

While away the hours in Oz once again



Dorothy with the Tinman and Scarecrow in the Haunted Forest chanting "Lions and tigers and bears, oh my!" just before encountering the Lion.

By JULIE SWINDELL
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There's no place like Oz.
Never in the history of motion pictures has a single film endured in the heights like the 1939 "The Wizard of Oz" has, capturing its audiences again and again through dazzling fantasy entwined with sublime youth. And you can see it this weekend in 108 Forum.

There's never been a year quite like 1939, at least not on those studio lots of Hollywood. Not only were the pictures unique in their quality but also for their breadth of style and subjects.

There were outstanding films of every kind. Included in the extraordinary range are "Gone With The Wind," "Wuthering Heights," "Stagecoach," "Gunga Din," "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington," "Goodbye, Mr. Chips," "Ninotchka," "Only Angels Have Wings" and "Dark Victory." But "The Wizard of Oz" tops them all. The very idea of making a musical out of L. Frank Baum's classic was brilliantly inspiring, much like Disney's use of "Snow White" for his first feature-length cartoon. It has become a keepsake in our hearts, regarded as a rare achievement that has already proven that timelessness is indeed possible.

The delightful fantasy begins in black and white in a bitterly real America of stern faces and vast plains. Dorothy is whisked from this place to a Technicolor dreamland "somewhere over the rainbow." There, she avoids danger, overcomes enemies, including the Wicked Witch of the West, and finds loving friends in the Scarecrow, Lion and Tinman. Well, enough of this fiddlededeedee. You know the story. But perhaps there are some things about his

classic movie you don't know. There's always an amusing curiosity about the Munchkins, so I'll start there. Director Victor Fleming wanted 350 midgets for the Munchkinland sequence, so he contacted Leo Singer (who was full-grown), of the Singer Midgets. However, Singer could only provide 150 little ones and Major Doyle, a midget monologist, was hired to gather together the rest.

Doyle, though, refused to work with Singer's professional midgets and since Fleming required so many, Doyle set off on a nation-wide task of gathering together the entire bunch. With three busloads of midgets bound for California, "Major Doyle's Revenge" was staged. As Leo Singer looked out his office window, he was saluted by a hundred midgets sticking their bare hands out the bus windows.

Most people know that MGM originally wanted Shirley Temple (then at the top in box office ratings) in the role of Dorothy. The movie would have been drastically different. The supporting characters could never possibly have related to curly Shirley in the manner they did with Judy Garland. The film would have perhaps been a variation on the typical Temple movies of the day.

Frank Morgan, the kind and scatterbrained Wizard, was not even third choice for the role. Ed Wynn, then a popular radio star, turned down the part, thinking it somewhat unimpressive. W. C. Fields refused the role because \$75,000 was a bit less than what he had in mind. Morgan begged for the role, knew the script before it was even his and proved himself a marvelous humbug.

Ray Bolger, the beloved Scarecrow

who will always be the symbol of true friendship for me, was first cast as the Tinman and Buddy Ebsen was the Scarecrow. Bolger was constantly drooling for the part and finally the studio realized his heart was truly in it and he and Ebsen switched roles. Ebsen didn't object... he was simply excited to be a part of such a promising project.

He wasn't part of it for long. After two weeks he was in the hospital with lead poisoning in his lungs, a result of the Tinman costume. It was then that Jack Haley was called in.

Margaret Hamilton has made countless pictures, but shall forever be associated as the Wicked Witch who (along with those ugly winged monkeys of hers) terrified most of us in our younger years. She remembers her first acting experience at the age of six, when she played Sleeping Beauty in a school play. She admits that was the very last time she ever played a beauty.

The Cowardly Lion was written for Bert Lahr, or maybe it's the other way around. Well, that's how perfect the suit fit (and that suit was 70 pounds). Lahr's performance is one of the most delightful of all-time on the screen. Without consulting the director, he ad-libbed quite a few lines like, "Unusual weather we're having, ain't it?" when the four comrades are stranded in the snowy poppy field just before reaching the Emerald City.

