



State Fair (1945) is an anomaly in the song catalogue of Rodgers and Hammerstein. For it represents the only time in their careers that R&H did not contribute both the book and lyrics for a production. *State Fair* is also uniquely a Hollywood incarnation rather than deriving from a stage show. The film is actually a musical update of a melodrama Fox produced in the mid 30s. After the overwhelming success of the stage version of *Oklahoma!* R&H suddenly found themselves in big demand on two coasts. Broadway was clamoring for another hit. Hollywood wanted the team to write a new score for this ancient property. Complying with ease and earnest, the score for this version of *State Fair* is a charmer. It features such standards as 'It's a Grand Night for Singing' and the Academy Award winning 'It Might As Well Be Spring.'

The story is that of the Frake family: mother Melissa (Fay Bainter), father, Abel (Charle Winninger), son, Wayne (Dick Haymes) and daughter, Margy (Jeanne Crain). They're off to Iowa's state fair to stake their claim on some prize money and throw caution and their hearts to the wind. Melissa enters the minced meat competition. Abel is convinced that his prized hog, Blue Boy, is a valiant contender for the ribbon. Wayne is determined to

(Below left: The Frakes 1945 versus the Frakes 1962.)





win back his respect from a carnival barker who gypped him out of a considerable chunk of change the previous year. Only Margy is reluctant in their departure. Dissatisfied with her current boyfriend, she meets and becomes instantly enamored with journalist, Pat Gilbert (Dana Andrews), a lady's man who has a change of heart and decides to settle down. In the end, most of the family's dreams and wish fulfillment come true. There is one exception to this rule. Having avenged his defeat at the ring toss, Wayne becomes smitten with singer Emily Edwards (Vivian Blaine). Their romance gets off to a rousing start until photographer, McGee (Frank McHugh) confides that Emily is already married and estranged from her husband.

(Left: Judges three, 1945 versus judges four, 1962. Below: Jeanne Crain's Iowa version of 'It Might As Well Be Spring' versus Pamela Tiffin's expansive Texas rendition. 1945's 'boy to have and to hold' sung by Dick Haymes versus 1962's garish spectacle sung by Ann-Margaret.)

When Pat fails to turn up for a prearranged date with Margy it seems as though he's reverted to his old ways of prowling for the ladies. Disheartened, Wayne and Margie rejoin their parents – both victorious in their endeavors. Upon returning home, Wayne's romantic angst is alleviated when learns that his girlfriend Eleanor (Jane Nigh) is impatient and heart sore for his company. Margie receives a phone call from Pat, explaining his absence and the two reunite on the road leading to the Frake farm. Thus ends State Fair – a hokey bit of feel good fluff and nonsense that is delightfully lighter than air and as effervescently charming as ever.

Unfortunately for Fox, producer Darryl F. Zanuck would not leave well enough alone. In 1962 he updated and recast State Fair with singing heart throb Pat Boone as Wayne and the decidedly charm free starlet Pamela Tiffin as Margy. Congenial lady's man Pat Gilbert became obnoxious Jerry Dundee (Bobby



Above: Fred (Dana Andrews) versus Jerry (Bobby Darin). Congenial newsman meets sensationalist news hound.

Darin) the swivel-hipster man on the spot. Ann- Margaret did her best to infuse sultry sass into the character of Emily Edwards (inexplicably renamed Emily Porter), but her take on unrequited flirtation smoldered with a sensuality that tended to devour Boone's Wayne at every turn. The ineffectual casting was rounded out by Alice Faye and Tom Ewell as the thoroughly disengaged and unbelievable elders of the Frake family.

In relocating the venue from Iowa to Texas to take advantage of the real life state fair (something the 45' film reconstructed on a backlot as quaint and idyllic) the move proved too expansive to buttress the charmingly small and cloistered plot. Wayne became a race car driver – his romance with Emily transformed into a rather erotic bit of nonsense, complete with beefcake scene in which a shirtless Boone passionately embraces a scantily clad Ann-Margaret in her hotel suite.

The reassigning of songs to different cast members only served to illustrate how stiff and out of place the home spun charm of the original was in its new setting. The poignantly melodic 'Maybe I'm Not The Boy To Have and To Hold' sung by Dick Haymes in 1945 was now performed as a neurotic bit of gyrating on stage nonsense with a spandex clad Margaret and male chorus. Boone sang 'That's For Me' in reference to his character's first meeting with Emily. In the original film, the song went to Vivian Blaine. The musical intimacy of 'It's A Grand Night For Singing' in the original was now presented against the busy swirling rear projection of midway rides with various cast members harnessed into Ferris wheel seats.

Below: The utterly charming Fay Bainter and Charles Winninger as Ma and Pa Frake (1945) and decidedly charm-free Tom Ewell and Alice Faye – less parental, more friends (1962)...mince meat, anyone?





In the end, **State Fair** (1962) proved to be little more than a footnote to both the reference and remembrance of the original film, and, the genre of grand musicals that were quickly becoming a thing of the past by the mid-60s.

(Left: Obligatory beefcake: Pat Boone with Ann-Margaret (1962), Below: Oh, those fresh-faced kids - Dick Haymes with gal pal, Jane Nigh.)



Fox has done a favorable job of remastering both versions of **State Fair** on this new 2-disc DVD. Despite working from the deficit of not having the original camera negative, the 1945 version of **State Fair** appears to be a very smooth and solid transfer. The original Technicolor is bold and vibrant with rich hues, deep blacks and very solid whites. Occasionally the palette can seem a tad on the pasty side, but nothing that will terribly distract. Age related artifacts are practically nonexistent. Overall, the visual quality will surely not disappoint. The audio is mono – as originally recorded – and suffering from all the shortcomings inherent in mono recording. Fox has done an admirable job in reducing background hiss and stabilizing the audio as best that can be expected for a film of this vintage.

The 1962 version of **State Fair** is widescreen Cinemascope presented for the first time anywhere in anamorphic widescreen. Having been printed on color

stock by DeLuxe – the colors are decidedly less vibrant and stable than on the 45' version. Flesh tones appear rather flat and pasty. The spectrum of color is overall much more subdued with decidedly more gray than black blacks and more yellowish or bluish whites. Age related artifacts are present throughout but will not distract. The audio is stereo and effectively represents dated six track audio of this vintage. Extras include a fascinating 'From Page to Screen' featurette that encompasses both film's productions as well as the more recently mounted stage version of **State Fair**. There's also a few rarities and outtakes to be had, along with audio commentaries – by Richard Barrios and Tom Briggs for 1945, and Pat Boone – aimlessly gushing for 1962. Stills galleries and theatrical trailers for both films are also presented.

BOTTOM LINE: *It's a grand time for singing. This state fair is a blue ribbon winner!*

