**Section 5: The Studio System in Action:**

**The Wizard of Oz: A Case Study**

**USA, 1939**

Running time: 101 minutes
Sepia/Technicolor

*directed by Victor Fleming*
*written by* *Noel Langley, Florence Ryerson, Edgar Allan Woolf*
*based on the book “The Wizard of Oz” by L. Frank Baum*
*cinematographer: Harold Rosson*
*Musical Score: Herbert Stothart*

*Songs: E.Y. Harburg and Harold Arlen*
*edited by* *Blanche Sewell*

*with:*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ***Judy Garland******Frank Morgan******Ray Bolger******Bert Lahr******Jack Haley******Billie Burke******Margaret Hamilton******Charley Grapewin******Clara Blandick*** |  |

**Section 5a:The Making of The Wizard of Oz**

**Read the article, view the documentary and answer the questions**

## Production

### Development and pre-production

Development of the film started when the success of [Walt Disney's](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walt_Disney) [Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snow_White_and_the_Seven_Dwarfs_%281937_film%29#Reception) showed that films adapted from popular children's stories and fairytale folklore could be successful.[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-Fricke-1)[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-TheMakingOfAMovieClassic-7) In January 1938, [Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer) bought the rights to the [hugely popular novel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Wonderful_Wizard_of_Oz) from [Samuel Goldwyn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Goldwyn), who had toyed with the idea of making the film as a vehicle for [Eddie Cantor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eddie_Cantor), who was under contract to the Goldwyn studios and whom Goldwyn wanted to cast as the Scarecrow.[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-TheMakingOfAMovieClassic-7)

The script went through a number of writers and revisions before the final shooting.[[7]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-Harmetz-8) Originally, [Mervyn LeRoy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mervyn_LeRoy)'s assistant William H. Cannon submitted a brief four-page outline.[[7]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-Harmetz-8) Because recent fantasy films had not fared well at the box office, he recommended that the magical elements of the story be toned down or eliminated. In his outline, the [Scarecrow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scarecrow_%28Oz%29) was a man so stupid that the only way he could get employment was to dress up as a scarecrow and scare away crows in a cornfield, and the [Tin Woodman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tin_Woodman) was a hardened criminal so heartless he was sentenced to be placed in a tin suit for eternity. The torture of being encased in the suit had softened him and made him gentle and kind.[[7]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-Harmetz-8) His vision was similar to [Larry Semon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Larry_Semon)'s [1925 film adaptation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281925_film%29) of the story, in which the magical element is absent.

After that, LeRoy hired screenwriter [Herman J. Mankiewicz](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herman_J._Mankiewicz) to work on a script. Despite Mankiewicz's notorious reputation at that time for being an alcoholic, he soon delivered a 17-page draft of the Kansas scenes, and a few weeks later, he handed in a further 56 pages. [Noel Langley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noel_Langley) and poet [Ogden Nash](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ogden_Nash) were also hired to write separate versions of the story. None of the three writers involved knew anyone else was working on a script, but it was not an uncommon procedure. Nash soon delivered a four page outline, Langley turned in a 43-page treatment and a full film script. He turned in three more, this time incorporating the songs that had been written by [Harold Arlen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harold_Arlen) and [Yip Harburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yip_Harburg). No sooner had he completed it than [Florence Ryerson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florence_Ryerson) and [Edgar Allan Woolf](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edgar_Allan_Woolf) submitted a script and were brought on board to touch up the writing. They would be responsible for making sure the story stayed true to the Baum book. During filming, [Victor Fleming](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victor_Fleming) and [John Lee Mahin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Lee_Mahin) revised the script further, adding and cutting some scenes. In addition, Jack Haley and Bert Lahr are known to have written some of their own dialogue for the Kansas sequence.

The final draft of the script was completed on October 8, 1938, following numerous rewrites.[[8]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-timeline-9) All in all, it was a mish-mash of many creative minds, but Langley, Ryerson and Woolf got the film credits. Along with the contributors already mentioned, others who assisted with the adaptation without receiving official credit include: [Irving Brecher](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irving_Brecher), [Herbert Fields](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbert_Fields), [Arthur Freed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Freed), [E. Y. Harburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yip_Harburg), [Samuel Hoffenstein](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Hoffenstein), Jack Mintz, Sid Silvers, [Richard Thorpe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Thorpe), [George Cukor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Cukor) and [King Vidor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_Vidor).[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-TheMakingOfAMovieClassic-7)

In addition, songwriter Harburg's son (and biographer) Ernie Harburg reports,[[9]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-democracynow.org-10)

So anyhow, Yip also wrote all the dialogue in that time and the setup to the songs and he also wrote the part where they give out the heart, the brains and the nerve, because he was the final script editor. And he — there was eleven screenwriters on that — and he pulled the whole thing together, wrote his own lines and gave the thing a coherence and unity which made it a work of art. But he doesn't get credit for that. He gets lyrics by E. Y. Harburg, you see. But nevertheless, he put his influence on the thing.

