

# Narrative and Number in Busby Berkeley's Footlight Parade

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### Recommended Music to accompany this article:

‘Honeymoon Hotel,’ from *Footlight Parade*,  
Music by Harry Warren and lyrics by Al Dubin  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NpH7\\_zNjEps](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NpH7_zNjEps)

‘Human Waterfall,’ from *Footlight Parade*,  
Music by Sammy Fain and lyrics by Irving Kahal  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FRqcZcrgPaU>

‘Shanghai Lil,’ from *Footlight Parade*,  
Music by Harry Warren and lyrics by Al Dubin  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8icVIEYmb98>

# Narrative and Number in Busby Berkeley's Footlight Parade

The brief 'Pre-Code' era of American film history, which lasted from 1929 until mid-1934, tackled many controversial themes in its films which would not be depicted on screen again until decades later. These included promiscuity, prostitution, drug use, interracial relationships, and homosexuality, as well as a focus on stronger female characters. [1] The enforcement of the Motion Picture Production Code (MPPC) in 1934 banned the exploration of these themes in future productions, while also forcing many past films to be edited to fit new regulations and some to become lost entirely. [2]

One successful genre of this era was the backstage film musical, where audiences witnessed the inner workings of a theatre studio and watched the creation and performance of a musical production unfold. Busby Berkeley, a choreographer for Warner Bros., was a key figure here, choreographing numbers for many film musicals throughout the early 1930s. This essay will focus on one of these film musicals, *Footlight Parade*, [3] and

[1] Thomas Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema; 1930-1934*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1999).

[2] The Chiseler, 'Where is "Convention City" Hiding?', *Tumblr*, 2011. <https://chiseler.org/post/1562863854/where-is-convention-city-hiding>.

[3] Lloyd Bacon and Busby Berkeley, *'Footlight Parade'*, United States: Warner Bros. Pictures, 1933.

examine its key musical numbers: 'Honeymoon Hotel', 'By a Waterfall' and 'Shanghai Lil'. Using these examples, I will analyse the relationship between musical number and film narrative, while relating the film to wider issues surrounding musicals in the 'Pre-Code' era and beyond.

*Footlight Parade* was one of three major 1933 Warner Bros. musicals choreographed by Busby Berkeley, with the others being *42nd Street*<sup>[4]</sup> and *Gold Diggers of 1933*.<sup>[5]</sup> These musicals' plots were strikingly similar with almost identical casts;<sup>[6]</sup> as such, the films' potential popularity relied on the success of Berkeley's musical numbers rather than narrative prowess.<sup>[7]</sup> *Footlight Parade*'s narrative shares this goal: director Chester Kent (James Cagney) must showcase three musical prologues in one night to secure an important contract. Despite time constraints, love scandals and financial struggles of the Great Depression, they prevail against all odds.<sup>[8]</sup> Later Warner Bros. musicals like *Dames*<sup>[9]</sup> and *Gold Diggers of 1935*<sup>[10]</sup> would lack this level of narrative importance towards their numbers, as the cast no longer completely relied on their success.<sup>[11]</sup> Due to this, it could be argued that their overall significance is weakened.

Uniquely, *Footlight Parade*'s musical prologues are at the end of the film, allowing for the narrative to naturally progress toward a finished product. Each performance celebrates the "individual triumph of everyone who made it", while granting its audience a sense of closure.<sup>[12]</sup> Martin Rubin notes that *Footlight Parade*'s overall structure contains elements from not only the backstage musical, but two other musical forms from the nineteenth century: farce-comedy and tour-of-the-town.<sup>[13]</sup> The farce-comedy style of musicals typically have a straightforward plot, with the narrative focusing on bringing its cast to a venue where they can watch or perform a variety of shows.<sup>[14]</sup> *Footlight Parade* demonstrates this through the narrative's progression towards the theatres where 'Honeymoon Hotel', 'By a Waterfall', and 'Shanghai Lil' are to be performed. Meanwhile, tour-of-the-town musicals tend to feature a

[4] Lloyd Bacon and Busby Berkeley, '42nd Street', United States: Warner Bros. Pictures, 1933.

[5] Mervyn LeRoy and Busby Berkeley, 'Gold Diggers of 1933', United States: Warner Bros. Pictures, 1933.

[6] Cy Caldwell, 'To See or Not to See', *New Outlook* CLXII, November (1933): 43.

