

the making of the wizard of oz

The making of The Wizard of Oz is a fascinating journey into the world of cinema that has captivated audiences since its release in 1939. Based on L. Frank Baum's beloved children's book, the film has become a cultural touchstone, known for its memorable characters, iconic music, and groundbreaking special effects. The production was marked by a series of challenges, creative decisions, and innovations that have shaped its legacy in the film industry.

Background and Development

The Wizard of Oz was not an immediate success; its road to the big screen was paved with multiple adaptations and numerous creative iterations. The story of Dorothy Gale, a young girl from Kansas who is swept away to the magical land of Oz, was first published in 1900. The book's popularity led to various stage adaptations and a silent film version in 1925. However, it wasn't until MGM acquired the rights in the late 1930s that the project began to take shape.

Initial Concept and Script Development

The first task for the MGM production team was to develop a script that could capture the essence of Baum's story while appealing to the contemporary audience. A team of screenwriters, including Noel Langley, Florence Ryerson, and Edgar Allan Woolf, worked on the screenplay, blending fantasy with a moral lesson about courage, friendship, and the importance of home.

Several changes were made during the scriptwriting process:

1. **Character Development:** The characters were fleshed out to make them more relatable. Each character in Dorothy's journey symbolizes a different aspect of human experience.
2. **Musical Elements:** The inclusion of songs was crucial. Harold Arlen (music) and E.Y. Harburg (lyrics) crafted the film's unforgettable score, including the iconic "Over the Rainbow."
3. **Tone Adjustment:** The tone shifted from a straightforward children's tale to a more nuanced narrative that appealed to both children and adults.

Casting the Film

Casting decisions had a profound impact on the film. The role of Dorothy was pivotal, and MGM sought to find the perfect actress to embody the character.

After an extensive audition process, Judy Garland, then 16 years old, was cast in the lead role. Garland's performance and her rendition of "Over the Rainbow" would become defining moments of her career.

Supporting Cast

The supporting cast was equally crucial to the film's success. Key roles were filled by:

- Ray Bolger as the Scarecrow
- Jack Haley as the Tin Man
- Bert Lahr as the Cowardly Lion
- Frank Morgan as the Wizard of Oz
- Margaret Hamilton as the Wicked Witch of the West

Each actor brought their unique talents to their roles, contributing to the film's charm and appeal.

Production Challenges

The making of The Wizard of Oz was fraught with challenges that tested the resilience of the cast and crew.

Changing Directors

Initially, the film was helmed by Richard Thorpe, but after several weeks of filming, the production was halted for a reevaluation. George Cukor briefly took over, followed by Victor Fleming, who eventually became the primary director. This change allowed for a more cohesive vision but also resulted in significant delays.

Technical Innovations

The film was groundbreaking in its use of special effects and color technology. It was one of the first major films to use Technicolor, which added depth and vibrancy to the fantastical world of Oz. Notable innovations included:

1. The Tornado Sequence: Created using a combination of miniatures and special effects, the tornado was a technical marvel.
2. The Yellow Brick Road: Made from painted canvas, the road was designed to stand out against the vibrant colors of Oz.
3. Munchkinland: The whimsical setting required careful planning, including

casting thousands of little people to portray the Munchkins.

Filming and Musical Elements

Filming took place at MGM Studios in Culver City, California, and the production spanned over six months. The film's elaborate sets and costumes were designed to transport audiences to the magical land of Oz.

Music and Songs

The musical score played a crucial role in the film's storytelling. The songs not only provided entertainment but also advanced the narrative. Some notable songs include:

- "Over the Rainbow": A poignant ballad that captures Dorothy's longing for a better place.
- "We're Off to See the Wizard": A lively number that introduces the journey to the Emerald City.
- "If I Only Had a Brain": A whimsical song that highlights the Scarecrow's desire for intelligence.

These songs have become classics, contributing significantly to the film's enduring popularity.

Release and Reception

The Wizard of Oz premiered on August 15, 1939, and had its general release in the United States on September 3 of the same year. Initially, the film received a mixed response from critics, with some praising its visuals and music, while others questioned its overall coherence.

Box Office and Awards

Despite the mixed reviews, the film eventually became a box office success, grossing over \$3 million during its initial release. It was nominated for six Academy Awards and won two: Best Original Song for "Over the Rainbow" and Best Special Effects.

Legacy and Cultural Impact

The Wizard of Oz has left an indelible mark on popular culture and has continued to be celebrated through various media. Its themes of friendship, courage, and the quest for self-discovery resonate across generations.

Influence on Future Productions

The film's innovative use of color, special effects, and music has influenced countless filmmakers. Its legacy can be seen in:

- Broadway adaptations: Including the successful musical "Wicked," which reimagines the story from the perspective of the Wicked Witch of the West.
- Film and Television: The story has been revisited in various adaptations, parodies, and spin-offs.

Enduring Popularity

Today, The Wizard of Oz is considered one of the greatest films in cinema history. It continues to be screened on television, studied in film courses, and celebrated in various forms of media. The film's timeless message and vibrant characters ensure that it remains a beloved classic for audiences of all ages.

Conclusion

The making of The Wizard of Oz is a testament to the creativity, innovation, and determination of everyone involved in its production. From its humble beginnings as a children's book to its transformation into a cinematic masterpiece, the film captures the imagination and hearts of viewers worldwide. Its legacy lives on, reminding us of the power of dreams, the importance of home, and the enduring magic of storytelling.

Frequently Asked Questions

What year was 'The Wizard of Oz' released?

The Wizard of Oz was released in 1939.

Who directed 'The Wizard of Oz'?

The film was directed by Victor Fleming.

What was the budget for the production of 'The Wizard of Oz'?

The production budget for 'The Wizard of Oz' was approximately \$2.8 million.

Which actress played the role of Dorothy?

Judy Garland played the role of Dorothy Gale.

How did the film use Technicolor?

The Wizard of Oz is famous for its use of Technicolor, particularly in the scenes set in the Land of Oz, which showcased vibrant colors to contrast with the sepia-toned Kansas.

What were some challenges faced during the filming of 'The Wizard of Oz'?

Challenges included changing directors, the difficult costume and makeup processes, especially for the Tin Man and the Cowardly Lion, and the weather conditions during filming.

How was the iconic song 'Over the Rainbow' created?

'Over the Rainbow' was written by Harold Arlen and E.Y. Harburg, and it was originally intended to be cut from the film due to concerns it slowed the pace.

What impact did 'The Wizard of Oz' have on popular culture?

The Wizard of Oz has become a cultural icon, influencing countless adaptations, merchandise, and references in various forms of media over the decades.

Did 'The Wizard of Oz' win any Academy Awards?

Yes, 'The Wizard of Oz' won two Academy Awards: Best Original Song for 'Over the Rainbow' and Best Special Effects.

What was the original source material for 'The Wizard of Oz'?

The film is based on the 1900 children's novel 'The Wonderful Wizard of Oz' by L. Frank Baum.

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