

## Episode 03 - BANANAS

*MUSIC - BANANAS theme*

### Introduction

BANANAS is the 2nd film written and directed by Woody Allen, first released in 1971.

Woody Allen plays Fielding Mellish, who is really just Woody Allen's stock persona in the 70s - a cynical, smart-assed, New York guy. To impress a girl, he gets caught up in a revolution, and stumbles his way to the top.

Set, in part, in the fictional country of San Marcos, BANANAS gives Allen a chance to throw his persona fish right out of the water. It's a slapstick joke fest, with very little signs of the philosophical film maker that would emerge a few years later. Yet, it's remarkably prescient in this day and age. The political jokes have aged, if anything, too well.

Welcome to the Woody Allen Pages podcast, from me, the creator of the Woody Allen Pages website. This week, episode three, we look at 1971's BANANAS. We look at how the film came to be, what I loved and didn't love, and plenty of fun facts. Of course, spoilers are everywhere.

*FIELDING: How long before I can go back to New York?*

*ESPOSITO: After we win the revolution, we are free.*

*FIELDING: When is the revolution?*

*ESPOSITO: Six months.*

*FIELDING: Six months? I got a rented car.*

*ESPOSITO: You have a chance to die for freedom.*

*FIELDING: Freedom is wonderful. On the other hand, if you're dead, it's a drawback to your sex life.*

## Conception and story

BANANAS was only Woody Allen's second film and looking at it, 50 years later, it is understandably a bit ropey. He had made only one film before this - 1969's TAKE THE MONEY AND RUN - and he was slowly finding his way, and the people he wanted to work with. But even though this isn't Woody Allen, the director, at full power, there's plenty to love about the BANANAS, not least of which is just how funny it is.

There's a few different points of origin for the film. Most notably, Allen had several film ideas around this time and some of them were more dramatic. What would end up being BANANAS was just one of many ideas floating around for Allen and his old friend MICKEY ROSE, who was his writing partner at the time. One of the ideas was THE JAZZ BABY, which would be rewritten decades later into SWEET AND LOWDOWN.

Another of the many ideas that Rose and Allen discussed was a book adaptation. The book was DON QUIXOTE USA, a political comedy written by RICHARD POWELL, first published in 1966. Allen and Rose had the rights before they made TAKE THE MONEY AND RUN, and they returned to it for the follow up. But it seems that Allen really just wanted to use a couple of the names and characters in the book and make it his own. Still, the people around Allen thought it was best to buy up the rights, but gave Powell no on screen credit.

Allen had also played around with similar themes in his own story, VIVA VARGAS! It was one of many of Allen's short comic pieces that he wrote at the time, and many of them were published by THE NEW YORKER. But VIVA VARGAS! was too political for The New Yorker, so it was ultimately published by THE EVERGREEN REVIEW in 1969, and can be found in the Woody Allen short story collection GETTING EVEN.

VIVA VARGAS! was a bunch of journal entries by a helpless sap (and a very typical Woody Allen persona) who was caught up in a South American revolution. Allen would take a lot of elements from this story into the film that would be BANANAS - not least of all reusing the name of Vargas for one of the film's revolution leaders.

Allen's schtick in this period was always to play his onscreen persona. He wanted to be the star of the film, but knew he could only play certain roles. So

he stuck, at least in this stage of his career, with playing the same kind of guy but putting him in sillier and sillier situations. The fish-out-of-water approach meant Allen could remain the person that audiences knew and loved. There's plenty of precedents - like how GROUCHO MARX or BOB HOPE or CHARLIE CHAPLIN were essentially the same character in every film. It's that funny thing with all those characters that they make smart ass comments and no one around them even reacts.