The original producers thought that a 1939 audience was too sophisticated to accept Oz as a straight-ahead fantasy; therefore, it was reconceived as a lengthy, elaborate [dream](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dream_sequence). Because of a perceived need to attract a youthful audience through appealing to modern fads and styles, the score originally featured a song called "The Jitterbug," and the script originally featured a scene with a series of musical contests. A spoiled, selfish princess in Oz had outlawed all forms of music except classical and [operetta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operetta) and went up against Dorothy in a singing contest in which her swing style enchanted listeners and won the grand prize. This part was initially written for [Betty Jaynes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Betty_Jaynes).[[10]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-11) The plan was later dropped.

Another scene, which was removed before final script approval and never filmed, was a concluding scene back in Kansas after Dorothy's return. Hunk (the Kansan counterpart to the Scarecrow) is leaving for agricultural college and extracts a promise from Dorothy to write to him. The implication of the scene is that romance will eventually develop between the two, which also may have been intended as an explanation for Dorothy's partiality for the Scarecrow over her other two companions. This plot idea was never totally dropped, however; it is especially noticeable in the final script when Dorothy, just before she is to leave Oz, tells the Scarecrow, "I think I'll miss you most of all."[[11]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-12)

In his book The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, Baum describes Kansas as being 'in shades of gray.' Further, Dorothy lived inside a farmhouse which had its paint blistered and washed away by the weather, giving it an 'air of grayness.' The house and property were situated in the middle of a sweeping prairie where the grass was burnt gray by harsh sun. Aunt Em and Uncle Henry were 'gray with age.' Effectively, the use of monochrome sepia tones for the Kansas sequences was a stylistic choice that evoked the dull and gray countryside.[[citation needed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia%3ACitation_needed)] Much attention was given to the use of color in the production, with the MGM production crew favoring some hues over others. Consequently, it took the studio's art department almost a week to settle on the final shade of yellow used for the [Yellow Brick Road](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yellow_brick_road).[[12]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-13)

### Casting

Mervyn LeRoy had always insisted that he wanted to cast Judy Garland to play Dorothy from the start; however, evidence suggests that negotiations occurred early in pre-production for [Shirley Temple](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shirley_Temple) to be cast as Dorothy, on loan out from [20th Century Fox](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/20th_Century_Fox). A persistent rumor also existed that Fox was in turn promised [Clark Gable](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clark_Gable) and [Jean Harlow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_Harlow) as a loan from MGM. The tale is almost certainly untrue, as Harlow died in 1937, before MGM had even purchased the rights to the story. Despite this, the story appears in many film biographies (including Temple's own autobiography). The documentary The Wonderful Wizard of Oz: The Making of a Movie Classic states that Mervyn LeRoy was under pressure to cast Temple, then the most popular child star; but at an unofficial audition, MGM musical mainstay [Roger Edens](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roger_Edens) listened to her sing and felt that an actress with a different style was needed. Newsreel footage is included in which Temple wisecracks, "There's no place like home," suggesting that she was being considered for the part at that time.[[13]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-14) A possibility is that this consideration did indeed take place, but that Gable and Harlow were not part of the proposed deal.

Actress [Deanna Durbin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deanna_Durbin), who was under contract to [Universal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_Studios), was also considered for the part of Dorothy. Durbin, at the time, far exceeded Garland in film experience and fan base and both had co-starred in a 1936 [two-reeler](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Short_subject) titled [Every Sunday](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Every_Sunday). The film was most notable for exhibiting Durbin's operatic style of singing against Garland's jazzier style. Durbin was possibly passed over once it was decided to bring on Betty Jaynes, also an operatic singer, to rival Garland's jazz in the aforementioned discarded subplot of the film.





[Buddy Ebsen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddy_Ebsen)'s first makeup test as the Tin Man.

Ray Bolger was originally cast as the Tin Man and [Buddy Ebsen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddy_Ebsen) (later famous for his role as Jed Clampett on the popular 1960s TV show [The Beverly Hillbillies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Beverly_Hillbillies)) was to play the Scarecrow.[[8]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-timeline-9) Bolger, however, longed to play the Scarecrow, as his childhood idol [Fred Stone](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fred_Stone) had done [on stage in 1902](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Wizard_of_Oz_%281902_stage_play%29); with that very performance, Stone had inspired him to become a vaudevillian in the first place. Now unhappy with his role as the Tin Man (reportedly claiming, "I'm not a tin performer; I'm fluid"), Bolger convinced producer Mervyn LeRoy to recast him in the part he so desired.[[14]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-cemeteryguide.com-15) Ebsen did not object; after going over the basics of the Scarecrow's distinctive gait with Bolger (as a professional dancer, Ebsen had been cast because the studio was confident he would be up to the task of replicating the famous "wobbly-walk" of Stone's Scarecrow), he recorded all of his songs, went through all the rehearsals as the Tin Man, and began filming with the rest of the cast.[[15]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-16)

Bert Lahr was signed for the Cowardly Lion on July 25, 1938; the next month, Charles Grapewin was cast as Uncle Henry on August 12.

