
CINEFANTASTIQUE

SCREENING THE IMAGINATION

Week 4: *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), *The Red Shoes* (1948) and *Invaders from Mars* (1953)

The Wizard of Oz (1939)

Though undoubtedly a classic Golden Age of Hollywood movie, this MGM feature had a somewhat troubled production. Initially, inspired by the success of Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1938), studios like MGM sought to replicate that box office business. However, there was still reluctance to fully engage in a fantasy feature as 'fantasy' often meant 'failure'.

Despite this MGM sought to option the rights to Frank L Baum's book *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. There had been other versions of the film, specifically one from 1910 and another from 1925, however this would be a much bigger sound production and musical.

As well as many other difficulties, one of the initial sticking points was deciding on a workable script. The pre-production of the film saw 10 writers come and go – these were:

- Herman Mankiewicz
- Ogden Nash
- Noel Langley
- Herbert Fields
- Samuel Hoffenstein
- Florence Ryerson
- Edgar Allan Woolf
- Jack Mintz
- Sid Silvers
- John Lee Mahin

Yet, despite this, many of the classic elements that we now are very familiar were created during this torturous process.

Not only did writers come and go, directors did too. Though the final film was credited to Victor Fleming, there actually 4 directors involved:

- Victor Fleming
- Richard Thorpe
- George Cukor
- King Vidor

The Final Cast

- Judy Garland – Dorothy
- Ray Bolger – Hunk/The Scarecrow
- Bert Lahr – Zeke/The Cowardly Lion
- Jack Hayley – Hickory/The Tin Man
- Frank Morgan – Professor Marvel/The Wizard
- Margaret Hamilton – Almira Gulch/The Wicked Witch of the West
- Billie Burke – Glinda the Good Witch of the North

Casting

Shirley Temple was initially considered before Garland was selected. Buddy Esben too was the first Tin Man, till he left the shoot.

Accidents

Among many other accidents, Margaret Hamilton (The Wicked Witch) suffered third degree burns and had to be hospitalised after a stunt involving fire and a trap door went horribly wrong.

The Munchkins

“We had a hell of a time with those little guys. They got into sex orgies at the hotel. We had to have police on every floor”

Mervyn LeRoy (Producer)

“They were drunks. They got smashed every night, and the police had to pick them up in picnic nets”

Judy Garland

Though the above quotes seem to point to the immoral behaviour of the actors playing the munchkins, there is little evidence to suggest these wildly exaggerated were true.

Make-up and costuming

Judy Garland was a 16-year-old playing a 12-year-old and subsequently had to be ‘taped’ to make her paper less ‘mature’. However, her problems with costuming paled in comparison to her co-actors.

The Tin Man

“I couldn’t lie down in that costume. I couldn’t even sit in it. I could only lean against a reclining board...”

Jack Hayley

The Cowardly Lion

“The only thing that was his was a bit of cheek and his eyes. On top of his head he wore that enormous fur wig and his chin was covered with a fur beard. He wore mittens and, besides being a real lion skin, his suit was padded. It was like carrying a mattress around with you. He had to take his lion suit off completely after each shot, and he’d always be dripping wet. The poor man went through hell.”

Charlie Schram (Make-up artist)

The Scarecrow

“I came home exhausted, and had two bourbon old fashioned. The drinks were therapeutic. I needed the alcohol to let me down and they had enough sugar to give e a kind of lift so I could manage to eat my dinner and fall into bed...”