[7] Mark Roth, 'Some Warners Musicals and the Spirit of the New Deal', *Velvet Light Trap* 17 (1977), 2.

[8] Morris Dickstein, 'Fantasy, Elegance, Mobility: The Dream Life of the 1930s', in *Dancing in the Dark: A Cultural History of the Great Depression* (London: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc, 2009), 380.

[9] Ray Enright and Busby Berkeley, 'Dames', United States: Warner Bros. Pictures, 1934.

[10] Busby Berkeley, 'Gold Diggers of 1935', United States: Warner Bros. Pictures, 1935.

[11] Mark Roth, 'Some Warners Musicals', 6.

[12] Morris Dickstein, 'Fantasy, Elegance, Mobility', 239.

[13] Martin Rubin, 'Busby Berkeley and the Backstage Musical', in *Hollywood Musicals: The Film Reader*, ed. Steven Cohan (London: Routledge, 2002), 56.

[14] Martin Rubin, 'Backstage Musical', 55.

“whirlwind tour of the big city”, with rapid transitions between different venues accompanying the cast’s singing and dancing<sup>[15]</sup> This is demonstrated in *Footlight Parade* during the cast’s rushed transitions between venues after each performance. Loud sirens are heard throughout these transitions, emphasising the urgency of the situation and importance that the production’s success holds for everyone involved.

The first musical prologue is ‘Honeymoon Hotel’.<sup>[16]</sup> Despite widespread credit to Berkeley, this number was in fact directed by Larry Ceballos, as Berkeley was filming *Roman Scandals* at the time.<sup>[17]</sup> Ironically, this discredit is reflected in *Footlight Parade*’s narrative when the choreographer Francis (Frank McHugh), who ultimately pulled the show together, receives no credit.<sup>[18]</sup> ‘Honeymoon Hotel’ has a strophic, rhyming musical structure, maintaining a simple melody to avoid distraction from the primary focus, the visuals. The number starts with *Footlight Parade*’s main performers Scotty (Dick Powell) and Bea (Ruby Keeler) walking together before being obscured by suitcases. An immediate distinction between the narrative and the cinematic audience is established; while the camera focuses on Powell and Keeler’s feet (hiding their faces for effect), this would not happen within the theatre. However, the opposite occurs during a check-in sequence where the camera directly follows Powell and Keeler as they navigate the lobby, providing camera angles that would be completely invisible to the diegetic audience.<sup>[19]</sup>

Later, as Powell leaves his hotel room, he marches in unison with the other men. Through these “eroticised barracks”, a glimpse of Berkeley’s military influence from his job as a First World War lieutenant is shown.<sup>[20]</sup> While later numbers contain more obvious representations of this influence, this use is more subtle. This is followed by the camera zooming out to reveal an intricate multi-levelled set, consisting of two corridors and four bedrooms all fully constructed, furnished and lit. This is the first major example in *Footlight Parade* of Berkeley’s

[15] Martin Rubin, ‘Backstage Musical’, 54-55.

[16] Dick Powell and Ruby Keeler, ‘Honeymoon Hotel’, in *Footlight Parade* (United States: Warner Bros. Pictures, 1933).

[17] Frank Tuttle and Busby Berkeley, ‘Roman Scandals’, United States: Samuel Goldwyn Productions, 1933.

[18] Michael LaRocco, ‘Larry Ceballos as Busby Berkeley: The Credit Dispute in *Footlight Parade* and the Branding of ‘Buzz’’, *Film History* 30, no. 2 (2018), 142.

[19] Per Krogh Hansen, ‘All Talking! All Singing! All Dancing! Prolegomena: On Film Musicals and Narrative’, in *Intermediality and Storytelling*, ed. Marina Grishakova and Marie-Laure Ryan (Gottingen: De Gruyter, 2010), 157.

