

IMAGINATION

Written By Dean Ward
Choreographer: Michael Rooney

LOGLINE: Romantic comedy about a young couple, fans of performers like Gene Kelly and Frank Sinatra, whose courtship starts to resemble the classic movie musicals they both love. Totally contemporary in setting, storyline and tone, but pays particular homage to the legendary 'Freed Unit' musicals produced at MGM in the 1940's and 50's (e.g. "*Singin' In The Rain*," "*The Bandwagon*," etc). The unlikely mash-up of an indie romantic comedy with an MGM musical.

PLOT SUMMARY: Joey Finn is an aspiring entertainer - the only problem is his show-business heroes are all from a bygone era. We first meet him teaching music at a preschool. The kids have metal washers taped to their sneakers (*makeshift taps*), as Joey leads them in a spirited rendition of "I Got Rhythm."

Joey gets home to find out his girlfriend, an aspiring singer and actress, is leaving him. A friend reminds Joey it wasn't meant to be... "You're old school crooner and she's new-school autotune." Devastated nonetheless, Joey turns to his Sinatra iTunes playlist – which he believes is a guide to life. He plays the haunting saloon ballad "What Is This Thing Called Love." Several days later, at an audition, Joey meets Elsie when she borrows his antique pen to fill out her application. She's an appraiser at the Rose Bowl Swap Meet and knows every detail about the pen. Joey is intrigued and watches Elsie audition, singing Irving Berlin's "Shakin' The Blues Away." The producers are impressed but ask if Elsie can sing something more contemporary. She confidently responds that she can, but would rather not.

As Elsie exits the soundstage on the Sony Lot (*formerly MGM Studios*), Joey catches up with her. She reveals that she only came to the audition cause it was on the lot where her favorite movie "*Singin' In The Rain*" was filmed. She had a childhood crush on Gene Kelly. Elsie laments that she grew up loving Hollywood, but the Hollywood she loves doesn't exist anymore. Joey tells her that movie studios were called dream factories, but anybody can manufacture dreams. If she loves old Hollywood, all she needs to do is dream it back into existence. He demonstrates, singing the standard "Imagination." It works - the studio magically transforms before Elsie's eyes into a Technicolor vision of 1950's glamour.

As they part, Joey asks if he can call her – but, since he's clearly old-fashioned like her, Elsie jokingly instructs him to send a telegram instead. Joey does just that... on his computer, he photoshops a Western Union-style telegram and has it delivered to Elsie at the Rose Bowl Swap Meet. When Elsie shows up at the bar where Joey hosts karaoke, he launches into a swinging rendition of Sinatra's "I Didn't Know What Time It Was."

We see further evidence of Joey's ability to summon the past as – from his POV – the setting changes from a dingy karaoke bar into a glamorous Rat Pack-era nightclub.

That night Elsie tells Joey she's planning to move home soon, so she's wary of getting too involved. He says that, following the rules set forth in old musicals, they don't even know if they're compatible yet. Gene Kelly and his love interests couldn't tell if they were romantically compatible until they found out if they were musically compatible. Elsie asks who will be the judge of their musical compatibility and, opening his laptop, Joey says "everyone." They sing into a webcam and post it to YouTube. The response is overwhelming – the video goes viral.

Their courtship soon starts to take on the conventions of a classic film musical. Joey suggests they "put together an act." Skeptical, Elsie asks, "And do what? Play the Copa?" But we soon see them playing a series of venues – which, in old movies, would've been lousy vaudeville theaters en route to The Palace. But, nowadays, the preschool where Joey teaches and the assisted-living facility where his grandfather lives will have to suffice.

After playing a trendy bar, a director approaches and asks them to appear in a film. But, when they get to set, they discover the star of the movie is Joey's ex-girlfriend who orchestrated their casting as a way to humiliate Elsie and reinsert herself back into Joey's life. Joey won't have it – he promptly quits, withdrawing them from the movie.

That night Elsie has a recurring dream she had previously explained to Joey. In the dream, we see her dancing with Gene Kelly in a scene from "On The Town." But this time the dream evolves... Gene Kelly vanishes from the dance number and Joey replaces him. She rushes to Joey's apartment to tell him. But she sees Joey's ex-girlfriend leaving – she had shown up drunk, trying to win Joey back. Joey had promptly kicked her out, but Elsie misreads the situation and breaks up with him.

Joey holes himself up in his apartment, depressed. His friends force him out of his funk, bombarding him with upbeat Frank Sinatra songs, until he agrees to go to Elsie's apartment. When he gets there, Elsie's roommate says she left to move back home. But the roommate hints, that being old-fashioned, Elsie was likely planning to take the train.

Joey rushes to Union Station and finds Elsie. She accuses him of being too much of a dreamer for her. He says if she wants real, he'll give her real. He narrates a vision of their life together, complete with heartaches, headaches and cancer scares. Finally, he gives her a piece of sheet music - the perfect Sinatra song for how he's feeling... "From This Moment On." He asks Elsie if she can hear the orchestra playing – she gets mad saying that she won't tolerate any more of his imagination games. He jokes that she can't hear an orchestra cause he couldn't afford one - he got his friend to bring an iPod and speakers instead. Sure enough,

his friend hits play and Joey sings. All him, all real. He leads Elsie on a dance through the station as they exit and we reach the The End.

BACKSTORY: Writer Dean Ward idolized Gene Kelly as a kid. In the 1990's, while attending film school at NYU, Ward began to correspond with Kelly - culminating in a nice letter he received from Kelly after Kelly viewed his student thesis film. Kelly concluded his note with the encouraging salvo "you must keep working." Ward did and, inspired by the success of "The Artist," and what he perceived to be a vaudeville spirit of showmanship creeping back into pop culture (*exemplified by entertainers such as Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Justin Timberlake, and Jimmy Fallon*), Ward felt the timing was finally right to embark on a screenplay that, while contemporary in every way, pays homage to legendary musical entertainers like Kelly and attempts to capture the essence and timeless charm of the films Kelly and his peers created at the height of their powers.

"Imagination" hopes to revive a brand of musical film that is rarely, if ever, attempted these days. While Broadway adaptations, period musicals, and remakes abound, in recent years, there have been virtually no original musicals written for the screen that can match the magic of what the 'Freed Unit' at MGM routinely turned out during the heyday of the genre. The most successful of these films featured a simple love story, punctuated with inventive song and dance numbers, and were propelled by the charm and exuberance of the film's talented stars. Thanks to a new crop of versatile, musically-inclined film actors working today, the ingredients are in place once again to make a film that fits this description. Using popular song standards, the musical numbers in "Imagination" blend reality and fantasy, and blur the line between past and present, but all within the framework of a contemporary romantic comedy. Conceived for the screen, whereas most modern musicals are theatrical, "Imagination" aims to be an experience that is purely and undeniably cinematic - a true "*movie* musical."