*FIELDING: Can you believe that? She say I'm not leader enough for her. Who's she looking for - Hitler?*

*PAUL: Women are very temperamental.*

*FIELDING: We went everyplace together. We did everything. We fell in love. I fell in love. She just stood there.*

*PAUL: Did you have trouble in bed?*

*FIELDING: You kidding? Do I look like the kind of guy that'd have trouble in bed? I didn't. I didn't.*

*PAUL: Was that any reason to quit the job?*

*FIELDING: I'm so depressed. I'd kill myself if I thought that she would marry me.*

And why wouldn't Woody Allen play to his persona? At this point, it was probably still touch and go whether Allen would be a full time writer and director at all. His films were successes but people loved Woody Allen, the funny guy they saw on TV, doing stand-up or appearing on talk shows. It seems a little reductive now, but taking Allen's New York schtick to South America was actually a way for Allen to grow the character. And in 1971, no one wanted to see anything else from him.

So somewhere between wanting to make another fish-out-of-water BOB HOPE type comedy, and the ideas in VIVA VARGAS! and DON QUIXOTE USA, came the film that would become BANANAS.

It is interesting thinking of what could have been had Woody Allen continued down the road of political comedy. Allen actually made a number of political works around this time. He had his first real Broadway success with the 1966 play DON'T DRINK THE WATER, which dealt with a New York family stuck on the wrong side of the Iron Curtain. He's had plenty of potshots at politicians and people in power in his standup.

*FIELDING: You're making a big mistake. You gotta be smart to be a president. Let me be vice-president. That's a real idiot's job.*

Then there was 1971's MEN OF CRISIS: THE HARVEY WALLINGER STORY - a half hour documentary starring Allen and DIANE KEATON which satirised HENRY KISSINGER, who at the time was the National Security Advisor for the

United States. Kissinger helped to drive the US into Vietnam and in 1973 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize - causing two members of the committee to resign in protest.

MEN OF CRISIS was commissioned by US TV channel PBS but was ultimately not shown. PBS got scared of offending the government, but it can be seen at the Paley Center of Media in New York (as well as sometimes leaking online). If Allen was to ever allow a proper Criterion Collection release of BANANAS, MEN OF CRISIS would make the perfect special feature. It is very much related to BANANAS, and shows that politics was on his mind.

Yet - I don't think Allen is trying to make any specific political point about America or the nature of revolutions or anything like that. I guess he's making some points about politics being silly, or how power corrupts. But really - BANANAS says as much on geo politics as the film AIRPLANE does about the aviation industry.

*FIELDING: At last this country can finally bask in the sunshine of a true democracy. A land where no man is better than the next and there's equal opportunity for all and respect for law and order.*

*ESPOSITO: Right now, I am the law.*

*FIELDING: Yes but soon we'll hold elections, let the people choose their leaders and you can voluntarily step down and return to your simple farming. What's the matter? You look glassy-eyed.*

*ESPOSITO: These people are peasants. They are too ignorant to vote.*

*FIELDING: But they have common sense.*

*ESPOSITO: I am the ruler of this country. There will be no elections until I decree it.*

Years later, he would say he only made things like BANANAS not because he was political, but that he lived in political times. Which is true. The late 60s and early 70s was a time of huge political upheaval in America with Vietnam and communism and civil rights marches and much more. It's not unlike the early 2020s, where politics is on the forefront with so many movements and so many abuses of power.

Then there's plenty of BANANAS that had nothing to do with politics. It's a good

30 minutes into this 80ish minute film before Fielding arrives in San Marcos. Before that, there's a lot of Fielding in New York being a loser at love and making smart ass quips all the way.

*FIELDING: I was always very shy when it came to girls. I remember when I was a little boy, I once stole a pornographic book that was printed in Braille. I used to rub the dirty parts. And I guess I had a good relationship with my parents. They very rarely...I think they hit me once, actually, in my whole childhood. They started beating me on the 23rd December 1942 and stopped beating me in the late spring of '44. I was a nervous child. I was a bed-wetter. When I was younger, I used to sleep with an electric blanket and I was constantly electrocuting myself.*

The New York scenes have very little to do with San Marcos and are pretty much just a bunch of funny ideas that Allen strung together. But the sketches - which is really all they are - were pretty funny.