[20] Cheyney Ryan, ‘Lawyers as Lovers: Gold Diggers of 1933 or ‘I’d Rather You Sue Me Than Marry Me’’, *University of San Francisco Law Review* 30, no. 4 (1996), 1130.

unrealistic set design; this construction would be physically impossible to present on a physical theatre stage, adding an air of illusion and fantasy to the scene. While it shows the cinematic audience the diegetic audience's view of the action, the setup is impractical. This is because scenes unfolding inside separate rooms may go unnoticed depending on the audience's seating position or attention, showing that the actors are playing more to the camera than to their physical onlookers.<sup>[21]</sup>

The other women staying in the hotel visit Keeler to welcome her, and a sense of utopian community is demonstrated.<sup>[22]</sup> Hotel guests typically do not have familiarity with each other, and a sense of belonging is built amongst the women despite a hotel's entire purpose being a temporary living space. The title 'Honeymoon Hotel' is rather ambiguous; however, one of the security guards breaks this illusion, "*You're in Jersey City, and not in Hollywood!*" This statement, albeit minor, grounds the scene within reality and, as seen in later numbers, 'Hollywood Hotel' becomes the most physically plausible number. Although this hotel could not realistically be on stage, its layout does not stray outside physical possibility for a real hotel, justifying the guard's statement to some extent.

'Honeymoon Hotel's clear romantic subtext helps to support the pre-existing narrative throughout *Footlight Parade*;<sup>[23]</sup> Powell and Keeler's characters begin a blossoming romance backstage, and their performances in both this number and 'By a Waterfall' solidifies their relationship, following Berkeley's typical romance method in Warner Bros. musicals.<sup>[24]</sup> 'Honeymoon Hotel' takes this a step further by thrusting them into a scenario where they must act as if they are married; a camera pan to a toddler in a magazine ends the number on an unsubtle note as Powell and Keeler lay in bed together. However, merely a year later, sexual undertones such as these would be forbidden from musicals altogether under enforcement of the MPPC. While 'Honeymoon Hotel' shows elements of fantasy through its unrealistic set design within a theatre space, it remains within

[21] Martin Rubin, 'Backstage Musical', 56.

[22] Richard Dyer, 'Entertainment and Utopia', in *Hollywood Musicals: The Film Reader*, ed. Steven Cohan, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 24.

[23] Richard Dyer, 'Entertainment and Utopia', 28.

[24] Rick Altman, 'The Show Musical', in *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), 227.

the realm of normativity. The next musical number starkly contrasts with this, removing the performance from reality completely and becoming a place of pure spectacle.

“While ‘Honeymoon Hotel’ shows elements of fantasy through its unrealistic set design within a theatre space, it remains within the realm of normativity.”

The second number, ‘By a Waterfall’, is an elaborate water ballet filled with beautiful women dressed as nymphs.<sup>[25]</sup> Of the three major musical numbers in *Footlight Parade*, ‘By a Waterfall’ journeys the furthest into the realm of fantasy in terms of choreography. The diegetic inspiration for this prologue comes when Cagney looks across a street and sees “*A mountain waterfall splashing on beautiful white bodies*”, which are revealed to actually be a group of African American children running around a fire hydrant, dimly lit with their faces obscured. This discovery of inspiration in a non-theatrical environment reflects the future methods that Radio-Keith-Orpheum (RKO) Pictures would adopt from the mid-late 1930s for their musicals. Unlike Warner Bros.’ film musicals, RKO’s numbers were not restricted

[25] Dick Powell and Ruby Keeler, ‘By a Waterfall’, in *Footlight Parade* (United States: Warner Bros. Pictures, 1933).

to the stage and took place anywhere within the narrative environment.<sup>[26]</sup> Cagney's character's inspiration here seemed to predict the direction that future musicals would take, yet the issue with this specific discovery is that his vision of utopia becomes whitewashed. The abundance of female figures, ornate decorations and elaborate staging in his final product showcases "the preferred, white, upscale alternative to darker bodies", and the value of the original scene becomes greatly diminished.<sup>[27]</sup> The act of white-washing in musical numbers was a staple for Pre-Code productions as well as Berkeley's other musicals: both *42nd Street* and *Gold Diggers of 1933* from that same year featured many more seemingly mass-produced beauties.<sup>[28]</sup>

However, this prejudicial notion cannot be entirely blamed on Berkeley; his musical numbers were often made separately from the narrative which can be seen throughout *Footlight Parade*.<sup>[29]</sup> During rehearsal scenes, the choreography and actions seem almost nothing like Berkeley's final creations, with an unrealistic jump in quality between the narrative and number. 'By a Waterfall' is the most striking example of this. The space featured in this number transcends physical limits to a much greater extent than in 'Honeymoon Hotel', with a sudden and unrealistic transition halfway through the number from a waterfall to a beautiful, ornate swimming pool with fountains and diving boards. The number itself ends on another unrealistic transition when Keeler, dressed as one of the nymphs in the pool, suddenly changes into a dress and is completely dry within seconds, waking Powell with splashes of water.

