



The Guide to Musical Theatre

THE COCOANUTS

Music and lyrics by Irving Berlin, book by George S. Kaufman

Lyric Theatre, Broadway - 8 December, 1925 (375 perfs)
Garrick Theatre, London - 20 March, 1928

The Marx Brothers attack the Florida property boom circa 1920 and find Margaret Dumont, jewels to steal, pockets to pick, lovers to confuse, hotel guests to confound - and songs by Irving Berlin! We are delighted to make this historic madcap romp generally available for the first time. Groucho, Harpo, Chico and Zeppo - brush up your slap-stick and head south for a feast of wild hilarity 'and great music, including the memorable "Always".

SYNOPSIS

The plot of *The Cocoanuts* is set in a resort hotel during the big Florida development boom of the 1920s. Groucho runs the place, assisted by "straight man" Zeppo. Chico and Harpo arrive with empty luggage, which they plan to fill by robbing and conning the guests. Margaret Dumont, in the first of her many appearances as a stuffy dowager wooed and tormented by Groucho, is a guest, one of the few paying customers. Her daughter is in love with a struggling young architect, who is working to support himself as a clerk at the hotel, but who has plans for the development of the entire area. Dumont's character wants her daughter to marry a man she believes to be of higher social standing. This man is actually a con man out to steal the dowager's diamond necklace with the help of his conniving partner.

NOTES

Many who are familiar with Marx Brothers movies, particularly the early ones, are aware, the plot is rather beside the point. The story and setting are little more than an excuse for the brothers to run rampant in their trademark style. The film is also notable for a very early usage of "production numbers" similar to those used in the 1930s by Busby Berkeley, including techniques which were soon to become standard, such as overhead shots of dancing girls imitating the patterns of a kaleidoscope. It is also notable that all musical sequences in this early "talkie" were recorded "live" on the soundstage as they were shot (not pre-recorded), using an off-camera orchestra.

In another sequence, Groucho is the auctioneer for some land of possibly questionable value ("You can even get stucco! Oh, can you get stuck-oh!") He has hired Chico to artificially "bid up" during the auction. Misunderstanding the concept, Chico keeps out-bidding everyone (even himself), much to Groucho's exasperation.

One of the more famous (or infamous) gags in the film has Groucho giving directions to Chico, who keeps misunderstanding "viaduct" as "why-a-duck", and a lengthy surreal dialogue plays out.

CAST: 7 men (including 4 Marx Brothers), 3 women, chorus



MUSICAL NUMBERS:

1. Bellhops
2. Can't You Tell?
3. Everyone in the World Is Doing the Charleston
4. Five O'Clock Tea
5. Florida By the Sea
6. Gentlemen Prefer Blondes
7. The Guests
8. A Little Bungalow
9. Lucky Boy; Minstrel Days; Monkey Doodle-Do
10. Take 'Em Away (He's Breakin My Heart)
11. The Tale of a Shirt
12. Tango Melody; Ting-a-Ling (The Bells'll Ring)
13. Too Many Sweethearts
14. We Should Care (Let the Sky Start to Cry)
15. What's There About Me (Why Am I a Hit with the Ladies?)
16. When We're Running a Little Hotel of Our Own
17. Why Do You Want to Know Why?
18. With a Family Reputation

INSTRUMENTATION:

Reed I (flute, clarinet, alto sax), Reed II (clarinet, bass clarinet, tenor sax), trumpet, percussion, piano, violin, bass