[W. C. Fields](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W._C._Fields) was originally chosen for the role of the Wizard, a role turned down by [Ed Wynn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ed_Wynn) as he thought the part was too small, but the studio ran out of patience after protracted haggling over Fields' fee; instead, another contract player, Frank Morgan, was cast on September 22.

[Gale Sondergaard](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gale_Sondergaard) was originally cast as the [Wicked Witch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wicked_Witch_of_the_West). She became unhappy when the witch's persona shifted from sly and glamorous (thought to emulate the wicked queen in Disney's [Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snow_White_and_the_Seven_Dwarfs_%281937_film%29)) into the familiar "ugly hag." She turned down the role and was replaced on October 10, 1938, just three days before filming started, by MGM contract player Margaret Hamilton. Sondergaard said in an interview for a bonus feature on the DVD that she had no regrets about turning down the part, and would go on to play a glamorous villain in Fox's version of [Maurice Maeterlinck](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maurice_Maeterlinck)'s [The Blue Bird](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Blue_Bird_%281940_film%29) in 1940; that same year, Margaret Hamilton would play a role remarkably similar to the Wicked Witch in the Judy Garland film [Babes in Arms](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babes_in_Arms_%28film%29).

According to [Aljean Harmetz](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aljean_Harmetz), when the wardrobe department was looking for a coat for Frank Morgan, they decided that they wanted a once elegant coat that had "gone to seed." They went to a second-hand shop and purchased a whole rack of coats, from which Morgan, the head of the wardrobe department and director Fleming chose one they thought had the perfect appearance of shabby gentility. One day, while he was on set wearing the coat, Morgan turned out one of the pockets and discovered a label indicating that the coat had once belonged to Oz author L. Frank Baum. Mary Mayer, a unit publicist for the film, contacted the tailor and Baum's widow, who both verified that the coat had indeed once belonged to the writer. After filming was completed, the coat was presented to Mrs. Baum. Baum biographer [Michael Patrick Hearn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Patrick_Hearn) disbelieves the story, it having been refuted by members of the Baum family, who never saw the coat or knew of the story, as well as by Margaret Hamilton, who considered it a concocted studio rumor.[[16]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-17)

### Filming

Filming commenced October 13, 1938 on the [MGM Studios](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer) lot in [Culver City, California](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culver_City%2C_California), under the direction of [Richard Thorpe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Thorpe) (replacing original director [Norman Taurog](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norman_Taurog), who only filmed a few early Technicolor tests and was then reassigned). Thorpe initially shot about two weeks of footage (nine days, total) involving Dorothy's first encounter with the Scarecrow, as well as a number of sequences in the Wicked Witch's castle, such as Dorothy's rescue (which, though unreleased, comprises the only footage of Buddy Ebsen's Tin Man).

Ten days into the shoot, however, Ebsen suffered a reaction to the aluminum powder makeup he wore; the powder he breathed in daily as it was applied had coated his lungs. Ebsen was hospitalized in critical condition, and subsequently was forced to leave the project; in a later interview (included on the 2005 DVD release of The Wizard of Oz), Ebsen recalled the studio heads initially disbelieving that he was seriously ill, only realizing the extent of the actor's condition when they showed up in the hospital as he was convalescing in an [iron lung](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Negative_pressure_ventilator). Ebsen's sudden medical departure caused the film to shut down while a new actor was found to fill the part. No full footage of Ebsen as the Tin Man has ever been released — only photographs taken during filming and test photos of different makeup styles remain. MGM did not publicize the reasons for Ebsen's departure until decades later, in a promotional documentary about the film. His replacement, [Jack Haley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_Haley), simply assumed he had been fired.[[17]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-18) Ironically, despite his near-death experience, Ebsen outlived all of the principal cast members by at least sixteen years, although his film career was damaged by the incident.

