

THE VOICE OF MGM

Judy Garland

SCOTT  
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ESSEX, CONNECTICUT



An imprint of The Globe Pequot Publishing Group, Inc.  
64 South Main Street  
Essex, CT 06426  
www.globepequot.com

Distributed by NATIONAL BOOK NETWORK

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information available

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Names: Brogan, Scott, 1960– author.

Title: Judy Garland : the voice of MGM / Scott Brogan.

Description: Essex, Connecticut : Lyons Press, 2025. | Includes bibliographical references and index. Summary: “This volume will be the definitive book about Garland’s legendary career at MGM, pulling back the curtain to reveal the truths about that career while also presenting previously unknown details and facts that are sure to delight her fans as well as fans of classic film”— Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2024034747 (print) | LCCN 2024034748 (ebook) | ISBN 9781493086542 (cloth) | ISBN 9781493086559 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Garland, Judy. | Women singers—United States—Biography. | Singers—United States—Biography. | Motion picture actors and actresses—United States—Biography. | Motion pictures—United States—History—20th century. | Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. | LCGFT: Biographies. | Filmographies. | Discographies.

Classification: LCC ML420.G253 B76 2025 (print) | LCC ML420.G253 (ebook) | DDC 782.42164092 [B]—dc23/eng/20241122

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024034747>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024034748>

Printed in India.

This book is dedicated to my late best friend, Andy England. His Judy Garland collection mixed with his Grateful Dead collection prompted us to joke, “Judy goes with everything!”

And to my husband, Doug, who has put up with me through thick and thin and whom I love so very much. And it was he who came up with the title. Thank you!

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Judy Garland, "The Voice of MGM," 1943 promotional photo. From the author's collection.

# INTRODUCTION

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Judy Garland was the voice of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) both during her time at the studio and after, a distinction that lasts to this day. She was the studio's top leading lady in its musical films during the golden age of the MGM musical, and she's now recognized as the greatest female musical star in the history of film. Any documentary or news story about MGM's golden age will feature at least one clip of Garland singing. Usually, it's "Over the Rainbow" from *The Wizard of Oz* (1939). If "Singin' in the Rain" was the studio's unofficial theme song, then "Over the Rainbow" was its unofficial ballad. Garland's film performance of "Over the Rainbow" alone would have given her eternal fame. But there are more legendary performances, such as her often imitated (but never equaled) "Get Happy" while sexily wearing a tuxedo jacket and a fedora, or the boundlessly joyful "The Trolley Song," or soulful ballads such as "But Not for Me." The number of perfect performances given by Garland while at MGM is astounding.

Garland's life and career at MGM have come to represent both the good and the bad of classic Hollywood more than any other star. She's a top example of a victim of the studio system (reportedly, she hated being called a "victim"). The one-dimensional image of an always suffering and always tragic Garland is a cloud that hangs over her public persona, to the extent that too many people with access to a computer and a search engine crank out error-laden hack articles. This is a great insult to everything Garland achieved at MGM and after. The truth is more nuanced, more joyful, and more exciting. She was an inherently positive, joyful, and funny human being. This is part of what makes her film appearances so timeless. MGM was the best possible

place for her talent to grow and thrive, and thrive she did. Garland was at the right place at the right time. From the age of two and a half to when she auditioned at MGM at thirteen years old, she had already lived a full life on the vaudeville stage, honing her craft. In hindsight, it seems inevitable that the little girl with the great big voice and pitch-perfect vaudeville instincts would become the ultimate vaudevillian. Garland had the talent early on, but she also had a natural instinct for retaining and learning from every experience. Audiences responded to her unique talents by applauding and cheering, even while watching the relatively passive medium of film. While she was at MGM, her personal appearance tours simultaneously charmed and electrified audiences even during her first one at thirteen. Local papers are filled with accolades.

Garland's three-era career (vaudeville, movies, the concert stage) is unique for a movie legend of her stature. In her short forty-seven years, she managed to conquer every entertainment medium of the twentieth century. Garland's story has it all. And through it all, her exceptional, once-in-a-lifetime talent never fails to dazzle and mesmerize us. No one since has come close to achieving the same blend of exalted status in the movie musical genre.

Like most kids of my generation, I was introduced to Judy Garland through *The Wizard of Oz* via the annual network TV broadcasts in the United States. We lived mostly overseas, but for several years, we were stateside, and I was at the right age for *Oz* and Garland to work their magic on me. Until the home media revolution in the early 1980s, the only way to see *Oz* was during its once-a-year broadcast. The event was anticipated for weeks prior by all the kids (and more than a few parents) in the neighborhood and at school. No "making of" books had yet been published, and the Internet was decades away, so all we had was what was made accessible, which wasn't much. There was the MGM Records soundtrack album, which truncated the music and dialog onto one 12" LP and didn't even include "The Merry Old Land of Oz" (the shame!). So one year, I taped my little cassette recorder's microphone to the speaker of the TV in the guest room and recorded the whole broadcast. Within weeks I had the whole film memorized. To this day, I can still lip-synch the entire movie (such a gift!). Later, I found out I wasn't the only one who taped the broadcast on their little cassette recorder, nor was I the only one who memorized the entire film as a result. Garland fans are creative at an early age!

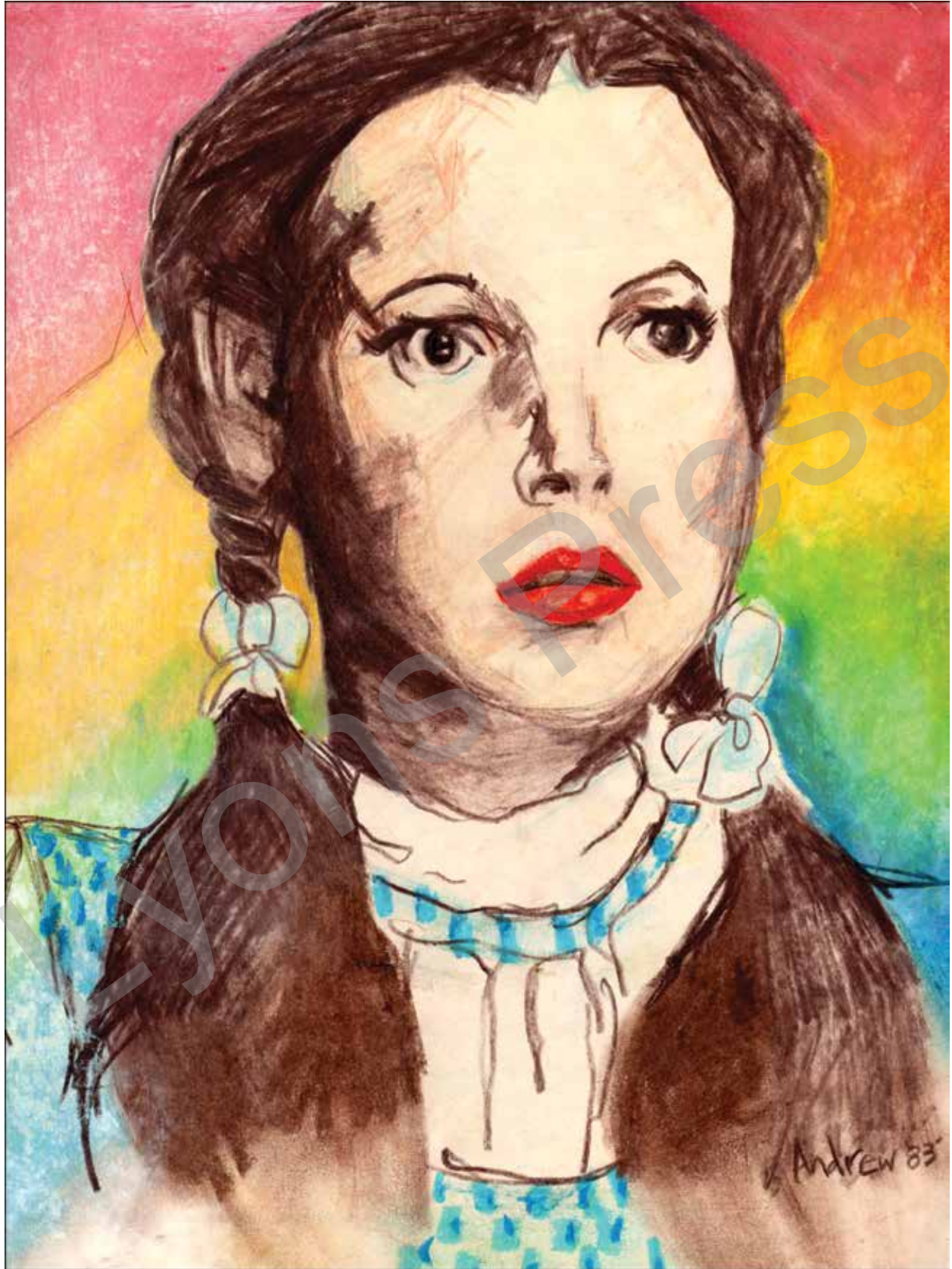
*The Wizard of Oz* was my "gateway drug" to Garland fandom. I loved her voice, and I wanted to find out more about her. Then several things happened within the span of just a few years. First up was her death in 1969. I was eight, and Mom called us in from playing outside to see something on TV. It was Garland's funeral. The famous scene of her casket, covered in bright yellow roses, being carried out of Frank Campbell's Funeral Home in New York City had a huge impact on me. Mom told us it was Judy Garland, the girl who played Dorothy. I said, "But she's a little girl." That's when I found out that *Oz* had been made many years before. The only other time Mom brought us in to witness something on TV was the moon landing. That's how important it was to her. Mom was obviously a Garland fan too, having grown up with her movies. The apple didn't fall far from that tree. Shortly thereafter, the biographies began to appear, and *That's*

*Entertainment!* was released. I devoured the film's two-record soundtrack long before finally seeing the film. I had begun randomly buying Garland records (mostly Decca and Capitol compilations) while MGM Records was rereleasing their soundtrack albums. Now we were back overseas, and these albums were all I could get my hands on. Imagine my surprise when I finally saw the films and found out just how edited down many of the musical performances were on those records. I ordered, via mail, every Garland and MGM soundtrack available in the catalogs. It really did take the advertised six to eight weeks for delivery from the United States via military mail. And that was normal. But it made them that much more special once they arrived. They were like movie musical treasures rationed a record at a time. Meanwhile, Mom was reading *Judy* by Gerold Frank, and I picked up a paperback copy of *Young Judy* by David Dahl and Barry Kehoe. I was fascinated by her life, especially those MGM years. The more I read, the more I wanted to know.

By the time of the Internet age, I had read every Garland biography (even the bad ones) and every book about movie musicals and MGM that I could find. It seemed that every few years, new details and facts were revealed. And now, thanks to the availability of newspaper, trade, periodical, and fan magazine archives, my ongoing research continues to uncover new nuggets of information about many aspects of Garland's years at MGM. For example, Garland's MGM personal appearance tours, and especially the USO tours, were mentioned in the biographies, but details about when and where she went and what she did at each city or army camp were nonexistent. In reading the local newspaper accounts of each stop on these tours, one thing is very clear: the public adored Garland. Thousands of people showed up to see her. She really was America's Singing Sweetheart. It's no wonder that when the chips were down for her, Garland's public rallied to her defense, providing unprecedented support at a level never seen before.

This book has been a long time coming and has been a joy to write. It is my hope that after reading it, you will come away with a better understanding of Garland as a performer and as a human being. She wasn't perfect, as some biographers make her out to be. She wasn't all sadness and tragedy, either, as others try to portray her. She was, like all of us, a complicated and flawed person; yet, ultimately, she was a true entertainment genius. How lucky we are that Garland shared her great talent with the world and left so many amazing performances that we can enjoy whenever we wish. She gave us one of the greatest of all gifts a human being can give to another: her legacy of performances.

Scott Brogan, 2024



Garland as Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, artwork by Andy England. From the author's collection.

## C H A P T E R 1

## THE ROAD TO MGM

**T**o understand Judy Garland's life and career at MGM, one must understand her life and career before MGM. Understanding Garland's formative vaudeville years helps us understand the choices she made, the choices others around her made, and why things happened the way they did. If anyone was "born in a trunk," it would be—at least euphemistically—Judy Garland.



Baby Gumm (Judy Garland) circa 1922. From the author's collection.

Judy Garland was born Frances Ethel Gumm in Grand Rapids, Minnesota, on June 10, 1922. Her parents were former vaudevillians Frank and Ethel Gumm, who had settled in Grand Rapids to raise a family. Frank was born Francis Avent Gumm in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, on March 20, 1886. He grew up to be a handsome young man with a beautiful voice, and, like his youngest daughter, Frances (Garland), he had an alternating romantic, optimistic, and melancholy disposition. Frank had an early interest in show business and later told of how he ran away at ten and joined a minstrel show. Whether the story is true is unknown, but it speaks to his romantic side and his early semi-transient history. At thirteen, Frank already possessed a beautiful voice, which prompted a sponsorship by a family friend, local rich man George Darrow, to both finish his grammar school and begin college at the University of

the South in Sewanee, Tennessee, on condition of his services to the school's choir. Frank called his time in Sewanee "six of the happiest, the most beautiful years of my life."<sup>1</sup> In late 1905, with just two of the eight years of school left, he quit and moved back home to help care for his ailing father.

There might not have been a Judy Garland at all if Frank's life had taken a dramatically different turn at this juncture, as it almost did. Frank was popular, singing at Sunday afternoon socials and in church. His frequent duet partner Nene White, who also had a lovely voice, thought Frank had the most beautiful voice she had ever heard.<sup>2</sup> They sang together often until Frank decided to propose, and although White adored him, she turned him down. Had she not done so, you wouldn't be reading this book.

The rejection prompted Frank to leave town, ending up in Tullahoma, Tennessee, living with his younger brother Allie and his sister Mary. He worked as an office manager and bookkeeper, while the local church choir and variety shows provided him with outlets for his performing talents.<sup>3</sup> In 1911, Frank, Allie, and Mary followed brother Robert up north to Ironwood, Michigan. Frank worked as an office clerk for the Oliver Iron Mining Company. His voice got him noticed and a nighttime job as a performer for the owner of several local area theatres, eventually becoming the manager of Ironwood's Temple Theatre, his first time managing a theatre. Frank and Robert formed "The Gumm Bros.," leasing and managing two theatres in Cloquet, Minnesota.



Frank Gumm (right) with an unidentified man in front of an unidentified theatre in Ironwood, Michigan, 1911. Note the poster advertising Frank's act. From the collection of Michael Siewert.



Frank Gumm (*left*) clowning with a friend on the Columbia River, Portland, Oregon, 1912. From the collection of Michael Siewert.



Frank Gumm on the Columbia River, Portland, Oregon, 1912. From the collection of Michael Siewert.

In December 1911, Frank gave his half of the business to Robert and left town again, this time settling in Superior, Wisconsin, where he got lucky and was immediately hired as a singer by the owner of several local theatres. He romanced Kathryn Francis McGraw, the daughter of a local real estate agent. Frank proposed but then kept putting off setting the date until Kathryn finally gave up. In an interesting twist, she married the famous vaudevillian and later film star, comedian Joe E. Brown, a marriage that lasted fifty-eight years.<sup>4</sup> One of Frank's singing engagements was at the local movie theatre, the Bijou Theatre, where he met and eventually became smitten with the theatre's pianist, Ethel Milne.

Ethel was born Ethel Marion Milne in Marquette, Michigan, on November 17, 1893, and, unlike Frank, she hadn't ventured far from her hometown after her family moved to Superior when she was fifteen. The two dated, and it looked as though they were heading for marriage when, in late March 1912, again, Frank abruptly left. He

traveled quite a bit in a short time, working for the People's Amusement Company. The bulk of his time away was spent managing and performing in the Crystal Theatre in faraway Portland, Oregon. He became entrenched in the Portland theatre community, performing at other theatres (such as the Sunnyside Theatre) as well as being a founding member of the People's Amusement Company's new Screen Club, serving on its advertising committee. In late 1913, he returned to Superior.<sup>5</sup>



More clowning by Frank Gumm (*far right*) with unidentified friends on the Columbia River, Portland, Oregon, 1912. From the collection of Michael Siewert.

The reasons for his pattern of abrupt departures weren't due as much to itchy feet as they were to the fact that Frank was homosexual and had affairs with and made advances at local young men. Either he was being run out of town or he left when rumors began to circulate and before he was found out.

Frank's vaudeville partner in Superior, Maude Ayres, noted about Frank's earlier exit from Cloquet, Minnesota, "He was accused of being a pervert, and he had to skip town and get out fast."<sup>6</sup> His reputation eventually followed him back to Superior, becoming known not long after he and Ethel married on January 22, 1914. According to Ayres, who was still his stage partner and a friend to the couple, "Everybody in Superior was talking about it. . . . I was shocked because I had had no idea that there was anything like that going on."<sup>7</sup> It's unknown whether Ethel knew of these rumors yet (she eventually would); if she did, it appears that she kept her feelings to herself. After a brief honeymoon, they left Superior and ended up in Grand Rapids, Minnesota. Frank went into business with Fred Bentz, becoming the manager and in-house singer at the town's movie theatre, the newly opened Grand Theatre. Not long after, the couple tried their luck in vaudeville as a duo act named "Jack and Virginia Lee, Sweet Southern Singers." Sweet they were; successful they were not. After three months on the road, while in Chicago, Ethel was hit with pneumonia and was bedridden for three weeks. They returned to Grand Rapids on February 20, 1915. Frank was able to purchase co-ownership of the Grand with Bentz from the theatre's other owner, James Barlow (in 1918, Frank and Bentz also purchased the Lyceum Theatre in nearby Deer River, Minnesota). Frank dubbed the Grand in Grand Rapids the "New Grand," although the trade magazines during Frank's co-ownership years referred to it as simply the "Grand."

The Gumms' first child, Mary Jane, was born on September 24, 1915, and their second, Dorothy Virginia, was born on July 4, 1917. As soon as the girls could walk, they learned the family business, and after some extensive home training, they premiered as a song and dance team at the Grand in 1921. Life was good as the family became a fixture of the town, providing entertainment for local events and church functions. Then, in late 1921, Ethel discovered she was pregnant again. The news was not welcome. Another mouth to feed could put the family under a financial burden. The couple drove to Minneapolis to get advice from their good friend, Marcus



Frank Gumm in front of the Crystal Theatre, Portland, Oregon, 1912. From the collection of Michael Siewert.



Frank Gumm shows off his flair, similar to that of his youngest daughter (Garland), at the train station in Pendleton, Oregon, 1912. From the collection of Michael Siewert.

Rabwin, who was a medical student at the time. Abortion was illegal, and Rabwin knew it, even though the couple hinted at wanting one. Ethel and Frank had tried to abort the baby on their own using a variety of known home remedies.<sup>8</sup> Rabwin convinced them not only that an abortion was dangerous to Ethel's health and illegal but also that they would not regret having a third child, saying, "After the baby's born, you wouldn't take a million dollars for it."<sup>9</sup>

Rabwin was right.

Frances (Judy Garland) and

Frank instantly bonded. He gave her the same nickname that he had grown up with: "Baby Gumm."<sup>10</sup> Garland later recalled, "My first two Christmases, I slept in a dressing room while the rest of the family was onstage performing."<sup>11</sup> For the rest of her life, Garland had fond memories of Grand Rapids and the happy times spent at the Grand, especially her father singing popular songs to her. "Danny Boy" was a favorite, which she would later record at MGM and during her concert years.

In the late spring of 1924, Frances had her public singing debut at an annual "Style Show" put on by the local Itasca Dry Goods Company store. After that event, the family visited relatives in Tennessee. Frank's cousin Anna Lee Mirtz later recalled that Frances "was already a charmer and even sang then."<sup>12</sup> Frances had already been singing informally, wanting, like any youngest sibling, to be a part of what her older sisters were doing. The wife of Frank's Tennessee cousin Ashton Pruett, Alice, later remembered a picnic during which Frances climbed on the top of a log and sang as though she were on stage: "Judy Garland could stand on a tree trunk and sing like a birdie when she was only two years old."<sup>13</sup> By the time of the Christmas season in Grand Rapids, the Gumms were ready for the official stage debut of the youngest member of their family troupe, Baby Frances Gumm.

There have been different versions of Frances's official stage debut at the age of two and a half years old on Christmas Eve at the Grand. For years, the story had Frances watching her two sisters perform, with mom Ethel at the piano, and she either broke free from sitting on her

grandmother's lap or was let go on purpose and bolted onto the stage. She sang the only song she knew, "Jingle Bells," over and over to the loud delight of the audience. Ethel yelled at her to get off the stage, but she kept singing, prompting Frank to go out, pick her up, and carry her off, which elicited more cheers and applause. In truth, her appearance was planned. Earlier in the week, Ethel had made a costume for her (her first), and during Mary Jane and Virginia's performance of "When My Sugar Walks Down the Street" (a song Garland later recorded for 1954's *A Star Is Born*, although it was cut prior to the film's release), the two sisters parted to reveal Frances. Frances proceeded to sing "Jingle Bells," ringing the family's little dinner bell. It's true that she wouldn't stop repeating the song thanks to the encouragement of the very approving applause of the audience. After singing the song for a sixth time, Frank, who was laughing so hard he had tears streaming down his face, walked out onto the stage, threw her over his shoulder, and took her off, still singing.<sup>14</sup> This was the beginning of Judy Garland's love affair with her audience.

The stage debut of Baby Frances Gumm became the first of many legends in Garland's life story. Almost immediately after Garland signed with MGM eleven years later, the studio's publicity department began to spin many fabricated stories about this event and others, which usually were barely rooted in truth. But at the time, no one in the general public would have known. That Friday after her debut, Frances had her first newspaper mention. The *Grand Rapids Independent*, in their notice for the Christmas Day and post-Christmas Day billing for the Grand, noted, "Added attraction for Friday eve-



Baby Gumm (Judy Garland), 1925. From the collection of Michael Siewert.



The Gumm Sisters, 1925.  
From the collection of Michael Siewert.



Early on, the incorrect story of Garland's early years was being disseminated, as shown in this syndicated newspaper panel published on August 12, 1939. From the author's collection.

and then having to wear socks with hot salt "an awful lot of the time." She joked that she looked "like a cocker spaniel."<sup>17</sup>

## CALIFORNIA

In the summer of 1926, Frank announced to Grand Rapids that the family would take a working vacation trip to California. They had been given good reports about California by Frank's older brother Robert, who was now living in Brea, California, managing the local Red Lantern movie theatre and the La Habra Theatre in nearby La Habra, and their friend Marcus Rabwin, now a doctor and living in Los Angeles. It was also the center of the movie business, a fact that most likely didn't escape Ethel's notice. They decided to visit Rabwin and Robert Gumm and look around for theatre owner/management opportunities.

The Gumm family sang and danced their way across Minnesota, North Dakota, Mon-

ning: the three Gumm girls will entertain in songs and dances featuring Baby Frances, two years old. . . . The little girls will appear between the shows at 9 o'clock."<sup>15</sup> Mary Jane, Virginia, and Frances became "the Gumm Sisters" and performed regularly at the Grand, as well as at various social events around Grand Rapids—sometimes even out of town. An early engagement at the Lyceum Theatre in nearby Deer River resulted in the local paper noting that the sister act was "delightful."<sup>16</sup>

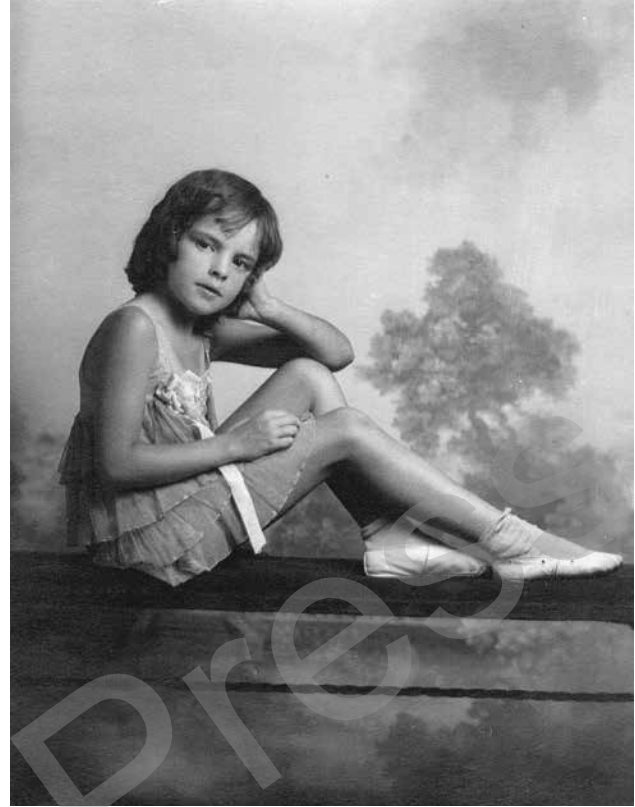
In 1925, a strange illness hit Frances. It got so bad that Frank and Ethel drove eighty miles in a snowstorm to St. Mary's Hospital in Duluth, Minnesota. The doctors couldn't figure out what was wrong and thought she might not recover. But she did, and a week later, they returned to Grand Rapids. This was her second serious illness. Previously, in 1924, Ethel took Frances to the doctor with a serious ear infection. They lanced her ears, and for months after, she endured a treatment that required her to wear socks filled with hot salt hanging over her ears. Although she was very young at the time, the event had an impact on her, and she remembered the details for the rest of her life, such as being held down to have her ears lanced without anesthesia ("You'd scream bloody

tana, Idaho, and Washington State before heading down to San Francisco and finally Los Angeles, California. The trip was a source of happy memories for Garland. She enjoyed telling the story of how Frank and Ethel would cheer for the girls as they performed, and then the girls would, in turn, cheer for Frank and Ethel's performances. Garland said, "The one thing I remember about that trip was [my mother would] come out and sing a song and play the piano and sing 'I've Been Saving for a Rainy Day,'" which was so sad it would make Garland cry: "It just broke my heart, you know."<sup>18</sup> They were usually billed as "Jack and Virginia Lee and Kiddies." No matter how small-time a venue might have been, the family had fun. Garland later joked about how they played "rotten" vaudeville—"We were in *lousy* vaudeville"<sup>19</sup>—and then proceeded to tell funny stories about other performers on the bill from this trip and their later stage experiences on the West Coast.