Children and adults who go to see "The Wizard of Oz" year after year never seem to tire of it. How to account for this timeless appeal? There is no way except to say that like all escapist fantasies, it is, somehow, "right."

And I don't believe it's a dream. Not for a minute.



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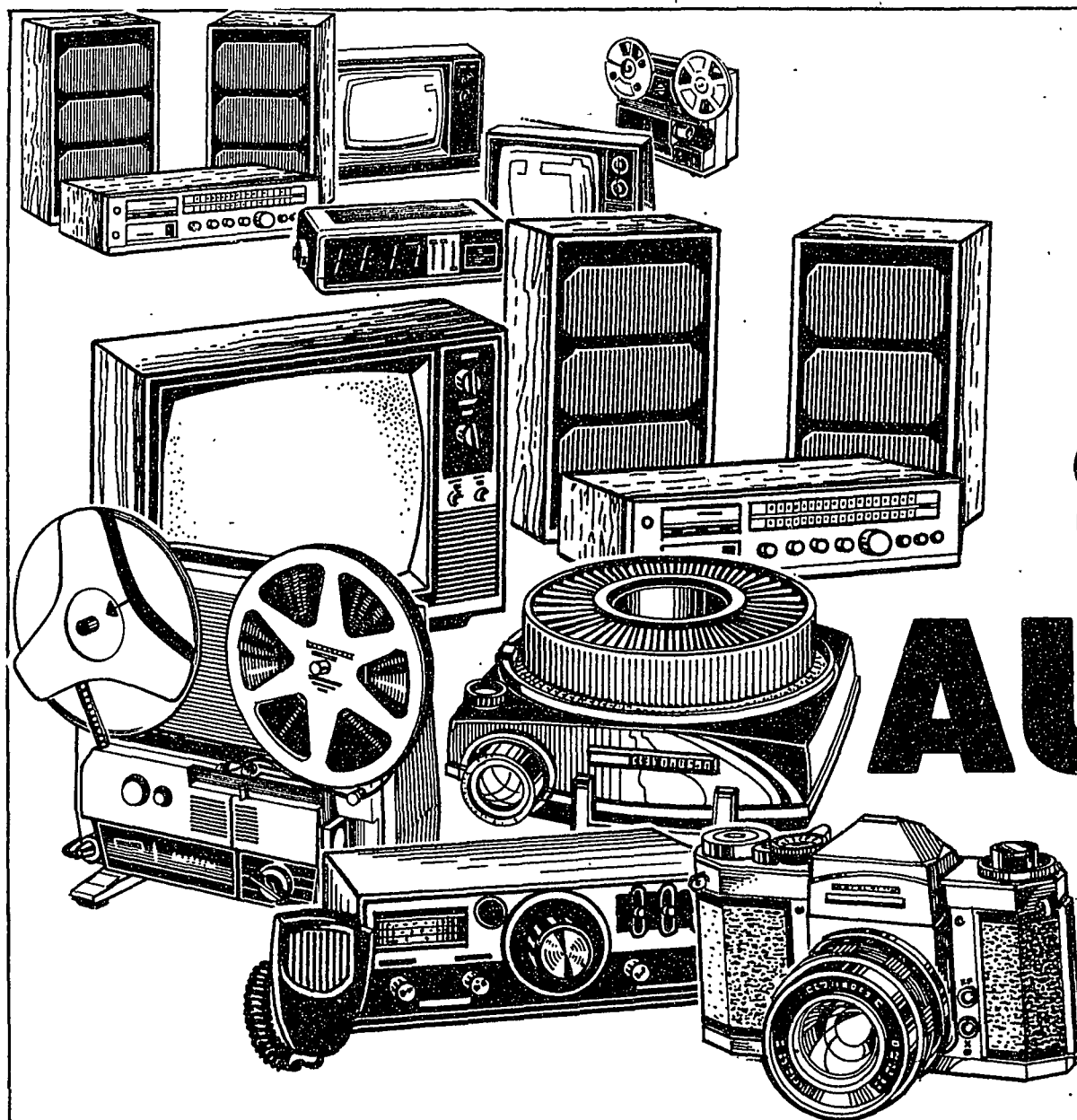
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