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FANTASY IN FILMLAND

A prodigal, streamlined Wizard of Oz comes deftly to the screen, decked forth with lavish hues and prankish playing

★ ★ ★ ★ THE WIZARD OF OZ

THE PLAYERS: Judy Garland, Frank Morgan, Ray Bolger, Bert Lahr, Jack Haley, Billie Burke, Margaret Hamilton, Charley Grapewin, Pat Walshe, Clara Blandick. Screen play by Noel Langley, Florence Ryerson, and Edgar Allan Wolfe, adaptation by Noel Langley from the book by L. Frank Baum. Directed by Victor Fleming. Produced by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Running time, 102 minutes.

PINNING elusive fantasy down to literal camera shots is one of the ultra-precarious jobs. Disaster is just around the first close-up. That this expensive, streamlined version of L. Frank Baum's fantasy of thirty-nine years ago is entertaining, sometimes quite lovely, and frequently amusing is, in itself, a triumph.

Baum wrote of a little Kansas farm girl who, fleeing before an approaching cyclone, doesn't quite make the storm cellar along with her aunt and her uncle and the farm hands. A whirling piece of wood from the twister strikes Dorothy—and the rest is her thumping technicolor nightmare. There are bad witches and good witches and a great magician. And there is a scarecrow seeking a brain, a tin woodman who would like a heart, and a cowardly lion who longs plaintively for courage.

Dorothy joins up with them. She longs for home. You see their quest for the magician and his aid through enchanted forests and poisonous poppy fields, into lands peopled with dwarfish Munchkins, past the winged monkeys who aid the wicked witch, into that evil lady's very castle. But it all ends happily, as a fairy tale should.

There are innumerable amazing camera tricks, and technicolor pictures Dorothy's dream in lavish hues, perhaps in too garish color. Music enlivens every foot of the film and there are some mildly tinkling tunes. You will find Judy Garland a pleasant and wholesome Dorothy. Of the rest, I liked best Bert Lahr as the timid farm hand who, in the dream, becomes the cowardly lion. Lahr's lion is a richly amusing creation, right after Androcles' own heart. Ray Bolger is the farm worker who evolves into the

BY BEVERLY HILLS

READING TIME • 7 MINUTES 30 SECONDS

4 STARS—EXTRAORDINARY

3 STARS—EXCELLENT 2 STARS—GOOD

1 STAR—POOR 0 STAR—VERY POOR

Scarecrow and the Tin Woodman. It opened on Broadway in 1903, ran some four years. . . . The Tin Woodman's costume in the film started as a metal suit, but it was too noisy. So they built one of buckram covered with silver leather. Haley's face was waxed and powdered with silver, a bolted jaw piece affixed to his chin moved up and down as he talked. Atop was a metal funnel hat. . . . The Scarecrow's costume was of rags with straw sticking out. Huge gloves covered Bolger's hands, his face was masked with strips of burlap over which grease paint was applied. . . . The Munchkins are 120 midgets gathered by Leo Singer of Singer Midgets fame. . . . And, speaking of size, the poppy field—an acre and a half in itself—has 40,000 red poppies with two-foot wire stems. Twenty men worked a week sticking the poppies in the set. . . . The colored horses? White ones tinted with a harmless dye from a popular gelatine dessert. But the nags kept licking it off.

Judy Garland, Jack Haley as the Tin Woodman, and Ray Bolger as the Scarecrow in The Wizard of ~

Scarecrow, and Jack Haley his co-hay tosser who becomes the Tin Woodman. They are both satisfactory. The bad witch of the West almost had our sympathy.

VITAL STATISTICS: Metro went studiously whimsical with The Wizard of Oz. Preparation started in the summer of 1938, tests began in August, actual work got under way in September. The film was before the technicolor cameras until last March. Cost ran well over \$2,000,000. . . . L. Frank Baum wrote Oz in 1900. It was created as a side line to his prolific writing. He wanted a fantasy sans horror and bloodshed. (The film, with its measure of terror, would sort of surprise him.) The side line made him rich and well known. Before he died he wrote fifteen Oz books. With the money from the Oz yarns Baum hunted up a sleepy little California town and in 1911 built a gray frame house. He called it Ozcot. Baum wanted to live quietly with his wife. The town he selected was pre-movie Hollywood. . . . The Wizard of Oz was a smashing stage success with Fred Stone and Dave Montgomery as the