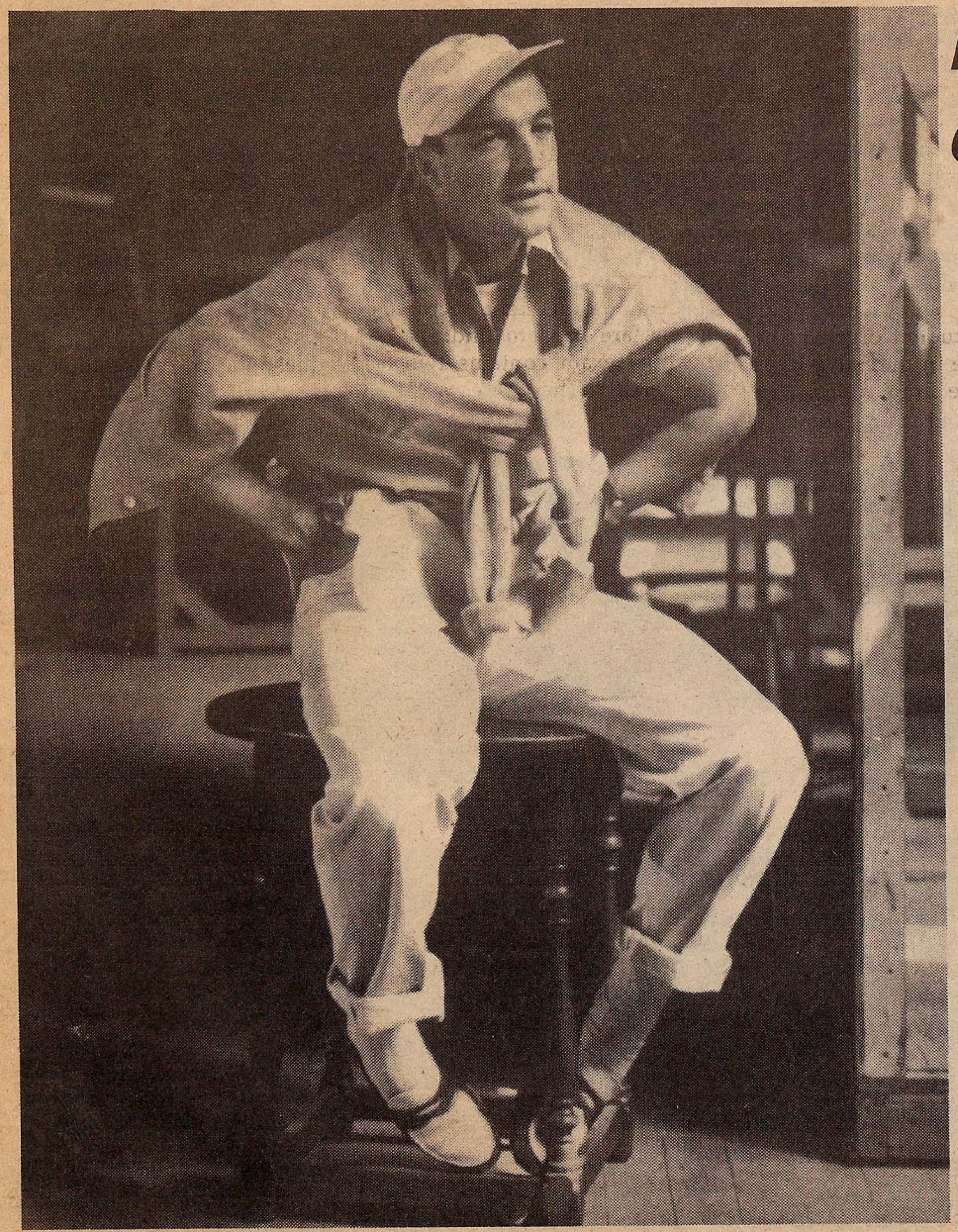
Entertainment



Interview

DKA tribute traces career of 'charming' Gene Kelly

By Jeanine Cardilla

Gene Kelly, the handsome and charming star who has danced his way into the hearts of people everywhere, skipped down the aisle to the stage in Norris Theater last Friday night to reminisce about his prolific career. He received a standing ovation from a large gathering of university students who attended the informal program.

The Delta Kappa Alpha (DKA) cinema fraternity presented an organized and successful tribute to Kelly featuring a series of film clips depicting the man as a dancer, choreographer, actor and director followed by an informative question and answer period.

Jack Haley Jr., producer and director of *That's Entertainment*, and executive producer of *That's Hollywood* moderated the event. Haley took a relaxed and prepared approach to his part in the tribute, which ran smoothly largely as a result of his efforts. (Haley escorted *Scruples* star Lindsay Wagner to the affair).

