

Two for the Road

In some sense, the “road” in *Two for the Road* (1967) is one gigantic metaphor: an Einsteinian continuum containing both the past and the present in one construct; memory throbbing within the perpetual “now”; or, as the wonderful critic Glenn Erickson so succinctly puts it, “the Road of Life—get it?” It’s certainly, also, a literal road, or series of roads, winding through an enticingly picturesque France visited, over a decade or so, by Joanna (Audrey Hepburn) and Mark Wallace (Albert Finney), who meet, marry, and struggle with their relationship along the way. And while the narrative’s backdrop is unfailingly gorgeous, the relationship isn’t: *Two for the Road* was unusual in its time for providing a realistic (or cynical, depending on your point of view) look at what happens to two people subsequent to their “happily ever after” moment.

Working with witty screenwriter Frederic Raphael (an Oscar®-winner for 1965’s perhaps even more cynical *Darling*), director Stanley Donen meant to do that. As he would note, “A happy marriage is not really a story ... there’d be nothing to make.” So the filmmakers instead offer us scenes from a marriage without refraining from hitting the sour notes, along with those both hilarious and romantic, the latter more treasured because they are rare. Making no bones about their perspective, they even open the film with Joanna and Mark in their most jaded if glamorous present-day mode (ten years down the line), driving past a wedding party and making some pretty bitter cracks about the newlyweds. “They don’t look very happy,” observes Joanna. “Why should they?” Mark snarks. “They just got married.”

Where and how along the road did things go so wrong for this stunning pair? Interestingly, as Donen and Raphael tell the tale via the film’s celebrated broken time-frame (direct cuts take us back and forth from one period to another; dialogue begins in one era and carries over to another; at times, the older versions of Mark and Joanna pass their younger selves on the road), we learn that perhaps things were never

quite perfect between them. Mark is a bit of a blowhard, controlling and self-centered even when young; the irrepressibly charming Finney (who’d recently made such a hit as the roguish *Tom Jones*) is fearless about showing us Mark’s dark side. This is the kind of man who has no qualms about ordering his wife to get out and push the broken-down if handsome MG he’s foolishly purchased, or about demanding that a whole plane “turn back” because he thinks he’s lost his passport. When he first encounters Joanna, she’s part of a girls’ choir on its way to a music festival; he’s far less interested in her than he is in a sultry Jacqueline Bisset (making a brief but memorable early appearance), and only “settles” for Joanna when the rest of the girls come down with chicken pox. (Quite a feat, it should be noted, “settling” for Audrey Hepburn.) Not too surprisingly, all Mark’s bluster masks a deep insecurity; what finally wins him over to Joanna is her unqualified adoration.

Joanna, meanwhile, is rather too willing a doormat, putting up with Mark’s callousness for the sake of his humor, his talent (he’s an architect making a pretty swift climb to the top), and his undeniable sex appeal. She makes him her job; it’s worth noting that in the film’s just slightly pre-feminist period, no mention is ever made of Joanna’s desire for a career, or indeed, any life of her own. She’s all about Mark, makes herself indispensable to him, and then has to endure his criticism of what he frankly can’t live without; “If there’s one thing I really despise,” he snaps cruelly, “it’s an indispensable woman.” Rather than fleeing this meanie, Joanna toughens up, and begins to fight back—not altogether a bad thing. There’s a certain exhilaration in their arguments—they’re so well-written!—and Hepburn’s enjoyment in playing these scenes is palpable.

She, we simply must say, has rarely been more beautiful than she is here: a stylish, stunning woman entering seductive maturity. Hepburn, of course, was always beautiful; here, at 37, she is something more:

sophisticated in the best sense of the word, but also looser, more fun-loving. Part of it is the role; director Donen, who had already enjoyed the pleasure of her company in *Funny Face* (1957) and *Charade* (1963), had her in mind to play Joanna from the beginning. But part of it was almost certainly personal: at the time, she was separated from husband Mel Ferrer—by most accounts a control freak rather in the style of *Two for the Road*’s Mark—and, having shaken off her fetters, was open to a new kind of joy. It came creatively, and romantically; although both were discreet, then and thereafter, she and Finney entered into an affair—and man, is their chemistry apparent on screen.

Chemistry’s particularly important here because otherwise, we might wonder why the Wallaces keep at it. Mark is casually (and apparently, chronically) unfaithful; in a very clever if unpleasant sequence, we see him picking up/being picked up by a blonde in a powder blue convertible and enjoying a one-night stand even as, in voiceover, we hear him assuring Joanna of how much he loves, misses, and longs for her—complete duplicity, perfectly if hideously conveyed. Eventually, Joanna, too, is unfaithful; with her, it’s less casual, although the object of her affections (Georges Descrières) is so pompous that we’re hardly surprised when she returns to Mark, driven by memories of his glorious goofiness. How, after all, could a self-consciously suave Frenchman compare with Finney emerging from the ocean like the *Creature from the Black Lagoon* to mutter, “Give us a kiss”?

There are other problems. Joanna longs for a child; Mark is dead set against, an opinion reinforced in one of *Two for the Road*’s most amusing sequences: an ill-fated car trip with an American couple, Cathy and Howard Manchester (Eleanor Bron and William Daniels, both insane and superb), and their evil spawn, Ruthie (Gabrielle Middleton, a child actress who apparently never acted again after giving a performance of Damien-like intensity). “You still want a child?” Mark asks Joanna, his voice

dripping with sarcasm. “I still want a child,” she responds, “I just don’t want that child.” When they do have a daughter, though—a perfectly sweet, un-demon seed-ish daughter—it’s not as Joanna imagined it might be. Mark is a deeply uninterested father; at one point, he hardly seems to remember his little girl’s name. He’s bored with parenting; even the things that seemed lovely when it was just him and Joanna—getting caught in the rain, say—are merely troublesome with a kid tagging along.