There is a celebrated scene where Fielding buys pornography. There is a whole strange dream featuring Fielding being crucified. And because it works as a GIF, there's a scene where Fielding helps a car back up and it hits another car, and it seems to have found a second life online. It's funny - but these scenes could have been in TAKE THE MONEY AND RUN or any number of these early Woody Allen films.

Allen wrote this film with his long time friend and recurring writing partner MICKEY ROSE. They had written TAKE THE MONEY AND RUN together, and the two would remain close friends, although they would never work together professionally again. But it's not like the pair scripted out a story and followed the pages. Allen and Rose wrote sketches and premises and the actors improvised over them. A lot of the scenes have very physical comedy and it was really up to Allen to bring the funny on the day in his performance in his performance. And much of the key dialogue was improvised.

It's clear they wrote and filmed a lot more than what was used in the finished film. There's a scene where Fielding drives a beat up car, with no hint to why it's damaged. There's a publicity photo of the date between Fielding and Nancy with Fielding holding two cigarettes that isn't used in the film at all. Another featured Allen dressed like a widow in San Marcos. There was also an unused car chase that was at least partly shot.

That car chase was supposed to be the film's ending, after the characters returned from San Marcos. That final part of the film features more sketches

including one completely random fake cigarette TV ad. But it's mostly an extended courtroom sequence. It was written out of necessity - the car chase didn't work and to reshoot it was too expensive. The courtroom idea was the cheapest and allowed Allen and Rose to do more jokes.

*FIELDING: I object, Your Honour. This trial is a travesty. It's a travesty of a mockery of a sham of a mockery of two mockeries of a sham. I move for a mistrial. You realise there's not a single homosexual on that jury.*

*JUDGE: Yes, there is.*

And that's really the long and short of it. BANANAS was really a platform for Allen to be funny. It's disjointed and scattered, but on top of it all is jokes, jokes and more jokes.

What's with the title? Well, Allen's not really offered a clear explanation. He's just said that the title worked - being a play on a number of angles. Bananas means crazy, but there's also a banana republic, a term to describe an unstable country. Allen has always been a fan of the song YES, WE HAVE NO BANANAS, which he would go on to use in other things. In some non English speaking countries the film was called ME AND THE REVOLUTION, because none of that Bananas stuff makes sense when you translate it. So you know, it's just a name.

*FIELDING: We need money.*

*LUIS: What is the chief export of San Marcos?*

*FIELDING: Dysentery.*

*LUIS: We grow bananas.*

*FIELDING: Bananas, bananas.*

## **Production, Cast and Crew**

For the San Marcos sequences, Allen and the team shot in Puerto Rico. Allen shot outside the US because there was tax breaks, but he admits that he wasn't made to function in such humidity.

Allen and his team shot all around the island. They brought with them the Cinemobile, the film studio in a van that had helped them save time and money on TAKE THE MONEY AND RUN. Incredibly, Allen was able to shoot a mock assassination right on the steps of the real San Juan Capital Building.

The San Marcos, Puerto Rico stuff gets all the attention. It's on all the posters

and it's the big hook of the film. But it's actually only slightly more than 35 minutes of the 80 minute film. Although Allen apparently cut it down from over an hour.

The San Marcos sequences feature quite a bit of action by Woody Allen standards. There's explosions and chases. Allen is never going to be JACKIE CHAN, but he put himself into the gags, and at one point hurt his hand doing a grenade stunt.

Allen used local crews and lots of local extras. I assume the extras were untrained but a lot of them are hilarious. I wonder what some of those big crowds were thinking. What are they making of the mock assassinations? Or watching a dictator make a speech?

And then there's San Marcos cast.

Mexican actor CARLOS MONTALBAN (the brother of RICARDO MONTALBAN of Star Trek and other famous roles) is great as Vargas, the first revolution leader. He's the posh leader, and he plays it straight so ridiculous things can happen around him. He was forty years into a career by this point and this was his last film role.

