sixth Astaire/Rogers film, this time bringing back Jerome Kern, who wrote an original score with lyricist Dorothy Fields for *Swing Time*. Astaire recorded five of the songs for Brunswick, and from that batch "The Way You Look Tonight" spent six weeks at number one in the hit parade and "A Fine Romance" peaked at number three upon the film's release in August 1936. Another drop in profits caused RKO to decide to break up the team temporarily after their upcoming seventh picture. Meanwhile, on September 15, Astaire began hosting his own weekly radio program, *The Fred Astaire Show* (aka *The Packard Hour*) on the NBC network. He found himself stretched to handle both the series and his extensive preparations for the dances in his films, however, and despite its popularity he gave up the show after one season. Meanwhile, George and Ira Gershwin were brought in to write songs for the next Astaire/Rogers film, *Shall We Dance*, and Astaire recorded all six of their contributions for Brunswick, resulting in three singles and another Top Ten entry in the hit parade, "They Can't Take That Away from Me," following the film's release in April 1937. *Shall We Dance* was only half as profitable as *Swing Time*, as production costs neared one million dollars. Astaire's next film, *A Damsel in Distress* (released in November 1937), his first not to feature Rogers since *Dancing Lady*, actually lost money, due to a production cost that topped one million. He recorded four of its Gershwin songs and scored another Top Ten hit with "Nice Work if You Can Get It." The release of the ninth Astaire/Rogers film, *Carefree*, in September 1938, was accompanied by the announcement that the team would be dissolved permanently after their next outing. The film featured a score by Irving Berlin, and it gave Astaire another number one hit with "Change Partners," even though the picture itself lost money for RKO. Nevertheless, the studio pressed ahead with *The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle*, an uncharacteristic film biography of the popular dance team of the '10s that appeared in the spring of 1939 and again cost more money than it made by company estimates.

Astaire ended his relationship with RKO after *The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle*. Over the next several years, he accepted one-off offers from different studios, making *Broadway Melody of 1940* (February 1940); *Second Chorus* (January 1941), and *Holiday Inn* (June 1942), the latter with Bing Crosby, for Paramount; *You'll Never Get Rich* (September 1941) and *You Were Never Lovelier* (October 1942), both with Rita Hayworth, for Columbia Pictures; and *The Sky's the Limit* (July 1943) back at RKO before signing a long-term contract with MGM in 1944. Meanwhile, he made recordings of some of his movie songs and other material for Columbia Records in 1940 and for Decca Records from 1941 to 1946. In 1942, Decca accompanied the release of *You Were Never Lovelier*, which featured a score written by Jerome Kern and Johnny Mercer, with Astaire's first album of three 78s.

Astaire made the long-in-gestation ensemble film *Ziegfeld Follies* (not in general release until 1946) at MGM and then the unsuccessful *Yolanda and the Thief* (October 1945) before being loaned to Paramount for *Blue Skies*, another film with Bing Crosby and the songs of Irving Berlin. As he had with *Holiday Inn*, he also joined Crosby for a Decca album of songs from *Blue Skies*, duetting on "A Couple of Song and Dance Men" and contributing a solo re-recording of "Puttin' on the Ritz," and the disc peaked at number two in the Billboard album chart in the fall of 1946. The film also was a big hit, and the 47-year-old Astaire decided the time had come to hang up his dancing shoes. He announced his retirement to spend more time on two other activities, owning and breeding racehorses, and launching a chain of dancing schools. He did not become completely inactive as an entertainer, for example acting in the radio play *The Animal Kingdom* on ABC's *Theatre Guild on the Air* on May 4, 1947, but he kept to his decision to retire from films until the fall of 1947, when Gene Kelly broke his ankle just prior to production on MGM's *Easter Parade*, a musical with Judy Garland featuring Berlin songs, and he agreed to go back to step in as a replacement. The film was released in June 1948, and after its success nothing more was heard publicly of Astaire's retirement. During his absence from the studio, MGM had started its own record label, and it began releasing soundtrack albums from its movie musicals. These became the chief outlet for Astaire's commercial recordings over the next several years, with MGM soundtracks for *Easter Parade*;

The Barkleys of Broadway (March 1949), which marked a reunion with Ginger Rogers; Three Little Words (1950), a film biography of songwriters Harry Ruby and Bert Kalmar, which spent 11 weeks at number one in the Billboard chart; Royal Wedding (February 1951), with a score by Alan Jay Lerner and Burton Lane, which reached number three and spawned the gold-selling novelty single "How Could You Believe Me When I Said I Loved You When You Know I've Been a Liar All My Life? (The Liar Song)," a duet with Jane Powell; The Belle of New York (February 1952); and The Band Wagon (July 1953), much altered from the 1931 stage version. (Let's Dance [August 1950], a loan-out to Paramount, did not result in a soundtrack album initially, although, as with all Astaire's musical films, its songs eventually turned up on an unlicensed disc.)