Producer Mervyn LeRoy had taken this time to review the already shot footage and felt that Thorpe seemed to be rushing the picture along, creating a negative impact on the actors' performances; thus, LeRoy decided to have Thorpe replaced. During reorganization on the production, [George Cukor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Cukor) temporarily took over, under LeRoy's guidance. Initially, the studio had made Garland wear a blond wig and heavy, "baby-doll" makeup, and she played Dorothy in an exaggerated fashion; now, Cukor changed Judy Garland's and Margaret Hamilton's makeup and costumes, and told Garland to "be herself." This meant that all the scenes Garland and Hamilton had already completed had to be discarded and re-filmed. Cukor also suggested that the studio cast Jack Haley, on loan from [20th Century Fox](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/20th_Century_Fox), as the Tin Man. To keep down on production costs, Haley only re-recorded "If I Only Had a Heart" and solo lines during "The Jitterbug" and "If I Only Had the Nerve;" as such, Buddy Ebsen's voice can still be heard in the remaining songs featuring the Tin Man in group vocals. The makeup used for Haley was quietly changed to an aluminum paste, with a layer of clown white greasepaint underneath to protect his skin; although it did not have the same dire effect on Haley, he did at one point suffer from an unpleasant eye infection from it.

In addition, [Ray Bolger](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ray_Bolger)'s original recording of "If I Only Had a Brain" had been far more sedate compared to the version heard in the film; during this time, Cukor and LeRoy decided that a more energetic rendition would better suit Dorothy's initial meeting with the Scarecrow (initially, it was to contrast with his lively manner in Thorpe's footage), and was re-recorded as such. At first thought to be lost for over seven decades, a recording of this original version was rediscovered in 2009.[[18]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-19)

Cukor did not actually shoot any scenes for the film, merely acting as something of a "creative advisor" to the troubled production, and, because of his prior commitment to direct [Gone with the Wind](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gone_with_the_Wind_%28film%29), he left on November 3, 1938, at which time [Victor Fleming](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victor_Fleming) assumed the directorial responsibility. As director, Fleming chose not to shift the film from Cukor's creative realignment, as producer LeRoy had already pronounced his satisfaction with the new course the film was taking.

Production on the bulk of the Technicolor sequences was a long and cumbersome process that ran for over six months, from October 1938 to March 1939. Most of the actors worked six days a week and had to arrive at the studio as early as four or five in the morning, to be fitted with makeup and costumes, and would not leave until seven or eight at night. Cumbersome makeup and costumes were made even more uncomfortable by the daylight-bright lighting the early Technicolor process required, which could heat the set to over 100°F. According to Ray Bolger, most of the Oz principals were banned from eating in the studio's commissary due to their costumes. Margaret Hamilton's witch makeup meant that she could not eat solid food, so she practically lived on a liquid diet during filming of the Oz sequences. Additionally, it took upwards of 12 takes to have Dorothy's dog Toto run alongside the actors as they skipped down the Yellow Brick Road.

All of the Oz sequences were filmed in three-strip [Technicolor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technicolor).[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-TheMakingOfAMovieClassic-7)[[7]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-Harmetz-8) The [opening](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opening_credits) and [closing credits](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Closing_credits), as well as the [Kansas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kansas) sequences, were filmed in black and white and colored in a [sepia tone](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sepia_tone) process.[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-TheMakingOfAMovieClassic-7) Sepia-toned film was also used in the scene where Aunt Em appears in the Wicked Witch's crystal ball.

The massive shoot also proved to be somewhat chaotic. This was most evident when trying to put together the Munchkinland sequences. MGM talent scouts searched the country far and wide to come up with over a hundred little people who would make up the citizens of Munchkinland; this meant that most of the film's Oz sequences would have to already be shot before work on the Munchkinland sequence could begin. According to Munchkin actor [Jerry Maren](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerry_Maren), each little person was paid over $125 a week for their performances. Munchkin [Meinhardt Raabe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meinhardt_Raabe), who played the coroner, revealed in the 1990 documentary The Making of the Wizard of Oz that the MGM costume and wardrobe department, under the direction of designer [Adrian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adrian_%28costume_designer%29), had to design over one hundred costumes for the Munchkin sequences. They then had to photograph and catalog each Munchkin in his or her costume so that they could correctly apply the same costume and makeup each day of production.

Filming even proved to be dangerous, at times. Margaret Hamilton was severely burned in the Munchkinland scene, and as she tells the story on the DVD commentary: "There was a little [elevator](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elevator) that was supposed to take me down, with a bit of fire and [smoke](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smoke) erupting to dramatize and conceal my exit. The first take ran like clockwork, I went down out of my clothes, the fire and smoke erupted and that's the one you see." But for the second take, the timing was off, and she was exposed to the flames. The grease in her copper-based makeup caught fire and had to be completely and quickly removed before the ensuing second-degree burns on her hands and face could be treated. After spending some six weeks in the hospital convalescing, she returned to the picture.

