



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

The Wizard of Oz

The Wizard of Oz

Director: Victor Fleming
Production Company: Loew's Incorporated
Producer: Mervyn LeRoy
Screenplay: Noel Langley, Florence Ryerson, Edgar Allan Woolf
Adaptation: Noel Langley
From the book by: L. Frank Baum
Photographed in Technicolor by: Harold Rosson
Associate Photographer: Allen Davey
Technicolor Director: Natalie Kalmus
Associate Technicolor Director: Henri Jaffa
Special Effects: Arnold Gillespie
Editor: Blanche Sewell
Art Director: Cedric Gibbons
Associate Art Director: William A. Horning
Set Decorations: Edwin B. Willis
Costumes: Adrian
Character Make-ups Created by: Jack Dawn
Music: Harold Arlen
Lyricist: E.Y. Harburg
Associate Conductor: George Stoll
Orchestration/Vocal Arrangements: George Bassman, Murray Cutter, Paul Marquardt, Ken Darby
Music Adapter: Herbert Stothart
Musical Numbers Staged by: Bobby Connolly
Recording Director: Douglas Shearer
Cast:
Judy Garland (*Dorothy Gale*)
Frank Morgan (*Professor Marvel/The Wizard*)
Ray Bolger (*Hunk/The Scarecrow*)
Bert Lahr (*Zeke/The Cowardly Lion*)
Jack Haley (*Hickory/The Tin Woodman*)
Billie Burke (*Glinda, the Good Witch*)
Margaret Hamilton
(*Miss Gulch/The Wicked Witch of the West*)
Charles Grapewin (*Uncle Henry*)
Pat Walshe (*Nikko*)
Clara Blandick (*Aunt Em*)
Toto (*Toto, the dog*)
Singer Midgets (*The Munchkins*)
USA 1939
102 mins
Digital 4K

On 13 October 1938 Production No. 1060 on the MGM's Culver City lot went before the cameras. A full six months later than the money men wanted, the film had already notched up the kind of budget MGM were used to receiving in box office receipts, not the other way around. When the lights finally went out on their newest sound stages after a record 22 weeks of filming, the total cost would come in at \$2,777,000, the biggest budget yet for the studio with the lion's roar.

When the studio was busy balancing its books, releasing the film to as many theatres as possible, filling the press with a publicity campaign the likes of which had never been seen before, there was little time for them to sit back and think that this film was a landmark moment in the history of the cinema. The studio heads were more concerned with getting it out there and seeing a return on their huge investment. The stars were already back on the MGM lot learning new lines ready for their next picture, their last film fading into memory. The 'film factory' was always churning out new features to keep directors, technicians, designers, and many more too busy to really contemplate what would become of the last thing they worked on. Realistically then, how could anyone involved in the film know that what they had created over late 1938 and early 1939 would turn out to be the most watched film of all time? Only with hindsight can we see the perfect marriage of all the elements of production that explains why this film, above all others, is so unique, so loved, so watched. To recall the film itself, when the munchkins tell Dorothy she'll go down in history, they were not wrong. *The Wizard of Oz* has done just that.

'Unlikely as it would have seemed to those mired in the day-to-day confusions, *Oz*, like all genuine works of art, was to emerge from its long gestation with the unblemished appearance of inevitability,' writes Gerald Clarke in the Judy Garland biography, *Get Happy*. Emerge unblemished it did, but there were quite a few blots on the *Oz* landscape during production to put in to question whether the film would ever emerge at all. It's common knowledge that the role of Dorothy almost went to the huge box office pulling power of Shirley Temple. Under contract at Fox, whom MGM had promised to loan out Clark Gable and Jean Harlow in return for the diminutive dimpled star, everything seemed to be set for Temple to take the role which in many ways she seemed made for. After all, in the *Oz* books Dorothy is a girl of ten, not a growing teenager of sixteen. But as luck would have it for Judy Garland, it was quickly discovered that Temple's singing voice was just not up to the job, or as Roger Edens (Garland's musical champion at MGM) put it, 'her vocal limitations are insurmountable', and so the door to the Yellow Brick Road was left open for Judy. And who now can imagine 'Over the Rainbow' sung by anyone else?