In Los Angeles, they looked up Rabwin and stayed for a month at the Hotel Iris (later renamed St. Moritz) in Hollywood while Frank looked around for theatre owner/management opportunities. The sisters had their Los Angeles stage debut on July 10, 1926, at the Erlanger Mason Theatre. As "the Gumm Sisters," they performed during an afternoon kiddies' matinee of the film *Topsy and Eva* starring the Duncan Sisters, which was the act that had allegedly inspired them. The Duncan Sisters (who were there in person) were so impressed with the Gumms, especially Frances, that they insisted the family keep in touch with them.<sup>20</sup>

Judy Garland's first time inside the MGM Studios was not in 1934 or 1935, as most have assumed, but rather during this trip in the summer of 1926. Frank had tried to find the sisters' favorite movie star, Fred Thompson. The family visited (the outside of) the various studios before finally seeing Thompson driving into MGM. Frank used his charm on Thompson and said, "My kids have been dying to meet you!" They were given a tour of the studio and saw a few films being made.<sup>21</sup>

During their visit, the Gumms decided that Los Angeles was the place to relocate to permanently. The family traveled back to Grand Rapids, this time without the frequent stops to



Baby Gumm (Judy Garland) circa 1929. From the collection of Michael Siewert.

perform. They wanted to get home quickly so they could take care of business (Frank and Bentz sold the Grand) and move as soon as possible. The change wasn't due solely to Ethel's ambitions and insistence on a film career for the girls, as later assumed, nor was it due to any problem with the business of the Grand. Rather, the move was prompted by a resurgence of the rumors about Frank's homosexual activities. Ethel had been concerned about Frank's proclivities for years and usually turned a blind eye, but now the word was slowly beginning to spread again.<sup>22</sup> For a brief time after the birth of Frances, the situation seemed to subside, but Frank couldn't deny his feelings for long and resumed his liaisons, this time allegedly putting most of his focus on one young man (whose name is unknown now). The rumors were sufficient for townspeople to claim later that Frank was asked to leave, in spite of how well liked he was.<sup>23</sup>

At this time, especially in small-town America, the topic of homosexuality was taboo, and homosexual activity of any kind, whether sexual or not, was not tolerated. Gay men and women were either run out of town or, worse, killed. There was no such thing as having an "alternative lifestyle," nor was there any knowledge (let alone any understanding) of what we now know as the LGBTQIA community. Gay people led double lives, playing the straight marriage game while either stepping out on the side or suppressing their natural inclinations altogether, resulting in a lot of substance abuse ("self-medicating") and/or suicide. Frank was no different. In another era, he might not have married at all but instead lived as an out and proud gay man. Frank probably would have also been very proud that his supremely talented daughter became one of the greatest gay icons of all time, linked forever with the beginning of the modern American gay rights movement.

The family gave their final performances at the Grand on October 8, 9, and 10, 1926, followed by a string of going-away parties. On October 27, they left Grand Rapids for good. Their first stop was Duluth, Minnesota, where Frank and Ethel left the girls with relatives before traveling via train to Tennessee to visit some of Frank's family. After traveling back to Duluth, the family drove to Kansas City, Missouri, where Ethel and the girls stayed while Frank drove ahead to Los Angeles to find a place to live. It's safe to assume that the sisters performed in vaudeville shows at the local Kansas City theatres, although there are no known listings or reviews in the local newspapers. After a couple of weeks, Frank sent for them, and they traveled via train to Los Angeles. By mid-November, they were living in the Atwater district of Los Angeles. Frank continued looking for theatres while Ethel continued refining the sisters' act.

In March 1927, Frank finally found a theatre to lease and manage eighty miles from downtown Los Angeles in the desert town of Lancaster. The New Lancaster Theatre had been open only since that previous Christmas and was more modern than the Grand back in Grand Rapids, boasting a seating capacity of over 450. Frank renamed it the "Valley Theatre." The family wasn't thrilled about living in this rustic town far away from Los Angeles, especially Ethel. It meant long trips into the city for engagements and professional schooling for the sisters. In an effort to not only announce the new management but also ingratiate the family with the skeptical

locals, Frank announced their arrival with a big advertisement in the local paper: “Mr. and Mrs. Frank Gumm and Daughters will present a cycle of songs and dances between shows each evening. . . . Having purchased the theater, I am taking this method of introducing the family to the good people of Lancaster and Antelope Valley. It is my intention to continue presenting the high class picture program as given by Mr. Claman [the former owner].”<sup>24</sup>

In 1926, Ethel began a long association for herself and the sisters with the Ethel Meglin Studio. The Meglin Studio served as a combination training class and talent agency for show business children in the Los Angeles area. Usually billed as the “Meglin Kiddies,” the child performers were booked mostly at various movie theatres as part of vaudeville-style stage shows that accompanied the films. On December 10, 1926, the sisters appeared on the Loew’s State Theatre stage in Los Angeles for their first time in a Meglin show, billed as “100 of California’s Cleverest Children” in the “Twinkle Toe Kiddie Revue” (named after the film currently being shown, *Twinkletoes* starring Colleen Moore). The engagement lasted six nights.

That December engagement would be the last major engagement for the Gumm Sisters for almost two years. For all 1927 and half of 1928, the sisters performed almost exclusively in Lancaster and the surrounding communities. This relatively inactive period of professional activity was due to a combination of reasons. Frank was establishing the theatre, which included family stage performances, mostly on the busy days and nights of the weekend. The sisters had to attend the local schools, naturally participating in school plays. At the same time, the whole family became involved in performing at many local events and activities such as parades, picnics, church functions, and, of course, their father’s theatre.

Then, in early 1928, Frances became ill again, suffering from the same mystery infection that had plagued her in 1925. Rabwin got her into the Los Angeles County Hospital, where she stayed for almost a month. Luckily, the mystery illness went away. It’s unknown what effect this issue had on Frances’s voice, which, even at this early stage of her life, was being noticed. Whatever effect it had was short lived. Her voice, obviously, turned out fine.<sup>25</sup>

In the latter months of 1928, Ethel decided it was time to leave the semi-bucolic life they had established in Lancaster and enter real show business again. During a trip to Santa Monica, she heard about an audition for the local Los Angeles KFI radio station’s show *Children’s Hour*. The sisters got the job, singing “Avalon Town” and “You’re the Cream in My Coffee.”<sup>26</sup> Lancaster’s local paper, the *Ledger-Gazette*, reported that the numbers “went over very well.”<sup>27</sup> They must have since they returned to the program off and on through October of that year.

Ethel renewed their association with Ethel Meglin, resulting in the sisters taking part in the “Famous Meglin Kiddies Recital” on October 28, 1928, at the Breakfast Club in Los Angeles. The surviving program reveals that the show featured seventy-six numbers(!). The Gumm Sisters had a few numbers toward the end of the show: Mary Jane performed “Song” (apparently it was unknown what song she would sing when the program was printed), the sisters performed “Harmony” (again, exactly what is unknown), and “Baby Frances Gumm” performed “Laugh, Clown,



Ethel and Frank Gumm circa 1930. From the collection of Michael Siewert.

Laugh” as song number 74, just two songs before the end “Finale” (in which the sisters most likely took part). Frances’s placement toward the end of the program is an indication that her talents were already sufficient to get her one of the best spots in the show.

In her recorded 1960 sessions with author and screenwriter Fred Finklehoffe for a proposed autobiography, Garland was candid about her mother’s actions around this time, stating that Ethel used her as a pawn in arguments she would have with Garland’s father. The arguments mostly centered around Ethel’s affair with their friend in Lancaster, Wil Gilmore:

*I don't think anything in the world frightens a child more than their mother and father [fighting]. [Mother would] come in the middle of the night and wake me up and dress me and say, "We're leaving Daddy" and I'd say, "I don't wanna leave Daddy," then she'd make me feel terrible because she'd say I didn't*

*love her and make me feel very guilty about loving my father. . . . She would put me in the back seat of the car, wrap me up, and to release her frustrations, she'd just drive hour after hour, 90 miles an hour, hell-bent for election, around mountain curves . . . and I was just terrified, and I don't think I ever went to bed at night without wondering whether I was going to be awakened and taken out in the night. And then she'd take me to Los Angeles, where we'd register at a crummy hotel somewhere . . . and we'd stay there sometimes for about three or four months.<sup>28</sup>*

Garland continued to explain that during those times, she would perform around Los Angeles in nightclubs and theatres while Ethel would get jobs as a music or singing teacher. Sometimes Ethel would get bookings for the trio, and the sisters would join them. She remembered the Strand Theatre in Long Beach, remarking, “We always worked there.” She talked about working in the Hippodrome Theatre, “where all the actors would say they’re working because they’re breaking in a new act; that isn’t true because it was such a terrible place they always used that as an excuse. . . . The rats backstage were so big we named them. And that’s where we worked on the bill with a man who threw up for an act!”<sup>29</sup>

The story about Hadji Ali was one she told often; the specifics would vary, but the main story remained the same. Hadji would come out in a big turban, swallow “twenty-seven hazelnuts

and one walnut,” and bring them up on command and finish by building a fire, drinking water, and then drinking kerosene. He would then bring up the kerosene to get the fire going and subsequently bring up the water to put it out. She laughed, “And God help the audience if he had any lunch that day! We worked with all kinds of *class acts* like that.”<sup>30</sup>

Garland’s memories were, like anyone’s, conflated in her mind. While the Hadji story is true (his act survives in an early sound film), there isn’t anything to support her claim that her mother would angrily or vindictively leave her father, with Garland in tow, for months on end. She was most likely confusing that with the times she and Ethel went into Los Angeles for bookings when her sisters had to stay behind for school. However, there’s no reason not to believe her when she said that Ethel used her as a pawn, knowing that Frances was Frank’s favorite, and, in an effort to hurt him or to make him acquiesce to her needs, would take her away. Whether the drive into the mountains happened more than once will never be known, although it was most likely a one-time occurrence that traumatized her. Garland was known to exaggerate, and by the time the 1960s rolled around, her exaggerations became the truth in her mind.

December 1928 saw one of Frances’s early successes as a solo artist. Ethel seemed determined to get more exposure for her, and so, through their association with Meglin, Frances was one of the one hundred children, “ages ranging from four to fourteen,”<sup>31</sup> who were part of Meglin’s new holiday revue show. The show was previewed at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles on December 13, which was part of a massive Christmas benefit that featured more than four hundred stars. This event was probably similar to the benefit at the Shrine as portrayed in Garland’s screen comeback in *A Star Is Born* (Warner Bros., 1954), which accurately shows the crowded hustle and bustle of all the acts (stars or otherwise) backstage waiting to go on. Imagine one hundred children and their parents added to that already crowded scene. The whole Gumm family attended the Shrine event in support of Frances, who sang one of 1928’s biggest hits, “I Can’t Give You Anything But Love, Baby.” Garland later recorded studio versions of the song for Capitol Records in 1958 and 1960, and she performed it on TV and in many of her concerts. The Meglin act then moved to its final destination: a week’s engagement at Loew’s State Theatre that began on December 21. Although Frances wasn’t singled out in the newspapers, the act as a whole was given positive reviews, and the *Los Angeles Record* reported, “We have no names with which to lay tribute to. One small miss shook these well-known rafters with her songs a la Sophie Tucker,” which is assumed to be a reference to Frances.<sup>32</sup> Originally, Frank did not want Frances to be a part of the show but eventually gave in, with the understanding that Ethel and Frances would return to Lancaster each night. In spite of the grueling schedule and Frank’s reservations, the family saw the engagement as a success.

By March 1929, the situation of driving back and forth between Lancaster and Los Angeles had become too much. Ethel and the girls moved into an upstairs apartment at 1814 1/2 South Orchard Street near the Los Angeles theatre district. The Lancaster *Ledger-Gazette* reported, “Mrs. Frank Gumm and daughters leave next week for Los Angeles where they will reside indef-

initely so that the girls may pursue special studies. They will spend their weekends in Lancaster, Mrs. Gumm furnishing the music at the theatre [the Valley Theatre, run by Frank]. Mr. Gumm will continue to reside at the family home on Cedar Avenue.”<sup>33</sup>

In June, the association with the Meglin Kiddies resulted in the sisters making their big screen debut in the Vitaphone film short *The Big Revue*, shot at Tec-Art Studios in Hollywood. They sang “That’s the Good Old Sunny South” live on the set. The film has survived, giving us a chance to see Judy Garland at the ripe old age of seven, singing and dancing with her sisters. Even at this young age, it’s obviously Judy Garland. Always the professional, when she flubs a step in the dance and looks up at her sisters, it doesn’t deter her, and she catches up so quickly that it’s barely noticeable. The “Garland Sound” isn’t there yet—in her solo lines, she shouts more than sings, “Yassir!”—but in harmony with her two sisters, she blends in just fine. The shouting is no doubt a result of their stage training. In those days, there were no microphones or speakers on stage. A singer had to be heard throughout the theatre.

The sisters appeared in three more shorts filmed in November and December 1929, a result of their association with Flynn O’Malley’s Hollywood Starlets organization. Billed as the “Three Kute Kiddies,” they appeared in *A Holiday in Storyland*, singing “When the Butterflies Kiss the Buttercups Goodbye,” with Frances getting her first on-screen solo, “Blue Butterfly”; *The Wedding of Jack and Jill*, in which Frances gets another solo, the prophetic “Hang onto a Rainbow”; and *Bubbles*, featuring the sisters singing “The Land of Let’s Pretend,” with Frances getting a short solo bit toward the end of the song. These shorts were shot in the early two-strip Technicolor process on the Warner Bros. lot, Frances’s (Garland’s) first time at the studio.

The audio for all of the films has survived thanks to Vitaphone’s process of using audio discs to accompany the films as the soundtracks. *Bubbles* is the only one of the three films to survive (in black and white only). For Frances’s solo bit in “The Land of Let’s Pretend,” she’s filmed in a nice close-up. We see her reaching out to the audience as she’s singing and already displaying some of that future legendary Garland charisma. Her voice is by far better here (and in the audio of “Hang onto a Rainbow”), indicating that she was learning her craft—fast. It had been only five months since their first film, but Garland seemed to have gained several years’ worth of expertise.

On March 4, 1930, “Baby Frances Ethel Gumm” participated in the “Eighth Annual *Los Angeles Evening Express* ‘Better Babies’ Exposition” at the Paramount Studios in Hollywood, placing second. She won a kewpie doll presented by screen legend Mary Pickford. Garland had competed in the same contest the previous year, at which time she was given an honorable mention and a \$10 gift certificate to the Broadway department store. She kept the doll, and, twelve years later, it made an appearance in the film that showcased her first adult role at MGM, 1942’s *For Me and My Gal*. For the “Oh, You Beautiful Doll” musical sequence, supporting actress Lucille Norman hands the doll to Garland’s costar George Murphy. The use of the doll was an in-joke, a nod and a wink to Garland’s vaudeville roots in a movie about vaudeville performers.

### STOPPING THE SHOW

In the early 1930s, the sisters were making a name for themselves in Los Angeles and along the West Coast. Frances tried out “Gracie Gumm” as a new stage name. It didn’t stick. She was also billed as “Baby Marie Gumm,” but that didn’t stick either. The most common billings for Frances at the time were as “Baby Gumm” or simply “Frances Gumm.” The sisters together were usually billed as the “Gumm Sisters,” the “Three Gumm Sisters,” or the “Hollywood Starlets Trio.” For a short while, there didn’t seem to be any consistency, with the billing alternating between the “Gumm Sisters” and the “Hollywood Starlets Trio.” It would be another several years before “Garland” and “Judy” were combined.

For an extensive time, the sisters were part of the kiddie “Big Brother Ken Show” as well as Maurice Kusell’s Theatrical Dance Studio, the latter resulting in the sisters taking part in Kusell’s “Stars of Tomorrow” shows. Kusell was enthusiastic about Frances, giving her a solo spot in the show and on the playbill as “Baby Gumm” at the show’s engagement the week of July 10, 1931, at the Wilshire Ebell Theatre in Los Angeles. The sisters, as a trio, were featured in three numbers. The engagement was successful enough for the *Los Angeles Times* to label it “a decided hit.” The paper also gave a shout-out to the “Gumm Sisters” at the top of its list of “interesting specialty numbers” in the show. Kusell introduced Ethel and the sisters to George Frank of the Frank and Dunlap Talent Agency. They signed Frances to a five-year contract, giving her the name “Frances Gayne.” However, soon after signing, the contract’s “option clause” was exercised, and Frances was let out of her contract because Frank objected, feeling that she was too young.<sup>34</sup>

These appearances, as well as the smaller ones in various shows in the Los Angeles area, began to get the sisters noticed. Being noticed meant more engagements. The school year kept the sisters from performing as often as they did in the summer months, but that didn’t stop Ethel from ensuring they kept busy performing on the weekends, usually in Los Angeles but also at their father’s theatre and other events in Lancaster, such as the local Kiwanis Club and school talent shows. They were performing part-time in Los Angeles and part-time in Lancaster while Ethel spent most of her time in Los Angeles, having been hired by Kusell as a “personality and harmony jazz singing teacher.”<sup>35</sup> Judging from the dates of the Los Angeles engagements, it appears Ethel tried to confine the sisters’ engagements to the weekends. One weekend engagement on January 23, 1932 (a Saturday), was a solo engagement for Frances that turned out to be a milestone for her. She performed at the famous Coconut Grove at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles. It was her first time at the Grove, where she would have one of her biggest concert successes decades later: her 1958 engagement that resulted in the very first Judy Garland concert album, *Garland at the Grove*, released by Capitol Records.

On August 25, 1932, the sisters began a very successful weeklong engagement at the Paramount Theatre in Los Angeles. They performed a twenty-minute act five times daily, six on the weekend. The engagement resulted in their first review in the trade paper *Variety*, with Frances



The Gumm Sisters in 1931. From the collection of Michael Siewert.

being singled out:

*Gumm sisters, harmony trio, socked with two numbers. Selling end of the trio is the ten-year-old sister with a pip of a lowdown voice. Kid stopped the show, but wouldn't give more.*<sup>36</sup>

Frances, again billed as “Baby Gumm,” made an impact in Kusell’s “Juvenile Christmas Revue” at the Million Dollar Theatre in Los Angeles, which ran from December 29, 1932, through January 4, 1933. The *Los Angeles Record* reviewed the show and stated that Frances was “astounding. Her singing all but knocks one for a loop, her dancing is snappy and clever. She handles herself onstage like a veteran pro.”<sup>37</sup> This is another indication that Garland’s voice was already developing into the sound we know today and that her natural stage presence was already electrifying audiences.

Frances regularly stopped the show during most of these engagements. However, not everyone was impressed. A year after that first *Variety* review, the sisters received their second *Variety* review, this time along with Frank and Ethel. The whole family took an engagement at the Golden Gate Theatre in San Francisco from August 2 to August 8, 1933. Frank opened for the sisters while Ethel played the piano. This time, the review in *Variety* was negative:

*The Gumm Sisters, with Mama Gum [sic] at the piano, and Papa Gumm in advance, deuced. Three girls of assorted sizes who sing in mediocre voice and style, with majority of the burden falling to the youngest one, a mere tot, who lustily shouted three numbers, decidedly not her type. And much too long.*<sup>38</sup>

However, the *San Francisco Chronicle*’s critic, George C. Warren, raved about the show and noted, “[The sisters] harmonize, and have a strong-voiced small woman who imitates and sings in a big way.”<sup>39</sup> The amusing mistake of audiences assuming that Frances was a grown woman had become fairly regular. She already sounded much more mature than her years, and many audience members assumed she was a young woman rather than a child. The act showcased this by having Frances sing the torch song “Bill” from *Show Boat* while sitting on top of a piano, in the manner of the song’s originator, Helen Morgan. The song would start with a pin spot on just

Frances's face. At the end of the song, the lights would come up to reveal that this young woman was a child. The usual audience response was first gasps, then applause, and sometimes cheers.

The sisters were back in the Los Angeles area theatres by the middle of the month. Their weeklong engagement at the West Coast Theatre in Long Beach brought additional praise for Frances:

*Little Frances Gumm of the Gumm Sisters Trio is a "natural." She fools everybody with her matured voice and sings quite as lustily as her two sisters twice her size.<sup>40</sup>*

*The Three Gumm Sisters present an entertaining harmony act with a real surprise "punch" in the appearance of Frances Gumm of KHFJ fame.<sup>41</sup>*

At the end of the month, they had a dual engagement that began at the Warner Brothers Hollywood Theatre in Hollywood from August 24 through August 30, 1933; then they moved over to the Warner Brothers Downtown Theatre in, naturally, downtown Los Angeles, from August 31 through September 6, 1933. *Variety* reviewed the act again, and once more it was negative.

*In the deuce spot are the Gumm Sisters, three harmony warblers, with Mother Gumm accompanying at the piano. Two of the sisters are grownup, while the third is a precocious juve whose mild attempts at comedy add nothing to the offering.<sup>42</sup>*

Viola Hegyi of the *Hollywood Citizen* is the critic who gave Frances the "leather-lunged" moniker popular with biographers when reviewing the August 24 performance:

*Little leather-lunged Frances Gumm, child singer, delighted last night's audiences with solos and harmony numbers in which she appeared with her two grown sisters. This oddly mature faced child possesses an extraordinary musical and rhythmic gift.<sup>43</sup>*

In late 1933, the sisters joined another organization of child performers, the Lawlor's School for Professional Children. In her 1979 autobiography *Hollywood's Children: An Inside Account of the Child Star Era*, former child star "Baby Peggy," Diana Serra Cary, wrote extensively about this era of child performers. Cary recalled Garland's first day at "Mom" Lawlor's, which she remembered as taking place in early 1934, although, in reality, it was late 1933:

*Judy was a quiet, plain little girl whose dresses were a trifle too long and obviously homemade. She looked too old for a child, but she did not yet have the body of a woman. Mom [Lawlor] brought her into our study hall, introduced her, and then asked her if she would sing a number for us. Ethel Gumm settled herself on the bench, and Judy clambered onto the top of the old upright piano. When she crossed her legs, I noticed the limp, worn taffeta bows on her tap shoes. They reminded me of my own tap shoes, whose soles had several times worn through, and what they told me about her made me want to cry. I thought it was needlessly cruel of Mrs. Lawlor to put this obvious amateur through such an ordeal; after all, she knew we were an audience of hardened professionals, and this was a poor little kid from the godforsaken desert town of Lancaster.*

*But we had misjudged both Judy and Mom. After Ethel Gumm swept through the introductory bars of the popular “Blue Moon,” an incredibly rich voice charged with a mature woman’s emotional power was flooding the room: “Blue Moon / You saw me standing alone / Without a dream in my heart / Without a love of my own.”*

*When Judy finished there were tears of pride in Mom’s eyes, and every student in the room was applauding wildly and cheering the forlorn little newcomer. Even then Judy was a professional’s professional. At our annual Lawlor shows, staged at the Wilshire Ebell Theater, we kept giving Judy encores that sometimes kept her singing until two o’clock in the morning. She seemed unable to say no to an audience.<sup>44</sup>*

This was the heyday of child performers. They seemed to be everywhere, but very few were as talented as Frances Gumm. The mania of parents exploiting their children would eventually yield great talents such as Mickey Rooney, Ann Miller, Donald O’Connor, Shirley Temple, Gypsy Rose Lee, and her sister, June Havoc. There were plenty of organizations and shows that were only too happy to hire the children with their parents’ enthusiastic blessing. The stereotype of “the stage mother” wasn’t for nothing. Ethel became one of the most famous, known at the time for her tenacity and seemingly boundless energy. If it weren’t for her supremely talented daughter, she would have faded anonymously into history along with the thousands of now nameless and faceless stage mothers of the era. Ethel’s ambition led to the sisters being signed up for several child performer organizations over the next several years. She usually helped pay for these associations by providing her services for anything musical, from piano accompanist to vocal arranger and coach. The associations included I. C. Overdorff’s Hollywood School of Dance and Flynn O’Malley’s Hollywood Starlets (the inspiration for the sisters’ sporadic billing as the “Hollywood Starlets Trio”).