On February 12, 1939, Victor Fleming hastily replaced George Cukor in directing [Gone with the Wind](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gone_with_the_Wind_%28film%29); the next day, [King Vidor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_Vidor) was assigned as director by the studio to finish the filming of The Wizard of Oz (mainly the [sepia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sepia_tone) Kansas sequences, including Judy Garland's singing of "[Over the Rainbow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Over_the_Rainbow)"). In later years, when the film became firmly established as a classic, Vidor chose not to take public credit for his contribution until after the death of his friend Fleming in 1949.

### Post-production

Principal photography concluded with the Kansas sequences on March 16, 1939; nonetheless re-shoots and pick-up shots were filmed throughout April, May and into June, under the direction of producer LeRoy. After the deletion of the "Over the Rainbow" reprise during subsequent test screenings in early June, Judy Garland had to be brought back one more time in order to reshoot the "Auntie Em, I'm frightened!" scene without the song; the footage of Clara Blandick's Auntie Em, as shot by Vidor, had already been set aside for rear projection work, and was simply reused. After Margaret Hamilton's torturous experience with the Munchkinland elevator, she refused to do the pick-ups for the scene in which she flies on a broomstick which billows smoke, so LeRoy chose to have stand-in Betty Danko perform the scene instead; as a result, Danko was severely injured doing the scene due to a malfunction in the smoke mechanism.[[19]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-20)

At this point, the film began a long arduous post-production. [Herbert Stothart](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbert_Stothart) had to compose the film's background score, while [A. Arnold Gillespie](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A._Arnold_Gillespie) had to perfect the various special effects that the film required, including many of the rear projection shots. The MGM art department also had to create the various matte paintings for the background of many of the scenes.

One significant innovation planned for the film was the use of "stencil printing" for the transition to Technicolor. Each frame was to be hand-tinted to maintain the sepia tone; however, because this was too expensive and labor intensive, it was abandoned and MGM used a simpler and less expensive variation of the process. During the re-shoots in May, the inside of the farm house was painted sepia, and when [Dorothy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dorothy_Gale) opens the door, it is not Garland but her stand-in, Bobbie Koshay, wearing a sepia gingham dress, who then backs out of frame; once the camera moves through the door, Garland steps back into frame in her bright blue gingham dress (as noted in DVD extras), and the sepia-painted door briefly tints her with the same color before she emerges from the house's shadow, into the bright glare of the Technicolor lighting. This also meant that the re-shoots provided the first proper shot of Munchkinland; if one looks carefully, the brief cut to Dorothy looking around outside the house bisects a single long shot, from the inside of the doorway to the pan-around that finally ends in a reverse-angle as the ruins of the house are seen behind Dorothy as she comes to a stop at the foot of the small bridge.

Test screenings of the film began on June 5, 1939.[[20]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-geo-21) Oz initially was running nearly two hours long. LeRoy and Fleming knew that at least a quarter of an hour needed to be deleted to get the film down to a manageable running time, the average film in 1939 running just about 90 minutes. Three sneak previews in [Santa Barbara](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santa_Barbara%2C_California), [Pomona](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pomona%2C_California) and [San Luis Obispo, California](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Luis_Obispo%2C_California) helped guide LeRoy and Fleming in the cutting. Among the many cuts was "[The Jitterbug](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Jitterbug)" number, the Scarecrow's elaborate dance sequence following "If I Only Had a Brain," a reprise of "Over the Rainbow" and "Ding Dong the Witch Is Dead," and a number of smaller dialogue sequences. This left the final, mostly serious portion of the film with no songs, only the dramatic underscoring.

One song that was almost deleted was "Over the Rainbow". MGM had felt that it made the Kansas sequence too long, as well as being far over the heads of the target audience of children. The studio also thought that it was degrading for Judy Garland to sing in a barnyard. Producer [Mervyn LeRoy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mervyn_LeRoy), uncredited associate producer [Arthur Freed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Freed), and director [Victor Fleming](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victor_Fleming) fought to keep it and eventually won. The song went on to win the [Academy Award](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academy_Award) for Best Song of the Year. In 2004, the song was ranked #1 by the American Film Institute on [AFI's 100 Years…100 Songs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AFI%27s_100_Years%E2%80%A6100_Songs) list.

After the preview in San Luis Obispo in early July, The Wizard of Oz was officially released in August 1939 at its current 101-minute running time.