Kelly's surprise entrance with an umbrella perfectly followed the first film clip of the evening — *Singin' in the Rain*. As Haley traced Kelly's career, he quoted Debbie Reynolds (Kelly's co-star in the film) as saying, "He (Kelly) is a monster to work with. But I would not be where I am today without him."

Reynolds, then a teenager, did not realize that Kelly was trying to instill the discipline she would need to become a star. "All she wanted to do was to return to the Girl Scouts," laughed Kelly in response to her statement.

An American in Paris, Kelly set another precedent by ending the film with an 18 minute ballet which he explained was difficult to do because of the many costume changes required for the dancers to become different characters.

When asked what his favorite film was he claimed not to have one but felt that *Summer Stock* (1951) was perhaps one of his best pieces of choreography. He explained how he incorporated ethnic and Scottish kilt dances to achieve a variety of steps and ways to strike a newspaper and a squeaky board in one of the numbers.

Kelly displayed his creativity and versatility as an actor in *Inherit the Wind* in which his part was truly uncharacteristic of the romantic roles he has become associated with.

During the evening questions touched on some sensitive issues for Kelly, some of which he did not want to discuss. As a director, he felt that *Gigot* (1962) was one of his finer films before it was severely edited for distribution in America. He was unhappy with the American version and said that it was an incident that was painful to remember.

Kelly recounted that while directing *Hello Dolly* he had to contend with the stormy working relationship between Walter Matthau and Barbra Streisand. "It was only Streisand's third film, and she was still learning the trade. Matthau was far more experienced and often became impatient with his co-star."

Throughout the evening, as he watched himself on the screen, he grim-

Interview

Gene Kelly — understanding the simplicity of brilliance

By James Grant
Entertainment Editor

When Gene Kelly strolled down the aisle of Norris Theater carrying an umbrella, at Delta Kappa Alpha's tribute last Friday night, he exuded an infectious charm that indicated why he has become quite possibly Hollywood's most beloved star. But in an exclusive interview shortly before the tribute, Kelly was not lovable. He was better than that.

Whether discussing his upcoming return to the screen, past achievements, colleagues, or his family, the dancer-actor-director-choreographer was modest, kind and open, displaying a simplicity that so often accompanies brilliance.

"I do not watch very many of my old films," Kelly said. "It is not wise to rest on one's past achievements. It can become a fixation that blocks the progression of life."

Kelly, who continues to "progress" in what has become one of the most durable careers in film history, is acting for the first time in 10 years in *Xanadu*, a disco-fantasy scheduled for a summer release that also stars Olivia Newton-John and Michael Beck.

"Each film poses a new challenge for me. In *Xanadu* I bring the two lovers together. I also play a character my own age (68), which is a change for me. But I dance for only five minutes with Olivia Newton-John. I do not predict that it will rank with any of my memorable films," Kelly said.

Kelly is understandably irked when people claim he is just having "fun" in his various cinematic capacities. "No. I do not have fun while I am dancing. But I get a sense of fulfillment after I have achieved my goal. But it is imperative that a professional be meticulous with every aspect of his performance."

The word "professional" is one Kelly uses frequently and with reason. Kelly brings new meaning to the banal compliment "perfectionist." Not that he appears incapable of having fun. But he is not about to be involved with anything done in a slipshod manner.

"I have not dedicated myself to films for the glory or glamour involved in it. The movie business is not all that glamourous. Look at what I am getting for this event — one lukewarm diet pepsi."

Kelly believes there are many more opportunities for students to learn about the aspects of filmmaking than there were when he grew up. "There was no place someone interested in films could go to learn about the craft when I was growing up. I gathered all my earliest knowledge by what I could pick up in the silent films that were shown at the Museum of Modern Art. Now there are many film fraternities and societies such as DKA (at the university) that provide some knowledge for budding filmmakers."

The star looks pained when questioned about his personal life. "I have been away from the screen for personal reasons. I wanted to raise my family. That's all." The statement was delivered with iron-willed dimples. But more importantly, it was indicative of the man who has managed to live a reasonably simple life amidst the superficiality of Beverly Hills living.

Looking back over his 40 year career, Kelly commented on the studio system that flourished in the forties and fifties. "By the time I made my first picture in 1942 (*For Me and My Gal*) the major studios already had the top three leading Hollywood men — Clark Gable, Robert Taylor, and Tyrone Power. They already had enough trouble finding suitable romantic vehicles for them. Then Bogart, Cooper and myself came onto the

(Continued on page 12)

Kelly related the changes in the film industry during the forties and fifties that came about through his work. *Words and Music* (1948) featured the first 8 minute ballet (Slaughter on 10th Avenue) within a film. Three years later in

aced and at one point commented that there were some things he would like to change in his past performances. But the avid fans of Kelly would argue that there are no imperfections in any of his endeavors.

Gene Kelly and Judy Garland