From February through March 1934, the sisters went on a tour with the Paramount Circuit up the West Coast to a series of engagements in Washington State, Idaho, and finally San Francisco on their way back to Los Angeles. In Spokane, Washington, the *Spokesman-Review* noted, “The Three Gumm Sisters are harmony singers in a dainty bit of vocal entertainment that features the youngster of the lot in a clever imitation of Helen Morgan. The crowd gave the girls a great hand.”<sup>45</sup> The sisters returned to their normal routine for a few months, highlighted by a few engagements with the Gilmore Circus, including one at the Agua Caliente Hotel in Agua, Mexico, that was broadcast on KHJ Radio, and one at the State Theatre in Long Beach, California, which earned Frances another rave review: “Frances Gumm, a charming youngster who is the ‘baby’ of the troupe, sings ‘That’s What a Darkie Is,’ and ‘Dinah’ in a singularly grownup little voice.”<sup>46</sup>

It wasn’t just the critics and audiences who were recognizing Garland’s supreme talents; so did her family. Ethel no doubt knew, as did Frank, that great things lay ahead. Always the proud father, Frank sent a letter to the editor of the *Rutherford Courier* in his hometown of Mur-

freesboro, Tennessee, published on April 27, 1934. He touted the trio's success on their tour up the West Coast and their upcoming engagement in Los Angeles as part of the "Movie Star Frolic" show at the Gilmore Stadium: "The youngest girl, Frances, who is 11 years old, is a big sensation, and a brilliant career is predicted for her as she will shortly be featured with many of the prominent stars of the screen." He also noted that Ethel and the girls would soon go on tour to Chicago and New York. Perhaps he was anticipating Garland's future monetary success for the family with "Should I ever accumulate much of worldly wealth, nothing could afford me more real happiness than to return to dear old Murfreesboro."<sup>47</sup> Frank then sent a letter dated May 20, 1934, to the editor of the *Los Angeles Times* thanking him for a recent review of one of the sisters' engagements and singling out Frances. He also supplied an anecdote for the paper to possibly print:

*My Dear Sir:*

*As a reader and an appreciative one of your excellent column, I am presuming to write you a line in regard to my little girl, Frances Gumm, whom you were kind enough to notice in your column when she appeared with Teddy Joyce at Warner's Hollywood theater; you will recall perhaps that you referred to her as "little hotcha singer and a show stopper." We appreciated this so much and the article is in the little girl's scrapbook.*

*All three of the girls are appearing on the frolic at the Gilmore Stadium this week-end; working at Leon Errols Beer Garden and going over, if I do brag a bit, very good indeed.*

*The other day the little one, Frances, 10 years old, made a wisecrack that I think is "hot" and I thought maybe you could use it. If you can I would get a big kick out of it and if you can't there is no harm done in asking anyway I hope. It would run something like this.*

*The other day little Frances Gumm, the ten-year-old member of the Gumm Sisters trio who appeared last week-end at the Movie Stars Frolic at the Gilmore Stadium, wanted to go downtown in Los Angeles alone. Her mother protested that such a thing would be out of the question. Frances wanted to know WHY and her mother advised her of the danger of being kidnapped. Frances said "Well mother why would anyone want to kidnap ME?" Her mother replied "Well they would kidnap you and HOLD you for RANSOM." Little Frances thought for a moment and replied, "Why mother, what's the matter with 'RANSOM' can't he HOLD his own girls?"*

*Again thank you for giving the baby the nice little mention you did and assuring you if you can use this gag I would be grateful to you I am with sincere wishes,*

*Very truly yours,*

*[Frank A. Gumm]*

### GUMM TO GARLAND

In mid-June 1934, Ethel and the sisters embarked on a cross-country tour to the Chicago World's Fair. The fair had been going on since 1933, and Ethel convinced Frank that it would benefit the act to take a weeklong engagement at the Old Mexico Cafe on the boardwalk of the fair, as well as two solid weeks of engagements in Colorado along the way, including Denver, Littleton, and Colorado Springs. Frank, who was opposed to the idea of “a woman and three girls driving more than halfway across the country by themselves,”<sup>48</sup> soon relented and gave them some traveler's checks for insurance, and they drove to Chicago. They opened at the Old Mexico Night Club in Chicago on July 15. For part of their time in Chicago, they stayed with some of Frank's relatives from Murfreesboro, including a distant cousin, Mrs. Barbara Goenne, who later recalled that Frances “was a happy girl with a fine sense of humor . . . and she was so natural and unaffected.”<sup>49</sup> The shows were successful, so much so that the man in charge of special events for the fair, “Captain Riley,” gave Frances the honor of being one of the star performers for the fair's Children's Day on July 19. Frances got to ride in the lead car of the procession along Leif Ericson Drive to one of the auditoriums, where she and others entertained the kids and their parents with a “special program” of songs and dances.<sup>50</sup> It was at the Old Mexico Night Club that they first met then-trumpet player Jack Cathcart. Cathcart eventually married Mary Jane and became a musical arranger for Garland during her legendary concert years in the 1950s, including her television premiere on the *Ford Star Jubilee* in 1955, as well as some of her Capitol recordings.

The engagement at the Old Mexico Night Club began well enough, but the management was slow in making their payments until, finally, the venue closed without paying the performers the remaining money owed to them. According to Garland biographer Gerold Frank, Ethel went to the manager and demanded payment but got nowhere, so she went to the local William Morris Agency, who told her to enter the sisters in the open “tryouts” on Friday nights at the Belmont Theatre. “The agency screened new acts there [and] a Morris man would be there to catch their act.”<sup>51</sup> The information about this sequence of events is sketchy. Other sources note that the engagement at the Belmont was not on a Friday but on a Wednesday and that it was a booked appearance rather than an open night for random acts.

Things had also gotten so dire money-wise that Ethel was forced to finally cash some of the traveler's checks Frank had given her—something she had tried to avoid to prove they could make their own way. Then Cathcart called them. A fellow musician told him that a singing act at the Oriental Theatre had been fired. This was the kind of break they needed. The Oriental Theatre was one of Chicago's biggest movie/vaudeville theatres and was the type of local top-tier theatre that Ethel had been unsuccessfully trying to get into. Ethel and the sisters rushed over, arriving barely in time to go on. They got the job.

The weeklong engagement at the Oriental became one of Judy Garland's biggest career milestones. Comedian George Jessell was the headliner, and, after noticing some laughs from the audience when he introduced the “Gumm” sisters, he took it upon himself to rename them

“Garland,” allegedly after his friend, New York critic Robert Garland. Another, more far-fetched version of the name change has Jessell exclaiming that Frances was “pretty as a garland of flowers.” Twenty years later, Jessell attended the star-studded opening of Garland’s comeback film, *A Star Is Born* (Warner Bros., 1954), and told his story about naming Garland. In his pre-premiere article, columnist Leonard Lyons reported about Jessell’s renaming the sister act:

*Earlier that day he’d received a message reminding him to send a telegram to Judith Anderson, who was opening on Broadway. The wire to Miss Anderson still was in his mind: “Dear Judy, may this new play add another garland to your Broadway laurels.” Now George was introducing Frances Gumm, and his tongue resisted the clumsy name. He finished his spiel, leading up to the name. “And here she is now,” he concluded, then blurted “Judy Garland.”<sup>52</sup>*

The first scenario is the more realistic of the three stories. Lyons’s story was apocryphal. Frances renamed herself “Judy,” but not until 1935. Jessell took great pride in having named one of show business’s greatest legends and would often quip, “You couldn’t have hidden that great talent if you had called her Tel Aviv Windowsill,” which he repeated that night at the premiere of *A Star Is Born* in 1954.

The local William Morris Agency handled the rest of their summer tour, which included the first-ever billing of the “Garland Sisters” at the Uptown Theatre in Chicago on August 21, 1934. Amusingly, that first billing as Garland came on the heels of being billed as the “Glumm Sisters” at the Marbro Theatre, also in Chicago. The sisters were booked throughout September and October in Detroit, Michigan; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and (on their way back home) Kansas City, St. Joseph, and Jefferson City, Missouri.

They were a big hit in St. Joseph, appearing for two nights at the local Dubinsky’s Electric Theatre on October 5 and 6. The *St. Joseph News-Press Gazette* promoted the show with an ad that mistakenly lists the “4 Garland Sisters ‘Harmony Singers’” and this promo copy:

*The Garland Sisters offer a singing and dancing act and present the youngest member in a Helen Morgan torch number.<sup>53</sup>*

Of interest is the fact that the film being shown, *Desirable*, featured a story about a “stage mother who interfered with her daughter’s happiness because of her own selfish, professional ambitions,” much like Ethel’s ambitions for Garland. The *St. Joseph News-Press Gazette* raved about the first night’s show:

*The opening number on the program is the four Garland sisters, one of them a mere child but with a voice and expression that reveal both ability and training. She imitates Helen Morgan in “Along Came Bill” [“Bill”] but the number gets a little tiresome when she repeats the chorus. The audience would like to hear more harmonizing. These girls can sing, but use the “hotcha” stuff with restraint, dropping back into good old dominant seventh chords with pleasing effect.<sup>54</sup>*

The *Kansas City Star* noted that Garland sang “Little Man, You’ve Had a Busy Day” during their

engagement there and mixed up Frances's and Virginia's names in a short review titled "A Young 'Show Stopper.'"

*Virginia Garland, the youngest member of the Garland Sisters, three girls from California, almost stopped the show on its first performance with her impersonation of Helen Morgan sitting on a piano and singing "Bill," and then repeated later before a microphone with "Little Man, You've Had a Busy Day." The girl has personality, as have her sisters, not to neglect them, and the act gets loud and long applause.<sup>55</sup>*

After their engagement in Jefferson City, Missouri, Ethel and the sisters headed directly back to California without stopping to perform. Once back in Los Angeles, the sisters were alternately billed as "Gumm" and "Garland," with the last known "Gumm" billing being at the Strand Theatre in Long Beach, California, from November 9 through November 11. From that date forward, they were known as the "Garland Sisters." Just prior to that last Gumm billing, the sisters received an often-quoted *Variety* review of their engagement at Grauman's Chinese Theatre in Hollywood, listed as "Gumm Sisters (3)."

*Hardly a new act, this trio of youngsters has been kicking around the coast for two years, but has just found itself. As a trio, it means nothing, but with the youngest, Frances, 13-year-old, featured, it hops into class entertainment, for, if such a thing is possible, the girl is a combination of Helen Morgan and Fuzzy Knight. Possessing a voice that, without a p.a. system, is audible throughout a house as large as the Chinese, she handles ballads like a veteran, and gets every note and word over with a personality that hits audiences. For comedy, she effects a pan like Knight and delivers her stuff in the same manner as the comic. Nothing slow about her on hot stuff and to top it, she hoofs. Other two sisters merely form a background.*

*Kid, with or without her sisters, is ready for the east. Caught on several previous shows, including the 5,000 seat Shrine Auditorium here, she has never failed to stop the show, her current engagement being no exception.<sup>56</sup>*

Frances had obviously eclipsed her two sisters in talent and stage presence. This development didn't bother Mary Jane and Virginia. They were getting older (Mary Jane was almost twenty) and were not as interested in show business as their little sister was. For the past several years, Frances had been the main attraction of the act and the main focus of Ethel's ambitions. If any of the sisters had what it took to succeed in show business, it was Frances.

The sisters enjoyed a very successful engagement at the Wilshire Ebell in Los Angeles, opening on December 8, 1934, in the "Irving Strouse Vaudeville Frolics," during which Frances created a lot of buzz in the local entertainment community. This engagement resulted in the false claim by the Wilshire Ebell that Garland was discovered there. The facts are much different, as noted later in this chapter.

The sisters received more great reviews. The *Los Angeles Times* noted:

*The Garland Sisters scored a hit, with the youngest member of the trio practically stopping the show with her singing.<sup>57</sup>*

W. E. Oliver of the *Los Angeles Herald-Express* was especially smitten with Frances's performance. The headline of his article read, "12 Year Old Girl Is Sensation at Frolics." Foreshadowing Garland's future concert years and her effect on audiences, he said:

*If the godfathers of the new vaudeville can discover one personality a month of the caliber of a little, 12-year-old girl who appeared this last weekend in the Frolics at the Wilshire-Ebell theater, their anew born ward will soon be up and flourishing as it was in the days before the talking picture dealt it a lethal blow.*

*This young maid is Frances Garland, of the three Garland sisters. Besides appearing with her two sisters, little Frances sat on a piano and with her mother accompanying, sang in a way that produced in the audience sensations that haven't been equaled for years.*

*Not your smart adult-aping prodigy is this girl, but a youngster who had the divine instinct to be herself on the stage, along with a talent for singing, a trick of rocking the spectators with rhythms, and a capacity for putting emotions into her performance that suggest what [stage legend Sarah] Bernhardt must have been at her age. It isn't the cloying, heavy sentiment that her elders so often strive for, but simple, sincere feeling that reaches the heart.*

*The three girls together are an act that anyone would want to see. Frances alone is a sensation, and last Saturday's audience realized it by the way they encored. Much of her individual style of singing was culled by the little girl from her parents' old act, although she must have the divine spark to be able to sing as she did.*

*Take a tip and see this little Frances Gumm if you want to experience a thrill. She would make any show.<sup>58</sup>*

Carl Combs of the *Hollywood Citizen News* reviewed the show as well:

*Frances Garland, a live-wire little miss, who appeared with her two older sisters in a couple of harmony numbers and who appeared alone in a smoothly executed "Helen Morgan" piano-sitting sob song about "Bill," vied for the big hand with Fuzzy Knight.<sup>59</sup>*

These are examples of just how well known the Garland Sisters had become, as well as Frances's effect on audiences. She wasn't as unknown in the entertainment circles on the West Coast as some have assumed. On December 15, 1934, the *Oakland Tribune* reported on the upcoming Christmas show at San Francisco's Curran Theatre and listed Garland among the performers as "Francis [sic] Garland, a recent discovery." On December 23, 1934, the *Los Angeles Times* noted that the Frolics show was moving up to San Francisco and that "the three Garland sisters will sing new songs, and Francis [sic] Garland, the youngest, will again do several solos."

The Frolics show opened at the Curran Theatre in San Francisco on December 25, 1934, and ran through the end of the year. The sisters were initially listed in the Curran's newspaper advertisements as the "Garland Trio," but by the last several days that billing was changed to "Frances Garland." In his December 27, 1934, review of the vaudeville acts currently playing around the Bay Area that late December 1934, the *Oakland Tribune's* Wood Soanes noted:

*Of the group [of acts,] the Garlands [Garland Trio] have the best novelty. They consist of three girls with mother at the piano and they sing. But the virtue of their performance lies in the talent of the youngest, Little Francis [sic]. I loathe child actors particularly in vaudeville, but this youngster sings a song called, I think, "Night and Day" in a fashion that would do justice to Helen Morgan. Little Francis [sic] will undoubtedly go places—but not with mama and sisters Virginia and Mary Jane.<sup>60</sup>*

Eighteen years later, on May 25, 1952, Soanes (still a critic for the *Oakland Tribune*) remembered his 1934 review when writing in anticipation of Garland's upcoming concert at Curran. By 1952, Garland had already achieved legendary status thanks to her recently launched "concert years." Soanes included his original 1934 review in his 1952 article. He definitely called it in 1934!

In early 1935, the film career of Judy Garland almost began on a completely different trajectory. On January 10, the Garland Sisters signed a one-picture deal with Universal Pictures to appear in *The Great Ziegfeld*. *Variety* noted that "Francis [sic] Garland landed a part in Universal's 'Great Ziegfeld.'" A few days later, the sisters performed at Universal cofounder Carl Laemmle's sixty-eighth birthday party at Universal Studios. It's very likely that they performed at other Universal functions. There are no records of any other activity at the studio that involved the sisters, although there is a surviving eight-by-ten promotional photo of Frances (taken during the 1934 Chicago trip) that she signed to Edward Miller and Universal Studios Inn. As late as May, while the sisters were up in San Francisco with the Wolf and Marco Revue, the *San Francisco Chronicle* raved about Frances being the star of the show and mentioned her role in *The Great Ziegfeld*, but by the time of that review, the project had been sold to MGM without the Garland Sisters attached. The resulting MGM version is a huge, extravagant musical that won the studio Oscars for Best Picture, Best Actress (Louise Rainer), and Best Dance Direction ("A Pretty Girl Is Like a Melody") for 1936, out of seven total nominations. There is no spot in the film that features a young sister act.

The sisters continued their stage engagements, including one at the Paramount Theatre in Los Angeles, which resulted in the only known photo of the trio performing on stage. The engagement generated another *Variety* review that singled out Frances:

*Garland Sisters, three femmes, one of whom, Frances, is still a child and about 80% of the combination, are excellent harmonists, but it remained for the youngster to tie things up in a knot. Girl looks like a bet for pictures and should make rapid headway. However, she should be coached more proficiently in her foreign tongue songs, particularly the German, as her pronunciation is none too accurate. Otherwise, the kid is tops and deserved everything she drew today.<sup>61</sup>*

Yet another Garland milestone occurred on March 29, 1935, when the sisters recorded test records for Decca Records. With Ethel at the piano, the trio sang “Moonglow,” and Garland soloed on “Bill” and a medley of “On the Good Ship Lollipop” / “The Object of My Affection” / “Dinah.” Only the latter two have survived. The recordings are the very first studio recordings of Judy Garland singing. They’re also the first recordings of her voice since the 1929/1930 film shorts. Comparing those with these studio recordings shows how much her voice had developed. Although she’s only twelve years old in these 1935 tests, the Garland voice is there. “Bill” is a revelation. Garland displays that vulnerability for which she would later be famous. She also gets a chance to engage in a dramatic recitative break similar to her later 1937 breakout song “(Dear Mr. Gable) You Made Me Love You.” In the medley, she displays her incredible expertise and versatility after the deceptively simple opening of “On the Good Ship Lollipop.” She turns up the jazz with “The Object of My Affection,” and by the time she ends with “Dinah,” she’s in full vaudeville mode, selling it all the way to the back row with her “hot” vocal stylings. In one short medley, she transitions from cutesy child to jazzy singer to experienced vaudevillian, transitions that singers twice her age would have trouble with. Much has been assumed and written about Ethel’s motivations for (and alleged horrible treatment of) Garland in her quest to make her a star, but these recordings prove that, at least vocally, she had her on the right track. When Garland came under the tutelage of Roger Edens at MGM, she didn’t need much polishing, and lucky for her and us, he knew exactly what to do. Decca rejected the tests. The recordings were thought lost until the early 2000s when a woman from Los Angeles did some research on two records that had been in her family, mostly forgotten, since the early 1960s. They were finally released to the public in 2010. The complete story is in the Decca Records appendix.

In April 1935, Frank lost the lease on the Valley Theatre in Lancaster and joined Ethel and the sisters in their rented home at 842 North Mariposa Avenue, near the 20th Century Fox studios in Los Angeles. The reason for the move was that rumors were spreading in Lancaster that Frank had been engaging in inappropriate sexual behavior with several local young men. As much as the community in Lancaster liked the Gumms, this was something they couldn’t tolerate. It was “suggested” that Frank leave town.<sup>62</sup> He soon managed to find a new theatre to lease, this time in Lomita, California.

In early May 1935, as part of the Franchon and Marco Hollywood Review, the sisters returned to San Francisco for another successful weeklong engagement at the Orpheum Theatre. Ada Hanifin of the *San Francisco Examiner* wrote a review of opening night (May 3), in which she amusingly referred to Garland as “Julia” and not “Judy.”

*Among his featured performers, little Julia [sic] Garland is the star, and incidentally, a “find.” She is only 12. But this little bundle of vitality and vivacity has much individually. She dances, talks to the audience with the aplomb of one who was practically born on the stage, has the fullness of voice that comes with much older years, and sings songs in English, Yiddish, Polish, Spanish, and French.*

*When she was in the Southland, the movie moguls wasted no time putting her under contract. She has been given a role in "The Great Ziegfeld." Her two sisters, the three are known as the Garland Sisters, make good harmony, but for the most part they are just background for Julia.*<sup>63</sup>

It's interesting that *The Great Ziegfeld* was still being mentioned, probably as part of the biographical info that Ethel would have given to the theatre and newspapers. After their return, the sisters continued performing in the Los Angeles area, including a return to the Paramount Theatre in May, resulting in their sixth *Variety* review:

*Class act on bill is the Three Garland Sisters, which, for the Paramount booking, seem to have concentrated heavily on Francis [sic], the youthful member of the family. Girls do only a couple of harmony numbers, leaving rest of performance to kid sister, who is talented beyond doubt, and who scores heavily with her rendition of "Eli, Eli," plus a couple of songs in foreign tongue.*<sup>64</sup>

The reviewer's note that the act focused mostly on "Francis" is a reflection of Garland's progression into the obvious star of the act and the fact that Virginia and Mary Jane were ready to leave the act and start their own lives, which they soon did.

The last major engagement for the sisters was from June 15 through 26, 1935, at the Cal-Neva Lodge at Lake Tahoe, in the Sierra Mountains in northern California on the Nevada border. It was during this engagement that Garland decided to change her name from Frances to Judy, based on the recent Hoagy Carmichael song of the same name. On the way back to Los Angeles, Ethel and the sisters had to return to the Cal-Neva to retrieve (depending on what story you read) a hatbox full of hats and/or some musical arrangements. Garland ran into the lodge, where she was intercepted by the manager, "Bones" Remer, who snagged her and said, "C'mon, kid, there's some people here you just got to sing for."<sup>65</sup> The people that Remer wanted her to sing for were none other than Harry Cohn, head of Columbia Pictures; Lew Brown, songwriter and executive at Columbia; songwriter Harry Akst; and agent Al Rosen. Garland sang, "Zing! Went the Strings of My Heart" and allegedly a few other songs before Akst asked her whether she knew any other songs; she replied that she knew "Dinah," for which Akst (the composer of the song) accompanied her on piano.<sup>66</sup> The men were enthusiastic, and Brown tried to convince Cohn to sign Garland to a studio contract. For unknown reasons, Cohn declined, probably because of Garland's age. However, by August 8, "Judy" Garland was in the Los Angeles Superior Court with her parents for the final approval/signing of a contract designating Al Rosen as her agent. The *Los Angeles Times* reported on the event on August 9, 1935, and included a photo of Garland taken at the courthouse. Unfortunately, as the article states, the petition was denied:

*The petition of Al Rosen for judicial approval of a contract for him to act as manager of 12-year-old Judy Garland in obtaining stage and motion-picture work for her was denied yesterday by Superior Judge McComb.*

*The court ruled it was without jurisdiction to approve a contract involving a minor whereby*

*she would have a manager who was to receive a commission for obtaining work for her in the future.*

*The child actress was accompanied to court by her parents, Ethel and Frank Garland.<sup>67</sup>*

It's interesting to note that the *Times* went to the expense of sending a photographer to take pictures of Garland in court to get her contract approved. Rosen probably arranged it with the paper, or the photographer might have been there for other reasons and stumbled onto the contract approval hearing. The *Times* felt it was newsworthy enough to publish the photo with the news blurb. This is another indication of the Garlands' local fame, as seen in the paper's coverage of the Garland Sisters act breaking up just six days later.

The final professional engagement for the Garland Sisters was their appearance in the Technicolor short film *La Fiesta de Santa Barbara*. The sisters filmed the short on location in Santa Barbara, California, on August 12, 1935. The short was independently produced by Lewis Lewyn and released by MGM on December 7, 1935. This is the first time Garland was filmed in the then-new three-strip Technicolor process. She did not appear in another color film until *The Wizard of Oz* in 1939. The sisters sing one song, "La Cucaracha" (about marijuana!), and it's the only known recording and footage of the sisters after their earlier 1929 shorts. Garland's voice stands out in their harmonies.

Just three days later, the *Los Angeles Times* published an article about the breakup of the Garland Sisters act, as Suzanne (the nickname the oldest sister, Mary Jane, had taken) left by plane to Reno, where she wed musician Lee Kahn. She had met Kahn during their engagement in Lake Tahoe. The accompanying photo shows Garland and Jimmie (the nickname that Virginia was now using) posed on Suzanne's right and left as she's boarding the plane to Reno.