## Release





A memorial commemorating the film's premiere at the Strand Theatre in [Oconomowoc, Wisconsin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oconomowoc%2C_Wisconsin) on August 12, 1939

The film's first sneak preview was held in [San Bernardino, California](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Bernardino%2C_California).[[21]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-22) The film was previewed in three [test markets](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Test_market): on August 11, 1939, at [Kenosha, Wisconsin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenosha%2C_Wisconsin) and [Cape Cod, Massachusetts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape_Cod%2C_Massachusetts),[[22]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-23)[[23]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-mad2009-24) and at the Strand Theatre in [Oconomowoc, Wisconsin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oconomowoc%2C_Wisconsin) on August 12.[[24]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-wsj-25)

The Hollywood premiere was on August 15, 1939,[[23]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-mad2009-24) at [Grauman's Chinese Theatre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grauman%27s_Chinese_Theatre).[[25]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-26) The New York City premiere at [Loew's Capitol Theatre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capitol_Theatre_%28New_York_City%29) on August 17, 1939 was followed by a live performance with Judy Garland and her frequent film co-star [Mickey Rooney](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mickey_Rooney). They would continue to perform there after each screening for a week, extended in Rooney's case for a second week and in Garland's to three (with Oz co-stars Ray Bolger and Bert Lahr replacing Rooney for the third and final week). The movie opened nationally on August 25, 1939.

The film grossed approximately $3 million (approximately $50 million today) against production/distribution costs of $2.8 million (approximately $47 million today) in its initial release. It did not show what MGM considered a large profit until a 1949 re-release earned an additional $1.5 million (approximately $15 million today).

## Reception

The movie received critical acclaim upon release. [Frank S. Nugent](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_S._Nugent) considered the film a "delightful piece of wonder-working which had the youngsters' eyes shining and brought a quietly amused gleam to the wiser ones of the oldsters;" "not since [Disney's Snow White](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snow_White_and_the_Seven_Dwarfs_%281937_film%29) has anything quite so fantastic succeeded half so well."[[26]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-nyt1939-27) Nugent had issues with some of the film's special effects, writing that "with the best of will and ingenuity, they cannot make a Munchkin or a Flying Monkey that will not still suggest, however vaguely, a Singer's Midget in a [Jack Dawn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_Dawn) masquerade. Nor can they, without a few betraying jolts and split-screen overlappings, bring down from the sky the great soap bubble in which the Good Witch rides and roll it smoothly into place." According to Nugent, "Judy Garland's Dorothy is a pert and fresh-faced miss with the wonder-lit eyes of a believer in fairy tales, but the Baum fantasy is at its best when the Scarecrow, the Woodman and the Lion are on the move."[[26]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-nyt1939-27)

[Roger Ebert](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roger_Ebert) chose it as one of his Great Films, writing that "'The Wizard of Oz' has a wonderful surface of comedy and music, special effects and excitement, but we still watch it six decades later because its underlying story penetrates straight to the deepest insecurities of childhood, stirs them and then reassures them."[[27]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-Ebert-28)

Writer [Salman Rushdie](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salman_Rushdie) acknowledged "The Wizard of Oz was my very first literary influence" in his 2002 musings about the film.[[28]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-29) He has written that "When I first saw The Wizard of Oz it made a writer of me."[[29]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-Rushdie-30) His first short story, written at the age of ten, was titled "Over the Rainbow."[[29]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-Rushdie-30)

In a 2009 retrospective article about The Wizard of Oz, [San Francisco Chronicle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Francisco_Chronicle) film critic and author [Mick LaSalle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mick_LaSalle) declared that the film's "entire [Munchkinland] sequence, from Dorothy's arrival in Oz to her departure on the [Yellow Brick Road](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yellow_brick_road), has to be one of the greatest in cinema history — a masterpiece of set design, costuming, choreography, music, lyrics, storytelling and sheer imagination."[[30]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29#cite_note-31)

### Viewing: The Making of The Wizard of Oz

**Take notes under the headings below.**

Head of Production: Leroy (Arthur Freed)

Directors: Fleming, Thorpe, Cukor

Accidents on the Set

The relationship of the Music

The contract system and Casting

Assembly Line Production

Market demands and Box office success

### Tasks:

### Relationships and Key Personnel.

### 1. Mervyn Leroy was the head of production on “The Wizard of Oz”. He received the producer credit. However, another producer, Arthur Freed was on hand to assist Leroy throughout the picture. What specifically were some of Freed’s contributions to the movie?

### In addition, who was ultimately responsible for making important decisions? Was it Freed or Leroy? What do you think?

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2. Casting was an important part of the film’s success and was just as important as the directing and writing. Who were some of the choices for the lead roles, and who was considered but never used?

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3. Writing is a more collaborative effort than it sometimes seems. In “The Wizard of Oz”, the writers worked at the direction of Mervyn Leroy and each contributed something to the plot. List the writers and their contribution to the story. Who made the most significant contribution to the film and its final story?

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4. MGM was known for its musical films, and was responsible for some of the most successful film musicals in the 1930s and 1940s. What was so significant about “The Wizard of Oz”, and why was it considered innovative in its approach to the music. Who were the composers, and how did they directly contribute to the success of the motion picture?

