

Saturday, April 9, 2011; 2 & 8 pm only



The Rocky Road to OZ

By the time *The Wizard of Oz* premiered at Sid Grauman's Chinese Theater on a summer night in 1939, it had been staged successfully as a Broadway musical and three silent film versions had already been released. L. Frank Baum, creator of the Oz franchise did his own production in 1914 and the 1925 version directed by silent film comedian Larry Semon featured Oliver 'Babe' Hardy as the Tin Woodman. Samuel Goldwyn, who had acquired the film rights in 1933, sold them to M-G-M for \$75,000 and the adventure began.

The making of *The Wizard of Oz* wasn't exactly a walk down the yellow brick road and a bumpy ride lay ahead on M-G-M's massive Soundstage 27 in Culver City. The characters of Dorothy and her friends have become forever linked with the actors who created the roles, particularly Judy Garland, but the film might have looked very different. "Producers originally wanted comedian W.C. Fields as the Wizard and considered using a real lion instead of a costumed actor," said Turner Classic Movies Host and author Robert Osborne in a recent interview. But a disagreement between M-G-M and the notoriously difficult comic actor squelched that deal. They also envisioned the Wicked Witch of the West as beautiful and cast the glamorous Gale Sondergaard before switching to Margaret Hamilton when others pushed for a disfigured, obviously evil villain.

And, of course, there was the central character herself, a part some sources say M-G-M head Louis B. Mayer wanted to give reigning child star Shirley Temple, then under contract to Fox. With Temple unavailable, M-G-M contract player Judy Garland was brought in to the role that made her a star, won her a special juvenile-performer Oscar®, and became an integral part of her legend. The memorable Harold Arlen and

E.Y Harburg tune "Over the Rainbow" (which was almost cut from the picture) became Garland's theme and a song that has attained cult status.

Casting was not the only problem. The script was labored over by 16 writers, 13 of whom went uncredited including cast members Jack Haley and Bert Lahr, poet Ogden Nash, and screenwriter Herman J. Mankiewicz, who authored *Citizen Kane* (1941). The picture went through five directors (Norman Taurog, Mervyn LeRoy, George Cukor, Richard Thorpe and Victor Fleming), a ton of extras and they almost fried Margaret Hamilton in the effects created for the Wicked Witch's fiery exit.

Yet despite the difficulties, and the initial lackluster box office, *The Wizard of Oz* was Oscar®-nominated for Best Picture, Color Cinematography, Interior Decoration, and Special Effects and won awards for Best Song ("*Over the Rainbow*") and Original Score. It also placed tenth on the list of the Greatest American Films of All Time. "There's no question that Steven Spielberg, George Lucas, Peter Jackson, almost any influential contemporary filmmaker you could name grew up on *The Wizard of Oz*," said film critic and author Leonard Maltin. "Its influence cannot be denied or even underestimated." ■



Original cast still and lobby card courtesy of the Natural History Museum, Los Angeles County - Motion Picture Collection.

Membership Benefits

Besides supporting our mission, members can enjoy our new **Movie and a Meal** promotion.

Members save 20% at premium restaurants anytime. Patrons on show days with ticket stub receive **10% off!** (Note: some restrictions apply, check when ordering)

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Please list your two favorite films:

Coming Events in 2011

Saturday, **June 25** at 2 & 8 pm only

**Elvis is at the wheel
but Ann-Margret drives him wild!**



The sizzling combination of Elvis Presley and vixen Ann-Margret is enough to carry **Viva Las Vegas** over the top, even with several flashy musical numbers, a glamorous locale and one electrifying auto race sequence. Cast also includes Cesare Danova, William Demarest, Nicky Blair and Jack Carter. Produced and Directed by George Sidney. (M-G-M 1964)

Saturday, **October 22** at 2 & 8 pm only

**Aliens Resurrecting The Dead!
Flying Saucers Over Hollywood!**



Ed D. Wood's
PLAN 9 FROM OUTER SPACE

Plan 9? What was the AFS Board thinking?

Can your heart stand the shocking facts about Graverobbers from Outer Space? That's the question on the lips of the narrator of this tale about flying saucers, zombies and cardboard tombstones. A pair of aliens, angered by the stupid minds of planet Earth, set up shop in a California cemetery. Their plan is to animate an army of the dead to march on the capitals of the world. (The fact that they have only managed to resurrect three zombies to date has not discouraged them.) An intrepid airline pilot living near the cemetery must rescue his wife from this low-budget, cult classic terror. **Plan 9 From Outer Space** stars Bela Lugosi, Vampira, and Lyle Talbot. (Reynolds Pictures 1958)

Short films underwritten by DAVID & CATHERINE STROHMAIER

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Alex Film Society

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