Through Powell's sleeping state, the larger-than-life set can be explained as a dream sequence, helping to justify Berkeley's use of multiple angles in his camerawork.<sup>[30]</sup> The number is intended to be unrealistic to both the theatrical and cinematic audiences, the camera "liberated from the mimicry of a static audience viewpoint" and free to capture shots which would be unseen or obscured for diegetic audience members.<sup>[31]</sup> Underwater shots with nymphs swimming through each other's

[26] Martin Rubin, 'Backstage Musical', 59.

[27] Linda Mizejewski, 'Beautiful White Bodies', in *Hollywood Musicals: The Film Reader*, ed. Steven Cohan (London: Routledge, 2002), 184-5.

[28] Thomas Doherty, 'Pre-Code Hollywood', 276.

[29] William Murray, 'The Return of Busby Berkeley', *New York Times Magazine*, March 2, 1969.

[30] Gary Lee Steinke, 'An Analysis of the Dance Sequences in Busby Berkeley's Films: 'Forty Second Street'; 'Footlight Parade'; and 'Gold Diggers of 1935' (University of Michigan, 1979), 93.

[31] Christopher Lewis-Smith, 'A Brief History of the Dancer/Camera Relationship', *Moving Image Review & Art Journal* 5, no. 2 (2016), 147.



legs, birds-eye views of the synchronised swimmers and close-ups of the women's faces as they rose from the water are all featured, with seemingly hundreds of these women appearing out of nowhere and singing despite being underwater.<sup>[32]</sup> This was likely achieved through a non-diegetic voiceover added in post-production, which further adds to the scene's surrealism as a live theatre production of the time would not have been capable of this.

While 'By a Waterfall' is more of a cinematic marvel than a dancing one, the female form is still utilised through complex choreography. The true spectacle in this element of the musical number comes from the intricacy and complexity of the masses moving in formation, rather than the individual dancer. These would culminate in complex, geometric, "kaleidoscopic masses of impersonal flesh" which warped to create intricate patterns and shapes, abstracting the female flesh.<sup>[33]</sup> 'By a Waterfall' includes several of these, including a rotating multi-layered star<sup>[34]</sup> and snaking lines.<sup>[35]</sup> This sequence comes to a climax through a spectacular multi-tiered human fountain which rises from the ground, with the nymphs standing on these rotating tiers and water sprinkling outwards around them. As these women sit down in unison, a birds-eye view is shown of them and opening their legs repeatedly, becoming kaleidoscopic shapes. These non-representational shapes of the female form show the audience what utopia may feel like, specifically in Powell's dream.<sup>[36]</sup> The focus on the abundance of female flesh in this scene becomes a representation of the male gaze towards women,<sup>[37]</sup> yet Berkeley's intention here is to not completely fetishize the women's bodies but celebrate them,<sup>[38]</sup> by abstracting them in such a way that they become something entirely new.

Additionally, this ornate fountain and the geometric patterns created by the women's legs reflect the Art Deco style of 1930s urban architecture, furnishings and jewellery.<sup>[39]</sup> Art Deco pieces often combined glass, geometric patterns and

[32] Rachel Joseph, 'Longing for Depth: The Frame of Screened Stages in the Screendance Spectacles of Busby Berkeley', in *The Oxford Handbook of Screendance Studies*, ed. Douglas Rosenberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 489.

[33] Morris Dickstein, 'Fantasy, Elegance, Mobility', 238.

[34] Warnerarchive, 'Footlight Parade (1933) - The Human Waterfall.', YouTube video, 2016, 0:40. <https://youtu.be/FRqcZcrgPaU?t=40>.

[35] Warnerarchive, 'The Human Waterfall', 01:35. <https://youtu.be/FRqcZcrgPaU?t=95>.

[36] Richard Dyer, 'Entertainment and Utopia', 20.

[37] Richard Dyer, 'Entertainment and Utopia', 28.

[38] Molly Haskell and Manohla Dargis, 'The Thirties', in *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 146.