Ray Bolger

Powell and Pressburger

- Michael Powell began directing films in the late 20s
- In 1939, he landed the job of directing *The Spy in Black*, a WW1 thriller under producer Alexander Korda
- During this production, Hungarian Emeric Pressburger was bought on board to make some rewrites
- This would mark the first time the pair had worked on a film together
- The pair adopted a joint writer-producer-director credit for their next film, *One of Our Aircraft Is Missing* (1942)
- They formed Archers Film Productions

The Archers Manifesto

1. We owe allegiance to nobody except the financial interests which provide our money; and, to them, the sole responsibility of ensuring them a profit, not a loss.
2. Every single foot in our films is our own responsibility and nobody else's. We refuse to be guided or coerced by any influence but our own judgement.
3. When we start work on a new idea, we must be a year ahead, not only of our competitors, but also of the times. A real film, from idea to universal release, takes a year. Or more.
4. No artist believes in escapism. And we secretly believe that no audience does. We have proved, at any rate, that they will pay to see the truth, for other reasons than her nakedness.
5. At any time, and particularly at the present, the self-respect of all collaborators, from star to propman, is sustained, or diminished, by the theme and purpose of the film they are working on.

The Red Shoes (1948)

- Alexander Korda had envisioned a film about ballet and Nijinsky back in 1934, however the project never came to fruition
- Later he picked up the idea again, this time about a fictional ballerina
- Intended as a vehicle for his future wife Merle Oberon
- He and Michael Powell cobbled together an idea
- But as Oberon was not a skilled dancer, and a stand-in would be needed, Korda abandoned the project
- He went to work on the *Thief of Bagdad* (Which Michael Powell co-directed)
- Powell and Pressburger bought the script from Korda for £9,000
- Was essentially a movie about 'art versus life'
- Contains a 17-minute dance sequence
- The film is very 'meta' the 'ballet within a film' is deliberately referencing the 'real life' tragedies of the central performer (Moirá Shearer)
- It's a lavish, deeply colourful production
- Both beautiful and tragic
- A poignant tale about art and the destructive mechanisms which attempt to capture it and make profit from it

Invaders from Mars (1953)

- Directed by William Cameron Menzies
- Studio bound
- Forgettable performances
- Shoddy special effects – lumbering men in ill-fitting leotards
- The second half of the film descends into dialogue heavy scenes/stock footage and repeated scenes

Plot and Themes

- The boy learns that his parents are not his parents – a child's worst nightmare
- The police and other figures follow
- The main character becomes trapped in an insane authoritarian society – perfectly mirroring the paranoid political atmosphere of the era
- The 'villains' are essentially red neck zombies – which would be revisited by numerous directors/writers in later films
- Plays on basic fears – what if our parents are not our parents? What if they suddenly become monsters
- Whatever relationships we are in – how can you ever be sure what they are thinking?
- Can be seen as a metaphor for growing levels of divorce/alcoholism within the family home

“...regarded by some psychologists and social historians as an indicator of the deeper apprehensions of its day: flying saucers, the Cold War and, most especially, the fear of Communist infiltration.”

Vincent Difate

“In a series of placidly beautiful scenes, the boy watches over victims falling into the Martian trap, as if being converted into a new and tranquil religion; the police of course, are the among the first converts...the film has a vivid and nightmarish quality (which fits the original concept, revealing at the end it has all been a dream.”

Phillip Strick

- Innovative use of lighting, space, depth and perspective
- Angled shots and shadow and studio based scenes give the film an unearthly feel
- The film has a Brechtian feel
- It is dream like – though we don’t discover it’s a dream till the end – which piques our curiosity

“This is the point where this classic alien invasion movie goes wholly Radical. For some it becomes an editorial tour-de-force, and for others a cinematic joke. The simultaneous actions of ticking bomb, escaping saucer and fleeing troops overlap to a point where time stops progressing altogether. It's as if Einstein or Stephen Hawking zapped the movie camera. The detonator never hits the Zero mark. David never reaches the bottom of the hill; the saucer never breaks free of the Sand Pit. We're stuck in the grammatical Present Progressive.”

The Climax

- David runs for his life in an unending close-up.
- A prolonged optical montage begins.
- Earlier scenes are recapitulated, superimposed over David's running face and intercut with that same repeated shell blast.
- Ethereal music – not heard in the rest of the film.
- A new series of superimposed images (nonviolent but disturbing) begins, now playing in reverse.
- One last blast breaks the montage and sends David back to his bed – the dream is over.