

Directed by  
Alan  
Crosland

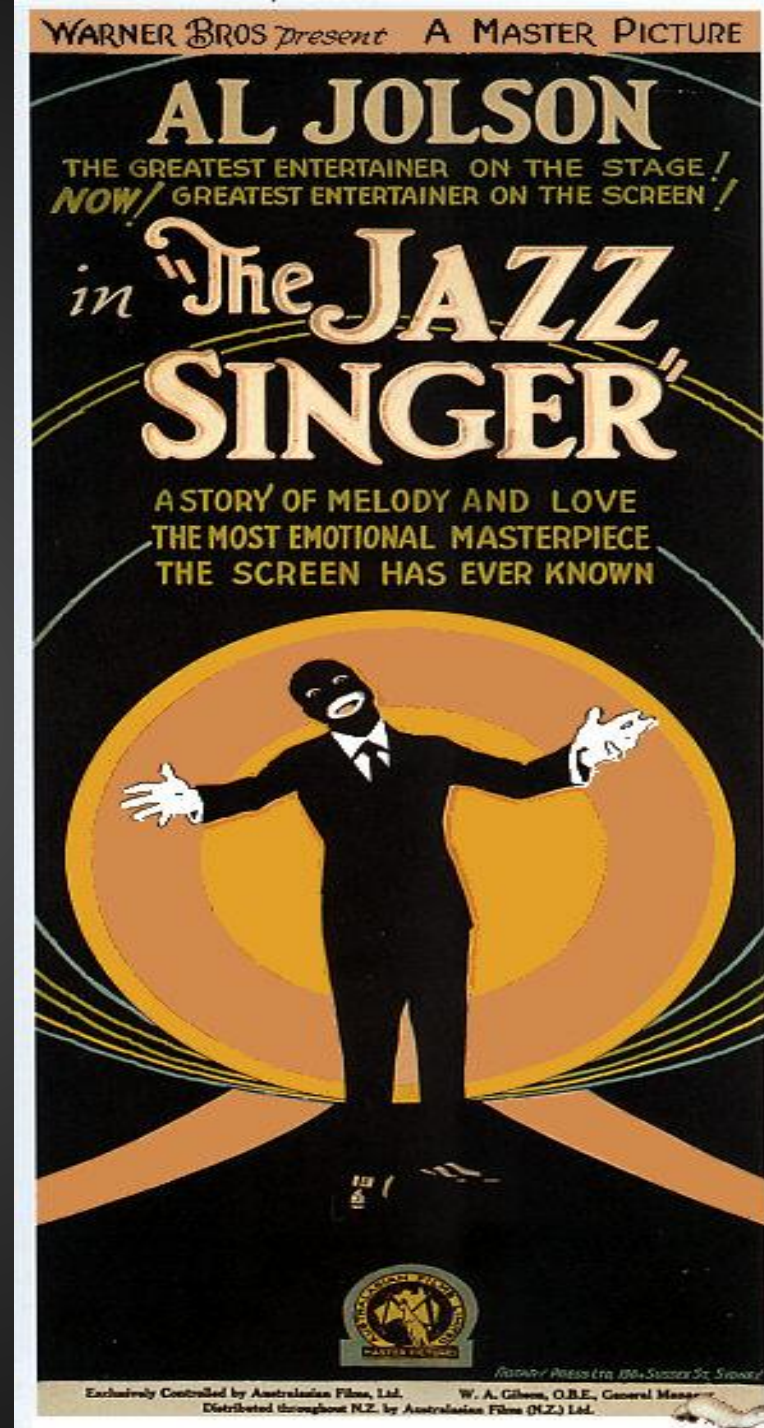


*The Jazz Singer* and the 1920's  
Film Group: Geethika Madhusudhanan,  
Sammie Smith, Ariel Landy

A WARNER BROS. PRODUCTION

## History...

- 1st feature film with synchronized spoken dialogue, pioneering in "talkie" films
- Based on Samson Raphaelson's short story "The Day of Atonement" adapted to screen by Alfred Cohn
- Warners' invested half a million dollars, the profits = \$ 3.5 million, made Warners' to one of the major film companies



