

My Old Flame

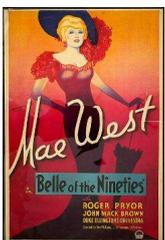
Written by bluesever
Tuesday, 08 August 2017 16:17 -

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“Belle of the Nineties” - western comedy starring Mae West. Ruby Carter (West) is a cabaret singer working in Mississippi. In a man's world, Ruby has little trouble surviving on her own terms, resisting the attentions of a deluge of lecherous men. Instead, she reserves her affections for a boxer called The Tiger Kid (Roger Pryor). The film was based on West's original story “It Ain't No Sin” which was also to be the film's title until censors objected. A publicity stunt went awry when 50 parrots were trained to shout the original title of “it ain't no sin”. The film was released on September 21, 1934.

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Mae West, expertly accompanied by Duke Ellington's Orchestra, introduced Arthur Johnston and Sam Coslow's number “**My Old Flame**” in the motion picture. West had long been a fan of Duke Ellington, insisting that Ellington and his orchestra appear in the film. Although Paramount executives lamely balked that he was too expensive, West got her way. Duke and company expertly accompanied West on several numbers in the film.



Belle of the Nineties (poster, 1934)

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West was no great vocalist, but, as was the case with many ex-vaudevillians and Broadway stars, she knew how to “put a song over.” Variety magazine praised her performance, commenting that Ellington’s accompaniment was a “*natural for Mae West.*” One of West’s biographers, Maurice Leonard in his book *Mae West: Empress of Sex*, commented, “*She sings the best she ever did on film.*”



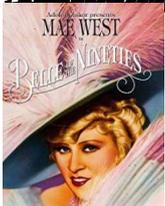
Mae West in Belle of the Nineties

The sheet music for “My Old Flame” credits both Coslow and Johnston for music and lyrics, however, various other references, including Robert Gottlieb and Robert Kimball in their book ‘Reading Lyrics’ suggest Johnston wrote the music and Coslow the words. Coslow himself in his autobiography ‘Cocktails for Two’ just says he and Johnston “collaborated” on the song. However, in his comment quoted on Duke Ellington congratulating him on writing “My Old Flame” there is an implication that Ellington is referring to the music, as he almost never wrote the lyrics for his own songs.

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