

City University of New York (CUNY)

CUNY Academic Works

Publications and Research

CUNY Graduate Center

2005

Review of Two for the Road

Michael Adams

City University of New York

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

More information about this work at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_pubs/154

Discover additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu>

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).

Contact: AcademicWorks@cuny.edu

Two for the Road
(Fox Home Entertainment, 11.1.2005)

By 1967, Hollywood filmmakers were just getting around to being strongly influenced to what had been going on in foreign, especially European, films over the previous decade. The best American movies of that remarkable year, *Bonnie and Clyde*, *The Graduate*, and *Point Blank*, all showed clear indebtedness to Francois Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Federico Fellini, and Jean-Pierre Melville. While Stanley Donen's *Two for the Road* is not quite in their league, it shows that Donen and screenwriter Frederic Raphael paid close attention to the experiments with traditional narrative structure and manipulations of time by such directors as Michelangelo Antonioni and Alain Resnais.

Two for the Road depicts five journeys in France taken by Joanna (Audrey Hepburn) and Mark (Albert Finney) over twelve years. They meet cute when Joanna is the only one of a busload of English music students not felled by chicken pox. Hitchhiking architecture student Mark has attached himself to this group, so he and Joanna end up on the road together. Later, they are a recently married couple, traveling in a broken-down MG convertible, share traveling expenses with one of Mark's old girlfriends (Eleanor Bron), and her husband and daughter, travel with their own young daughter, as Joanna becomes tempted into adultery, and, finally, in the present, try to hold their shaky marriage together as well-to-do, bored sophisticates.

The main pleasure of *Two for the Road* is the way the narrative jumps back and forth between times in a way not previously seen in a Hollywood movie. This technique must have been confusing for mainstream audiences of 1967 who had not seen the films influencing Raphael and Donen. In his commentary, the director says he has often been asked if he decided on this structure only after shooting the film as a conventional narrative. Since a major transitional device is having one Joanna and Mark passed by the same couple from another period, these people clearly don't know how to watch a movie. Donen is correct in saying the film would be banal with a chronological structure and that the characters are constantly being affected by their earlier experiences so that all five periods become slight variations on one larger, shared experience.

This latter point is essential for understanding why Joanna stays with Mark, who becomes an increasingly work-obsessed jerk. He does not even recognize his daughter's name. One large problem with *Two for the Road* is that while Raphael, whose credits include *Darling* and *Eyes Wide Shut*, is capable of writing clever dialogue and making tentative attempts at grappling with bigger themes, he is not that good with characterization. Joanna and Mark leave us a bit cold, and if Hepburn and Finney were not around to lend their star magnetism, they would be deadly. Even the inestimable Hepburn seems at a bit of a loss at times because of Joanna's aloofness.

Donen explains that he shot the film in a 2.35:1 ratio to showcase the beautiful French scenery. Fox has restored *Two for the Road* to its original splendor, devoting an extra to a comparison with an inferior 1993 transfer. Much of Donen's commentary addresses the difficulties of filming on location. He is at his most amusing when recalling Jacqueline Bisset's audition for the role of the young Joanna's main rival for Mark's attentions. He admits she had the part as soon as he saw her. With a fuller face than she had soon afterward, Jackie resembles Rachel Weisz. Unfortunately, Bisset's voice was dubbed by another actress because when the dialogue was looped she was in Hollywood making *The Detective* with Frank Sinatra.—Michael Adams