

BERT RIGBY YOU'RE A FOOL!



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The true musical is a dying art form. *Me and My Girl* revived it on Broadway. I hope that **Bert Rigby, You're a Fool** will

do the same for the movies." Robert Lindsay, the lover of the musical, never thought of himself as much of a singer or dancer, but last year when the musical in which he starred, *Me and My Girl* transferred from London's West End to Broadway, he won the Tony, the Olivier, and the Fred Astaire award given each year to the best dancer on Broadway. Lindsay was baffled by all the attention his show received. He says "I was surprised by the success of a homegrown English story in America. I'd walk into restaurants and people would give me standing ovations. I'd find myself clinging to reality by remembering how hard I worked to get to this point in my life."

Although known to Brits for his Shakespeare and TV comedies Lindsay was a virtual nobody to American audiences when he exploded on the New York theatre scene. Luckily, for Lindsay, Carl Reiner happened on *Me and My Girl* and was blown away by his performance. Reiner says now "There wouldn't have been any movie without Robert. When I saw him I thought 'someone should write a movie for this guy.' So I did."

When Lindsay and Reiner met for the first time Lindsay told him his life story and Reiner turned it into **Bert Rigby, You're a Fool**. In Reiner's movie Bert is a coal miner in a town in northern England called Langmoor. He works underground all day and spends his evenings with Laurel, (Cathryn Bradshaw, a British stage actress who looks remarkably like a young Debbie Reynolds.) Bert's friends and co-workers think he's a bit crazy because he is constantly dancing and singing to show tunes from the '50s. He spent most of his childhood huddled in the dark of the Ritz cinema with his mom watching Fred and Ginger and Charlie Chaplin, all the greats of that era. Bert is happy, in love and sure that he is going to be a star.

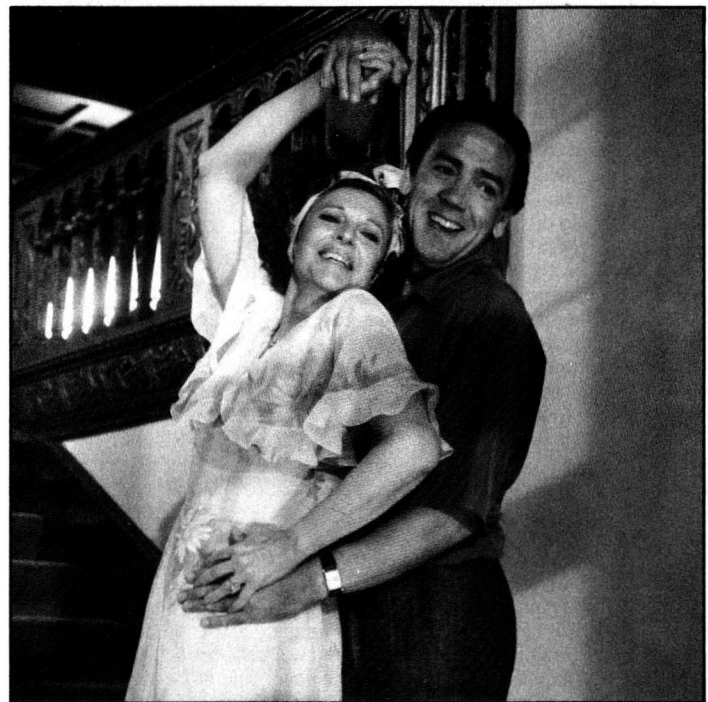
He finally gets his big break when a travelling amateur show comes to town. His friends beg him to do Springsteen or Michael Jackson, or even the Muppets, but Bert does a bloody nosed version of 'Isn't It Romantic?' (the bloody nose is picked up at a rugby match before the competition) and his career is launched. He makes a



first class entrance to Hollywood but quickly learns about paying his dues.

What's interesting about **Bert Rigby, You're a Fool** is that it's an archetypal movie musical in which characters burst into song to express their emotions, yet it's set in the '80s. Reiner, who wrote and directed this film uses many of the standard techniques from the great musicals but tucks them into a modern day context. Let's face it. In 1989, if somebody bursts into a song and dance routine in the street we think they are a bit unbalanced, so many of the big production numbers are in daydreams, or in scenes where Bert, as the life of the party, is entertaining his friends. In the same way, a '50s musical would have tempted the lead character away from his true love with a great dancer in an angora sweater. In the '80s version temptation is a buxom blonde in a string bikini lounging by his friend Jim's (Corbin Bernsen of *L.A. Law*) pool.

Shot half in England, half in Hollywood most of the cast of **Bert Rigby, You're a Fool** were drawn from the London stage with the addition of a delightful special guest performance by Anne Bancroft. Bancroft plays a former dancer and wife of a film producer who finds Bert up a tree in her backyard singing Noel Coward's "I'll See You Again". With her, Bert gets to replay some of his favorites, she the



Ginger Rogers to his Fred Astaire tapping their way up and down her huge circular stairway.

Lindsay says playing the ever smiling Bert was wonderful "Working on a musical is an uplifting, fun experience, even for the crew and since working on a real musical is rare, it was a constant surprise for all of us. It's ironic because the

genre can be old fashioned and romantic but this is the '80s and we felt we were breaking new ground."

With this film, it looks as though Reiner is trying to show that even in this cynical decade we like to root for a sweet simple guy who deserves some success.

— Jane Hawtin