#### *CUPID ROBS RADIO TEAM*

*Suzanne Garland Flies to Reno to Become Bride of Musician*

*The radio-stage-screen trio of Suzanne, 22; Jimmy, 18; Judy, 12 [Judy was already thirteen at this point but apparently mom Ethel shaved a year off her age just as MGM would soon do]; familiarly*

#### *Anyway, Judge, Here's a Smile*



Although Superior Judge McComb yesterday denied he had jurisdiction to approve a future film work contract between an agent and a minor, 12-year-old Judy Garland was smiling in court yesterday.

The petition of Al Rosen for judicial approval of a contract for him to act as manager of 12-year-old Judy Garland in obtaining stage and motion-picture work for her was denied yesterday by Superior Judge McComb.

The court ruled it was without jurisdiction to approve a contract involving a minor whereby she would have a manager who was to receive a commission for obtaining work for her in the future.

The child actress was accompanied to court by her parents, Ethel and Frank Garland.

Fine watches and jewelry are repaired by an advertiser whose announcement appears in Class. 10, Times Classified Ads.

On August 8, 1935, Judy Garland's new agent, Al Rosen, attempted to get a contract approved designating him as her agent. Despite failing to get approval, Rosen still worked on Garland's behalf.

From the author's collection.

**Nuptials Turn Trio to Duet**



**CUPID ROBS  
RADIO TEAM**

*Suzanne Garland Flies to Reno to Become Bride of Musician*

The radio-stage-screen trio of Suzanne, 22; Jimmy, 18; July, 12; familiarly billed as the Garland Sisters, yesterday became a duet.

Romance, in the person of Lee Kahn, musician, broke up the successful trio when Suzanne boarded a United Air Lines plane at Union Air Terminal for Reno.

Kahn, a member of the Jimmy Davis orchestra playing at Cal-Neva Lodge, Lake Tahoe, drove to the Nevada city to meet Suzanne's plane. The two were to be married there last night.

With conclusion of the Tahoe season, Kahn goes to San Francisco for an engagement and the couple will make the Bay City their home, Suzanne said.

During a tearful parting with her two sisters at the airport, Suzanne revealed that Jimmy Garland is now engaged to Frankie Darro, of screen note.

Judy, Suzanne and Jimmy, left to right, the Garland Sister trio broken up yesterday by the flight of Suzanne to Reno, where she was to be married to Lee Kahn, orchestra player of the Cal-Neva Lodge at Lake Tahoe.

*billed as the Garland Sisters, yesterday became a duet.*

*Romance, in the person of Lee Kahn, musician, broke up the successful trio when Suzanne boarded a United Air Lines plane at Union Air Terminal for Reno.*

*Kahn, a member of the Jimmy Davis orchestra playing at Cal-Neva Lodge, Lake Tahoe, drove to the Nevada city to meet Suzanne's plane. The two were to be married there last night.*

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*Kahn goes to San Francisco for an engagement and the couple will make the Bay City their home, Suzanne said.*

*During a tearful parting with her two sisters at the airport, Suzanne revealed that Jimmy Garland is now engaged to Frankie Darro, of screen note.<sup>68</sup>*

On the same date, the *San Francisco Examiner* published a similar notice with the headline "At Reno She'll Make It a Duet!" and a photo of Suzanne. Part of their text read, "She may sing again, but not unless her husband wants her to, 'because he's the leader of the orchestra now,' she said."

It was the end of the Gumm/Garland Sisters as an act and the end of an era. The time was right for the youngest Garland sister, Judy Garland, to become strictly a solo act. For all intents and purposes, Garland had been a solo act for some time, with reviewers commenting that the older sisters provided mostly backup (even in the trio numbers) to their obviously more talented younger sister. Now it was official.

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fore Frank became angry that they were being so cold about everything and took Garland home. The next morning, Rosen again called, this time because Koverman wanted them to come back and have Garland sing again for Mayer, the implication being that this second trip to the studio was due to Edens's enthusiasm for her. Edens again provided accompaniment, with the addition of producer Jack Cummings and Freed in attendance. This also allegedly happened on MGM Soundstage 1. Garland sang "several Jazz numbers" before singing "Eili, Eili." The group convinced Mayer to sign her without a screen test.<sup>72</sup>

Another version begins again with Rosen calling the Gumm home and Frank taking Garland to MGM. This time, she sang for MGM talent chief Jack Robbins, who complained, "I'm looking for a woman singer. Why are you bringing me a child?"<sup>73</sup> Garland sang "Zing! Went the Strings of My Heart" for Robbins, who then called Koverman and Edens in to listen. Edens took over for Frank at the piano. Koverman called Mayer, hanging up the phone and exclaiming, "He's coming!"<sup>74</sup> Mayer appeared, and Garland sang "Zing!" again. He listened without emotion and then left. This is when Frank became angry and took Garland home.

In his interview with Albert Johnson, published in the spring 1958 issue of *Sight and Sound* magazine, Edens said:

*The biggest thing to happen to the MGM musical was the discovery of Judy Garland. . . . She was terrific, right from the beginning. I remember, she was brought in and auditioned; she sang "Zing, Went the Strings of My Heart" and I almost fell off the piano bench. When she finished, I went straight into Mr. Mayer's office and said he just had to sign her.*<sup>75</sup>

In Gerald Clarke's biography of Garland, he tells the story differently. He notes that by September 1935, Garland had already been rejected by MGM at least twice. Koverman sent Edens to the offices of an MGM-owned publishing house to hear her sing, with Ethel providing the piano accompaniment. When Edens took over, he asked Garland what she planned to sing. She replied, "Zing! Went the Strings of My Heart," and then she asked him whether he could change keys. He said, "Yes, can YOU?" Edens immediately recognized Garland's talent and said, "Mrs. Koverman, Mr. Mayer must hear this girl." This incident resulted in the audition at the studio on September 13.<sup>76</sup>

Fifty-plus years later, MGM director George Sidney claimed to have "discovered" Garland in 1934. In December 1934, writer (and future producer/director) Joseph L. Mankiewicz took Sidney and Mayer's secretary, Ida Koverman, to the Wilshire Ebell Theatre to see Garland perform. Sidney said:

*They used to have amateur acts that would go on. And one of these acts was three girls called the Gumm Sisters and their mother played the piano. The poor mother walked out with the bad feet and she played the piano and these three little girls sang, and Mr. Louis B. Mayer's executive secretary, Mrs. Koverman, said "that girl's good, bring her out to the studio." Me, I at that time, was the test director at MGM and I made all the screen tests of all the new people so I went backstage to this little girl and I said, "You*

*come to MGM tomorrow morning, Monday, and at 1 o'clock, we're gonna make a screen test of you."* And she came out there and on Stage 16—I can remember it—and we rolled out the mat and the mother came with the bad feet and she walked, and the other two sisters, and we said, "No, you two sisters sit over there, we just wanna do this with this little girl here." And she [Garland] said, "What do I do," and I said, "Remember you sang a little number with a baseball bat and you just sing it right here to me in front of the camera," and she did it, and they saw it the next day and they signed her.<sup>77</sup>

Christopher Finch, in his 1975 biography on Garland, reported that the screen test directed by Sidney, with the baseball routine and Ethel playing the piano, happened "a few days" after the audition on September 13, 1935, and not in December 1934. In this version, Edens was going to accompany Garland on piano, but the routine was complicated and included props, so Ethel played. Garland didn't hear anything for a couple of weeks when they were contacted to see the test. Frank went with them. The enthusiasm in the screening room told them it was considered highly satisfactory.<sup>78</sup> Finch doesn't give any source material in his book, although the way it reads, one would think Finch spoke with Sidney directly. Sidney's various recollections have not been verified by any studio documentation, and the footage of this alleged test no longer exists. There are no surviving records from MGM of any Garland screen test happening, nor is there anything in the trade publications (which were already well aware of Garland) of Garland signing with MGM in 1934. Sidney told his story fifty years later. Considering the other inconsistencies and mix-ups in his stories told at the same time, it's clear that his recollections are not reliable. Another false narrative is that Garland was tested at MGM in early 1935. This could be confusion over the brief association at the time with Universal and *The Great Ziegfeld*. It's been claimed that at this alleged early 1935 audition (and the real audition in September 1935), Mayer himself took Garland around the entire studio and made her sing for everyone. It's preposterous to think that Mayer would have had the time to take Garland all over MGM, showing her off, no matter how talented she was, expensively halting the many films currently in production—and then not even sign her to a contract.

MGM kept incredibly detailed records, which makes it inconceivable that all of the print documentation and, to a lesser degree, the film footage regarding at least two separate alleged Garland auditions or screen tests would have become lost. Due to Sidney's stories, the Wilshire Ebell Theatre now incorrectly claims that Garland was "discovered" there and that the engagement (on December 8, 1934) led to her MGM contract. If that claim were true, it would have resulted in a completely different sequence of events in Garland's life and career than what actually happened in the months between December 1934 and September 1935. But it makes for more dynamic article copy and good promotion for the Wilshire Ebell in spite of it being a lie.

The MGM publicity department contributed to the false legends almost immediately after Garland signed with the studio. As early as November 1, 1935, not even two months after her audition, columnist Wood Soanes noted the absurdity of a recent MGM press release stating that Garland "wandered into the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studios one day last week and said she wanted

to sing.” The press release went on to tell the story that she was given an audition and was being hailed as “the baby Nora Bayes” and was “said to be one of two or three players ever signed without the formality of a screen test.” Soanes noted how difficult it was to get into any of the studios and that the idea of a young girl just “wandering in” was ridiculous.<sup>79</sup> MGM also stuck to the studio line of giving Garland’s age as twelve rather than thirteen, an attempt to make her seem even more precocious. The studio continued to shave a year off her age for the next several years.

On November 20, 1935, *Variety* carried the story (dated November 19) that Sam Katz of MGM was looking for a property to star “Metro’s 12-year-old torch singer” Judy Garland (she was thirteen). The story incorrectly claimed that Garland went to MGM when *The Great Ziegfeld* did and that no one at MGM noticed her until she sang at a “night spot.” The unnamed author reported that Universal changed Garland’s last name from “Gumm” to “Garland.” The article is pure fiction, aside from the fact that Garland was indeed contracted to Universal for the film. It’s noted here because it’s another indication that even though Garland had been at MGM for only a little over a month, the studio was already getting her name in the trade publications and creating false narratives of how she ended up at MGM.

The complete truth about exactly who was or wasn’t at that legendary Garland MGM audition on September 13, 1935, will most likely never be known for sure. It can be assumed, with about 95 percent confidence, that Rosen called the Gumms, Frank took Garland “as is” to MGM, and Rosen, Koverman, Freed, and Edens listened to her sing “Zing! Went the Strings of My Heart” prior to calling Mayer to do the same. Mayer sat stone-faced as Garland sang “Eili, Eili” and left without saying much (if anything at all). He then ordered that a standard seven-year contract be drawn up.

According to the local newspapers, Garland was part of another Kusell show in Pasadena, California, at the Pasadena Community Playhouse, titled “Rhythm Madness,” which opened on September 24, 1935. Garland’s participation in the show was short lived. These stage engagements at movie theatres were usually a week long, but Garland’s first day at MGM was just a few days later, on October 1, 1935. The result is that “Rhythm Madness” holds the distinction of being Garland’s last professional engagement before beginning her MGM career.

All the years of singing and dancing across half the United States had paid off. Judy Garland won the ultimate show business prize: a contract with the biggest, most glamorous, and arguably the best of all the Hollywood studios, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. She was on her way. But first, she still had to prove herself.



Garland poses in the same manner that she sang “Bill” on stage in dozens of shows (Chicago, 1934).  
From the author’s collection.

C H A P T E R 2

# MGM'S NEWEST CONTRACT PLAYER

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**O**n September 16, 1935, just three days after Garland's audition for the studio, MGM executive F. L. Hendrickson sent a detailed memo to the contract department that began, "Please prepare contract for the services of JUDY GARLAND as an actress." Hendrickson laid out the details:

*Original term of this agreement is for a period of 6 months, commencing October 1, 1935, at a salary of \$100.00 a week, 20 week guarantee. We have the following options:*

*6 months \$200.00 per week, 20 week guarantee*

*1 year 300.00 per week, 40 week guarantee*

*1 year 400.00 per week, 40 week guarantee*

*1 year 500.00 per week, 40 week guarantee*

*1 year 600.00 per week, 40 week guarantee*

*1 year 750.00 per week, 40 week guarantee*

*1 year 1000.00 per week, 40 week guarantee*

*Miss Garland is a minor. The details of her birth, however, her parents name and address, will have to be given to you later. We will also verify whether or not the above name is her real or professional name.*

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unique potential. Both Freed and Edens hitched their wagons to Garland's star. They would have succeeded regardless, but in Garland, they found their perfect muse.

At this time, Arthur Freed and fellow songwriter Nacio Herb Brown were MGM's resident songwriting team. Like Garland, Freed found his way to MGM through vaudeville. Born Arthur Grossman in Charleston, South Carolina, on September 9, 1894, he started off as a "song plugger" for a Chicago music publisher. He met the mother of the Marx Brothers, Minnie Marx, and toured the vaudeville circuit with their act. He first collaborated with Brown in 1921 while also collaborating with other songwriters, including Gus Arnheim and Abe Lyman, with whom he collaborated on 1923's "I Cried for You," which was his first hit song. He ended up in the Los Angeles nightclub circuit, and, in the late 1920s, he was hired by Irving Thalberg at MGM as a lyricist and assigned to write songs with Brown. The duo put out a string of hits, beginning with the studio's first all-talking, all-singing, all-dancing extravaganza, the Oscar-winning *The Broadway Melody* (1929). Their hits include "Singin' in the Rain," "The Broadway Melody," "Broadway Rhythm," "All I Do Is Dream of You," "Good Morning," "Temptation," and many more. Freed was ambitious and wanted to do bigger things by becoming a producer. He got his wish, first as an uncredited associate producer on *The Wizard of Oz* and then with his first producing credit, *Babes in Arms*, both released in 1939 and both starring Garland.

Roger Edens was born Rollins Edens in Hillsboro, Texas, on November 9, 1905, and came to MGM via his association with another singing legend, Ethel Merman. Edens made his way from Texas to Broadway as the accompanist to the ballroom dancers Tony and Renee De Marco. In 1930, he was one of the musicians in the now-famous pit orchestra for the new Gershwin musical *Girl Crazy* starring Ethel Merman and Ginger Rogers (Edens provided the music adaptation for the 1943 film version starring Garland and Mickey Rooney). The pit orchestra included future big band legends Tommy Dorsey, Gene Krupa, Glenn Miller, and Harry James. Edens became Merman's accompanist and vocal arranger, and in a couple of years he went with her to Hollywood. Freed saw and heard Edens accompany singer Patricia Ellis at Warner Bros. and immediately arranged for Edens to move to MGM.<sup>2</sup> His first job at the studio was as the musical supervisor on the Jean Harlow musical *Reckless* (1933). He became the musical supervisor for most of the studio's musicals, chiefly tap dance sensation Eleanor Powell's films, appearing on screen as her accompanist in 1935's *Broadway Melody of 1936*.

Edens provided the musical foundation of what became the Freed Unit. The Freed Unit quickly became the studio's (and then the movie industry's) premiere musical makers. Edens gave invaluable input for most of the studio's musical films and always seemed to know what was right, musically speaking, writing songs and sometimes serving as an associate producer. The special material and songs that he wrote specifically for Garland throughout her career are legendary; the most famous of these is the "Born in a Trunk" sequence in *A Star Is Born* (Warner Bros., 1954) and her "Judy at the Palace" medley, which she regularly performed in concert and on television. Edens was an early proponent of advancing the "integrated musical," in which the songs are

integrated into the dialog and advance the story in one way or another. It became a hallmark of the greatest MGM musicals.

Initially, Garland's daily schedule at MGM consisted of song rehearsals with Edens and going to school at MGM's Little Red Schoolhouse (which wasn't red), along with other young contract players, including Freddie Bartholomew, Mickey Rooney, and Jackie Cooper. Fifteen-year-old Rooney had a series of Mickey McGuire shorts on his resume as well as impressive supporting performances in various films, including a scene-stealing performance as Puck in the Warner Bros. adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1935. Rooney and Garland had already known each other, their friendship going back to their time at Lawlor's School for Professional Children and probably even before that, backstage during their vaudeville years. The two bonded and became best friends for life. In his article about Garland for the July 1943 issue of *Photoplay* fan magazine, columnist Sidney Skolsky wrote a fictionalized version of how they met:

*It was while she was going to school at Lawlor's, in Hollywood, that a freckled-faced boy was ushered into the classroom and given the seat next to her. The boy began tapping his foot and whistling softly. Then he took a comb from his pocket and proceeded to get his hair so tangled that he couldn't remove the comb. She reached over and unknotted the mess. Giving her a big grin, he stuck out his hand and said, "Thanks, my name is Mickey."*

*This was her first meeting with Mickey Rooney. She fell in love with him.*

*A few weeks later Mickey told her he was leaving school. He had just signed a contract at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and had to attend the studio school. She felt miserable that he was leaving "I'll call you tomorrow," he said. He never did. She didn't see him again until she was signed by the same studio.<sup>3</sup>*

The first work assignment MGM gave Garland was singing at the Los Angeles Coliseum during halftime of the University of Southern California Football Game on either October 5 or October 12 (the details are sketchy). She sang "Fight on for Good Old USC."<sup>4</sup> In mid-October, Garland was penciled in for a role in the upcoming MGM production of *This Time It's Love*, starring Robert Montgomery. According to a letter that Garland's father, Frank, sent to a friend in Lancaster, she was to appear opposite Buddy Ebsen in the film.<sup>5</sup> *This Time It's Love* eventually became *Born to Dance*, starring Eleanor Powell, with James Stewart replacing Montgomery, and was released in 1936. Garland's part was written out of the screenplay before she would have begun any work on the film. On March 10, 1936, songwriter Cole Porter noted in his diary that to his "great joy," *Born to Dance* would include "Buddy Ebsen and Judy Garland."<sup>6</sup> Even though Garland was still relatively unknown to the greater American public, Porter knew who she was and had no issue that she would be singing his songs. He later wrote the score for 1948's *The Pirate* starring Garland and Gene Kelly.

On October 26, 1935, MGM "officially" introduced Garland to a nationwide audience

on the NBC Radio variety show *Shell Chateau Hour* hosted by MGM star Wallace Beery. The show was typical of its time, serving to promote MGM films and stars. Beery introduced Garland as being twelve years old (she was thirteen), and she enthusiastically exclaimed, “I want to be a singer, Mr. Beery. And I’d like to act, too!” She sang the latest Freed/Brown hit, “Broadway Rhythm,” and received a loud reception from the studio audience.

After a few appearances at various industry and MGM-related events, including entertainer Frank Fay’s show at the Cafe Trocadero on November 10 (where she was photographed with stars Spencer Tracy and Una Merkel), Garland’s next big assignment was her return to the *Shell Chateau Hour*, again with Beery as the host, broadcast live on November 16. Beery led the audience to believe that Garland had just signed with MGM due to her first appearance on the show and had been immediately cast in producer Sam Katz’s new film *Yours and Mine*. None of that was true; it was more fiction the studio publicity department concocted. This appearance is notable because, at the time of the broadcast, Garland’s father was in the hospital suffering from a sudden case of spinal meningitis. A radio was placed at his bedside so he could listen to his daughter. Garland sang a stirring rendition of “Zing! Went the Strings of My Heart” and then an equally stirring reprise after a quick chat with Beery. The audio for this performance (and the previous *Shell* appearance) has survived. These are the earliest surviving recordings of Garland’s voice after the Decca test records she recorded in March 1935 and before the early film and radio performances in 1936. When comparing the Decca tests and this radio performance, one can hear the influence of Edens on Garland’s delivery. Her vocals are a bit more polished. Edens, like Ethel before him, had Garland on the right track.

In an early sign of the kind of control MGM would exert over Garland’s personal life, rather than allowing her to go to the hospital to be with her father after the Beery show, MGM sent her to sing at the MGM Club Dance at the La Monica Ballroom in nearby Santa Monica.

Frank Gumm died the following day, November 17, 1935. Garland was devastated. She later said that it was “the most terrible thing that ever happened to me in my life.”<sup>7</sup> Ever since, Garland fans and Garland herself have pondered how different her career and certainly her personal life might have been if Frank had lived. Could Frank have shielded her from future overwork and her reliance on prescription medication? Would he have been able to stand up to the studio grind in a way that her mom, Ethel, couldn’t (or wouldn’t)? In that misogynistic world, MGM might have given Frank more respect than they gave Ethel because he was a man. It’s one of the biggest of the many what-ifs of the Garland legend.

As if the death of her father weren’t enough, November 17 was also Ethel’s birthday. Frank, unbeknownst to the rest of his family, had planned a surprise party for Ethel that evening. They had been sitting around the living room, stunned over Frank’s death, when, out of the blue, people began to arrive with “Surprise! Happy Birthday!” on their lips. No one knew how to stop it because no one knew that Frank had planned the surprise or whom he had invited. Virginia later said, “All these people they [Frank and Ethel] knew came to the door with presents. Some

of them were from Grand Rapids. That's the saddest thing I can remember. My mother was lying on the couch and all these people came to the door and said, 'Happy Birthday!'"<sup>8</sup> Compounding the tragedy of it all for Garland was that due to her professional obligations the night before Frank's death, she never had the chance to say goodbye to him.

Ten days later, on November 27, 1935, Garland recorded two more test records for Decca: "All's Well" and "No Other One." These were the first studio recordings Garland made after beginning her MGM career, but, unfortunately, they have not survived. They must have made an impression because, at that same time, Decca president Jack Kapp was visiting Los Angeles from New York and signing new talent for the label. A week after the recording session, *Variety* reported that Kapp had signed several artists before returning to New York, including Garland, "the 12-year-old Metro contractee-songstress."<sup>9</sup> The details of that first contract are unknown, as no documents have survived. It was most likely a per-record contract, which wasn't unusual. Garland didn't record for the label again until seven months later, on June 12, 1936, when she recorded "Swing, Mr. Charlie" and "Stompin' at the Savoy" while in New York. The songs became the first Garland single ever released. No other records exist regarding any contract for this 1936 New York session, which was most likely either another per-record contract or perhaps the fulfillment of that 1935 contract/agreement that *Variety* reported on. Nothing else happened between Garland and Decca for over a year, and then, in August 1937, a contract was written for an initial six months. By that point, her star was obviously on the rise, and Decca was happy to sign her for longer terms. That was the beginning of Garland's ten-year association with the label.

For the rest of 1935, Garland continued her daily activities at MGM as well as her personal appearances, including more singing at various studio and industry events, which kept her relatively busy. Even at this early stage in her movie career, she was a popular addition at Hollywood parties, as she would always be. In her March 1936 column, Louella Parsons reported on the "Studio Party" MGM put on at the Ambassador Hotel on February 29, mentioning, "Usually these parties are frankly a bore, but the entertainment in this one was so good everyone lingered on and on [with] Judy Garland called back again and again."<sup>10</sup>

Over the ensuing decades, the assumption has been that MGM forgot about Garland or that since they didn't know what to do with her, she basically twiddled her thumbs, waiting for a

## KAPP BACK WITH FILM SIGS FOR DECCA DISCS

Jack Kapp, prez of Decca, is back from a month's stay in Hollywood lining up recording talent and setting more dates. Among the new Decca artists are Frances Langford, Ginger Rogers, Dick Powell, Judy Garland, latter the 12-year-old Metro contractee-songstress.

Miss Langford and Powell were last on Brunswick, shifting to Decca.

Crosby also recorded eight numbers under Decca's personal supervision, chiefly pops, which is a departure for the crooner since he's been in pictures, preferring to can only the numbers he introduced in his Paramount film musicals. Being between pix for so long, however, he's done 'Treasure Island,' 'Boots and Saddle,' 'Red Sails in the Sunset,' 'Silent Night and 'Adeste Fideles' for the Xmas trade, and others.

*Variety* notice about Garland's first contract with Decca Records, December 4, 1935. From the author's collection.

chance. But it's obvious from her activities in these early months that someone at MGM was getting Garland exposure and increasing mentions in the newspapers. Although MGM still hadn't figured out how to present Judy Garland to the public on film, at least they were getting her out there.

One notable industry event was the "Show of Shows" put on by the Will Rogers Memorial Fund at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles on December 1, 1935. On November 25, the *Los Angeles Times* listed Garland among those added that week to the notice of the lineup of eighty-six stars scheduled to participate. No records exist regarding what Garland sang or whether she sang at all. She posed for photos backstage with film stars Joe E. Brown and May Robson and child stars Edith Fellows, Mickey Rooney, and Freddie Bartholomew. The photos show a very gangly and awkward-looking Garland wearing another ill-fitting outfit, this time a child's jumper dress with an oversized bow in her hair. The outfit contrasted with the more glamorous fur coat, dress, and hat that Fellows, who was one year younger than Garland, was wearing. Fellows was being presented as "glamorous" (for a "tween") while Garland was the non-glamorous kid. The contrast is just like "Dainty June" and "Rose Louise" portrayed years later in *Gypsy*. The image of Garland as the ugly duckling surrounded by glamorous girls started early.

