

# Photographers on Film: Dick Avery in 'Funny Face'

by IRIS VEYSEY on Jul 14, 2012 • 7:50 am



*Funny Face* (1957, Stanley Donen, Paramount Pictures)

*Funny Face* (1957) is a light musical comedy directed by Stanley Donen. Set to a Gershwin score, it centres on the romance between Dick Avery (Fred Astaire) and Jo Stockton (Audrey Hepburn). Avery is a fashion photographer at 'Quality' magazine; Stockton is the Greenwich Village intellectual who becomes his model.

Frivolous fantasy it may be, but *Funny Face* drew on real figures in the fashion industry. Most notably, Dick Avery was modelled on Richard Avedon. By 1957 Avedon was one of the world's most famous photographers. Marrying elegance and glamour with fun and spontaneity, Avedon brought fashion photography out of the studio and onto the streets. This is echoed in the film; in the sequence 'Take the Picture', Stockton poses for Avery on the streets of Paris, holding flowers in the market and fishing on the Seine. Stiffness and formality are eschewed in favour of natural vivacity.

Of course, Avery's character is really less about photography and more about Astaire. This is Astaire in his usual film persona: graceful, charming, and full of a jovial 'let's-put-on-a-show-kids' energy. Dressed in that familiar late-Astaire style (summer jackets, neckerchiefs, scarves as belts), Avery resembles Avedon in name and profession alone.

It is in the look of the film that Avedon's influence comes to the fore. Working on *Funny Face* as 'Special Visual Consultant', Avedon peppered the film with memorable imagery. In particular, he provided photographs for the opening titles. This is a sequence of glossy images: a woman in turban and jewels; chattering models in tweeds; Audrey Hepburn's wide-eyed face, floating on a white background.

*Funny Face* is remembered for its famous leads and sumptuous costumes. Yet photography is also integral to its success. Avery's profession enables the film to experiment visually, showcasing still photographs on the big screen. On the film's release, **LIFE** magazine declared it to be a 'movie enlivened by many bewitching photographic tricks'. Bewitching it is; with Hepburn shouting 'Take the picture!' in Paris, *Funny Face* makes photography seem easy, effortless, and beautifully simple.