*VARGAS: May be some poison in my food but I am OK. I have been poisoned so many times, I have developed an immunity.*

The rebel gang are great. I love MIGUEL ANGEL SUAREZ, who plays rebel sideman Luis. It's almost like those awkward sitcoms like THE OFFICE, watching his shocked facial expressions as his boss goes mad.

And oh his boss, the great Esposito played so well by JACOBO MORALES. He also plays it straight, and steals the show when his true colours are revealed and he takes power. This speech is used as a meme all the time.

*ESPOSITO: Hear me. I am your new president. From this day on, the official language of San Marcos will be Swedish. Silence. In addition to that, all citizens will be required to change their underwear every half hour. Underwear will be worn on the outside so we can check. Furthermore, all children under 16 years old are now 16 years old.*

*FIELDING: What's the Spanish word for 'straitjacket'?*

*LUIS: The power has driven him mad.*

Puerto Rico gave Allen and his team a tax break to come to their country. And in turn, he gave first roles or early roles to a bunch of actors, including Morales and Suarez, who went on to be important actors and filmmakers in their own

country. Morales in particular is considered one of the most significant and important Puerto Rican filmmakers, and was nominated for an Academy Award.

Allen let's a whole bunch of his cinematic influences show in the film. The most conspicuous is the quick, erratic cutting of the French New Wave, or Nouvelle Vague. That film movement, which was still pretty new at the time, was rewriting rules of cinema. A rush of scenes, not necessarily in the correct order, could do more to convey an emotional feeling than a traditional sequence played in order. And Allen employs that here - you just have to look at the opening assassination sequence.

That might also be the excuse for many odd editing choices throughout the film, where we get just a glimpse of something - like Fielding closing a window - to simply let us know that they entered the apartment. Or, it's kinda just ropey editing.

The other big influence on this film is silent cinema. We'll go on a little bit more about that when we get to SLEEPER. But there's actually a whole lot of sequences here where it's just music and Allen doing physical comedy. There's not even diegetic sound.

This physical work is a real development as an actor and comedian for Allen. He started his career writing one liners, then did very verbal stand up comedy and wrote witty plays and films. Allen was known for his way with words and now he's working on his slapstick.

He does pretty well too. The sequence in Puerto Rico where he drugs his comrades is hilarious. Allen knows his own face very well at this point. He throws a particular smile that screams "I'm not guilty, please move along" that gets a laugh out of me every time. The scene early in the film with the excusizer could be lifted from CHARLIE CHAPLIN's MODERN TIMES. And despite his image of being a weakling, Allen manages to get a few shots of the basketball into the hoop. He'd dial down the physical comedy when he became a more serious filmmaker, but I think it's worth pointing out how good that stuff is here.



What also lifts the silent comedy sequences was another collaborator - MARVIN HAMLISCH, the renowned composer. Well, he wasn't that renowned in 1971, but he would go on to win every major award. Like, literally win every major award. He would go on to be an EGOT- a winner of an Emmy, a Grammy, an Oscar and a Tony. Only 16 people on the planet has that honour, and he's the only one who ever worked with Woody Allen. But in the early 70s, all those honours still lay ahead.

Allen had yet to settle on his trademark of using American jazz to score most of his films. Plus, he was apparently unable to really give Hamlich any real direction. Much like how he works with his actors, he just wanted someone talented to come along and go figure it out.

I feel like Hamlich has overproduced the music. He's come up with this incredible suite of orchestral arrangements. He uses gun shots sounds, Latin American influences and all manner of tricks to create this complex score. In a way it's good because it a lot of it has to carry a lot of the film. Like I said earlier, there are long comedic sequences in this film where the sound design is just score. On the other hand, it's like Hamlich brought a shotgun to a knife fight. I guess Hamlich is just super duper talented.