At the 1949 Academy Awards ceremony, Astaire, whose work as a singing and dancing star of movie musicals did not fit into any Oscar category, was presented with a special award "for his unique artistry and his contributions to the technique of musical pictures." In 1952, he was approached by Norman Granz, a record producer and the impresario of the successful "Jazz at the Philharmonic" concert series, to re-record his catalog of standards backed by a small jazz group. Granz engaged Oscar Peterson (piano), Alvin Stoller (drums), Flip Phillips (tenor saxophone), Charlie Shavers (trumpet), Barney Kessel (guitar), and Ray Brown (bass), and took Astaire into a recording studio in December 1952 for marathon sessions that resulted in the 38-track, four-LP box set *The Astaire Story*, released by Granz's Clef label through Mercury Records in 1953.

With the completion of his MGM contract in 1953, Astaire again thought of retiring, but he kept accepting offers for films on an ad hoc basis, making *Daddy Long Legs* (May 1955), accompanied by an RCA Victor single of its song "Something's Gotta Give" (music and lyrics by Johnny Mercer), and an adaptation of his old stage hit *Funny Face* (March 1957), with a soundtrack album on Granz's Verve Records label, both for Paramount, then Cole Porter's *Silk Stockings* (May 1957) for MGM, with an MGM Records soundtrack LP. With that, he turned away from movie musicals and focused his attention primarily to television, starting with an acting role in a half-hour comic film, *Imp on a Cobweb Leash*, broadcast live on the General Electric Theatre program on December 1, 1957. Far more ambitious was the one-hour *An Evening with Fred Astaire*, broadcast on October 17, 1958, which found him dancing with new partner Barrie Chase. The special won nine Emmy Awards including Outstanding Single Program of the Year and Astaire's award for Best Single Performance by an Actor. He followed with two more similar shows, *Another Evening with Fred Astaire* (November 4, 1959) and *Astaire Time* (September 28, 1960), which earned him a second Emmy Award for Outstanding Performance in a Variety or Music Program or Series. Meanwhile, he took occasional acting roles in non-musical films: *On the Beach* (December 1959), *The Pleasure of His Company* (May 1961), and *The Notorious Landlady* (June 1962). He also made an album, *Now* (1959) for Kapp Records, which consisted largely of re-recordings of his old favorites. Also, he issued a combined television soundtrack album, *Three Evenings with Fred Astaire* (1960) on his own Ava Records label, named after his daughter, as well as a few singles. But most of his work in the '60s continued to be done for television. Starting in 1961, he hosted *Alcoa Premiere*, an anthology series of one-hour teleplays, and he acted in several of them in 1962. On October 2, 1964, he and Chase danced and acted in *Think Pretty*, a teleplay that was part of the series *Bob Hope Presents the Chrysler Theater*. In November 1965, he appeared in several episodes of the medical series *Dr. Kildare*. He and Chase made a series of appearances on *The Hollywood Palace*, a variety series, in 1966. The *Fred Astaire Show*, his fourth TV special, aired on February 7, 1968. And in 1970, he had a continuing role on the series *It Takes a Thief*. His first feature film appearance in six years was also his first appearance in a movie musical in 11 years, and his last, a belated screen adaptation of the 1947 Broadway musical *Finian's Rainbow* released in August 1968 and accompanied by a soundtrack LP on Warner Bros. Records that spent six months in the Billboard chart. Less than a year later, he was back onscreen starring in the crime picture *Midas Run*, released in May 1969.

