

## Blu-ray Review: Rich, Brilliant Restoration of 'My Fair Lady'

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CHICAGO – One of the clear observations in re-connecting with the 1964 Oscar-winning Best Picture “My Fair Lady,” is that essentially it’s a timeless musical. It lives in a universe of George Bernard Shaw, adapted from his original play “Pygmalion,” and comes to life through the music and lyrics of Frederick Loewe and Alan Jay Lerner.



Blu-ray Rating: **4.5/5.0**

Audrey Hepburn stars as Eliza Doolittle, a controversial choice at the time, since Eliza was brought to the stage by the legendary Julie Andrews, but she creates a captivating, sprightly character that handles all the complex emotions of the character’s transition. Rex Harrison revives from the stage the role he is best known for, that of Professor Henry Higgins. Hepburn and Harrison have fine chemistry, and carry the glorious rendering of the film by iconic director George Cukor with heart and bearing.

Eliza is a street urchin, barely making ends meet as a flower girl outside the London opera. Her shrill Cockney accent is noticed by a linguist professor, Henry Higgins, as she converses with one Colonel Pickering (Wilfred Hyde-Pierce), a wealthy adventurer. Higgins and Pickering connect through the girl, finding out that Pickering is in London expressly to meet Professor Higgins, and the two renaissance men take up residence with each other.



Wouldn't it Be Lovely?: Eliza (Audrey Hepburn) and Higgins (Rex Harrison) in 'My Fair Lady'  
*Photo credit: CBS Blu-ray/Paramount Home Entertainment*

Eliza comes up with a plan, to ask Higgins to modify her Cockney accent, so she can get a better job. When she goes to the professor to offer her meager funds for the assignment, Pickering ups the ante. He wagers Higgins that he can't pass off Eliza as a cultured lady at a British embassy event. Higgins grandly takes the challenge, and tortures Eliza towards that end. Even as everything somewhat successfully takes place, the transition period ends, and confirmed bachelor Higgins finds he's "grown accustomed to her face."

"My Fair Lady" is often called the "perfect musical," and ran on Broadway from 1956 to 1962, as well as having numerous revivals, repertory runs and high school musical versions. It has inculcated itself within the general culture, and its original cast recording was even the best-selling album of 1956. And why not? It has given the musical realm such standards like "Wouldn't It Be Lovely?," "With a Little Bit of Luck," "The Rain in Spain," "I Could Have Danced All Night," "On the Street Where You Live," the bridegroom hymn "Get Me to the Church on Time" and the aforementioned "I've Grown Accustomed to Her Face."

The film version looks beautiful, and is a convincing argument for bringing Blu-ray technology to any system, especially a home theater. The opening overture is a kaleidoscope of flowers changing colors, and the precise film restoration combined with the technology is an explosion of sensory visuals. Small background images, like a series of Eliza pictures pronouncing various words in Higgin's lab, suddenly become apparent. This beauty allows for the combination of words and music to erupt from the screen.



And has there even been a most potent combination? The original play and screenplay from George Bernard Shaw's "Pygmalion" is used as the foundation for the musical, with Alan Jay Lerner writing the book as well as the lyrics. All the social class commentary that was in the original source makes it to the musical, and the dialogue parts are as good as the songs, which is often unusual for even the best musicals.

Audrey Hepburn holds her own, despite not singing the songs (she was dubbed by the ubiquitous Marni Nixon). She knows Eliza as she knows her own life, that of an ordinary girl made extraordinary star. Rex Harrison gives it his all for Higgins, and is best when playing the vulnerable parts of the character. Stanley Holloway as Eliza Dad Alfred Doolittle, from his original Broadway role, steals every scene he's in. The rest of the cast creates the Shaw-esque atmosphere that is vital for both the comedy and commentary.

Blu-ray packages are known for their extras, and My Fair Lady contains a "making-of" documentary, vintage featurettes, commentary which includes Marni Nixon and most remarkable of all, an alternate take on the original Audrey Hepburn vocals for the Eliza songs. It was her greatest disappointment that they weren't used for the finished film.

There are some problems. The length of the film is a touch overwhelming, as two of the best-known numbers come after the two hour, 15 minute mark. This might be a drag, but why complain? The definitive magic of the "My Fair Lady" in our culture is forever captured, looking more "lovely" than ever.

*The Blu-ray release of "My Fair Lady" is presented by CBS Blu-ray and Paramount Home Entertainment. Featuring Audrey Hepburn, Rex Harrison, Stanley Holloway, Wilfrid Hyde-White, Gladys Cooper and Jeremy Brett. Score by Frederick Loewe, Lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner. Screenplay by Alan Jay Lerner. Directed by George Cukor. Rated "G"*

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