And then there is the corrupting influence of success. Donen and Raphael—both worldly big cheeses who knew whereof they spoke—are ruthless both in their evisceration of the jet-setters with whom the Wallaces are “forced” to hang, and of the Wallaces, themselves. Oh, the awful villas, the reprehensible galas, the disgusting caviar they’re made to choke down! Do we need to say that this pair has a love-hate relationship with all these glittering trappings? Even as Joanna complains about a house party (“We’ve been here month after month for two whole days!”), she certainly knows how to dress for it. And even as Mark critiques his wife for wanting expensive “things,” he’s the one who keeps happily trading up his toys, moving from that ramshackle MG to a snazzy Triumph to, finally, a plush Mercedes.

In addition to serving as signifiers of the Wallaces’ steady climb up the ladder of success, the cars also help to let us know where we are on *Two for the Road*’s invigorating jump-cut timeline. So, too, Joanna’s haircuts and clothes, which grow increasingly—or decreasingly—stylish depending where we are on the continuum. That wardrobe—brilliantly assembled by Clare Rendlesham—was another marker, by the way, of Hepburn’s burgeoning kick-over-the-traces relaxation. Heretofore famous for being dressed almost exclusively by the great couturier Hubert de Givenchy, the star allowed herself to be persuaded into wearing actual “store-bought” clothes—although some, of course, were from the exclusive and very trendy boutiques of Mary Quant and Paco Rabanne. There are some genuinely sensational period looks here (and we’d be remiss if we failed to mention them): a black patent-leather pantsuit; a dress barred by huge yellow and orange stripes with a matching yellow sunshade;

and most spectacularly, a mini-dress constructed of sparkling, space-agey silver discs. Hepburn, of course, looks fabulous in everything.

The gorgeous look of the film came courtesy of Christopher Challis, a British cinematographer who began his career as a camera operator for Powell and Pressburger (working with Jack Cardiff on *The Red Shoes*), graduating to DP on many of their later films, including *The Small Back Room* (1949), *The Tales of Hoffmann* (1951), and *Ill Met by Moonlight* (1957). He would go on to shoot the likes of *Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines*, *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* (1968), and Billy Wilder’s *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* (1970). Here he gives us a France both sun-dappled and washed with spring rain: the perfect eternal backdrop to the ups and downs of *Two for the Road*’s central relationship.

And then there is Henry Mancini, composer, songwriter, and romantic psychologist par excellence. Already an Oscar®-winner (for a celebrated Audrey Hepburn movie, no less, 1961’s *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*), Mancini was an extraordinarily gifted, jazz-inflected musician who brought his very best to *Two for the Road*. The man who scored the *Pink Panther* films was of course adept at the more comic elements; the man who wrote “Moon River” certainly understood poignancy. But here—and particularly in *Two for the Road*’s main title theme, inventively reiterated throughout—he achieves something truly special: music that sums up all the contradictory, bittersweet emotions that define this spectacularly original film.

— Julie Kirgo

Mancini and Hepburn – *Two for the Road*

Whatever that strange alchemy that happens between performer and camera, Audrey Hepburn had it in spades. And she also had it with Henry Mancini – four of his best scores were written for films she starred in. Beginning with Blake Edwards’ 1961 film, *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*, Mancini and Hepburn were pure screen magic – her beauty lighting up the screen luminously, and his music capturing her captivating charms perfectly. Just hearing the main title

for *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* or its song, “Moon River,” immediately conjures up Hepburn’s face, just as hearing the theme from Stanley Donen’s 1963 classic, *Charade*, does the same. Mancini’s score for the 1967 film *Wait Until Dark* not only captures the suspense inherent in the film, but also Audrey’s “world’s champion blind lady” character, making the viewer care about her and what might potentially happen to her at the hands of some extremely bad men. And it’s simply not possible to hear the main theme from *Two for the Road* (also 1967) without thinking of Hepburn and her screen magic.

At the time of *Two for the Road*, Mancini was one of the most in demand film composers working. In addition to the Audrey movies listed above, he’d also written classic scores for *The Great Imposter*, *Experiment in Terror*, *Hatari*, *Days of Wine and Roses*, *Soldier in the Rain*, *The Pink Panther*, *A Shot in the Dark*, *Dear Heart*, *The Great Race*, *Arabesque* and others. And, of course, subsequent to *Two for the Road*, he continued to write one great score after another.

In *Two for the Road*, Mancini came up with one of his most heartfelt and beautiful main themes, which perfectly captures everything about the marital journey in the film, from its joys to its sorrows, to its recriminations, betrayals, and rebounds. Nobody wrote this kind of score better than Mancini. It is suffused with warmth, sadness, fun, and joy. Leslie Bricusse wrote a lyric to the main theme and that song has had a long life in recordings and cabaret acts.

At the time of the film’s release, there was the usual Mancini re-recorded album, really meant for a pop market. This is the first release of the actual soundtrack of the film, taken from the elements in the Fox vaults. It’s classic Mancini and the kind of score no one really would be allowed to write today.

— Bruce Kimmel