By 1970, the 70-year-old Astaire was semi-retired, but he continued to work periodically. He co-starred in a Western TV movie, *The Over-the-Hill Gang Rides Again*, broadcast on ABC on November 17, 1970, and less than a month later, on December 13, served as a voice for the animated TV film *Santa Claus Is Comin' to Town*, which was accompanied by a soundtrack LP released by MGM. In 1972, he appeared in two television specials, the first a Gershwin tribute, 'S Wonderful, 'S Marvelous, 'S Gershwin, broadcast on NBC on January 17, which also had a soundtrack LP released on Daybreak Records, and the second a patriotic program, *Make Mine Red, White and Blue*, broadcast on NBC on September 9, for which he served as host. In May 1974, he was one of the hosts of the anthology film *That's Entertainment!*, consisting of clips from MGM musicals. The film was an enormous hit, with a double-LP soundtrack album that reached the charts, and was followed two years later by *That's Entertainment, Part II*, for which Astaire and Gene Kelly served as hosts, and for which they did a little modest singing and dancing. Of course, it too was accompanied by a soundtrack album. In between, Astaire took a role in the disaster film *The Towering Inferno*, released in December 1974. It became the biggest box-office hit of the year, and he earned his only Academy Award nomination for best supporting actor.

In 1975, Astaire accepted an offer from record producer Ken Barnes to go to England and record a series of albums for United Artists Records. He cut three LPs: *A Couple of Song and Dance Men*, a duet collection with Bing Crosby; *They Can't Take These Away from Me*, yet another set of re-recordings of his old favorites; and *Attitude Dancing*, containing recordings of some new songs and some of his own compositions. In 1976, he returned to filmmaking in the detective film *The Amazing Dobermans*, released in November, and he followed it with *Un Taxi Mauve* (*The Purple Taxi*), an international production released outside the U.S. in May 1977 that failed to find an American distributor. The *Easter Bunny Is Coming to Town*, broadcast on ABC April 6, 1977, was something of a sequel to *Santa Claus Is Comin' to Town*, with Astaire again providing a voice for an animated character. *A Family Upside Down* was a made-for-TV movie broadcast on NBC April 9, 1978, in which he co-starred with Helen Hayes; his performance won him his third Emmy Award for Outstanding Actor in a Special. On December 3, 1978, he was one of the recipients of the prestigious Kennedy Center Honors, presented at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., and broadcast on CBS two nights later. The following month, he appeared in an episode of the science-fiction series *Battlestar Galactica*, and he starred in the TV movie *The Man in the Santa Claus Suit*, broadcast on NBC December 23, 1979, a performance that allowed him the opportunity to make his final recording, of the song "Once a Year Night" (music by Peter Matz, lyrics by Norman Gimbel), issued as a promotional single by Dick Clark Productions. On June 24, 1980, Astaire married for the second time, to jockey

Robyn Smith. The bride was 35-years-old, the groom 81. He made his final film appearance in the thriller *Ghost Story*, released in December 1981. He died of pneumonia at 88 on June 22, 1987.

Astaire's film work is, of course, available extensively on video. The story is somewhat more problematic with regard to his recordings, although there is no dearth of Astaire discs in release at any given moment. European copyright law, which allows recordings to fall into the public domain after 50 years, has led to an unending series of unlicensed compilation albums on which Astaire's performances are remastered from old 78s; they vary wildly in quality. There are also numerous unlicensed compilations of film soundtrack material, also of dubious value. The major American record labels, which claim ownership of the studio recordings for the U.S. market, own different pieces of Astaire's catalog. Sony BMG controls the Victor, Brunswick, and Columbia recordings; Universal has the Decca, Mercury, Verve, and Kapp material. EMI has the early English Columbia tracks and the United Artists recordings. Periodically, these labels repackage their holdings, with notable collections including *Starring Fred Astaire* (Columbia, 1989), *Rarities* (RCA, 1990), *Top Hat: Hits from Hollywood* (Columbia/Legacy, 1994), *The Complete London Sessions* (EMI, 1999), and DRG's' reissue of *The Astaire Story* with bonus tracks. Astaire's soundtrack recordings have been compiled by Rhino in the excellent collections *Fred Astaire at MGM* (1997) and *Fred Astaire & Ginger Rogers at RKO* (1998). DRG has reissued the soundtracks from the TV specials. That such collections continue to appear, both from reputable and questionable sources, testifies to the ongoing appeal of Astaire as a singer of timeless American popular music. ~ William Ruhlmann, Rovi

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