



PRESS RELEASE:

## Meet Me in St. Louis

Directed by Vincente Minnelli

with Judy Garland, Margaret O'Brien, Mary Astor and Leon Ames

US 1944 | 113 mins | Cert U

A BFI release

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Release date: 16 December 2011

**Opening venues: BFI Southbank, Cornerhouse Manchester, Filmhouse Edinburgh, Showroom Sheffield, National Media Museum Bradford, Queen's Film Theatre Belfast, plus selected cinemas nationwide**

“Have yourself a merry little Christmas ...” So sings Esther Smith (Judy Garland) to her little sister Tootie (Margaret O'Brien) in Vincente Minnelli's endlessly enchanting, luscious Technicolor treat. An instant hit when it first appeared, **Meet Me in St. Louis** remains a popular favourite while ranking high in the pantheon of great movie musicals. It is re-released by the BFI on 16 December in a spirit of festive cheer.

**Meet Me in St. Louis** was first released towards the end of the war, on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1944. Intended as the ultimate feel-good movie, it offered a joyous antidote to the harsh reality of the times. Set in a gentler, supposedly happier age, its story was based on Sally Benson's literary recollections of her own childhood published in the New Yorker magazine. The lives of the Smith family - four daughters and one son - in turn-of-the-century St. Louis are depicted in lovingly vivid detail through the summer, autumn, winter and spring leading up to the great Louisiana Purchase Exposition of 1904 (or 'World Fair' as it was more simply known) – an event which they suppose will make their city the centre of world attention. The family's idyllic existence is, however, threatened with upheaval when their lawyer father is offered a promotion which will require them to move to New York. Not only will Mrs Smith lose her home and the two younger sisters their playmates, but the budding romances of the two elder sisters will be disrupted ...

This was biggest picture of Judy Garland's career – here at the very top of her form –and her first with future husband Vincente Minnelli (they married a

year later). At the age of 22, it was the first time she had felt truly beautiful on screen - and whether this was due to Minnelli's adoration or indeed to the genius of Dottie Ponedel who did her make-up (and stayed with Garland throughout her career), it's clear that Garland blossomed on this film. Ironically, she hadn't originally wanted to play the teenage Esther Smith. Worried that the part was too young for her, she was concerned too that Margaret O'Brien (only six years old when shooting started), who played the part of her youngest sister Tootie, might overshadow her.

Vincente Minnelli was in 1943/44 a new, almost untried director. **Meet Me in St. Louis** was only his third film and his first using the Technicolor process. The studio spent \$200,000 building an entire St. Louis street on backlot no. 3 in Culver City, and Minnelli worked tirelessly with Sally Benson to recreate the period details of the Smith house at 5135 Kensington Avenue. A former window-dresser, Minnelli took extraordinary care over every sequence, every frame, attending to visual details that an audience might not even notice consciously. Talking of **Meet Me in St. Louis** he said: *'You have to have great discipline in what you do. I spent a great deal of time in research, and finding the right things for it. I feel that a picture that stays with you is made up of a hundred or more hidden things.'*

Celebrated as the one of the very first musicals where character, plot and songs were closely integrated (with the songs driving the narrative forward), **Meet Me in St. Louis** brilliantly combines specially composed songs ('The Trolley Song', 'The Boy Next Door', 'Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas' and 'You and I') with original Edwardian numbers such as 'Meet Me in St. Louis', 'Under the Bamboo Tree' and 'Skip to my Lou'.

Indeed, with its memorable melodies, gorgeous production design and wonderfully vital performances, **Meet Me in St. Louis** is arguably Vincente Minnelli's masterpiece, Judy Garland's greatest screen achievement and the very best cure for the winter blues.

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## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

**Meet Me In St Louis** is released by the BFI to selected cinemas nationwide on 16 December. It closes the Gotta Sing, Gotta Dance MGM season at the BFI Southbank.

### **About the BFI**

The BFI is the lead body for film in the UK with the ambition to create a flourishing film environment in which innovation, opportunity and creativity can thrive by:

- Connecting audiences to the widest choice of British and World cinema

- Preserving and restoring the most significant film collection in the world for today and future generations
- Championing emerging and world class film makers in the UK
- Investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work
- Promoting British film and talent to the world
- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences

**\*\*\* PICTURE DESK ALERT \*\*\***

**A selection of images for journalistic use in promoting BFI theatrical releases can be found at [www.image.net](http://www.image.net)**

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