Hamlich also wrote a love theme that I assume was an attempt to write a hit song. It was not unheard of for a song to become a hit from a film, and Hamlich fashioned a musical theme he used in the film into an actual song. It was called CAUSE I BELIEVE IN LOVING.

*CAUSE I BELIEVE IN LOVING - JAKE HOLMES*

I've always wondered if that title is a pun - that the 'cause, you know, short for because, is a play on a political cause. But it seems unlikely, yet it's the only thing I can think of that ties this film to that lyric.

It was ultimately recorded and released by folksinger JAKE HOLMES. It didn't threaten the chart and it was no MRS ROBINSON. Hamlich liked the song enough that he later pitched it to CLIFF RICHARD who recorded a version. And it would be another 36 years before Allen would work with a dedicated composer again.

Another film influence. There's a sight gag that alludes to BATTLESHIP POTEMKIN, the 1926 silent Russian film. It's one of those films they talk about

in film class - very important in the history of filmmaking. The gag is during one of the revolutions where we see a pram falls down the stairs, much like one does in *BATTLESHIP POTEMKIN*. There's many more famous tributes to this scene, probably the best being in *THE UNTOUCHABLES* in 1987.

I bring up this small gag because I just don't know who in Woody Allen's audience in 1971 is just hanging out for him to make a *BATTLESHIP POTEMKIN* joke. Or parody French New Wave, now that I think about it. This is Woody Allen being indulgent. Not over indulgent, but he's deciding clearly to just make stuff for himself because he likes it and not for the audience. He would follow that instinct further as the years go on. But these Arthouse and cult film influences are just a glimpse of Allen's directing future. His palette was getting wider and he was learning to use all those influences and make incredible work.

The cinematographer is *ANDREW M COSTYKIAN*. Costikyan had done commercials and documentaries and some TV, but this was his most high profile film. This was the thing about these first few comedies - Allen had yet to attract top talent behind the camera. He was still finding his team. Costykian does an OK job but some of his shot choices are pretty showy. He loves placing out of focus elements in the foreground and it's pretty distracting.

Apart from Allen, *LOUISE LASSER* is the only other main cast member, playing Nancy. Allen wanted to cast her in *TAKE THE MONEY AND RUN* but she wasn't a big enough name. She was Woody Allen's second wife and the couple only recently divorced by the time the film was made. The break-up scene between Fielding and Nancy actually mirrors the real life breakup between Allen and Lasser. Some press found it curious at the time that Allen would star in a film with his ex-wife.

They had been married a few years, but their relationship was very turbulent. Allen writes about those crazy days in his memoir *APROPOS OF NOTHING*, and describes Lasser with great affection. The two remained friends and Lasser would work with Allen a few more times.

This is her best performance in an Allen film. She is a great foil for Allen, playing the straight man role. You imagine it's not easy to not break whilst putting up with Allen's silliness and she would hold her own with an improvised joke. And she remains captivating whilst doing it. Whatever their marriage problems, the two could still make each other laugh. They almost break character a couple of times, they are having so much fun.

*NANCY: I have to tell you something and I don't know how to break it.*

*FIELDING: Why? Is something the matter? Have you seen X-rays of me?*

*NANCY: I saw X-rays of you.*

*FIELDING: I fail to see the humour of this.*

*NANCY: You didn't see the X-rays.*

There's no other real characters in the film, but there's more than a few memorable cameos.

The film opens with DON DUNPHY and HOWARD COSELL, both real life sports presenters playing themselves. Both are part of ABC's Wide World Of Sports, and you can still see a logo on Cosell's jacket. The two men were flown to Puerto Rico to film their scenes, and both improvised their long monologues in the middle of a crowd. I get that both men probably do this for a living - I mean, what is sports commentary if not improv? But both men simply knock it out of the park. Here's Cossel talking about a coup like a sporting play.