It wasn't just Judy's role that was up for grabs. There would be more changes to cast and crew before the cameras started rolling, not to mention a few significant changes once they were up and running that altered the face of the film, making it the timeless classic it is today. Originally cast as the Scarecrow, Buddy Ebsen agreed to swap places with Ray Bolger, who felt miscast as the Tin Woodman knowing his acrobatic dance skills were best served if filled with straw. And in early costume stills from the film it does seem that Ebsen was born for the part of a man made out of tin. One imagines, however, as he

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Fri 17 Jan 20:35

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Adrian Wootton, Chief Executive, Film London and
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languished in an oxygen tent two weeks after filming had begun, having breathed in the toxic aluminum dust of his make-up every day, that he wished he'd never been so generous to his fellow Vaudevillian star Bolger. As he recuperated from the near-fatal poisoning, the make-up department redesigned the Tin Woodman, using aluminum paste instead of powder for the skin tone and, unbeknownst to Ebsen, a new Tin Woodman was hired: radio star and MGM contract player Jack Haley, who was not told about Ebsen's unfortunate departure from the film.

Along with Ebsen, Oz's producers Mervyn LeRoy and Arthur Freed replaced original director Richard Thorpe, whose two weeks worth of dailies hadn't impressed the men in suits. In came George Cukor, whose brief contribution to the film became the most vital part of all. Remember Dorothy was supposed to be a ten-year-old girl with blonde curls, which couldn't be farther from the curvy redhead figure of a young Judy Garland. The star recalls how the make-up department under instruction from Thorpe 'tried to convert me into another person. They put a long blonde wig on me and tried to change my nose by reinforcing it with putty. Then they put caps on my teeth, and made me wear a special corset to flatten my bust.' Cukor took one look at her, hated the make-up and Garland's acting, got rid of the wig, the fake nose, the frilly costume, and coached Garland into giving what is arguably the best performance of her career. Even though Cukor wasn't around long enough to shoot any actual footage, replaced by the tough no-nonsense direction of Victor Fleming, without his input (he also altered the Scarecrow's costume) *The Wizard of Oz* certainly wouldn't look as it does today, and who knows whether it would be as popular.

One last change behind the scenes perhaps sealed the fate not only of *The Wizard of Oz* taking up residence in our hearts all these years, but of its tragic star as well. Fleming, having steered his stars along what turned out to be quite a tumultuous path down the Yellow Brick Road was called over to yet another troubled production shooting in 1939, ironically enough replacing George Cukor again as *Gone with the Wind* sailed in to some choppy waters. All that was left on Oz to shoot was the farewell ending in the Emerald City and the black-and-white scenes on the Kansas farm, so in stepped King Vidor. Bringing with him the wealth of experience garnered in his work in silent film, which can quite clearly be seen in what has become the iconic moment from the film, when Judy sings 'Over the Rainbow'. He goes uncredited for the work he did on Oz, but no one can underestimate his contribution which, like Cukor's, arguably shapes the film into what it is today. With emotion and melancholy borne out of the deeply affecting lyrics of Yip Harburg's Oscar winning song, Judy's rendition is at the heart of the film, Vidor's direction adding some indelible element that perhaps would not have been there had it been left to Fleming.

Fourteen writers, four directors, on-set accidents with fire and exploding broomsticks, not to mention 120 'munchkins' running amok on the MGM lot, couldn't have made *The Wizard of Oz* the easiest film to work on. But it is undoubtedly a classic. Proving that dreams, even the ones thought up in Hollywood, really do come true.

Emma Smart, BFI Director of Collections, Learning & Engagement