On December 18, *Variety* published a short blurb (dated December 17) that MGM was



Garland (*far right*) is seen with Edith Fellows, Mickey Rooney, May Robson, and Freddie Bartholomew at the Will Rogers Memorial Fund "Show of Shows" at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles, California, December 1, 1935. From the author's collection.

preparing an adaptation of Edgar Allan Woolf's *La Belle Dolly* as Garland's first film, costarring the seventy-four-year-old opera diva Madame (Ernestine) Schumann-Heink. Heink was a legendary opera star who was forced out of retirement when she lost everything in the Crash of 1929, working as a vocal coach and, of course, singer. Harold W. Cohen picked up the story for his column "The Drama Desk" on December 24, 1935, but mentioned only Mme. Schumann-Heink and Woolf's names, not Garland's. It's unknown

Page 44 is not included in this sample

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three were not part of any show but were photographed together backstage. The photo was syndicated on January 1, 1936, with the headline “On Their Way in Movies,” noting that the trio was “the three foremost up-and-coming juvenile stars in Hollywood.”<sup>12</sup>

After the new year, Garland, her mother Ethel, and her sister Jimmie moved into a home in Hollywood at 180 South McCadden Place that featured Garland’s first swimming pool, a reflection of the family’s new prosperity. At MGM, Garland’s workload continued to be light, but her personal appearances continued at a regular pace. On April 3, she was one of several juvenile “child film players”<sup>13</sup> who were a part of the Junior Troupers’ benefit show and fashion parade at the Hollywood Masonic Temple, along with Rooney, Deanna Durbin (billed as Edna Mae [*sic*] Durbin), Cora Sue Collins, Scotty Beckett, and Dickie Moore. The papers also reported that Garland was a guest at eight-year-old “screen cowboy” Dickie Jones’s party at the Hollywood Brown Derby on May 15, along with another laundry list of Hollywood child performers, including Jane Withers, Frankie Darro, Virginia Weidler, and Edith Fellows.<sup>14</sup>

### FINALLY ON FILM

Garland finally got to appear in an MGM film—sort of—in the spring of 1936 when she and another teen singer newly under contract, the classically trained Deanna Durbin, filmed a one-reel test film. The test was not shown to the public but instead was shown solely at the MGM exhibitor’s convention in Chicago, Illinois, between May 11 and 16 of that year. Nothing more is known about the test because it’s a lost film.

That test with Durbin had a positive impact on MGM’s opinion of Garland because not long after, in early June, the studio sent her to New York for the first time. Mayer’s secretary (and Garland champion), Ida Koverman, wrote a letter of introduction dated June 1, 1936, for Garland to take with her and present to local New York MGM representative Florence Browning. Koverman’s letter is revealing in that it gives us a glimpse into how Garland was perceived at this time and how she was still relatively unknown outside of Hollywood, necessitating the letter of introduction. Koverman wrote:

*Dear Florence:*

*This will be presented to you by little Judy Garland, who is under contract to us.*

*She is twelve years old and an extremely clever little artist. Her mother, who will be with her, plays her accompaniments, and I hope you will be able to arrange to hear her sing a few numbers. She is really a marvellous [*sic*] child.*

*Her agent is taking her East to try to book her in some of the theatres, and I think it would be very wise to have someone connected with our office see the child before she gets into opposition house[s].*  
*[This is a reference to ensuring that Garland would appear only at theatres owned by MGM’s parent company, Loew’s Inc.]*

*She sings very well, is an excellent dancer, and does the Eleanor Powell routines, and is a little genius.*

*In addition to this she is a dear little thing, I am devoted to her. I know you will like her too.*

Garland wrote back to Koverman, telling her that she had met with Browning and other MGM executives and that she “hoped my singing pleases them.” She spent her time in New York appearing on a few local radio shows, including Rudy Vallee’s popular series and the *Broadway Melody Hour*. In his syndicated column, Sidney Skolsky noted of Garland’s appearance at the Trocadero nightclub, “Judy Garland, a truly great singer of popular songs—New York will acclaim her after she debuts on the Rudy Vallee program—sang ‘Broadway Rhythm,’ and the Times Square crowd gathered at the troc [*sic*] took it big.”<sup>15</sup>

On June 12, 1936, Garland was at the Decca Records New York studio recording the two songs that made up that first-ever Garland single release: “Swing, Mr. Charlie” and “Stompin’ at the Savoy.” Bob Crosby and His Orchestra backed Garland, and, amusingly, Crosby’s manager, Gil Rodin, asked that the band not be listed on the record label because he “didn’t want to use our name on the same record label with this unknown girl.”<sup>16</sup> Seven years later, Crosby and his orchestra backed Garland on two songs in a scene in *Presenting Lily Mars* (1943). By that time, they definitely had no problem with “this unknown girl.”

After Garland returned from New York, she went to work on her first official film assignment for MGM, the “Tabloid Musical” short *Every Sunday* costarring Durbin, who had returned to MGM specifically for this project. On June 30, 1936, Garland and Durbin prerecorded their songs for the short. The surviving *Daily Music Report* documents that Garland and Durbin recorded at least seven takes of their duet “Opera vs. Jazz,” two of which were “printed” (kept for use by the sound engineers to mix into the film), and Garland recorded at least six takes of her solo “Americana,” with four of those being printed. Filming began soon after and was finished in a few short weeks.

Durbin left MGM for the last time and found instant stardom at Universal Studios in *Three Smart Girls*. That film’s producer, Joe Pasternak, later stated that he wanted Garland for the role. The subsequent legend, as repeated over the decades but without any documentation, is



Deanna Durbin and Garland with director Felix Feist during the filming of *Every Sunday* (1936). From the collection of Hisato Masuyama.

that he (or Universal) was denied by MGM, so the script was changed to accommodate Durbin's talents. There are no records of Universal making a request for Garland's services to MGM, nor are there any records of the script for the film being rewritten due to a Garland/Durbin swap. Pasternak was a Garland fan and might have "wanted" Garland for the role, but he was in no position to make that kind of request of Universal, and, frankly, the then-minor studio didn't have the budget to pay for the loaning of an MGM contract player for a low-budget film, which is what *Three Smart Girls* was.

MGM releasing Durbin and keeping Garland has resulted in more legends and assumptions. The version put forth by Hollywood columnist Hedda Hopper in her book *The Whole Truth and Nothing But*, published in 1963, states that Mayer planned to let Garland go, but, "by a fluke," the studio let Durbin's contract lapse. Mayer was in Europe and "went berserk" about the alleged mix-up when he returned, saying, "I'll take this fat one, Garland, and make her a bigger star than Durbin."<sup>17</sup> Neither Garland nor Durbin appear "fat" in the film. There are a couple of scenes in which Garland looks heavier than in the rest of the film, a foreshadowing of her propensity to lose and gain weight quickly during production and have it show on screen, but for the bulk of the film, she's slender.

The basis of these stories is the popular image of Garland as the unattractive one that glamorous MGM was stuck with after the prettier Durbin was mistakenly let go. This perspective



Trade advertisement for *Every Sunday* from the *Motion Picture Herald*, December 19, 1936.

From the author's collection.

made the story of Garland's success at the studio more dramatic. Durbin was a teenage version of the studio's resident soprano (and number-one singing star) Jeanette MacDonald, which no doubt worked in her favor. Traditional singers like Durbin and MacDonald were seen as more legitimate and classier than the current "swing" singers, such as scrappy vaudevillians like Garland. However, when watching *Every Sunday*, Garland is the one who comes across best. Durbin sings beautifully, but she's stiffer and less dynamic than Garland, who is more natural, and when Garland sings, she steals the film. Although Mayer was known to have loved the "classy" opera singers, he also loved singers of all styles, male or female. He adored and respected Garland's talents, as he would prove years later. Durbin had a lovely voice; Garland had a one-in-a-million voice. The "drop the fat one" story is apocryphal.

Another version states that the studio decided there wasn't room for two teen singers on the lot, and one had to go. Garland's voice was the tiebreaker. This

story is at least partly true. While Garland's voice was not any kind of a tiebreaker, MGM let Durbin go because, according to the studio's casting director, Bill Grady, the studio didn't have any films with parts for a fourteen-year-old opera singer. Durbin came back to MGM to make the short, solely to fulfill that contractual obligation. The studio had a clause in her contract that they could call on her services up to sixty days after the termination date of her contract, which wasn't unusual. That obligation was *Every Sunday*, which neatly fell into that time frame. As with so many of the Garland legends, the tiebreaker stories are more dramatic. In this case, they're moot because Durbin was no longer under contract except for that clause. It appears the true explanation of the story is the simplest one: there just wasn't room for Durbin at MGM.

At the same time the studio let Durbin go, they also released other young performers for whom they had trouble finding suitable parts, including Joan Leslie, Dennis Morgan, and Peggy Ryan.<sup>18</sup> Leslie and Morgan went on to stardom at Warner Bros. Ryan, just twelve at the time and similar to Garland as a singing tween but nowhere near Garland's league, ended up at Universal in a series of teen musicals with Donald O'Connor and Gloria Jean, which were pale imitations of the hugely successful MGM teen musicals starring Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland.

It could very well be true that Mayer was angry about losing Durbin, but that would have been after her success at Universal. At the time of her release by MGM, Durbin was not a sure thing for movie stardom any more than Garland was, regardless of her voice. However, MGM obviously realized that great things lay ahead for Garland. Why else would they go to the expense of sending her to New York if they didn't have any plans for her? It was just a matter of time. *Every Sunday*, released on November 28, 1936, was more popular with exhibitors than most shorts due to the talents of both girls and was in circulation or at least available to theatre owners for over a solid ten years. When Garland appeared in person at the Stanley Theatre in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1938, the rival Alvin Theatre obtained a print of *Every Sunday* and gave it top billing in newspaper ads.<sup>19</sup> It's interesting to note that local theatre ads initially gave Durbin top billing (or solo billing) due to her early success. Then Garland received top billing when the short was shown in the mid-1940s, as her success began to eclipse Durbin's. Although the short was Garland's first film assignment with MGM, it wasn't her first film to be released to the public since joining the studio (excepting the brief appearance in the 1935 short *La Fiesta de Santa Barbara*, filmed before her September 1935 audition but released two months later). That honor went to *Pigskin Parade*, which was Garland's feature film debut, but it wasn't an MGM production; it was made at 20th Century Fox and released more than a month before *Every Sunday*.

MGM loaned Garland to Fox for *Pigskin Parade* in early August 1936, the only time they loaned her out to another studio. She spent five weeks in August and September reporting to the Fox lot to prerecord her songs and film her scenes. The film's plot features some screwball comedy situations mixed in with lots of music. It's a simple narrative about the mistake of a small-town Texas college football team being invited to play against the Yale team. Stuart Erwin plays a local farm boy with natural throwing gifts, and the Texas team's coach, future Tin Man Jack

**EVERY SUNDAY**

A TABLOID MUSICAL

**EXPLOITATION**

Exploitation opportunities by the stars are offered by the title "Every Sunday." Listed below are but a few newspaper suggestions which can be readily adapted in any average town. For example:

**WINDOW DISPLAYS** Since Sunday is the principal day of the week for various sports and recreational activities, the title lends itself admirably for a window fix-up with a department or sporting goods store which will feature equipment for all types of Sunday diversions such as golf, riding, dining, skating, etc., etc. Naturally, the window will also include a prominent display of the title and stills of your film.

**RESTAURANT MENUS** Restaurants almost without exception make a practice of featuring a special Sunday dinner. Contact your largest restaurant or chain of eating places with an offer to supply them with small cards to be attached to their menus which will point out that every Sunday their patrons can enjoy a special dinner — and that "Every Sunday" can be seen any day during the week on your screen.

**WANT-AD TIEUP** Newspapers are always on the hunt for new thoughts on which to base promotion ads for their want-ads. Because Sunday is always the biggest day of the week in the want-ad section, suggest to your classified manager that he use the title of your film as the keynote of an ad which will point out the multitude of opportunities — jobs, homes, automobiles, and bargains of every description — that parade before the reader's eye EVERY SUNDAY in the Local Gazette. A generously-sized panel will be devoted to "Every Sunday" as a feature of your program.

**FOUNTAINS & TRUCKS** No screen companies frequently feature a special lunch or home package on week-ends. Offer to cooperate with them in a lineup which will include fountain drinks and signs for their trucks using "Every Sunday" as a display line for mutual advantage.

**COOPERATIVE ADS** Innumerable other title tieup angles for coop ads will present themselves to the alert showman. Instead of handling them individually, perhaps there are enough Sunday features in your town so that this short subject can be made to bring you a special cooperative page in your newspaper. Check with your advertising manager, but remember not to solicit any Sunday amusements or events which might be direct opposition to your theatre.

WITH **JUDY GARLAND**  
**DEANNA DURBIN**  
DIRECTED BY **FELIX E. FEIST**

A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer PICTURE

Pressbook for *Every Sunday* (1936). From the author's collection.

Page 50 is not included in this sample

Lyons Press

# PUBLICITY

**POSTER**

A TABLOID MUSICAL

**EVERY SUNDAY**

JUDY GARLAND  
DEANNA DURBIN

ONE-SHEET

**FILM LAUNCHES TWO 13 YEAR OLD STARLETS**

**Highlights**

**New Short Offers Musical Variety**

**AD MATS**

A TABLOID MUSICAL

**EVERY SUNDAY**

JUDY GARLAND  
DEANNA DURBIN

A TABLOID MUSICAL

**EVERY SUNDAY**

A TABLOID MUSICAL

**EVERY SUNDAY**

NEWSPAPER AD MATS FREE AT YOUR M-G-M EXCHANGE

**"CUTE" KIDS NOT WANTED IN FILMS**

Music And Dance Training Recommended For Youngsters Who Aspire To Screen Training

"Mother, if you have screen ambitions for your daughter —  
"Frank her name and dancing," is the advice of William Grealy, acting director at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studios.  
"Hollywood is filled with 'cute' youngsters, and some of them are trying to get screen work," says Grealy.  
"Cuteness" alone isn't sufficient to succeed a studio considering a child as a potential actress. A child may be very clever and say and do any number of cute things among friends and in the privacy of her own home, but it is an entirely different matter when she is on a studio stage and must say and do the things the script calls for.  
"A training in music or dancing, particularly both, indicates that the child has a disciplined mind and body; that she can do the things she is supposed to do, as she is supposed to do them, and when they are supposed to be done."  
"Look over the list of prominent child actresses of the screen. You'll find, almost without exception, they are trained in music or dancing, or both. It is true of Shirley Temple, Jane Withers, Edna Feltus, and the two thirteen-year-old songwriters, Judy Garland and Deanna Durbin who are making their screen debut in "Every Sunday," "Musical Variety."  
"Every Sunday" will be at the \_\_\_\_\_ Theatre.

**SIX 8 x 10 BLACK AND WHITE STILLS**

Order from M-G-M Exchange for **NEWSPAPERS WINDOW AND LOBBY DISPLAY**



**At a Glance!**

A TABLOID MUSICAL

**"EVERY SUNDAY"**

with  
Judy Garland  
and  
Deanna Durbin

Directed By  
Felix E. Feist

A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Picture

When Judy and her class Edna, host that Judy's grandfather, who has led us at the village banding afternoon concerts in the past, is to be dismissed because of lack of patronage, they are heartbroken. They determine to do something about it.

Edna's father also determines to help. The following Sunday, the children sing at the concert, Edna singing quartet numbers and Judy singing a hot jazz number, which Edna's father presents the band concert to conclude.

The result is surprising. The empty benches fill as the crowd collects to listen to the children sing and to hear the "hot" jazz music of the fabulous vocal soloists. The village soon becomes

Music from opera to jazz is featured in M-G-M's new Musical Musical, "Every Sunday" featuring two thirteen-year-old players, Judy Garland and Deanna Durbin, which is at the \_\_\_\_\_ Theatre.

Special numbers include the evergreens "Merris" and "D. D. D." with Herb Magdon and Gus Carter's "Americana," capturing the just offering.

Miss Durbin makes the square dances with Miss Garland singing and dancing to "Americana."

The picture was directed by Felix Feist, Jr., from M-G-M's script, Jack Chertok is the producer.

Change their minds about dismissing the orchestra leader, and engage the children and Edna's father in permanent members of the orchestra.

**CHILD'S SINGING FUTURE INSURED**

As ten-year-old Durbin, electrifying screen player, will have a chance to compete for annual offers.  
The youngster featured with Judy Garland in M-G-M's Musical Musical, "Every Sunday," which Felix Feist, Jr., directed, and which opens at the \_\_\_\_\_ Theatre, has just had the first screening program as a two-year endowment policy which, when it matures, will be sufficient to insure her of two years' school under the best teachers in the "Old World."

The child is now taking singing lessons from André de Seguara, former Metropolitan star who is coaching a number of pupils in Hollywood. She is also studying tap and ballet dancing under "Doris" (Lillian) "Merris" (Merris) under Herber Hovick, M-G-M dramatic coach. Before coming to the screen, Miss Durbin had considerable experience as a church soloist. She was recently featured in the Shell Chateau Tour.  
Jack Chertok produced "Every Sunday."

**"Every Sunday" Crew Bows to Alarm Clock**

The three-week crew was made an important session picture necessary when M-G-M short subject producer, Jack Chertok, ordered the troupe installed on the set of "Every Sunday," a Musical Musical which will be seen at the \_\_\_\_\_ Theatre.  
California state fair folkish, the working of nature, more than eight hours a day and as "Every Sunday" features Judy Garland and Deanna Durbin, both thirteen-year-old players, all work was stopped when the children completed the allowed time limit.  
"Every Sunday" was very highly praised by technicians and other members of the production crew. They would rather work with the thirteen-year-old players than with stars, Gable, Crawford or Sherrin, at a place with the children aware there of being at home at five pay at the first.  
Felix Feist, Jr., directed "Every Sunday" from M-G-M's script, Jack Chertok is the producer.

**Catchlines**

No better screen musical in a month of Sundays!

- When Grandpa "wings" the classic, the village goes to town!
- See how rhythm saved the village band!
- The village band didn't mean a thing . . . until it got that SWING!
- Jazzing the classics—and HOW!

Pressbook for *Every Sunday* (1936). From the author's collection.

Haley, thinking Erwin can lead the team to victory against Yale, entices him to join the team. It's a typical mid-1930s musical comedy, with lots of songs and young talent, and thoroughly enjoyable.

*Pigskin Parade* was one of Fox's major productions featuring quite a few well-known personalities, including a pre-stardom Betty Grable, Johnny Downs, Patsy Kelly, Tony Martin, Arline Judge, Dixie Dunbar, Elisha Cook Jr., and even an unknown Alan Ladd as a student. For MGM, loaning Garland to Fox for *Pigskin Parade* cost them nothing to see how she would fare in her first feature film role. She wowed audiences and critics alike, taking full advantage of Fox's generosity in giving her two solos ("The Texas Tornado" and "It's Love I'm After") and the bulk of the production number "The Balboa." Garland prerecorded an additional song for the film, "Hold That Bulldog," which was deleted. Neither the footage nor the prerecording exists today. The only existing recording of Garland singing the song is from her appearance on the *Jack Oakie's College* radio show on January 5, 1937, which is most likely the way it was performed on the lost Fox prerecording. It's a novelty number typical of the era, in which "Judy Barks!"—part of the song features her and the chorus barking "Woof! Woof!—Woof! Woof!" That could be part of the reason it was cut.

Garland doesn't appear in *Pigskin Parade* until forty-two minutes into the film. The film then teases the audience with a running joke in which her character, Sairy Dodd, keeps boasting, "I can sing! Y'all wanna hear me?" only to get shot down each time. About twenty minutes later, she finally gets to sing when she takes the stage during "The Balboa." The impact on unsuspecting filmgoers was electrifying. Since Garland's MGM short *Every Sunday* was released after *Pigskin Parade*, this was the first exposure most film audiences had to Garland and her talents. Her solos are powerhouse performances; it's easy to see why people took notice. During "The Texas Tornado," her costars' expressions of genuine amazement are obvious. When Garland performed "It's Love I'm After," there were shouts of "Bravo!" from the cast and crew. Haley went over to her, hugged her, and said, "You're terrific! Now I remember you." He remembered the first time he saw her perform when she appeared at Frank Fay's show at the Trocadero in November 1935.<sup>20</sup> Grable became a lifelong Garland fan after working with her on this film. Garland's remake of *A Star Is Born* (Warner Bros., 1954) was one of Grable's favorite films and one of the last films she had privately screened for her prior to her death.<sup>21</sup> Fox knew what they had, too, and they exploited her talents—in a good way. The *Film Daily* noted, "Fifteen-year-old Judy Garland, given her first screen chance, delivers solidly with 'It's Love I'm After.'"<sup>22</sup> *Picture Play* noted, "[One of the highlights] is the singing of Judy Garland, a deep-chested youngster who is all the more remarkable if her given age of thirteen years is true."<sup>23</sup> Both reviews had Garland's age wrong; she was fourteen when she made the film. Columnist Colleen McPherson singled out Garland as "a crooning girl-wonder" and was impressed by the realistic-looking snowstorm (during which Garland amusingly belted "It's Love I'm After" while being pelted with snow).<sup>24</sup> T. H. C. of the *Kosuth County Advance* commented on Garland's "triumphal debut" and then oddly noted, "There is something vaguely suggestive about Dixie Dunbar in Miss Garland's characteristics, and in

spite of her rather large mouth she bids fair to go far.”<sup>25</sup>

Although she was getting raves and public recognition for her role, Garland herself wasn't thrilled with her performance or her physical appearance in *Pigskin Parade*. She would later half-joke that she assumed she'd look like a glamorous movie queen when she saw herself on screen, but, instead, she thought that she looked like a “fat little frightening pig with pigtails.”<sup>26</sup> She was only fourteen years old but already insecure and hypersensitive about her physical appearance.

In 1937, Garland's workload began to increase significantly. She started off the year with the first of what became weekly appearances on the CBS Radio show *Jack Oakie's College*. Garland's radio show appearances were incredibly important to furthering her career. There was no television at the time. Every home had a radio, and it was almost always on, with listeners tuning in to their local stations to hear their favorite shows, as they later would with television. Having Garland as a regular on a weekly show gave her a familiarity with audiences so that when they saw that a film at their local movie house featured Garland, they knew who she was and would, presumably, buy a ticket. She no doubt garnered many fans due to her radio appearances. As they did with all of their stars' radio appearances, MGM ensured that in her appearances, mention was made of the studio's latest film. Garland continued to be a popular guest on radio shows throughout her career at MGM.

Many recordings from the *Oakie* show have survived, and they document a unique part of Garland's career. She was fourteen years old (her last appearance on the show was just after she turned fifteen), which makes them even more amazing than they already are. Garland had the chance to flex her vocal talents and sing all types of songs, from swing to ballads to comedy numbers. She also got to engage in some skits and scripted banter, which showed off her natural flair for comedy. But it's her songs that are the real gems, including “They Can't Take That Away from Me,” “Always,” “Smiles,” “You Couldn't Be Cuter,” “Pennies from Heaven,” and the first known nationwide radio performance of the new Rodgers and Hart song “Johnny One Note” from their recent Broadway hit show *Babes in Arms*. The song wasn't included when MGM loosely adapted the show into the first Garland/Rooney musical, *Babes in Arms*, in 1939, although Garland later got the chance to perform it in 1948's *Words and Music*. Comparing the young Garland with the adult Garland on the same song, twelve years apart, is a rare treat. The two versions aren't very different aside from the fact that the earlier version includes some extra music and lyrics (“original interpolation,” as noted in the official show transcripts<sup>27</sup>) provided by Edens and meant to show off Garland's vocal versatility. The young Garland naturally sounds younger, but her command of the song is there, as it was again in 1948. She sang it seemingly without effort in both instances. Another notable Garland performance on the *Oakie* show happened on February 23, 1937, when she premiered her first “identifier song”: “(Dear Mr. Gable) You Made Me Love You.”

