

The Rat Race

The *Rat Race* began life as a Broadway play by Garson Kanin. It opened on December 22, 1949 at the Ethel Barrymore Theater, where it ran for eighty-four performances. Among its large cast were such great actors as Betty Field, Barry Nelson, Ray Walston, and Doro Merande; several notable musicians were also in the cast, including Georgie Auld and Joe Bushkin. A decade later, Paramount Pictures brought *The Rat Race* to the screen, starring Debbie Reynolds, Tony Curtis, Jack Oakie, Kay Medford, Norman Fell, and a very young Don Rickles. As with the Broadway play, several notable musicians were also in the cast – reprising his Broadway role was Joe Bushkin, and Gerry Mulligan and Sam Butera also appeared. The film was directed by Robert Mulligan (it was his second film, after *Fear Strikes Out* – also for Paramount), and the screenplay was by Kanin.

The story concerns an aspiring musician named Pete Hammond Jr. (Curtis) from Milwaukee, who arrives in New York to seek his fame and fortune. He meets Peggy Brown (Reynolds), a down-on-her-luck model and dancer who's just been evicted from the apartment that Pete has rented. She has no money and nowhere to go, and Pete suggests that they share the room together, platonically. Distrustful of him (and everyone), but having no choice, she agrees. She warns him about the city and the people – and her warnings prove to be apt. He auditions for a band and is hired, but when they send him out for a beer he returns to find his instruments gone and that

he's the victim of a scam. Eventually, Pete gets a job (thanks to Peggy's borrowing money to get him instruments), Peggy suffers more humiliations, and in the end, the two begin a relationship.

While there are occasional laughs, the film offers heavy doses of disillusionment and cynicism. It was fairly risqué for its time, with an unmarried couple sharing an apartment, albeit platonically. The dialogue is great, and there are magnificent location shots of New York in 1960. Curtis and Reynolds deliver star performances – it's one of Reynolds' best performances, and the large supporting cast is wonderful (especially Rickles, who is really effective as a sleazeball). The photography of Robert Burks (at that time, Alfred Hitchcock's regular cameraman) is stunning and Mulligan's direction is terrific – he would, of course, go on to direct *To Kill a Mockingbird* just three years later.

As much of a leading character as those played by Curtis and Reynolds is the incredibly dynamic score by Elmer Bernstein. Right from the get-go, his electric, jazzy, and spectacular theme grabs you and never lets go. That theme recurs throughout the score – pulsing with the teeming life of the city, with wailing brass and insistent rhythms. Some cues keep the big-band jazzy feeling, while others are mournful and tender, as the story requires. It is, simply put, one of Bernstein's best – it was a great year for Bernstein, what with *The Rat Race* and then one of his all-time masterpieces, *The Magnificent Seven*. As happened occasionally back then, the theme from *The Rat*

Race enjoyed some popularity when it was recorded by cast member Sam Butera and the Witnesses.

This is the world premiere release of *The Rat Race* original soundtrack recording. There was an LP release of the Sam Butera version of the theme – an album called “Sam Butera and the Witnesses play the Music from *The Rat Race*,” but it was just the theme; the rest of the album was filled with standards. The original tapes, housed in Paramount's vaults, were in excellent condition and we present Bernstein's score in its entirety. In the bonus section we've included some mono source cues (all by Bernstein) and a couple of demos.

— Bruce Kimmel