*HOWARD COSELL: This is tremendous, Don, just tremendous. The atmosphere heavy, uncertain, overtones of ugliness. A reminder, in a way, of how it was in March of 1964 at Miami Beach when Clay met Liston for the first time and nobody was certain how it would turn out. The crowd is tense. They've been here since ten this morning. And... I think I see...the door beginning to open. El presidente may be coming out. The door opens. It's he.*

Cossel would work with Allen again years later and become friends. Dunphy also has another significant film credit - he called the fights in RAGING BULL.

Other cameos I love. I particularly love DOROTHI FOX, the black woman who plays J EDGAR HOOVER. The joke is so ridiculous, and Fox sells it.

*LAWYER: Name?*

*J EDGAR HOOVER: J Edgar Hoover.*

*LAWYER: Occupation?*

*J EDGAR HOOVER: Head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.*

*LAWYER: Can you tell the court why you're dressed like this.*

*J EDGAR HOOVER: I have many enemies and I rarely go out unless I'm in disguise.*

ED CROWLEY is great as an FBI agent who looks after Fielding in the US. Again, he plays it straight and gets some big laughs.

*BILL: I'm Bill Simmons. This is Tom Sloan. FBI. We're here to see that your safety is ensured. We'll act as your shield in the event of trouble. We missed him. We get most of them.*

And then there's the translator played by EULOGIO PERAZA. Who is incredible in what I think is his only ever film role.

*MR HERNANDEZ: I am Mr Hernandez, the official interpreter.*

*SENATOR: Welcome to the United States.*

*MR HERNANDEZ: Welcome to United States.*

*FIELDING: Thank you.*

*MR HERNANDEZ: Thank you.*

*SENATOR: Did you have a good flight?*

*MR HERNANDEZ: Did you have a good flight?*

*FIELDING: Yes, I did.*

*MR HERNANDEZ: Yes, I did.*

*SENATOR: We hope your stay in our country...*

*MR HERNANDEZ: We hope your stay in our country...*

*SENATOR: ...will be delightful.*

*MR HERNANDEZ: ...will be delightful.*

*FIELDING: I am looking forward to it...*

*MR HERNANDEZ: I am looking forward to it...*

*FIELDING: ...with great anticipation.*

*MR HERNANDEZ: ...with great anticipation.*

Then there's the cameo from SYLVESTER STALLONE. Stallone plays a thug in a subway, alongside ANTHONY CASO. Both are uncredited. Stallone was a struggling actor at this point and was considering giving up. He was still five years away from making ROCKY.

The story, as told many times, was that the two of them auditioned for Woody together and it didn't go well. So they went to a nearby shop, bought some stuff to slick up their hair and make them look more dangerous, and barged back into the audition, scaring the hell out of Allen and his team. Allen would audition Stallone again for several roles after this, but they would finally work together again, in voice only, for ANTZ, 27 years later. There they played best friends.

*WEAVER: Me, I'm cuttin' lose. We got a royal inspection comin' up.*

*Z: Inspection, meaning you're gonna stand around like an idiot while a bunch of*

*blue bloods smirk at you. I don't know how you put up with it, Weaver.*

*WEAVER: Z, I've known you for a long time. Right?*

*Z: Definitely. You were born two seconds after me.*

*WEAVER: Yeah. And ever since we were little, I've been listenin' to you complain.*

*What are you bitching about? In case you haven't noticed, we ants are running the show. We're the lords of the Earth.*

*Z: Hey. Don't talk to me about earth, okay? 'Cause I just spent all day hauling it around.*

## **Release and Reception**

BANANAS was released in May 1971. It did better than TAKE THE MONEY AND RUN. In fact, it's pretty much a steady rise with these films, each doing better than the last, up to and including the world beating ANNIE HALL in 1977.

BANANAS was the first film as part of a new deal with UNITED ARTISTS, a studio known for its director friendly approach and had Chaplin himself as a founder. By the early 70s, they had released films like WEST SIDE STORY, THE GRADUATE and other acclaimed films.