# The Jazz Singer: Plot

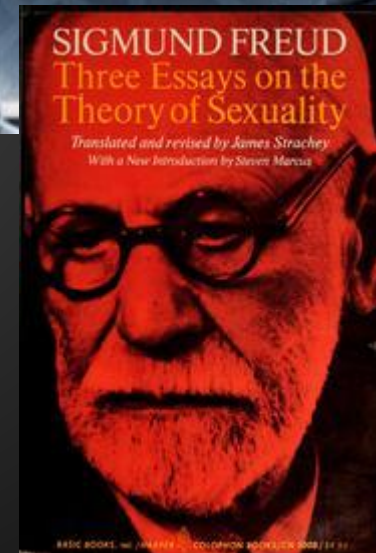
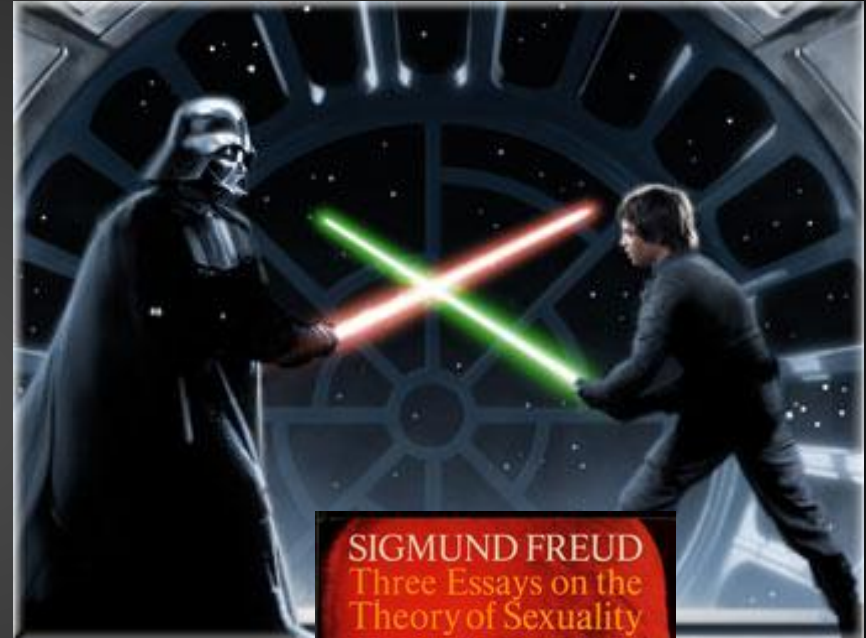
- Jakie is more interested in playing jazz and ragtime music than following in his father's footsteps as a Cantor in a synagogue.
- Cantor Rabinowitz is horrified that Jakie plays jazz music in a club. After arguing angrily, Jakie decides to leave home.
- He changes his name to a more American-sounding Jack Robin, and starts to succeed as a stage-performer thanks to the help of another performer named Mary Dale.

# The Jazz Singer: Plot

- Jack wins a role on Broadway and decides to visit his parents who do not let him in the house.
- On the evening of Yom Kippur, Jack's father is very ill and can't perform as Cantor. Jack must choose between the opening night performance of his big break, or singing the Kol Nidre at Yom Kippur services.
- Jack ultimately decides to sing the Kol Nidre at Yom Kippur. Mary sees him perform and says he is "a jazz singer — singing to his God."
- By the end of the film Jack is once again a successful performer. He sings "My Mammy" for his mother in the front row.

# Tradition and Modernity: Crossing the Threshold

- Intertitles *and* sound:  
"You ain't heard  
nothin' yet."
- Parallel deaths:  
silent cinema & the  
archetypal father
- Freud & *The Jazz Singer*



## Clip - "Blue Skies"



## Clip - "Mammy"



## Generational Gap

- Jakie's dream vs. his father Cantor Rabinowitz's dream for his son
- Being a cantor (singer during Jewish religious services) vs. being a popular jazz singer
- Jakie's dilemma: familial obligation vs. individual dream
- Faith vs. secularism
- Desire of "making it" in NY





# *The Jazz Singer:* Triangulations and the Man Behind the Mask

- Identities: Judaism, blackness, & entertainment
- Jazz = "musical miscegenation"
- What is *American*?



## Clip - "Kol Nidre"



# Revolutionizing the Industry

- While critics were not impressed by the film's artistry, the audience's reaction to the talkies would change movies forever
- *Life* magazine critic Robert E. Sherwood described his reaction to the spoken dialogue thusly, "I for one suddenly realized that the end of the silent drama is in sight"
- Two years after *The Jazz Singer* premiered, sound films nearly replaced all silent film produced by Hollywood.



# Supplementary Works Cited

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