An interesting sequence of events led to the creation of “(Dear Mr. Gable) You Made Me Love You.” Edens and actress Carmel Myers had previously created some special material for Myers to perform on Rudy Vallee's radio show centered around the Harold Arlen song “Let's

Fall in Love.” Myers had the idea to recite a nearly three-minute monologue (which Edens set to music) about a chambermaid at the Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles and her adoration of Clark Gable. To cheer herself up after an argument with her boyfriend, she takes a bus to the gate of MGM in an attempt to meet her idol. She falls asleep at the gate and dreams of spending part of the day with Gable, only to wake up and find out she missed seeing him for real. A couple of years later, Edens was tasked with coming up with something for Garland to perform for Ben Bernie on the February 2, 1937, edition of his popular NBC Radio show, *Ben Bernie and All the Lads*. Garland wanted to sing the Ethel Merman torch song “Drums in My Heart.” Edens had to convince her that the song was too adult for a fourteen-year-old to sing. They both knew that vocally, Garland could handle the song without any problems, but it would be uncomfortably indecent for a young girl to sing such a torrid torch song to the forty-six-year-old Bernie. Edens asked Myers whether she would allow him to adapt their idea into a more tongue-in-cheek young fan’s adoration of Bernie. Myers admired Garland and gave Edens her blessing. Edens rewrote the material and coupled it with the 1913 song “You Made Me Love You,” popularized by Al Jolson.<sup>28</sup>

Concurrently, Ida Koverman asked Edens to provide some entertainment for Gable’s upcoming birthday party, while, at the same time, the newspapers were reporting about a woman being arrested for attempting to extort money from Gable. She claimed that Gable, going by the name “Frank Morris,” had fathered her illegitimate child while visiting England in 1922. None of it was true; Gable had never been to England. The press printed the contents of the letter she sent to Gable via MGM, which began “Dear Frank.” Edens rewrote the Bernie routine as “Dear Mr. Gable,” poking gentle fun at the incident, made more amusing by the fact that Garland was just a year older than the fictional Gable daughter.

On February 1, 1937, Garland premiered the number at Gable’s birthday party on the set of his latest film, *Parnell*. Edens brought Garland out, sitting on the top of an upright piano. Although the routine was partly satirical, Garland’s soulful performance amazed and charmed everyone in attendance, including Louis B. Mayer. As with most Garland milestones, this one also had different versions of the event told over the years. One version claims that Garland popped out of a big cake. This story could be derived from Gable’s teasing Garland in later years, telling her he was always afraid that at birthday parties, if a big cake were wheeled out, she would pop out and sing the song. Other versions claim that MGM decided to put Garland and the song into *Broadway Melody of 1938* because of this party. In reality, the earliest mention of Garland attached to the film was in a short news blurb published on October 30, 1935, when it was titled *Broadway Melody of 1937* (to be released in 1936). The routine, with the recitative dialog rewritten by Edens into a more audience-friendly little girl’s fan letter to Gable, was added for Garland to perform in *Broadway Melody of 1938* after the success at the Gable birthday party—that is certain. Garland’s performance at Gable’s party was so impressive that she was taken that same evening to the Trocadero to give her first public performance of the song. However, when she appeared on the



Performing “Everybody Sing” in *Broadway Melody of 1938* (1937) with Delos Jewkes, Sophie Tucker, and Barnett Parker. From the author’s collection.

Bernie show the following evening, she sang “Oh, Say, Can You Swing?” but, strangely, not “Dear Mr. Gable.”

Garland began work on *Broadway Melody of 1938* on March 5, 1937, prerecording her other big number in the film, “Everybody Sing,” with Sophie Tucker, Barnett Parker, J. D. Jewkes, and the MGM Studio Chorus. It was her first recording session for an MGM feature film. She later prerecorded “Dear Mr. Gable” on May 7, 1937. Tucker was an early supporter of Garland and labeled her the “Next Red Hot

Mama” (Tucker had been billed as the “Red Hot Mama” for years in vaudeville for her similar song-belting style). There are quite a few promotional photos of Tucker and Garland. Tucker hosted Garland and fellow MGM child star Freddie Bartholomew at her home with an MGM photographer present to snap photos of the kids enjoying Tucker’s pool, all to promote her motherly approval of the young stars and as a kind of passing the baton to Garland as a “belter.” Almost two decades later, in 1954, Tucker attended the premiere of Garland’s screen comeback, *A Star Is Born*, and its post-premiere party.

It was around this time that MGM’s Special Services Department assigned an assistant to Garland, Mary Schroeder. When Garland arrived at MGM each morning, Schroeder would give her the rundown of whatever work she had for the day, which included anything from interviews to acting lessons to photo sessions, presumably keeping Garland on track with the ever-increasing obligations on her time.<sup>29</sup>

By June 1937, Garland’s weekly appearances on the *Oakie* radio show ended. She wasn’t a regular on another major radio series until the end of the year. However, she still made random appearances on a variety of radio shows and was featured in a limited series of fifteen-minute shows titled *Frank Morgan Varieties*. The Morgan shows, sponsored by the Dodge car company and hosted by MGM star (and future “Wizard of Oz”) Frank Morgan, premiered on May 30, 1937, with promotional notices touting Garland, “the 15-year-old prodigy who sang her way to sensational success,” as one of the show’s rotating guests. A sign of MGM’s new focus on promoting Garland is reflected in the number of times she was noted as one of Morgan’s main guests in

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all morning, and consommé wasn't my idea of a filling lunch."<sup>34</sup> Whether it was true is unknown. It was probably an isolated incident that Garland, known as a creative raconteur, embellished for effect. Garland's claim that she was brought soup "for years" sounds like exaggeration rather than fact. Whatever happened, and whether it was an isolated event or a series of events, it had a big enough impact on Garland for her to stick with variations of the story for the rest of her life.

Garland was under enormous pressure to succeed at MGM. Regardless of her incredible voice and, as yet, largely untapped other talents, she still had to prove herself. She had the singing down pat, but her image was another issue, and she knew it. MGM wasn't the most ideal place for a young girl with body-image insecurities. They didn't seem to be very sensitive to the feelings of their stars and stock players in this regard. In fact, they could be quite brutal at times. MGM was the most glamorous of all the movie studios, and Garland was not glamorous, nor was she a character actor, for whom it didn't matter that they didn't conform to MGM's beauty standards. Garland wasn't a budding young Joan Crawford or Jean Harlow; she wasn't a cutesy child like Temple, either. MGM didn't want its glamorous stars (or, in Garland's case, stars in grooming) to be fat. Garland was more on the chubby side than fat at the time, but at MGM any extra poundage on screen was seen as just plain fat. Although true addiction didn't come until later, Garland developed a habit of using the pills as a hunger suppressant, a source of energy, and an emotional crutch that gave her false confidence that masked her insecurities. Part of the reason that Garland became addicted to her "medication" (as the pills would later be called) more than others who also took them on a similarly regular basis was two-fold: she had a genetic predisposition for addiction, and the chemicals were introduced to her during early puberty. Practically everyone in Hollywood took the pills from time to time, but in Garland's case, as her body grew into womanhood, she grew with a greater physical need for the chemicals than normal. But for now she was young, strong, and eager to please. If the pills gave her some false confidence and helped her to better conform to MGM's idea of female beauty, no one was the wiser. And no one could know that a decade later, it would all come crashing down. In 1937, Garland might have been a casual user of the pills, but images of Garland as "always drugged up" or evil studio staff forcing pills down her throat throughout her career at MGM are false and offensive to Garland and her talents.

*Broadway Melody of 1938* was previewed on August 13, 1937, at the Village Theatre in the Westwood area of Los Angeles, near the MGM studios in Culver City. Decca Records president Jack Kapp was once more in Los Angeles from New York and attended the preview. He was again taken with Garland, and the result was that first six-month contract. Garland's first recordings under the new contract were "Everybody Sing" and "All God's Chillun Got Rhythm," recorded on August 30 and released the following month. A few days prior, on August 24, Garland was sent on a quick trip to the Bay Area in northern California for a personal appearance at a matinee of *Broadway Melody of 1938* at the Fox Theatre. On August 26, she was back at the recording studio at MGM, prerecording "Swing, Mr. Mendelssohn" for the upcoming production

of *Everybody Sing* (1938) while also working on her next film, *Thoroughbreds Don't Cry* (1937).

Filming on *Thoroughbreds Don't Cry* went along at a fast pace. It was released just a few months later, in November 1937. The film is a minor “B” comedy that didn’t tax the cast’s talents, least of all Garland’s. Her role wasn’t in the original script but was added after her success in *Broadway Melody of 1938* in an attempt to capitalize on her new popularity. Only one of her songs made the final cut: “Got a Pair of New Shoes.” Her ballad “Sun Showers” was deleted, but the prerecording survives. It’s possible it was deleted because Garland sounds very mature, and her emoting, while perfectly executed, is out of sync with the lightness of the rest of the film. Tucker costars again, but this time she doesn’t get any songs, a situation that contributed to her discontent with her career at MGM and her decision to leave the studio. Ronald Sinclair played the role intended for child star Freddie Bartholomew, who couldn’t make the film because, as Garland later joked, his voice was changing. *Thoroughbreds Don't Cry* is most notable today as Garland’s first on-screen pairing with Mickey Rooney.

While working concurrently on *Thoroughbreds Don't Cry* and *Everybody Sing*, Garland continued to appear regularly on radio shows, including becoming a regular on the NBC Radio show *Good News of 1938*, again sponsored by MGM. She also continued to show up at industry events, such as Eddie Cantor’s party at the Ambassador Hotel on October 28, 1937. She recorded “(Dear Mr. Gable) You Made Me Love You” and “You Can’t Have Everything” for Decca Records on September 24. The latter song was from the Fox musical of the same name.

Garland’s career was now gaining steam. Her recent successes in film, on radio, and on records was more proof to MGM that Judy Garland could become a lucrative star for the studio. It’s been written over and over that Deanna Durbin’s success at Universal is what lit the fire of MGM’s interest in making Garland a star, and that’s possibly partly true. But there’s no denying that Garland succeeded on her own merit and hard work and not just on a corporate grudge. It was Garland’s unique talents and her hard work that led to her success.

MGM was now heavily promoting Garland as a “typical” American teen to the American moviegoing public. The studio’s publicity department was very clever and adept at creating mostly fictional scenarios for the newspapers and fan magazines to print, such as a photo of Garland and her mom enjoying hot dogs just like anyone else or a photo of the two admiring a new refrigerator. There were stories of how Garland was studying to become a lawyer or a doctor, and one in which she planned to create a publishing house for “juveniles only, ranging up to 18 years.”<sup>35</sup> One alleged interview had Garland exclaiming that her “greatest ambition” was to build a hospital and that she was afraid she would go bald: “It’s really serious. But my hair just doesn’t grow. I haven’t had a haircut in eight years.”<sup>36</sup> Another article presented “that Garland Gang” and featured a group of photos of Garland and the other juvenile contract players horsing around at the studio. Of course, “gang” in this context meant clean and wholesome fun: “Juvenile stars of the movies worry just as much about their nickels as any other kids. Judy Garland, the child singer, today submitted conclusive proof on the side of the little professionals. They run in gangs, enjoy their little



Two typical American teens, Mickey Rooney and Garland, go roller skating, 1937. From the author's collection.

disagreements and swear by their childish loyalties, exactly as youngsters do in every neighborhood in America.” For the record, Garland’s “gang,” according to the article, consisted of Delia Bogart, Leonard Barrett, Mickey Rooney, Freddie Bartholomew, Jackie Cooper, Ronald Sinclair, Deanna Durbin, and Suzanne Larson (soon to be Susanna Foster).<sup>37</sup> The fact that Durbin is listed in a 1938 article about Garland’s gang on the MGM lot is a clear indication that it’s all fiction. Durbin was firmly established at rival Universal Studios by this point and wouldn’t have been hanging around MGM.

But not all of the stories were fiction. The MGM publicity department was also happy to report about real events that showed Garland attending parties, movie premieres, and outings with the younger set of child and teen stars and contract players that included Rooney, Bartholomew, Cooper, and Betty Jaynes. MGM created puppy-love romances for Garland, linking her mostly

with Cooper or Bartholomew; in some stories, Cooper and Rooney competed for her affection in a kind of puppy-love triangle. According to Cooper, he and Garland did have a real, albeit brief, puppy-love romance, although how much of that was nudged by MGM (or the kids’ parents; the moms of both kids were friends) is anyone’s guess. These stories and many others were published in different papers on varying dates over several months at a time or in monthly fan magazines. This publicity served to keep the budding stars’ names in the papers while, as always, promoting their latest films. It was all very innocent and as all-American as apple pie. The reality was much different. These kids were experiencing a world far removed from anything normal, innocent, or all-American.

From this time into the early 1940s, and despite seeing Garland as unglamorous, MGM promoted her as a teen model, having her pose in the latest teen fashions. There are many surviving MGM publicity photos of Garland posing in various teen fashions that were originally sent out to newspapers and magazines. It was all very modest compared to the treatment the glamour

girls were getting, with wholesome frocks targeted toward middle-American teen girls. It wasn't long before "Judy Garland" dresses and handbags were being advertised for sale in stores around the country. By November 1939, the "Judy Garland as Dorothy" doll, complete with the gingham dress (but with the standard black shoes rather than ruby slippers), was advertised in time for the holiday season. A year later, a new doll of Garland was promoted for *Little Nellie Kelly* (1940). On November 18, 1940, the movie trade magazine *Film Daily* published the following notice: "Metro [MGM] has made a national tie-up with the Ideal Novelty Manufacturing Co, giving it the right to produce and sell a Judy Garland doll. First promotion under this co-operative arrangement is in conjunction with 'Little Nellie Kelly.'"<sup>38</sup> Naturally,



MGM had Garland pose for publicity photos with the doll and its plethora of outfits, with studio-provided text on the back of the photo for a newspaper to print: "I'LL NEVER GROW UP. . . . At least not enough to give up my favorite doll! And Judy Garland poses with her pet doll. The young Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer star is proud of the wardrobe she has acquired for the doll. She claims it's more complete than her own." The doll was heavily promoted in articles and with movie theatre tie-in contests. Even MGM star Hedy Lamarr was photographed posing with the doll. "As beautiful as Judy Garland herself!" she's quoted as exclaiming.<sup>39</sup> As with most of the Garland tie-in products approved by MGM, Garland never saw a penny of profit from the sales of the dolls, but it helped MGM get Garland's name and persona to the ticket-buying public.

Garland's next film was *Everybody Sing* (1938). It was the first film specifically tailored to her talents in which she

Another day at the MGM photo studios, August 6, 1937. From the author's collection.



MGM promotional photo of Garland at home. From the collection of Michael Siewert.

plays the main character, with crooner Allan Jones and comic legend Fanny Brice providing solid support. The three share top billing in the ads, posters, and lobby cards. Also in the cast is future Glinda, the Witch of the North, Billie Burke, playing Garland's mother, with Reginald Owen, Lynne Carver, and Reginald Gardiner supporting. The MGM star-making machine was in full swing, building up Garland as a rising star. "Judy Garland will become an overnight sensation!" touted the film's trailer, while print and poster ads proclaimed, "It's a little early to predict but here's a prophecy for 1938! Judy Garland—Stardom!" But even with this star buildup, the writers at MGM couldn't resist putting lines in the script referring to Garland's character as an "Ugly Duckling," which was the original title of the film. Thankfully, that title was changed, first to *Swing Fever* and finally to *Everybody Sing*.

Garland proved she could handle the bulk of the dramatics and comedy in the film, and she's given several chances to show off her vocal versatility. She has a charming comedic duet with Brice ("Why? Because!") in which she's Little Lord Fauntleroy to Brice's famous stage and



Garland poses with her doll and the doll's clothes. The suggested studio text accompanying the photo reads, "I'LL NEVER GROW UP. . . . At least not enough to give up my favorite doll! And Judy Garland poses with her pet doll. The young Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer star is proud of the wardrobe she has acquired for the doll. She claims it's more complete than her own." From the author's collection.

**"LITTLE NELLIE KELLY"**

## JUDY GARLAND DOLL FREE!

Read very carefully the subscription agreement so you will understand just what is required of the new subscriber signing the agreement and then get four (4) of your friends, relatives or neighbors as new subscribers for THE DESERET NEWS. All carrier-delivery subscriptions must be NEW and signed up for a period of six months agreeing to pay the regular DESERET NEWS carrier the regular subscription rate of 18 cents per week.

First you clip the coupon below. Get your father or mother to be the first to sign, if they are not already subscribers to THE DESERET NEWS. Then see your aunt or uncle, your neighbors and your friends. Anyone who is not now a DESERET NEWS subscriber will be glad to help you win this gorgeous doll. Start right away...and be the first to own a real "Little Nellie Kelly" Judy Garland Doll.

A new subscriber is one who has not received THE DESERET NEWS at his present address for the past thirty (30) days. You collect no money from the new subscribers where delivered by carrier.

In towns and on rural routes where THE DESERET NEWS is delivered by mail, contestants will be required to collect payment in advance from each subscriber at the rate of \$4.50 for 6 months.

Subscribers moving from one address to another will be classed as old subscribers in this campaign.

All subscriptions will be verified by THE DESERET NEWS before being accepted.



**FOR SECURING ONLY 4 NEW  
6 MONTHS SUBSCRIPTIONS TO  
THE DESERET NEWS**

*Deseret News* (Salt Lake City, UT) ran a free Judy Garland doll giveaway with subscriptions, November 23, 1940.

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Garland and Fanny Brice perform "Why? Because!" in *Everybody Sing* (1938). From the author's collection.

Sheridan Theatre on January 24, 1938. This was the beginning of what became Garland's first major film promotional tour. The amount of attention given to Garland and *Everybody Sing* by local MGM executives and theatre owners/managers is reflected in this blurb in *Variety* about the events surrounding the train's short stop in Houston, Texas, while en route to Miami:

*Because the train on which Judy Garland was heading east stopped for half an hour at Houston, Lionel H. Keene, of Loew's State, got an hour for publicity work, aided by Homer McCallon, his press agent. The extra half hour is explained by the fact that McCallon took a couple of reporters 40 miles up the line to board the train and get interviews before the city was reached.*

*Once in the station, the big event was a 15-minute interview over KPRO, the NBC outlet. It opened with a greeting from Mayor Fonville, the arrival of a guard of honor, composed of 25 girls from the Sam Houston high school, who held the autograph seekers at bay during the broadcast, six children dressed as she was in "Everybody Sing" gave her a box of pralines, after which she was questioned about her trip by announcer Gene Wyatt.*

*The remainder of the time was given over to autographing albums and posing for motion pictures for local showing at the State. It all made a great advance stunt for "Everybody Sing," which*

short chorus of the song in three days, from November 6 through November 8, in time for MGM to send it out to theatres for the 1937 Christmas season. The prerecording surfaced a few years later when Garland and Rooney were featured on the annual *Leo Is on the Air* (MGM) holiday show, broadcast live on November 28, 1940, from "Santa Claus Lane" (Hollywood Boulevard) in Los Angeles. Garland and Rooney rode in the parade on one of the floats, and MGM cleverly inserted this 1937 prerecording of "Silent Night" into the broadcast under the guise of being sung live by Garland from "Santa Claus Lane."

#### NEW YORK STAGE DEBUT

When *Everybody Sing* was completed, MGM sent Garland, her mother Ethel, Roger Edens, and a small entourage that included her tutor (Garland was still under California education and labor laws) via train to Miami, Florida, for the film's world premiere at the

*was the house's underline and all it cost was a lot of hard work.*<sup>40</sup>

The train also stopped in Mobile, Alabama, where two sisters boarded and met with Garland at the station restaurant in the train's next stop at Flomaton, Alabama. The sisters' basketball team had just lost a game, but their meeting with Garland perked them up, as reported by the local newspaper: "Judy told them of her school life in California, where she is a student in the eleventh grade, her ice skating and her fondness for eating which she displayed in stops at the Mobile, Flomaton and Pensacola station restaurants."<sup>41</sup> The "fondness for eating" comment is notable because it foreshadows later reports of Garland sneaking food whenever she was away from the constant hovering and watchful eye of MGM and the strict diet they imposed on her in these early years.

Garland and her entourage arrived in Miami on January 24 at 4:30 p.m. local time. Immediately on arrival, she was interviewed for WIOD Radio by Eddie Cohen of the *Miami Daily News*, which was broadcast live from the train station at 4:45 p.m. According to the *Miami Daily News*, Garland was scheduled to end the interview and leave the train station after a train carrying some of MGM's New York executives arrived, and then she would go to her room at the Roney Plaza Hotel to rest and prepare for her personal appearances at the theatre, which premiered the film at 8:00 p.m., with another screening at 10:00 p.m. The premiere was a big success. In his article for the *Miami News*, Cohen noted Garland's ability as an actress:

*When M-G-M let Deanna Durbin slip through their fingers somebody on the lot must have been sore. We can just hear him bellowing, "Alright, find me another!" Judy Garland is the result. While Durbin is a singer who happens to be an actress, Garland is an actress who happens to be a singer, and in the long run, it is our belief, M-G-M has got something that will even spell greater "box office" than Durbin, because little Judy's appeal is to the masses. She sings our language when she "swings" out and she is thoroughly human at the same time.*<sup>42</sup>

*Variety* reported that after the premiere, "Judy Garland, her ma and Harry Rapf guests of Mr. and Mrs. Nicholas Schenck at Patio Moresque" in Miami Beach.<sup>43</sup> A decade later, Schenck became a villain during Garland's personal and professional struggles at MGM. While in Miami, Garland also posed for more teen fashion photos on the grounds of her hotel, looking very chic in white slacks and a light jacket. The photos were widely published in papers around the country.

The Garland entourage left Miami and headed to New Orleans, Louisiana, where, on January 28, Garland presented an autographed photo to mayor Robert Maestri and had time to sing for charity at a local hospital. While Team Garland was on its way back to Hollywood, MGM decided that since the recent premiere and personal appearances had been so successful, they would extend the trip and have Garland make her New York stage debut at Loew's State Theatre, followed by an extended tour. Team Garland immediately turned around and headed to New York. This meant a scheduled and publicized stop in El Paso, Texas, on January 30 did not happen. There was a quick stop in Jacksonville, Florida, on February 4, where Garland and her



Garland and her mom, Ethel, arrive in Miami, Florida, for the world premiere of *Everybody Sing*, January 24, 1938. From the author's collection.

Garland poses in some teen fashions while in Miami, Florida, January 1938. From the author's collection.

mom were photographed having breakfast in the back of the Florida Theatre with theatre owner Guy Kenimer and more local MGM executives before they traveled up the East Coast, arriving in New York on February 7. The last-minute change by MGM and their booking of Garland at Loew's State Theatre in Times Square was monumental. As it is today, New York in 1938 was the pinnacle of show business. Garland had already gotten the big Hollywood prize of a contract at the biggest and best studio; now her name would be blazoned over Times Square in larger-than-life lights: "In Person Judy Garland." MGM would not have given her this honor if they hadn't already known (or at least suspected) that in Garland, they had the total package. She was as natural on stage as she was in film, and she already possessed a stage presence that drew people in both musically and emotionally. MGM saw the dollar signs. According to the trade magazines, she increased the house box office wherever she appeared.

Garland opened at Loew's State on February 10, with the Albertina Rasch dancers, the Four Franks, and rising comedy duo Abbott and Costello on the same bill, in the vaudeville format still popular at the time. Her appearance at the State grossed \$10,000 more for the theatre than their average weekly gross at the time. On February 16, 1938, *Variety* reported Garland's

week at the State Theatre grossed \$30,000, which was “very katish”:

*Youngster is a resounding wallop in her first vaudeville appearance. Comes to the house with a rep in films and after a single date on the Chase and Sanborn radio show. Apparent at the outset that the girl is no mere flash, but has both the personality and the skill to develop into a box-office wow in any line of show business.*

*Offered three numbers at last show Thursday (10), and then bowed out. Applause was solid and insistent, however, she encored twice, finally begging off with an ingratiating and shrewd thank-you speech. Her 20-minute stint didn't seem that long, and she could have stayed indefinitely.*

*Kid is ballyed as 14 years old, which seems about right according to her appearance, mannerisms, dress, etc. She's big for her age, however. Voice is pleasant in its quieter tones. At such times it has exact pitch, with expressive warmth and not a little richness. She has a tendency to turn on the steam, however, and then her voice becomes nasal, strident and loses its expressive shadings. She knows how to put over the appealing parts of a song, builds a number well and has definite rhythmic sense, but she must learn the discipline of modulation. Enunciates clearly.<sup>44</sup>*

In addition to her show at Loew's State, Garland made many personal appearances in the city, including wowing the crowds at the Casa Manana nightclub on February 13, which prompted a mention in columnist Walter Winchell's world-famous column along with a photo of Garland (in some markets): “The most deafening applause ever heard by these ears greeted Judy Garland at Casa Manana Sunday Night.”<sup>45</sup> On February 14, the WEW radio station held a Judy Garland look-alike contest and “audition,” with the winner receiving cash and the other contestants receiving guest tickets to see Garland at Loew's. The Famous-Barr Co. department store, “which handles Judy Garland clothes,” created elaborate window displays promoting Garland and the show at Loew's.<sup>46</sup> MGM's local promotional team did their job well.

After the success in New York, the *Everybody Sing* tour moved on to engagements in Providence, Rhode Island (February 18 through 24), and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (February 25 through March 3), where Garland was given membership in the local “Sekatory Hawkins Club.”



Typical MGM promotion of Garland in the latest teen fashions, February 28, 1938. From the author's collection.