[39] Lucy Fischer, 'City of Women: Busby Berkeley, Architecture, and Urban Space', *Cinema Journal* 49, no. 4 (2010), 115.

adornments of female figures,<sup>[40]</sup> with designers such as René Lalique and Jean Dunand being key figures in this movement.<sup>[41]</sup> Conveniently, this use of glasswork helped Berkeley to capture many different angles of the girls above and below water, which was a brand new idea at the time and allowed Berkeley to take advantage of the set's design to achieve new technological feats.<sup>[42]</sup> 'By a Waterfall's fantastical arrangement, set design and choreography dove into the realm of pure escapism; while its apparent whitewashing of paradise is problematic, it is still a technologically impressive sequence which has withstood the test of time.

[40] Lucy Fischer, 'City of Women', 125.

[41] Anika Dačić, '10 Art Deco Artists Who Changed the World of Decoration Forever', *Widewalls* (2015).

[42] Gary Lee Steinke, 'An Analysis', 95.

**"The true spectacle in this element of the musical number comes from the intricacy and complexity of the masses moving in formation, rather than the individual dancer."**

The final prologue in *Footlight Parade* is 'Shanghai Lil', where Cagney takes the stage in place of the intended star Barrington (Philip Faversham) alongside Keeler after he becomes drunk and refuses to perform.<sup>[43]</sup> His character's inclusion within a musical number holds significance; throughout *Footlight Parade* (and *42nd Street*), the onscreen directors are prominent throughout the narrative elements of the film, only being overshadowed during the musical numbers.<sup>[44]</sup> Warner Bros. would never again give this degree of time in the spotlight

[43] James Cagney and Ruby Keeler, 'Shanghai Lil', in *Footlight Parade* (United States: Warner Bros. Pictures), 1933.

[44] Mark Roth, 'Some Warners Musicals', 1.

to the director. In fact, future films went on to diminish the director's role entirely, prioritising the performers' character development instead.<sup>[45]</sup>

The first half of 'Shanghai Lil' takes place within an opium den filled with prostitutes, with Cagney playing an American sailor who is searching for his 'Shanghai Lil'. The woman in question is portrayed by Keeler in yellowface makeup and broken English: "*I miss you very much a long time*". Cagney's attraction to Lil is rivalled, however; several men at a bar table sing about their longing for Lil while other prostitutes scorn her success, "*That Oriental dame is detrimental to our industry!*" One important factor of this scene is the ethnicity of the brothel's patrons. White, African American, Asian, and Jewish men are all given equal screen time through a panning shot of the bar, demonstrating a "barroom equality" absent from the rest of the film.<sup>[46]</sup> This is likely due to Berkeley's choreography being separate from Bacon's direction.

As the sailors in the bar toast to Shanghai Lil, Cagney punches one of them and a brawl ensues. The film speed is reduced during this fight to make it appear faster and more intense, which helps the scene transition from the slow introduction of the bar to the faster-paced section that follows.<sup>[47]</sup> When Cagney changes into his sailor uniform and reunites with Keeler, they begin a spontaneous tap-dancing sequence on the bar table. This impromptu dancing is reminiscent of RKO's future musical numbers, which would narrow the distinction between narrative and number by presenting the narrative world as more utopian and the musical world as more natural; a performance could happen anytime, anywhere.<sup>[48]</sup> These characters' ability to perform perfectly together without prior preparation is another characteristic of RKO works, such as *Shall We Dance?*<sup>[49]</sup> In the case of 'Shanghai Lil', this was shown through Cagney taking Barrington's place and effortlessly performing with Keeler without the need for rehearsal.

[45] Mark Roth, 'Some Warners Musicals', 1.

[46] Ellen Scott, 'More than a 'Passing'; Sophistication: Dress, Film Regulation, and the Color Line in 1930s American Films', *Women's Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1-2 (2013), 68.

[47] Gary Lee Steinke, 'An Analysis', 102.

[48] Richard Dyer, 'Entertainment and Utopia', 26.

[49] Mark Sandrich, 'Shall We Dance?', United States: RKO Radio Pictures, 1937.