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5. In “The Wizard of Oz”, many of the important departments of the studio were utilized. What were some of these departments, who was in charge of each department, and what was their contribution to the film?

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6. Who was the key force behind ‘The Wizard of Oz’? What does this say about the auteur theory?

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Section 5bTask: Key personnel and relationships in The Wizard of Oz

### On the next page is a model of key personnel and relationships for “The Wizard of Oz”. Complete the model. You should be adding in who the person was, what they contributed to the story and any major communications issues involved in production.

**The Chief Executive Officer**

Name:

Role:

**Head of Production**

Composer

Original Writers

Additional Writers

Final Writers

Chief Writer

Directors and their Contributions

**Appendix 5.1: Timeline: The Wizard of Oz**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| January 1938 | [MGM](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/MGM) personnel begin planning for the studio's film of *The Wizard of Oz*, even before the property is officially theirs. In a 31 January memo, [Arthur Freed](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Arthur_Freed)'s initial casting suggestions include [Judy Garland](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Judy_Garland) and [Frank Morgan](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Frank_Morgan), plus [Buddy Ebsen](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Buddy_Ebsen) as the [Scarecrow](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Scarecrow) and [Ray Bolger](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Ray_Bolger) as the [Tin Woodman](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Tin_Woodman). |
| Feb 3, 1938 | [Mervyn LeRoy](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Mervyn_LeRoy)'s MGM contract takes effect. He is announced as the film's producer on 24 February. |
| Feb 18 1938 | The date of the contract by which [Samuel Goldwyn](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Samuel_Goldwyn) sells the film rights to [*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/The_Wonderful_Wizard_of_Oz) to MGM. |
| Feb 26 1938 |  William H. Cannon submits his four page treatment of the story. |
| Feb 28 1938 | Herman J. Mankiewicz is the first [screenwriter](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_Screenwriters) assigned to the job of writing an *Oz* script. Soon [Noel Langley](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Noel_Langley) and Ogden Nash are also assigned, separately and in ignorance of each other. |
| March 3 1938 | Mankiewicz turns in a 17-page treatment of the Kansas portion of the story. |
| March 7 1938 | Mankiewicz submits a 56-page partial script. Separately, Ogden Nash is assigned to write a treatment of the story. |
| March 11 1938 | Noel Langley is assigned to work on the *Oz* script, separate from Mankiewicz and Nash. |
| March 22 1938 | Langley turns in a 43-page treatment. Mankiewicz is taken off the film the next day. |
| April 5 1938 | The date on Langley's first finished script. |
| April 16 1938 | Ogden Nash submits a four-page treatment. |
| May 4 1938 | The date on Langley's second script. |
| May 9 1938 | [Yip Harburg](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/E.Y._Harburg) and [Harold Arlen](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Harold_Arlen) report the the MGM studio to begin writing songs for the film. |
| May 13 1938 | Director [Norman Taurog](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Norman_Taurog) signs a long term contract with MGM. |
| May 14 1938 | The date on Langley's fourth script. |
| June 3 1938 | The screenwriting team of [Florence Ryerson](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Florence_Ryerson) and [Edgar Allan Woolf](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Edgar_Allan_Woolf) is hired to work on the script. They work on the project through July. |
| June 4 1938 | Langley turns in his final script for the film. |
| June 13 1938 | Ryerson and Woolf's first script. |
| June 29 1938 | The songs for the film are done. |
| July 5 1938 | Ryerson and Woolf's second script. |
| Summer 1938 | Bolger convinces [Louis B. Mayer](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Louis_B._Mayer) to switch his role, from the Tin Man to the Scarecrow. |
| July 27 1938 | Ryerson and Woolf finish their work of the screenplay. Langley resumes work on the script three days later. |
| Sept 9 1938 | The date of [Bert Lahr](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Bert_Lahr)'s MGM contract to play the [Cowardly Lion](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Cowardly_Lion). |
| Sept 17 1938 | [Richard Thorpe](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Richard_Thorpe) is assigned to direct the movie, replacing Norman Taurog. |
| Sept 22 1938 | Gale Sondergaard does screen tests for the beautiful-but-evil version of the [Wicked Witch of the West](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Wicked_Witch_of_the_West). Buddy Ebsen tests the Tin Woodman costume for the first time. Frank Morgan wins the role of the [Wizard of Oz](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Wizard_of_Oz_%28character%29). |