The Pittsburgh crowds were so big, the local papers reported, that traffic was stopped for half an hour, and the crowd was four abreast, with “thousands pushed and strained.”<sup>47</sup> *Variety*’s review of the Pittsburgh show noted, “Anything trying to follow Miss Garland is immediately behind the eight ball” (the show featured other acts) and “Youngster delivering as few others have around here in several seasons,” singling out the song “Bei Mir Bist Du Schoen” as “very slick.”<sup>48</sup> On March 2, the crowds were still large enough that, in spite of it being Ash Wednesday, Garland ended up giving six shows that day. The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* said of Garland, “For encountering the young lady in person at the Stanley, you realize at last what a distinguished song stylist she really is, a remarkable artist every inch of the way.”<sup>49</sup>

It was during this time that the news broke that Garland had been cast as Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*. It was also reported that Garland was cast in a screen version of *Topsy and Eva*. That project never happened. MGM’s publicity department most likely cooked up the story.

Garland’s next stop was Columbus, Ohio (March 4 through 10). The Columbus appearance is notable because it resulted in Garland’s first time being featured in *Life* magazine. She was



During her *Everybody Sing* tour, Garland posed with newspapers from various cities as part of the promotional campaign for the film. This one shows Garland reading the *Boston Globe*, as published in that paper on February 18, 1938. From the author’s collection.

honored as the “Sweetheart of Sigma Chi” by the Alpha Gamma Chapter of the Sigma Chi Fraternity at Ohio State University. The event was photographed and presented in the magazine’s March 28, 1938, issue as that month’s entry in their “Life Goes to a Party” series. *Variety* noted about the Columbus shows that Garland “does four songs with piano accompaniment only, in front of curtain. . . . Opens with ‘Shine on Your Shoes.’ Follows with ‘You Made Me Love You.’ Then novel arrangement of ‘Bei Mir Bist Du Schoen,’ which puts over well-worn tune like a new one. Encores with ‘Melody Farm’ and gets off with curtain speech.”<sup>50</sup>

The tour was finally beginning to wind down and headed west for a weeklong run at the Chicago Theatre in Chicago, Illinois, from March 11 through 17. Garland and Ethel stayed at the Palmer House, and Ethel wrote to a friend that Garland’s fan mail had increased to over one hundred letters a day, necessitating the hiring of a young woman to come in a few times a week to help with the

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Theatre, where Garland had her stage debut. They returned to Chicago on April 2 to catch the Super Chief train back to Los Angeles. The train took thirty-eight hours and forty-five minutes, which included fourteen stops, to return. On April 3, the train stopped in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where Garland had time to be interviewed by the local paper and photographed waving from a train window. The subsequent article published the following day quoted Garland's happiness to be off the train for a bit: "It's too grand to be cooped up in there." The paper interestingly noted Garland's beauty: "Red hair and freckles do not detract from Judy's beauty, and her off-screen personality is as pleasing as it is on the camera." Garland met with fans and asked a reporter to mail a letter for her (she bought the stamp) addressed to "a gentleman in Washington, D.C., Romance in the offing?"<sup>54</sup> It was probably a letter to Perry Frank.

### BACK TO MGM AND ON TO CARVEL

Garland returned to MGM triumphant, thanks to the success of the *Everybody Sing* tour. She immediately went back to her weekly (more or less) appearances on the *Good News of 1938* radio show while also beginning production on her next film, *Love Finds Andy Hardy*. It was the fourth installment in a new series of increasingly popular films centered around the Hardy family of the fictional all-American small town of Carvel, Idaho. The series began with 1937's *A Family Affair*, which was based on the Broadway show *Skidding* by Aurania Rouverol. *A Family Affair* was a kind of sequel to MGM's 1936 film adaptation of Eugene O'Neill's Broadway hit *Ah! Wilderness*, which was also about an all-American small-town family. It featured most of the same cast as *Ah! Wilderness*, but when it was decided to turn *A Family Affair* into a series, Lewis Stone replaced Lionel Barrymore as Judge Hardy, Fay Holden replaced Spring Byington as Mrs. Hardy, and Ann Rutherford replaced Margaret Marquis as Andy Hardy's girlfriend, Polly Benedict. Mickey Rooney was Andy Hardy from the beginning and the breakout star of the series, which put the focus on Andy's trials and tribulations with his on-again, off-again girlfriend, Polly; his wooing of or being wooed by a variety of girls; and his "man-to-man" talks with his father, the wise Judge Hardy. Andy always learned a valuable life lesson or two in each film. MGM boss Louis B. Mayer loved the series not just because the films were cheap to make and brought in tons of profits but also because they epitomized his idealized version of what he thought small-town America should be.

*Love Finds Andy Hardy* is the best and quintessential Hardy film. Garland appears as Betsy Booth, the visiting (from New York City) singing granddaughter of one of the Hardy family's neighbors. It was the first of three appearances Garland made in the series as Betsy Booth. It was also Garland's first time filming on MGM's new permanent "New England Street" on Lot 2 (the first film shot on the street was *Ah! Wilderness* in 1935), which provided the street where the Hardy and Booth families lived. It became one of the most famous spots on the backlot and was informally known as "Andy Hardy Street." In *That's Entertainment!* (1974), Rooney comments about basically growing up on the street and indicates that Polly Benedict's home was across the street from the Hardy home when, in fact, it was located on the nearby "Small Town Square" on the

same backlot. Between the Hardy films and their “Let’s Put on a Show!” musicals, Garland and Rooney spent countless long days and nights filming on the fabled street.

Another young starlet, Lana Turner, made her MGM debut in *Love Finds Andy Hardy* (not counting an uncredited bit as an extra in 1937’s *Topper*), and although she was just one year older than Garland, she might as well have been ten years older. There was no mistaking Turner for anything other than an MGM “Glamazon” in the making. Garland’s Betsy Booth character was an adolescent, a kid, someone Andy Hardy saw as a pal but not a love interest, whereas Turner’s Cynthia was an obvious object of sexual desire. Garland was fifteen when *Love Finds Andy Hardy* went into production, and, like any girl her age, she longed to be seen and portrayed as a glamorous and sexy woman. She and Turner became friends, but Garland also envied Turner’s beauty and how she was treated at the studio and socially. Garland seemed to be surrounded by an endless parade of glamorous women, including Joan Crawford, Greta Garbo, and Norma Shearer. It probably didn’t help much that in *Love Finds Andy Hardy*, her big solo is the song “In-Between,” in which she laments that she’s not a child but not yet an adult. Similar to “Dear Mr. Gable,” Garland gets a recitative break in the song with lines like “I’m allowed to go to picture shows, that is if nurse is feeling able. But we only go to Mickey Mouse; I’m not allowed Clark Gable.” For the time being, MGM was more than happy to keep portraying Garland as an adolescent. It would be several years before she was allowed to grow up on screen.

Garland was almost written out of *Love Finds Andy Hardy*. Early in production, on May 24, 1938, she was involved in a car accident that resulted in a sprained back, three broken ribs, and a punctured lung. Luckily, none of the injuries were life-threatening, and she recovered quickly enough to be back at MGM working on the film by June 11.

The success of the addition of Garland and Turner to the Andy Hardy series began a tradition at MGM of trying out various new contract players by putting them in the series to see how they fared, gauge audience response, and give them a bit more experience before graduating to larger roles. Included in the growing list were Donna Reed, Kathryn Grayson, Ray McDonald, and Esther Williams. Garland was the only star to make return appearances in the series, still as Betsy Booth, and in both return appearances, she’s helping Andy navigate the world of her hometown, New York City.

Originally, it was planned for Garland to go directly into work on *The Wizard of Oz* after *Love Finds Andy Hardy*. On April 29, 1938, she posed for Max Factor hair and makeup tests for *Oz*, her first work on the film, and the earliest surviving photos of Garland as Dorothy. However, preproduction was taking longer than planned, so the start date was pushed out. In the interim, MGM rushed a quickie “B” movie into production, *Listen, Darling*, to get more on-screen exposure of Garland to movie audiences. Garland costarred with Freddie Bartholomew, Mary Astor, Walter Pidgeon, Scotty Beckett, and Alan Hale Sr. in a story centered around two teens, Pinkie Wingate (Garland) and Buzz Mitchell (Bartholomew), and their attempt to find a suitable husband for Pinkie’s widowed mom (Astor) by kidnapping her in the family trailer and going on a husband-hunting

road trip. Although it's a short seventy minutes long, the film features three songs. "On the Bumpy Road to Love" is a group number sung, not surprisingly, while they're driving. The other two are Garland solos: "Zing! Went the Strings of My Heart" (her MGM audition song) and "Ten Pins in the Sky." The two were shortened before the film's release. For "Zing!" Garland recorded two versions, one as a ballad and one with a partial jazz midsection, similar to her 1935 radio performance. The surviving prerecording of the ballad version is three minutes and thirteen seconds; in the film, it's cut to two minutes and thirty-three seconds. It's unknown why the song was trimmed. Perhaps it was thought that a full ballad coming so early in the film would slow it down too much. "Ten Pins" is one of Garland's most beautiful MGM ballads and also one of the least recognized. Her vocals are subdued and tender, similar to her vocal on "Over the Rainbow," prerecorded that same year, just a few months later.

Garland's work on *Listen, Darling* was in its last weeks when she began costume tests and prerecording sessions for *The Wizard of Oz*. Over the next year, most of her time was spent either working on *Oz* or with *Oz*-related duties, as well as completing another film, *Babes in Arms* (1939). It took MGM less than four years to make Judy Garland a star.



British sheet music for "It Never Rains, But What It Pours" from *Love Finds Andy Hardy* (1938). From the author's collection.



MGM studio portrait used to promote *Listen, Darling* (1938). The suggested studio text accompanying the photo reads, "Brown, Grosgrain Bows, and a back veil, are youthfully charming on this high-crowned, roll-brim brown felt hat chosen for fall by Judy Garland, appearing in Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's 'Listen, Darling.'" From the author's collection.

## C H A P T E R 3

## MGM MAGIC

*THE WIZARD OF OZ AND BABES IN ARMS*

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**T**he making of *The Wizard of Oz* has been the subject of many books that range in quality from poor to excellent. It would be futile to try to encapsulate the now legendary production of the film here in one chapter. Instead, the following is an overview of the production followed by the quick production of *Babes in Arms*, Garland and Rooney's tour of the East Coast leading up to the New York premiere of *The Wizard of Oz*, and the rest of Garland's activities in that golden year of 1939.

In late February 1938, the news broke that MGM was producing a film version of L. Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz* with Mervyn LeRoy as producer and Garland as Dorothy. Producer/director Mervyn LeRoy had been lured away from Warner Bros. by MGM boss Louis B. Mayer to replace the recently deceased "Boy Wonder" chief of production Irving Thalberg. LeRoy immediately said he wanted to make a film of Baum's classic children's book. At the same time, MGM studio songwriter Arthur Freed was aspiring to become a producer. Allegedly (there is some debate), Freed also wanted to adapt the Baum book for the screen as a musical. Mayer told Freed to apprentice as an associate producer for LeRoy, telling him the project was too big and expensive for a first-time producer. This decision turned out to be a blessing for the production. Freed, along with Roger Edens, took charge of the musical aspect of the production. One thing was clear from the beginning: everyone wanted Judy Garland as Dorothy.

MGM's version of *The Wizard of Oz* might not have happened at all were it not for the blockbuster success of Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in late 1937. That masterpiece of animation showed Hollywood that musical fantasies, when executed correctly, could

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Garland posed for portraits for *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), February 25, 1939. From the author's collection.

plot points), and once the songs were written and (most of) the cast was in place (having endured many costume, hair, and makeup tests), it was time for the first prerecording session on September 30, 1938. According to the surviving *Daily Music Report*, Garland, Ray Bolger (the Scarecrow), Buddy Ebsen (the Tin Man), and Bert Lahr (the Cowardly Lion) prerecorded “If I Only Had a Brain,” “If I Only Had a Heart,” “If I Only Had the Nerve,” and “Wonderful Wizard of Oz” (“We’re Off to See the Wizard”) (the duo, trio, and quartet versions). Garland prerecorded “Over the Rainbow” on October 7, 1938. Six takes were printed (that is, kept for audio mixing), takes 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, and 8. The version heard in the film was edited together by taking the first verse of Take 5 and joining it to the bulk of Take 6.

Filming was originally scheduled to begin on September 15, 1938, under the direction of Richard Thorpe, but it was delayed to October 13, 1938. After twelve days, the production was halted. No one liked what was being seen in the rushes. Worst of all, the original Tin Man, Buddy Ebsen, had been unknowingly poisoned by the “silver” makeup and had to be taken off the

film to recuperate from his near-death experience. Thorpe was fired, not because of Ebsen but because his direction was wrong for a musical fantasy. None of the Thorpe footage has survived, so it's impossible to know how wrong he was. It must have been *very* wrong for the studio to stop and scrap everything and start anew.

Director George Cukor came to the production for a week without the intention of directing the entire film. His contributions turned out to be genius and more than helped the resulting success of the film. Cukor changed the look of all of the main characters, most famously changing Dorothy from honey blonde to brunette and using makeup for Garland that was more natural. The acting advice he gave her was also to act naturally. She was an innocent farm girl from Kansas. The assumption is that Thorpe had her acting affectedly. At the time, Garland was quoted as saying, "I learned more in the two days [Cukor] was on 'The Wizard of Oz' than I ever learned at any one time before. It isn't that the other directors aren't wonderful, but they don't know how to handle people my age. It takes a very special kind of understanding to cope with in-betweeners."<sup>1</sup> Cukor also pulled Margaret Hamilton's hair back into a bun to make the Witch look more severe, as well as giving her a protruding chin and nose. Even the Yellow Brick Road was changed from oval bricks to standard rectangular bricks and given a curb.

Production began again on the updated Cornfield set on November 4, 1938, with veteran MGM director Victor Fleming at the helm. For a while, filming went smoothly without any major issues, with scenes shot in the following order:

- Cornfield (November 4 to the week of November 7)
- Tin Man's Forest (week of November 7 to November 19)
- Lion's Forest (November 21 to November 26)
- Poppy Field (week of November 28)
- Witch's Castle (including the melting of the Witch) (December 1 to approximately December 14)
- Munchkinland (December 17 to December 30)

A notable event occurred on November 25, 1938, during filming on the Lion's Forest set: MGM officially promoted Garland from "featured player" to "star." She was presented with her very own dressing room trailer, and the cast and crew were assembled for the event. It was just a little over three years since her 1935 audition.

On December 28, 1938, the good fortune of the relatively smooth previous weeks of filming ended. Things went wrong in the scene in which Margaret Hamilton's Wicked Witch of the West exits Munchkinland in a blast of flames and smoke. Everything was fine until after lunch when the scene was filmed again. The trap door on the floor of the stage that contained an elevator rigging to lower Hamilton didn't work properly, and she was severely burned. The green makeup had copper in it, resulting in her being so badly burned that she was immediately rushed to the hospital and out of the film until mid-February. She suffered first-degree burns on her face

and second-degree burns on her hands. Thankfully, she recovered and understandably refused to do any more special effects shots. The shot you see in the film is the single good shot they were able to get that day before lunch and the accident.

After the new year, production resumed with the cast on the Haunted Forest set and proceeded as follows.

- Haunted Forest (January 3)
- “I’d Turn Back If I Were You” scene (January 6)
- “The Jitterbug” (January 9, 11, and 13)
- The scene on the Yellow Brick Road after waking up from the poppies (January 12)
- Emerald City Sequence (January 14 through mid-February)
- “The Merry Old Land of Oz” (January 17, 19, and 20)
- Wizard’s Balloon Sequence (including the tearful goodbyes) (last week of January)
- “If I Were King of the Forest” plus Wizard’s hallway and Throne Room (late January through mid-February)
- Wizard’s Throne Room (February 3)
- Toto’s Escape from the Witch’s Castle (February 7)
- Wizard’s Presentations (February 12)—this was director Victor Fleming’s last work on the film before leaving to rescue the troubled production of *Gone with the Wind*. They were also the last Oz sequences to be filmed. King Vidor came in to take over beginning with the Kansas sequences, which were the last sequences filmed.
- Kansas Sequences (February 19 through mid-March)
- “Over the Rainbow” (February 23, possibly also 24)
- Miss Gulch scenes, Professor Marvel scenes, Cornfield retakes (late February into mid-March)
- Retakes/pickup shots with Glinda (Billie Burke) (May 1 and/or 2)
- More retakes (according to the assistant director’s report for *Babes in Arms*, Garland was “on Wizard of Oz retakes” on June 30). This was Garland’s last work on *Oz*.

Once principal filming was completed, *The Wizard of Oz* went into the postproduction phase, including recording the Oscar-winning background score, creating the groundbreaking special effects, and the final editing. In mid-July 1939, the first previews of the film were held unannounced at theatres outside of the greater Los Angeles area. The elaborate production number “The Jitterbug” was removed after the first preview, and “Over the Rainbow” was removed for at least one preview. There was a debate by studio executives about the song’s merits and whether it slowed down the film, plus concern that the sheet music (still a very lucrative market at the time) wouldn’t sell. Mayer held a meeting during which Freed exclaimed, “The song stays—or I go! It’s as simple as that.”<sup>2</sup> The song stayed in the film, and Freed stayed at MGM.

The rest, as they say, is history. Unlike reports given decades later, *The Wizard of Oz* was

a big hit. It was also recognized as an instant classic. The reviews were almost unanimous in their praise. However, *The Wizard of Oz* did not immediately turn a profit due to the high cost of the long production and the extensive publicity campaign. It was MGM's most expensive production and most expensive and biggest ad campaign to date. Added to that was the fact that a majority of the ticket sales were at children's prices. To further compound things, most of the European market closed a month after the premiere when World War II began. Because the film didn't turn a profit until the 1949 rerelease, later authors dubbed it unsuccessful, and to this day, that misconception is wrongly reported as fact. Some of that flop scenario is tied to the film becoming an annual tradition on American television in the late 1950s. That makes for more dynamic copy for articles and books that incorrectly claim the film was a flop until it was rescued by TV.

*The Wizard of Oz* was nominated for five Academy Awards (\* winner):

- Best Picture (winner: *Gone with the Wind*)
- \*Music (Song)—“Over the Rainbow,” Harold Arlen and E. Y. Harburg
- \*Music (Original Score)—Herbert Stothart
- Best Art Direction (winner: *Gone with the Wind*)
- Best Special Effects (winner: *The Rains Came*)—this one is especially puzzling considering what they achieved on *The Wizard of Oz*, including the realistic tornado

Garland received a special Juvenile Oscar for her performances on film in 1939 (both *The Wizard of Oz* and *Babes in Arms*). Newsreel footage shows Mickey Rooney presenting the award to Garland at the February 29, 1940, ceremony at the Coconut Grove in the Ambassador Hotel.

Director Victor Fleming won the Best Director Oscar for *Gone with the Wind*. If he hadn't been nominated for that film, he might have been nominated for *The Wizard of Oz*. The year 1939 was incredible for the movies, considered by most the best year for classic films, topped off by the mega-hit *Gone with the*



MGM trade ad as published in the *Film Daily* magazine on August 2, 1939. From the author's collection.

*Wind*. There were more than enough great films to go around. However, it's a bit puzzling that *Oz* wasn't nominated in some of the other categories, such as Sound Recording, Film Editing, or Color Cinematography.

Due to its legendary status, there have been many misconceptions and urban legends surrounding *The Wizard of Oz*. They're perpetuated today in poorly researched clickbait articles on the Internet, equally poor magazine articles, and even some "legitimate" books. The following explains some of the most persistent and incorrect urban legends.

### SHIRLEY TEMPLE AS DOROTHY

A common misconception about this casting is that MGM and/or the producers initially wanted Shirley Temple from 20th Century Fox to play Dorothy. That misconception is understandable. Temple was the number one box office star, and she was the right age, judging from the illustrations in the original books (Baum's book doesn't give Dorothy's age). The legend of Temple missing out on the role and Garland getting it as a second choice was accepted as fact for so long that in 1974's *That's Entertainment!*, the dialog Garland's daughter Liza Minnelli provided as part of the narration about her mother also told this story. It's not true. Everyone wanted Garland. The film's producer, Mervyn LeRoy, later reported that studio head Louis B. Mayer had no problem with Garland playing the role.<sup>3</sup> The role was written for Garland, as were the songs. Freed's early casting outline from January 1938 lists Dorothy as "an orphan in Kansas who sings jazz." That definitely wasn't Temple. Roger Edens went to Fox to meet Temple to test her out, musically speaking. He came back and reported that while she was charming, she wasn't up to the intended vocal demands of the role. It's also safe to assume that Fox had no intention of lending their biggest box office star to MGM for an extended production schedule. On February 28, 1938, columnist Louella Parsons reported, "Judy Garland to Play Dorothy in Metro's 'Wizard of Oz' Film."<sup>4</sup>

### THE HANGING MUNCHKIN

When the home media market began in the early 1980s, the prints of the film made available on videotape and early LaserDiscs were faded and slightly fuzzy, similar to what had been broadcast on TV over the previous decades. Viewers mistakenly thought that some of the movement in the background of the scenes in the Tin Man's Forest were people rather than what they really were: exotic birds. This error morphed into the legend that a Munchkin actor hanged himself while a scene was being shot, and it was mistakenly left in the film. Another version claims this incident happened on the Munchkinland set, while yet another version claims it happened right behind the Wicked Witch while she's on top of the roof of the Tin Man's cottage threatening Dorothy and her companions. The legend has persisted over the past several decades.

*The Wizard of Oz* was filmed on closed sets because it was more costly and tricky to shoot than most films. Everything was accounted for, and it makes no logical sense that a random little person would find their way onto the set during a day of filming to hang themselves.

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**OZ**

READY! SET! GO!—This industry is talking about nothing else but the greatness of M-G-M's "THE WIZARD OF OZ". The preview confirmed advance reports that it is one of the biggest box-office sensations of all time. 400 happy theatres are about to play it in the largest simultaneous booking of film history. M.G.M. has set the stage. The American public is waiting!

**\$250,000 CAMPAIGN!**

**NATIONAL MAGAZINES**  
Full-page, full color ads

MAGAZINE	ON SALE	MAGAZINE	ON SALE
WOMAN'S HOME COMPANION	Aug. 9	GOOD HOUSEKEEPING	Aug. 22
LADY'S HOME JOURNAL	Aug. 9	FAMILY	Aug. 22
AMERICAN	Aug. 9	LIBERTY	Aug. 22
LIBERTY	Aug. 1	LIBERTY	Aug. 22

**JUVENILE MAGAZINES**  
Full-page, 2-color ads

MAGAZINE	ON SALE	MAGAZINE	ON SALE
AMERICAN BOY	Aug. 22	AMERICAN BOY	Aug. 22
BOY LIFE	Aug. 22	BOY LIFE	Aug. 22

**FAN MAGAZINES**  
2-color, 2-page spreads

MAGAZINE	ON SALE	MAGAZINE	ON SALE
SCREEN BOOK	Aug. 1	SCREEN BOOK	Aug. 1
HOLLYWOOD	Aug. 1	HOLLYWOOD	Aug. 1
MOVIE PICTURE	Aug. 1	MOVIE PICTURE	Aug. 1
MOVIE STORY	Aug. 1	MOVIE STORY	Aug. 1

**COMIC SUPPLEMENT ADS**  
Full-page 4-color ads (just like the funnies) in 29 newspaper in 21 cities!

CITY	NEWSPAPER	DATE	CITY	NEWSPAPER	DATE	CITY	NEWSPAPER	DATE
ALBANY	Tribune	Aug. 22	INDIANAPOLIS	Star	Aug. 22	INDIANAPOLIS	Star	Aug. 22
ALBANY	Tribune	Aug. 22	INDIANAPOLIS	Star	Aug. 22	INDIANAPOLIS	Star	Aug. 22
ALBANY	Tribune	Aug. 22	INDIANAPOLIS	Star	Aug. 22	INDIANAPOLIS	Star	Aug. 22

**NATION-WIDE TEASER ADS**  
100-line insertions have been running for months in 99 newspapers in 43 cities radiating national coverage

**RECORD PUBLICITY RESULTS**  
Never such a barrage of pre-release publicity as that which greets "The Wizard of Oz"! Just a fraction of it listed below!

Most of publications mentioned hereunder will be on sale during July, August or September. List incomplete.

**COGNAC**: Story in the August issue, entitled "Hollywood Discoveries in Never-Gone-By," by Florence Ryan and Edgar Allan Wood; illustrated by stills from the production.

**GOOD HOUSEKEEPING**: General production story by Lew Hils, illustrated by production stills. "The Wizard of Oz."

**LIFE**: Two-page spread in color, using one production still, one still shot July 27th. "Dancing Ballerina. Marie M.G.M.'s Color Version of 'The Wizard of Oz'."

**VOGUE**: Full color page, using one of our lead-actresses.

**RED BOOK**: Has selected THE WIZARD OF OZ as "Favorite of the Month"; will use a layout of lead-actresses from the production.