A set change occurs on camera through use of wheeled set pieces as a military horn resonates. The bar set is seamlessly rolled back to reveal a mass of marching sailors in a crowded street with a bridge, several buildings, and a wide walkway. Much like the sets in the previous musical numbers, its sheer size is impossible for a theatrical stage. Yet, similarly to 'By a Waterfall', this open space serves as a canvas for Berkeley to demonstrate his choreography skills. This time, it is a more literal showcase of his military influence through the "disciplined male body" rather than the female form.<sup>[50]</sup> As the soldiers march, Chinese women in short cheongsams and conical hats join them and the two groups merge, a birds-eye view shot making them indistinguishable from each other as they raise up cards that make the American flag, Franklin D. Roosevelt's face (who had been inaugurated earlier that year) and the National Rifle Association logo, before firing guns in unison. The patriotism surrounding this scene is emphasised by the music.<sup>[51]</sup> Both 'Yankee Doodle' and 'Anchors Aweigh' are heard as the flag is assembled. The referential political meaning behind this is clear.<sup>[52]</sup> Through the act of white sailors and Asian women celebrating in solidarity, Berkeley is rallying support for Roosevelt's New Deal, a scheme aimed at providing relief for America's poor and racially prejudiced citizens during the Great Depression.<sup>[53]</sup>

The number ends when Cagney manages to sneak Keeler onto the ship, showing her a flipbook animation of a boat sailing across the sea using playing cards. The camera shows Cagney and Keeler turning towards the audience, yet the flipbook is presented in a way that could only ever be seen by Cagney & Keeler. Yet again, the number plays more to the camera and becomes detached from the diegetic reality it is part of.<sup>[54]</sup> The scene itself symbolises the sailor and Lil sailing away towards a new life together, yet this notion is unrealistic in practice as there would be numerous issues with Lil being

[50] Nadine Wills, 'Clothing Borders: Transition Discourses, National Costumes and the Boundaries of Culture', *M/C: A Journal of Media and Culture* 3, no. 2 (2000).

[51] Roger A Kendall and Scott D Lipscomb, 'Experimental Semiotics Applied to Visual, Sound, and Musical Structures', in *The Psychology of Music in Multimedia*, ed. Siu-Lan Tan, Annabel J Cohen, Scott D Lipscomb and Roger A Kendall (Oxford: University Press, 2013), 52.

[52] John Booth Davies, 'Events of the Past: The Critical Role of Things We Have Heard Previously, in the Perception of Music', in *The Psychology of Music* (London: Hutchinson), 1978, 69-70.

[53] Louis Kaplan, 'A Patriotic Mole: A Living Photograph', *CR: The New Centennial Review* 1, no. 1 (2001), 112-3.

[54] Martin Rubin, 'Backstage Musical', 56.

“The level of spectacle and fantasy within these musical numbers detaches them from narrative reality, with Berkeley’s dynamic camerawork giving the cinematic audience a unique experience compared to the diegetic audience within the film”

smuggled into America.<sup>[55]</sup> However, 'Shanghai Lil' neglects to acknowledge the realism of the situation, as it is unimportant to the story. Admission of this may have broken audience immersion, removing the utopian atmosphere surrounding the number.

What allowed 'Shanghai Lil' to stand out from *Footlight Parade*'s other numbers is the incorporation of both Berkeley's famous choreography skills and a meaning behind the performance. Despite most numbers being an intentional escape from the Depression, Berkeley was able to rally up support for a cause by using propaganda as spectacle. 'Shanghai Lil' was still permitted to be shown despite the controversial nature of its themes. However, these would be banned a year later under enforcement of the MPPC.

While the musical numbers in *Footlight Parade* focused more on spatial spectacle rather than narrative development, the numbers still hold some significance. 'Honeymoon Hotel' and 'By a Waterfall' provided a chance for a young couple to develop their romance, while 'Shanghai Lil' allowed the director to achieve a taste of the limelight from his own production. The level of spectacle and fantasy within these musical numbers detaches them from narrative reality, with Berkeley's dynamic camerawork giving the cinematic audience a unique experience compared to the diegetic audience within the film, and his choreography abstracting the human form in an aesthetically pleasing and innovative way.

Berkeley's distinctive style of creating musical numbers provided an entertaining escape for filmgoers during the 'Pre-Code' era and time of the Great Depression. Despite his numerous Warner Bros. musicals sharing similar plots and cast members, the uniqueness of their musical numbers kept audiences coming back for more, eager to see what wonders Busby Berkeley could showcase next with the same narrative template.

[55] Nadine Wills, 'Women in Uniform: Costume and the 'Unruly Woman' in the 1930s Hollywood Musical', *Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 14, no. 3 (2000), 321.

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