| Sept 30 1938- Oct 11 1938 | Bolger, Ebsen, Garland and Lahr report to [Herbert Stothart](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Herbert_Stothart) and his assistant George Stoll to pre-record musical numbers. |
| Oct/Dec 1938 | Tests on the flying monkeys. |
| Oct 3 1938 | Sondergaard re-tests for an ugly version of the Wicked Witch. She and the producers agree she is wrong for the part. |
| Oct 10 1938 | The casting of [Margaret Hamilton](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Margaret_Hamilton) as the Wicked Witch is announced. |
| Oct 12 1938 | Principal photography on the film officially begins. |
| Oct 21 1938 | Richard Thorpe completes filming in the entrance hall of the Witch's castle. His footage will later be discarded and re-shot by [Victor Fleming](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Victor_Fleming). Buddy Ebsen is hospitalized from breathing in the aluminum dust in his Tin Man makeup. |
| Oct 24 1938 | Richard Thorpe is fired as director. |
| Oct 26-31 1938 | [George Cukor](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/George_Cukor) serves as interim director. |
| Nov 1 1938 | Victor Fleming is announced as director. He and his screenwriter [John Lee Mahin](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/John_Lee_Mahin) begin revising the script, and continue during the film's shooting. |
| Nov 4 1938 | [Jack Haley](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Jack_Haley) replaces Buddy Ebsen. the Scarecrow's cornfield scene is being filmed on Stage 26. |
| Nov 8 1938 | Haley records the Tin Woodman's solo song, "If I Only Had a Heart." |
| Nov 11 1938 | Publicity photos record the arrival of little people to play the Munchkins. |
| Nov 16 1938 | Frank Morgan begins costume and makeup tests for his multiple roles. |
| Nov 19 1938 | Garland, Bolger, and Haley film their chorus of "We're Off to See the Wizard." |
| Nov 22 1938 | Munchkins rehearse their dance numbers under choreographer Bobby Connolly and his assistant [Dona Massin](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Dona_Massin). |
| Early Dec | Construction begins on the Munchkinland set during the first week of December. |
| Dec 9 1938 | [Ken Darby](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Ken_Darby) begins music rehearsals and pre-recordings for the Munchkins; through 22 December. |
| Dec 22 1938 | Recording of the "[Jitterbug](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Jitterbug)" song begins. |
| Dec 23 1938 | Margaret Hamilton suffers her accident. |
| Dec 25-26 1938 | The production shuts down for 2 days for Christmas. |
| Dec 30 1938 | Munchkinland shooting is finished. |
| Jan 1939 | Rehearsal and filming of the "Jitterbug" production number fills five weeks in late 1938 and early 1939. |
| Jan 14 1939 | A Saturday; protagonists reach the [Emerald City](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Emerald_City) and begin work with Frank Morgan ("Who rang that bell?"). |
| Feb 1 1939 | [Clara Blandick](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Clara_Blandick)'s casting as [Aunt Em](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Aunt_Em) is announced. |
| Feb 9 1939 | [Charley Grapewin](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Charley_Grapewin) is cast as [Uncle Henry](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Uncle_Henry). |
| Feb 10 1939 | Margaret Hamilton returns to work after her burns have (mostly) healed. |
| Feb 11 1939 | [Betty Danko](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Betty_Danko) has her accident. |
| Feb 17 1939 | Fleming is given an on-set goodbye party as he leaves to direct *Gone With the Wind*. |
| Feb 19 1939 | [King Vidor](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/King_Vidor) films the Kansas scenes over the space of a week. |
| March 16 1939 | Principal photography on the film officially ends. |
| March 17 1939 | The film's Kansas set is dismantled. |
| March-May 1939 | Blanche Sewell and Victor Fleming edit the film. |
| Late March 1939 | Sewell and Fleming complete the rough-cut print. |
| April 1939 | Buddy Gillespie and his team add special effects shots. |
| April 11 1939 | [Herbert Stothart](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Herbert_Stothart), George Stoll and their staff begin recording sessions for the background musical score and song arrangements. (Songs were previously recorded as vocals and piano accompaniment only.) Ten recording sessions follow in the next three months. |
| April 12-13 1939 | Final vocal tracks for the [Munchkins](http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Munchkins) are recorded. |
| June 1939 | Audience previews. |
| June 16 1939 | A test screening of the film, at the Pomona Fox Theater. |
| June 27 1939 | Another test screening, possibly in San Luis Obispo. The film ran 112 minutes, but is eventually cut to 101 minutes. |
| July 5 1939 | Editing is complete. |
| July 9 1939 | Stothart and associates complete the film's music track. |
| Aug 7 1939 | MGM copyrights the film. |
| Aug 9 1939 | MGM screens the film for the press; reviews are highly positive. |
| Aug 15 1939 | *The Wizard of Oz* premiers at Grauman's Chinese Theatre in Hollywood. |
| Aug 17 1939 | The film opens in New York City. |
| Sept 14 1939 | The film opens in Canada. |
| Nov 17 1939 | The film opens in Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro. |

References

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Harmetz, Aljean. *The Making of The Wizard of Oz*. New York: Knopf, 1977. Print.