

Behind the scenes of Yankee Doodle Dandy starring James Cagney

MURRAY HILL, NJ, UNITED STATES, June 29, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- This July 4th, many Americans will learn about Independence Day and the life of George M. Cohan, a flamboyant Irishman, and the personification of American patriotism, from the 1942 film biography Yankee Doodle Dandy starring James Cagney.

Warner Brothers songwriter M.K.(Moe) Jerome played a significant role in the making of that film. He taught Cagney to dance in the stiff leg way that Cohan used as well as other members of the cast, which included Cagney's sister Jeanne (who played Cohan's sister in the film.) Moe was so active on the set, playing the piano, and coordinating the twelve major Cohan numbers the cast performed, that the film's producer William Cagney (Jimmy's brother) dubbed him the movie's "choreographer."

□ Moe and his lyricist partner, Jack Scholl, also wrote two new songs for the film, "All Aboard for Old New York," and "Good Luck Johnny." People who watched had no idea that they weren't authentic Cohan numbers—until James Cagney revealed the truth.

Cagney was so upset that many who worked on the film did not receive the screen credit they deserved. Violating the spirit of the Revolution ("no taxation without representation") Cohan would not allow any music which was not his from receiving credit.

Not long after the 1943 Oscar ceremonies—in which Cagney won as Best Actor—the only Oscar he ever won in his career, Cagney took out a full-page ad in Variety thanking those he felt were ignored. At the top of the list of six men were M.K. Jerome and Jack Scholl who, Cagney wrote, "did a masterful job of telling the entire story of 'little Johnny Jones' in about 12 minutes of verse." Moe would never forget Cagney's kindness or Cohan selfishness.

Yankee Doodle Dandy was Cagney's last film at Warner Brothers. He left the studio to form his own production company. Other great roles lay ahead, like White Heat (1949) and Mister Roberts (1955) but none required Moe's talents. He never worked with Cagney again.

So, on this Independence Day, the film's forgotten men overlooked by Cohan, the American version of the British King, should be remembered.

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Gary May is a historian and grandson of J.K. Jerome. He is the author of The Tunesmith: The

Musical Journey of M.K. Jerome published by BearManor Media.

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Ben Ohmart

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