

Meet Me at the Fair

US : 1953 : dir. Douglas Sirk : Universal : 87 min
 prod: Albert J Cohen : scr: Irving Wallace : dir.ph.: Maury Gertsman
[Chet Allen](#); [George Arglen](#)
 Dan Dailey; Diana Lynn; Hugh O'Brian; Carole Mathews; Rhys Williams; Scatman Crothers;
 Russell Simpson; Thomas E Jackson; George Chandler

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω □ ∅ Z ∞	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Not a scene from a Grimm fairy tale. Although, now that you mention it...

Source: The Moving Picture Boy

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 1996 review:

"Dailey is good as a sideshow medicine man who helps a young orphan and courts Lynn; pleasant musical. **1½"

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review - identical to above

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"In 1900, an orphan joins a travelling medicine show. Mildly pleasing open-air comedy

drama. Scr: Irving Wallace, from the novel "The Great Companions" by Gene Markey. Musical dir: Joseph Gershenson"

Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89 review:

"Charming film about a traveling medicine man who gets involved with a runaway orphan and the authorities. *** "

Variety Movie Guide 1993 review:

"The production has a period flavour featuring nostalgia and schmaltz against a 1904 setting. The old-fashioned drama (from the novel "The Great Companions" by Gene Markey, adapted by Martin Berkeley) revolves around an orphan kid who runs away from a grim institution, takes up with a medicine man, with his new friend charged with kidnapping. Before it's all over, the medicine man and the kid are mixed up in a political fight and eventually bring about reforms at the orphanage. Best in the musical department is Carole Mathews doing "Bill Bailey" and the title number. She also works with Dan Dailey on "Remember The Time" and generally impresses. Dailey is very likeable as the medicine man, giving the character a good-natured flavour that helps the film.¹"

The Universal Story review:

"Set in 1904 and starring Dan Dailey as a travelling medicine man, **"MEET ME AT THE FAIR"** provided easy, undemanding entertainment, laced with some good musical numbers performed by Dailey, a lively Carole Mathews (as a vaudeville entertainer in love with Dan), Scatman Crothers and child singer Chet Allen. Young Master Allen played an orphan on the run from a grim children's home who finds sanctuary with Dailey. The latter is then accused of kidnapping the child, and gets into a wrangle with social worker Diana Lynn² who is engaged to politician Hugh O'Brian. O'Brian turns out to be crooked³, Miss Lynn's animosity to Dailey turns to affection and, together, they foil O'Brian's nefarious plans, as well as reforming the offending orphanage.

¹ *Perhaps it wouldn't have hurt to mention in passing the actor who plays the lead. But it's just a kid, right?*

² *La plus ça change, la plus ça même chose..*

³ *Ditto ditto ditto*

Albert J Cohen produced, and was well-served by director Douglas Sirk who drew as much from the material as possible. The screenplay was by Irving Wallace (adapted by Martin Berkeley from a novel by Gene Markey), and the cast was completed by Rhys Williams, Russell Simpson, Thomas E Jackson and George Chandler. The dances were staged by Kenny Williams. Songs and musical numbers included: "Meet Me At The Fair" (Milton Rosen, Frederick Herbert), "I Was There" (F.E.Miller, Scatman Crothers), "Bill Bailey Won't You Please Come Home" (Hughie Cannon), "Ave Maria" (Schubert), "I Got The Shiniest Mouth In Town" (Stan Freeberg), "Ezekiel Saw De Wheel" (traditional)."

The Moving Picture Boy entry on Chet Allen (elsewhere scrupulously ignored):

"The wandering orphan given an extended lift by medicine man Dan Dailey in Douglas Sirk's musical **"MEET ME AT THE FAIR"** was an admired soloist of the Columbus Boy Choir. On TV he created the name part in Menotti's popular Christmas opera **"Amahl and the Night Visitors"**, and he sang in Honegger's oratorio "King David" at the 1952 Los Angeles Music Festival. The name "Chet Allen" is sometimes given in inverted commas, implying that it may not have been his true name.

In his only film he sang some rather awful songs very prettily, and acted with good will and a helpful smile more or less throughout. But poor Chet didn't strike one as likely to make a successful adult career, and, unhappily, this proved the case. After 1952 most of his singing was in churches, though he had the role of an opera singer's son in the 1953 TV series **"Bonino"**. He was credited as Art Director on Altman's **"THE DELINQUENTS"** in 1956; but later he worked as a stockboy in stores, and as a volunteer helper at a drop-in centre. Finally, in 1984, depressed beyond endurance, he took his own life."

[no listing in "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]



*An itinerant showman, a social worker, a runaway orphan – all the ingredients for a musical frolic. “But what **tricks** can he do?” asks sceptical Dan Dailey. “I can mime the Gettysburg Address underwater!” suggests Chet hopefully.
Source: *The Universal Story**

On the face of it then, a whimsical Victorian melodrama with musical trappings, and not to be taken very seriously, but just imagine the tone of a 1990s remake, with allegations of "child abuse" flying hither and yon, and Dan Dailey falling under suspicion of more than kidnapping. One critic remarked of the musical "**OLIVER!**" that it was a very jolly treatment for what is in essence a staggering catalogue of child cruelty and institutional corruption, and perhaps the same might be said here. Times have changed in the culture of professional social workers, however, and the venom they for so long turned upon their own charges is now in search of other victims. Society today does not need "protecting" from these unruly and godless waifs. The waifs must now be "protected" from society...

Traveling medicine men have frequently cropped up in the archive, generally as benign itinerants – Peter Ustinov, for example, befriending two runaways in Disney's Mark Twainish adventure "**THE TREASURE OF MATECUMBE**" (76) – but this is only a slight variant on the familiar theme of boys running away to join a traveling circus.

Chet Allen was 13. George Arglen (age unknown) was apparently a regular face on the **MA AND PA KETTLE** films ('49-'57).

See subject index under **CIRCUS / CLOWNS / FAIRGROUNDS, KIDNAPPING, MUSICALS, ORPHANS / ADOPTION, POLICE / SOCIAL WORKERS, RUNAWAYS / STOWAWAYS** and **SPECIAL FRIENDSHIPS**.