They would really go for working with auteurs with leanings towards New Hollywood. They were on fire in the 70s, making films like ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST, and allowing that subway thug to write a script to make ROCKY. Those two films along with ANNIE HALL would make three Academy Award Best Picture winners for UNITED ARTISTS in a row. Allen would make eight films for UNITED ARTISTS all up.

Allen's deal with UNITED ARTIST mirrored the creative control Allen got for his first film, which he made for PALOMAR PICTURES. But Palomar was a new company eager to get some known names onboard and willing to give Allen a modest amount as long as he delivered a film with his name on it and they could build a reputation. UNITED ARTISTS was different - a big independent film company who didn't normally do these kinds of deals. Allen got full creative control of the film - including final say on what to make, who to cast and final edit. He also got control of the marketing and advertising, and all aspects of how his work is presented. It wasn't a huge financial risk for UNITED ARTISTS - Allen worked pretty cheap - but the deal was the envy of directors everywhere.

Of the five films Woody Allen made before ANNIE HALL - the bunch of slapstick films that are often called The Early, Funny Ones, BANANAS for me is the weakest. It's not bad by any means, and there are some great moments. But it's just not as great as SLEEPER, LOVE AND DEATH and the others for me in this period.

If anything, it's a victim of it's time. These kind of bawdy silly comedies were de rigueur in the 60s and 70s, before New Hollywood hit. Just look at Allen's earlier writing project WHAT'S NEW PUSSYCAT? or look at some of the PETER SELLERS films at the time. Disjointed sketches with laughs over plot. You want to make a comedy film in the early 70s? Well this was kind of it. Allen would kind of make the ultimate version of this with his next film EVERYTHING YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT SEX\* (\*BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK). And then go on to destroy what comedy films could do shortly after.

There's lots of nice firsts here. Allen's first filming in New York City. Allen's first scene with a psychiatrist and his first steps paying tribute to European cinema. And it solidified Allen's standing as a bankable leading man. It's strange to imagine but the film company that had the rights to PLAY IT AGAIN, SAM didn't actually think Allen was famous enough to be the star of the film, even though he wrote the play and starred as the lead on Broadway. Allen's performance here, and the film's box office, changed their minds.

Yes, some of the filmmaking is ropery. The pacing is very slow and the plot is paper thin. Some of the editing is bad. He hasn't worked out what to do with music. You get a small glimpse of what Allen is trying to achieve, but it's just technically not very awesome. And a lot of it comes from the fact that it's a five decade old film and tastes and styles have moved on.

Still, it stands up as being pretty hilarious. The jokes still work, particularly a lot of the San Marcos stuff. Allen wasn't trying to make you think or feel, just laugh. And he does so, many, many times. It's fun to come across memes of this film, and as much as parts of it are dated, some parts of it are frighteningly relevant. Because I guess we are once again living in political times.

## **Fun facts**

Some fun facts about BANANAS.

The poster was designed by JACK DAVIS. Davis is a legend of cartooning, and one of the founders of MAD MAGAZINE, but his work was seen far and wide beyond that. His distinctive comic style led to him making posters for films such as IT'S A MAD MAD MAD MAD WORLD and BAD NEWS BEARS.

BANANAS was screened as part of the 1971 Taormina International Film Festival in Sicily, Italy, with Allen in attendance. Its location was Teatro Greco. Allen loved the location so much that he would shoot parts of MIGHTY APHRODITE there, two decades later.

Working as a casting assistant on this film is JULIET TAYLOR. Taylor would go on to cast every Woody Allen film up to 2015. It's one of the longest professional collaborations in all of cinema and it starts here. And she is the first of a number of people who would join Allen's circle for decades, and form one of the best filmmaking teams in cinematic history.

## **Outro**

Thanks for listening to this episode of the Woody Allen Pages podcast.

Next week - we look at a film that swept the awards, and lived two lives.

*LUIS: We are in the rebel camp with Esposito.*

*FIELDING: Blood. That should be on the inside.*