

## ALL THAT JAZZ

Directed by Bob Fosse

*There's no people like show people  
They smile when they are low  
Even with a turkey that you know will fold  
You may be stranded out in the cold  
Still you wouldn't trade it for a sack o' gold  
Let's go on with the show  
Let's go on with the show!  
The show!  
The show!*

– “There’s No Business Like Show Business,” music and lyrics by Irving Berlin

In 1973, Bob Fosse won an Oscar (Best Director, CABARET), an Emmy (Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Comedy, Variety or Music, LIZA WITH A Z), and two Tony Awards (Best Director, Best Choreographer, PIPPIN). Following so much good fortune, Fosse checked himself into a psychiatric hospital for acute depression. He suffered his first heart attack soon after. A less ambitious man, or maybe one less driven by his demons, might have heeded that twin hit of depression and cardiac distress as a call to action – to quit show business and everything that went hand and hand with it. The booze and the pills, the womanizing, the round-the-clock attention to career, those endless cigarettes he’d leave hanging on his lower lip till they burnt down to his mouth. Instead, Fosse funneled all that and more into his 1979 film ALL THAT JAZZ.

The film began life as an adaptation of Hilma Wolitzer’s novel, ENDING, about a man with terminal cancer. Screenwriter Robert Alan Aurthur (GRAND PRIX) ran through multiple drafts, incorporating Fosse’s feedback, personal experience, and keen interest in the Kübler-Ross model, as well as the notes of Fosse’s closest friends, including the brilliant screenwriter Paddy Chayefsky (NETWORK), writer/director Herb Gardner (I’M NOT RAPPAPORT), and journalist and novelist Pete Hamill (THE GIFT). According to Fosse biographer Sam Wasson, it was Hamill who suggested turning the lead into a choreographer, like Fosse, and using musical sequences to illustrate the five stages of grief. The option to Wolitzer’s novel eventually lapsed, but by then the script had become something else entirely – as close to an autobiography as Fosse would ever put on film.

Roy Scheider played Joe Gideon, a movie director and Broadway choreographer.

(Warren Beatty and Jack Nicholson both passed on the part; Richard Dreyfuss was initially cast, but he and Fosse didn't get along.) Gideon is burning the candle at both ends: By day, he preps a new Broadway production (the centerpiece is the hypersexualized "Air Erotica" number, which Fosse first envisioned as a piece for the Joffrey Ballet); by night, he edits a film that looks an awful lot like Fosse's previous film, 1974's LENNY, down to the casting of Cliff Gorman as a Lenny Bruce-like character. (Gorman won a Tony for playing Bruce on Broadway, but Dustin Hoffman, a much bigger star, was cast in the film version.) Sick with stress and a steady diet of drink, drugs, and sex, Gideon starts every day with the same routine: cold shower, Dexedrine, eye drops, Alka Seltzer, a smoke, and the self-motivational speech of an inveterate performer: "It's showtime, folks!"

The film makes a point of logging screentime with Gideon in the editing bay, and that's significant: Fosse's editor Alan Heim was a crucial figure in establishing the film's fragmented, associative cutting. Composer Ralph Burns came up with a name for it – Fosse time – which Heim elaborated on in 2009 interview with Matt Zoller Seitz: "When we were working on Bob's films, we were working in Fosse time. The phrase has to do with not really being locked into any particular time frame but taking full advantage of what you can do with film, which is mess around with time. That's one of my favorite things to do, and you don't get too many chances to do it in straight narrative movies." (Heim won an Oscar for the film.)

Fellini's 8 1/2 was an influence – Fosse previously reinterpreted NIGHTS OF CABIRIA for his musical SWEET CHARITY – and he hired Fellini's frequent cinematographer, Giuseppe Rotunno, to shoot ALL THAT JAZZ. Guido's famous harem of women from 8 1/2 has a mirror here in Gideon's retinue of estranged wife, girlfriend, daughter, and one-night stands. There were undeniable real-life analogies, too. The wife (played by Leland Palmer) was openly inspired by the extraordinary Gwen Verdon, who was more or less amicably separated from Fosse and continued to be his lifelong creative partner until his death.

Fosse's one-time girlfriend, Ann Reinking, had to audition for the part that was based on her. She got it. And good thing: Her dance duet, "Everything Old Is New Again," with Gideon's daughter (played by Erzsebet Foldi) is a sweetheart of a scene. It zings on multiple levels: as a joyful evocation of bodies moving and communicating via dance, as a cheat sheet in Fosse's signature style (even the dance neophyte will recognize the rolled shoulders, tucked-in chins, pelvic powerhousing, and hat fetish), and as a full-bodied demonstration of the women's devotion to Gideon. For all their glorious high kicks, it's Scheider your eyes are locked on. He helplessly melts at their tribute but never tries to soften the fundamental truth of Gideon, which is that he already knows he will do badly by these beloveds – choose career, always, over careful tending to them, even when he's staring death in the face.

Four out of the five films playing in this series about directors undergoing a creative crisis involve the death, either real or imagined, of the protagonist. But only ALL THAT JAZZ affords its hero the opportunity to choreograph and attend his own hallucinated

funeral – here, a 9-minute-long song-and-dance extravaganza that ends with Gideon in a body bag and Ethel Merman belting out “There’s No Business Like Show Business.” Given the similarities between Gideon and his maker, the attention lavished on Gideon’s last exit might seem a little unseemly, even self-aggrandizing, but Fosse always had his eye on insuring a good time for his survivors: His will set aside \$25,000 for his friends and family to throw a hell of a party when he departed. Indeed, they did. When Fosse suffered another heart attack in 1987 – fatal this time, and with Verdon beside him – his nearest and dearest gathered at Tavern on the Green for a champagne-soaked celebration of his life. Predictably, there was dancing.

#### SOURCES:

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*Fosse* by Sam Wasson. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013.