**COUNTRY GENTLEMAN**: Stills of Judy Garland and Billie Burke from the production.

**LOOSE**: Layout.

**GLAMOUR**: Layout and stills.

**McCALL'S**: Layout.

**NEWSPAPERS**: out of town, which use ROTOGRAFORE. Full page layout.

**TRIBUNAL OPEN ROAD FOR BOYS**: INSTRUCTOR.

**GRADY TRUCKER**: SCHOLASTIC.

**BOY LIFE**: ANTHONY.

**BOY PARENTS**: Story material and layouts by August and September issues.

**NORTH AMERICAN NEWSPAPER ALLIANCE** (covering 100 newspapers, including 50 large metropolitan dailies): Victor Fleming life story installment with art, to be published simultaneously with our play dates.

**BOY LIFE**: Layout "Miracle of the Month."

**FANCY PUBLICATIONS**: including HOLLYWOOD, MOTION PICTURE, SCREEN BOOK, MOVIE STORY: Layouts and production stills.

**PHOTOPLAY**: Several pages of layout and a production story by Dave Wilson. "The Wizard of Oz."

**PICTURE PLAY**: Double-page layout.

**MOVIE MIRROR**: "Of All a Dream!"

**SCREEN GUIDE**: Double page layout in color, using one lead-actress.

**MODERN SCREEN**: Layout.

**SCREEN ROMANCES**: August issue and September issue.

**SCREENPLAY**: Layouts "Judy's Crashes" by May Sloan.

**SILVER SCREEN**: Layouts "Miracle of Makeup."

**MODERN MOVIE**: Production story and layout.

**MOVIE LIFE**: Cover and the story of Judy Garland.

**TOWN AND COUNTRY**: Layout.

**FID**: Layouts "The Top Ten—Why."

**HOLLYWOOD**: On "The Wizard of Oz" set.

**FAMILY CIRCLE**: "The Wizard of Oz"—Dudley Earl.

**MOVIES**: "Hollywood leads the Wizard."

**SUNDAY MORNING** (N.Y.): Magazine Section. Front Cover, August 20, 1939.

M-G-M's Technicolor Wonder Show "THE WIZARD OF OZ" with Judy Garland - Frank Morgan - Ray Bolger - Bert Lahr - Jack Haley - Billie Burke - Margaret Hamilton - Charley Grapewin and The Munchkins. A VICTOR REXING Production - Screen Play by Noel Langley, Florence Ryan and Edgar Allan Wood - Music and Lyrics by Harold Arlen and E. Y. Harburg - From the Book by L. Frank Baum - Directed by Victor Fleming - Produced by MERVYN LLOYD

MGM trade ad published in the *Film Daily* trade magazine, August 11, 1939. From the author's collection.

little people at night in butterfly nets and that one little man asked her out. She said that when she politely replied that her mother wouldn't like it, he allegedly said, "Aw, come on, bring your ma, too!"<sup>8</sup> At the time that she told these stories, everyone knew she was embellishing.

These stories have been blown out of proportion. It didn't help that before and during the decades after the production, little people were the butt of insensitive and offensive jokes and harassment due to their size. There were most likely isolated incidents, as there would be with any large group assembled like this and staying at the same hotel for an extended time. "Work hard, play hard." But the image of little people running around Los Angeles like something out of a Looney Tunes cartoon or a scene in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* isn't a fair one. The little people worked just as hard as everyone else on the production, getting to the studio in the early morning hours to endure hours of being made up and costumed for long six-day workweeks. There wasn't much time for the kind of mischief that's been attributed to them.

One aspect of the film that's not an urban legend was Garland's charm and the respect she earned from the cast and crew. In a 1977 interview, Margaret Hamilton (best known as the Wicked Witch) said, "Once we started to work with her, we realized there was something special about her. . . . No one impressed me quite as much as Judy did those first days. She had those

marvelous, expressive eyes, and there was a whole feeling of wonder in that little face. Her enthusiasm was contagious.” She talked about the film’s enduring popularity, citing as an example the famous deletion of “The Jitterbug” number prior to the film’s release: “I remember when they cut a scene because it included a jitterbug dance that they feared might date the movie. I asked them how long they expected it to play,” she recalls. “When they said, ‘about 10 years,’ I said, ‘you’re crazy!’”<sup>9</sup>

Immediately after her work on *The Wizard of Oz* was completed, MGM sent Garland on a short promotional trip to New York, with Ethel and Edens among the entourage, back to the Loew’s State Theatre in Times Square, where she had triumphed the year before. They arrived on March 31, and Garland appeared on local radio, notably on the CBS Radio show *Tune-Up Time* on April 6, in which she sang “F. D. R. Jones,” “Sweet Sixteen,” and “It Had to Be You.” Another guest on that radio show was Kay Thompson, who became Garland’s closest female friend in just a few years when she joined the famous Freed Unit at MGM in the mid-1940s. Her influence on Garland’s life, especially her later singing style, was monumental. She was so close to Garland that she was chosen to be godmother to Garland’s first child, Liza Minnelli, who later cared for Thompson in her final years.

True to form for MGM, Garland didn’t appear just at Loew’s State; they had her make as many appearances as possible. On April 8, Garland amusingly attended a convention of twins at the Loew’s Ziegfeld Theatre, where she reviewed a “parade of doubles.”<sup>10</sup> Garland took part in the New York Easter Parade on April 9, riding in a carriage with future Broadway legend Mary Martin. Nine years later, the famous annual event became linked to Garland thanks to her smash hit, the 1948 MGM musical *Easter Parade*, costarring Fred Astaire. Prior to her opening night at Loew’s, Garland made a whirlwind of appearances at the Loew’s theatres in the New York area over two nights.

- April 10: Yonkers at 7:45 p.m., Orpheum at 8:45 p.m., Triboro at 9:25 p.m., Valencia at 10 p.m.<sup>11</sup>
- April 11: Jersey City at 8:30 p.m., 175th Street at 9:30 p.m., Paradise at 10 p.m.<sup>12</sup>

Due to the appearance times given and taking into account the time to travel, Garland’s appearances at the theatres weren’t stage shows; rather, she was meeting and greeting her fans. The local papers reported that when Garland appeared at “a Jersey theatre,” she was “forced to appear in the lobby at the demand of her fans.”<sup>13</sup>

On April 13, Garland opened at Loew’s State in Times Square, again with her name in lights bigger than the theatre’s marquee. This time, she was accompanied by Joe Venuti, “The Swing King,” and His Orchestra and a vaudeville show featuring Don Darcy, Barrett Deems, Chick Robertson, the Gaudsmith Brothers (who did the poodle act that they also performed in the Garland/Gene Kelly musical *The Pirate* in 1948), and Stafford & Louise (“Outstanding American Dance Stylists”), plus “international comedians” and “a program of sophisticated jazz.” The



Garland as Dorothy makes a lovely cover for the August 1939 issue of the fan magazine *Movie Life*. From the author's collection.

featured film was the MGM version of Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, starring "America's Favorite Boy!" Mickey Rooney.<sup>14</sup> Incidentally, that was the film that director Norman Taurog left *The Wizard of Oz* to direct. Taurog was the original director of *Oz* (before Richard Thorpe) but left the project before any shooting began, knowing he wasn't the right director for it.

Garland's Loew's engagement lasted for a week, ending on April 19, and was another big success. Walter Winchell noted in his column that Garland took "the box office record at Loew's State away from [boxer] Jack Dempsey."<sup>15</sup> Another notable New York appearance for Garland was at the Press Photographers' tenth annual ball, held on April 14 in the grand ballroom of the Astor Hotel in New York City. The Astor later played a pivotal part in the plot of Garland's dramatic debut in *The Clock* (1945).

It was during this New York trip that Garland had one of her early crushes on an older man when she met composer, pianist, and wit Oscar Levant. As was her way, Garland obsessively

showered him with phone calls, letters, and copies of her poems. At this point in her life, Garland had a pattern of roller coaster crushes, almost always with older men. Levant was attracted to her but kept the relationship platonic, probably because he harbored love for starlet June Gale. Garland's intensity of affection prompted Gale to stop resisting Levant's marriage proposals and marry him. Levant also had an addiction to prescription medicine and later quipped that if he had married Garland, "she would have given birth to a sleeping pill."<sup>16</sup> In the late 1940s, Levant had a brief career at MGM and would have been one of Garland's costars in *The Barkleys of Broadway* had she been able to complete the film.

On the way home from New York, Garland and her entourage stopped for an engagement in Cleveland, Ohio. On April 21, she sang the national anthem at the opening game of the Cleveland Indians baseball team. She was photographed at the game with the team's owner, Alva Bradley, manager Oscar Vitt, and Cleveland mayor Harold Burton. The local paper featured a photo of Garland at the game wearing a traditional Native American headdress, which must



"Where or When"—Garland and Mickey Rooney in *Babes in Arms* (1939). From the author's collection.

have been placed there for the photo op, as other photos show her in normal clothing for the game.

Garland returned to MGM on April 30 and went directly into rehearsals for her next film, *Babes in Arms*, costarring Mickey Rooney. This was their third film together and the first of what became a subgenre of the movie musical, the “Let’s Put on a Show!” teen musical. Arthur Freed, the uncredited associate producer on *The Wizard of Oz*, chose the 1937 Rodgers and Hart musical *Babes in Arms* for his first film as a full-fledged producer. The stage version had a similar plotline to the film—about teenagers in a small town who put on a show to avoid being sent to a work farm when their show business parents go out on the road. The main difference is that in the stage version, the parents are never seen. Freed wanted to change that and make the plot more sentimental. “I want to . . . have the vaudevillians show that time has passed them by and that they couldn’t catch up. . . . That’s why in the last scene when [Rooney] gets his big chance at success, I want him to send right away for his father.”<sup>17</sup>

Freed and Edens decided that most of the songs from the stage version were too “adult” for teens Garland and Rooney, so they removed “My Funny Valentine,” “The Lady Is a Tramp,” “Johnny One Note,” and “I Wish I Were in Love Again.” The latter three were later featured in the 1948 MGM musical biopic about Rodgers and Hart, *Words and Music*, and performed by Lena Horne, Garland, and Garland and Rooney, respectively. One of the new songs added to *Babes in Arms* was written by Freed and his usual collaborator Nacio Herb Brown, “Good Morning,” sung as a duet by Garland and Rooney in the opening of the film. Their unique chemistry is magical and immediately lets the audience know that the film they’re about to see is special. It was later performed to great effect by Gene Kelly, Debbie Reynolds, and Donald O’Connor in 1952’s *Singin’ in the Rain*. An older Freed song was dusted off and added, “I Cried for You,” written in 1923; it became another one of Garland’s best film vocals and on-screen ballads. She performs the song similarly to “(Dear Mr. Gable) You Made Me Love You”; however, this time, she sings to a photo of Rooney rather than Clark Gable. The dialog break in the song includes lines like “I know I’m no glamour girl like Baby . . . like her! And maybe someday you’ll realize that glamour isn’t the only thing in this world. You can’t eat glamour for breakfast . . . I might be pretty good-looking myself when I grow out of this ugly duckling phase . . . time is a great healer.” The lines are melodramatic corn, but Garland had a natural ability to make even the corniest of dialog completely normal, believable, and impactful, as she would prove time and again.

*Babes in Arms* was also the first MGM film directed by Busby Berkeley. Freed hired Berkeley for a one-picture deal (for the time being) from Warner Bros., where he had phenomenal success reinventing the early movie musical with his kaleidoscopic and extravagant musical numbers, beginning with 1933’s *42nd Street*. Berkeley was a taskmaster and tough on performers. It didn’t help that he suffered from alcoholism, which fueled his erratic and abusive behavior. He became especially tough on Garland. He felt that her eyes were her best feature and would scream at her, “Eyes! Eyes! I want to see your eyes!” while working her, Rooney, and everyone else to exhaustion

Page 86 is not included in this sample

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her confidence (most likely driven by Ethel) that she would continue to succeed at MGM. Located at 1231 Stone Canyon Road and designed by architect Wallace Neff, the 5,513-square-foot home was built on just under three acres of land. Mabel, the mother of Jackie Cooper, Garland's friend, designed the interior. Garland lived in it with Ethel until her marriage to David Rose in 1941 and sold it on March 21, 1943. MGM used this setting to its advantage, taking photos of Garland on the grounds, tending the garden, and posing in various rooms, including a music room where she played records.

Although MGM promoted Garland doing "homey" things at her new home, like tending a garden or listening to records, the reality is that she rarely had time for any of these activities. It was all part of the studio's intense promotional campaign, which ramped up in the months ahead of the premieres of *The Wizard of Oz* and *Babes in Arms*. According to MGM, Garland, despite her talent, fame, and money, was just another teenager with many crushes and ambitions. Depending on which newspaper or magazine article was being read, Garland wanted to be everything from a doctor to a lawyer to a veterinarian. Articles provided to columnists by MGM and/or allegedly written by an author instead of MGM's publicity department quote Garland saying things like claiming that the best way to learn to sing outside of having a teacher was through records: "For all ambitious beginners phonograph records are invaluable. They offer the world's greatest singing stars in all fields of music as teachers."<sup>19</sup> Another amusing article, published in late 1939 and attributed to author Mayme Ober Peak, titled "Judy Garland Builds Home of Her Dreams," purported to be a personal tour of the new home with Garland. "I want to show you MY room," Garland allegedly said. "My goodness, did I have to fight to get it like I wanted it! They thought I ought to have a French room or a room with a four-poster bed and a canopy. But I don't like pinks and blues and ruffled things. I'm not the ruffle type. I like everything tailored."<sup>20</sup>

Another Garland-related address featured in newspapers and fan magazines at this time was 5421 Wilshire Blvd., in Los Angeles. This was the site of "Judy Garland Flowers." MGM sent out several publicity photos and stories about the shop allegedly owned and run by Garland. Photos showed her serving customers, including her sisters and director George Sidney. Most of the photos were taken in December 1938, and at least one was part of the official promotional set of photos for *The Wizard of Oz*; the promotional text on the back of that photo reads, "WIZARD OF OZ' . . . was not the only activity that kept Judy Garland busy, for the young Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer star is the owner of her own flower shop, 'Judy Garland Flowers Inc.'" The studio promoted the shop as something Garland would help run during her time off. The truth is that aside from these photo sessions, Garland didn't spend much time at the shop because she was too busy at the studio and with her many other obligations.

Over her birthday weekend, Garland and some of her peers at MGM were invited to Mayer's beach house to celebrate. Garland was filmed having fun with "the gang," including Rooney, Ann Rutherford, and Jackie Cooper. She's seen cutting a huge birthday cake, with Mayer hovering like a proud father. Because MGM had been shaving a year from Garland's birth date



Label of the Decca Records 78-rpm-release of “Over the Rainbow” from the 1940 album of songs from the film. From the author’s collection.

in publicity for so long, the voiceover on the newsreel and the text in various newspaper articles and fan magazines incorrectly reported that it was Judy’s “Sweet Sixteen” birthday. Cooper later said that the whole day was scripted. The teens were told what to do and where to do it, all for the cameras. They never had any real time to themselves.

On June 29, 1939, the NBC Radio show *Maxwell House Coffee Time—Good News* devoted its entire show to *The Wizard of Oz*. The episode pretends to go behind the scenes of the making of the film. It featured the premiere public performance and first radio performance of “Over the Rainbow” by Garland. It’s also the only known recording in which Garland publicly flubbed the lyrics to the song. Garland’s costars Ray Bolger and Bert Lahr, the *Good News* musical director Meredith Willson, and the film’s songwriters E. Y. Harburg and Harold Arlen joined Garland on the show. Arlen accompanied Garland on piano for her “Over the Rainbow” debut. As if this wasn’t enough of an obligation, Garland was busy at MGM filming parts of the title number for *Babes in Arms* before the show and after. The partial nighttime shoot began at 1:00 p.m. and ended at 10:00 p.m. The assistant director’s notes state, “Judy Garland worked on Good News

program between 4:00 p.m. and 6:30 p.m.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, Garland was sweet Patsy Barton in *Babes in Arms* for half the day, then she scurried over to the NBC Radio studios and played a fictionalized version of herself learning “Over the Rainbow,” and then it was back to MGM and Patsy Barton. While she was at NBC Radio, director Busby Berkeley used her stand-in for the shot in the film that ends the “Babes in Arms” number. It’s laughingly obvious that it’s not Garland. It’s most likely that audience members of the time noticed the switch since they would have seen it blown up on a huge movie screen and probably got a kick out of it. Spotting gaffes in films goes back to cinema’s early years when lip readers would get a laugh “reading” what silent film actors were really saying to each other.

Garland began a new one-year contract with Decca Records on July 15, 1939. Ethel signed the contract as “Judy Garland by Ethel M. Garland” because Garland was still a minor. Ethel had been using the last name Garland since she and Frank had begun using it in 1935, although neither she nor Garland had legally changed their names. The new contract called for twelve songs to be recorded within the year, for which Garland would be paid a royalty advance of \$250 per completed song. She recorded seventeen songs. Her royalty rate was as follows: if



### **They're Tired, but Also Happy—**

*Oscar A. Doob suggests the reader be not misled by the woeful expressions of Joe Vogel, center, and Harry Shaw, extreme right. He says they really are very happy, but tired in this picture which was made after Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland jammed 'em into Loew houses in New Haven, Hartford and Bridgeport. During it all, Vogel, as in Washington, and Shaw served as ushers, bodyguards, pacifiers and utility men at large. At the left is Les Peterson, studio representative. He is making the tour with the two youngsters.*

The August 1939 Judy Garland–Mickey Rooney promotional tour was chronicled by the *Box Office* trade magazine.  
From the author’s collection.

Garland had a song on both sides of a single, she would receive two cents for each single (78 rpm) sold in the United States and Canada and 10 percent of the wholesale price in other countries; if Garland had only one song on one side of a single, she would get one cent per disc sold in the United States and Canada. She was also paid 50 percent of whatever Decca was paid for public performances or broadcasting. As far as what Judy would record, the contract states, “The Artist agrees to record such selections as Decca may choose within the Artist’s repertoire.”

On July 28 and 29, Garland recorded eight songs under the new Decca contract, including her first studio recording of “Over the Rainbow.” It was released in September 1939 on Decca single number 2672 with “The Jitterbug” on the B-side and peaked at the number 5 spot on the Billboard charts.

Two of the four songs recorded on July 29—“Zing! Went the Strings of My Heart” (another Garland studio first) and “Fascinating Rhythm”—remained unreleased in the United States until they were included on the 1943 compilation album *Judy Garland Second Souvenir Album*. “I’m Just Wild about Harry” was released only on Decca’s Brunswick label in England and Australia in the spring of 1940. It was not released in the United States until 1984, when it was included on the MCA Records LP *Judy Garland—From the Decca Vaults*. The fourth song, “Swanee,” was rejected, and no copy has survived. Garland rerecorded it on October 16, 1939.

### GARLAND AND ROONEY GO ON TOUR

Garland completed her work on *Babes in Arms* on August 2, 1939. Four days later, on August 6, 1939, she and Rooney left Los Angeles by train for Washington, DC, where they kicked off a quick tour of a few cities in the Northeastern United States, culminating in the New York premiere of *The Wizard of Oz* on August 17 at the Capitol Theatre. The duo’s entourage included MGM publicity executive Les Patterson, “orchestra leader” Georgie Stoll, music arranger Roger Edens, and Garland and Rooney’s mothers.



**HINTS ON NEWSPAPER ADVERTISING**  
 No. 63—“The Wizard of Oz” (Metro)  
 Behind some of the ads on “The Wizard of Oz” which do not appear in the postcard, although a few do.  
 One reason why some of the boldface ads are shown here is because they present an angle on how the boys are selling the second words.  
 “Oz” is doing a swell kid’s business, and where it has been having trouble, it is a question of getting the adults in. We think, therefore, that the adult angles should be emphasized.  
 We like the Philadelphia spring day ad, and we like the billboard ad from Boston.  
 Make certain that this one’s sold entirely as a kid’s picture, as it is more than that.

Some examples of MGM’s advertisement artwork are shown in the September 6, 1939, edition of *The Exhibitor* trade magazine. From the author’s collection.

Loew Notes: *Lester Isaacs, chief projectionist, has been in New Orleans trying out the new double track sound device for "Wizard of Oz" . . .*

The tour went as follows:

**August 9, 1939:** Garland and Rooney met with teens who won contests to meet the duo at a reception at the Willard Hotel, Washington, DC. According to one article, Garland and Rooney had only ten minutes to eat before meeting with the guests.

**August 10, 1939:** The entourage arrived in Bridgeport, Connecticut. They drove to New Haven, Connecticut, where the duo was given a reception in their honor at the Hotel Taft. On the following morning (August 11), they were driven to Hartford, Connecticut. Also on this day, the *Film Daily* trade magazine published an early review of *The Wizard of Oz* with the headline "Handsomely Mounted Fairy Story in Technicolor Should Click Solidly at the Box Office," referring to the film as "a corking achievement all the way through."

**August 11, 1939:** The duo performed at the Loew's Poli Theatre in Hartford, Connecticut. They gave four shows this day between showings of *Lady of the Tropics* starring Hedy Lamarr and Robert Taylor. They had arrived that morning from their appearance and overnight stay at the Taft Hotel in New Haven just an hour before their first scheduled show at 10:30 a.m.

**August 12, 1939:** The entourage returned to Bridgeport, Connecticut, where the duo performed and then spent Sunday, August 13, at the Long Island home of Mr. and Mrs. Nicholas Schenck before heading to New York.

**August 14, 1939:** The entourage, accompanied by Loew's New York executive Joseph



**Judy, Mickey, the Capitol and "Oz"—**

*Master Mickey Rooney and the young Miss Garland at one of the many parties, all with an eye to the press, arranged in connection with their appearance at the Capitol and the run of "The Wizard of Oz." To the right is an off-angle, roof shot of the line that created a policing headache on the opening day.*

The *Box Office* trade magazine noted the New York premiere of *The Wizard of Oz* as well as a new "double track" soundtrack for the film, August 26, 1939. From the author's collection.

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MGM promotional picture, 1939. From the author's collection.

chatting with New York's Mayor LaGuardia.

**August 30, 1939:** The last day of appearances for Garland and Rooney at the Capitol Theatre. Rooney had to go back to MGM in California. Later that night, the duo appeared at Madison Square Garden for the Harvest Moon Ball dance competition. Some footage of the duo sitting in the audience after performing (but no actual performance video) has been released on various *Oz* home media releases.

**August 31, 1939:** Ray Bolger and Bert Lahr joined Garland in the show at the Capitol Theatre. For this new show, Garland added "F. D. R. Jones" and "Blue Evening" to the lineup. The engagement ended a week later, on September 6, when Garland returned to MGM.

An amusing incident occurred at the beginning of the tour in Washington, DC. The duo's appearance violated the District of Columbia's child labor laws, which stated that girls under the age of eighteen could not work on stage between 7:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. The transgression was noted in the papers with headlines such as "Judy Garland Causes a Row" and "Judy's Show Brings Charges."

The lines went around the block when Garland and Rooney opened at the Capitol in conjunction with the New York premiere of *The Wizard of Oz* on August 17. As was the case at every stop on their tour, the duo triumphed. The *Hartford Courant* noted that fifteen thousand people showed up to see Garland and Rooney at the local Loew's Poli Theatre. MGM representatives and theatre owners around the country had been busy with promotional events that included newspaper coloring contests, look-alike contests, and ticket giveaways. In Atlanta, Georgia, there was an *Oz* character dress-alike contest, with prizes of \$20 each going to the best Dorothy, Scarecrow, and Tin Woodman; \$8 to the second best of the three; \$5 to the third best. A local clothing store in Appleton, Wisconsin, gave away free tickets to the film with each purchase of a "Judy Garland" dress. At most of the stops on the duo's tour, local contests were awarding a lunch or meet and greet for local teens with Garland and Rooney. In the New York

area, one local high school boy and girl were chosen to represent each Loew's theatre. The lucky teen couples got to take part in the reception luncheon for Garland and Rooney at the Empire Room in the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York on August 16.

Up to this point, the teen market had been largely untapped by the movie studios. However, with the recent successes of Deanna Durbin at Universal, Rooney in the Andy Hardy films, and Bonita Granville in the Nancy Drew films, it was clear that child stars didn't need to be little children like Shirley Temple to be very lucrative for the film studios. Garland and Rooney proved to be the era's most popular movie teen duo.

When Garland returned to California in early September 1939, MGM gave her a bonus of \$10,600 for her efforts on the tour. For all of her *Oz*-related work, the promotion, and the tour, Garland received a total of just \$30,749.98.<sup>23</sup> She (and the rest of the cast) never received any royalties for the film, but, as Ray Bolger noted in an interview in the 1970s, they received a "kind of immortality" with *The Wizard of Oz*. To date, one doesn't need to know a thing about Judy Garland to know who she was due to her now iconic (in the true sense of the word) image as Dorothy and her timeless rendition of "Over the Rainbow" as performed in the film. All one has to do is say, "She was Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*," and there is instant recognition. Almost a century after *The Wizard of Oz* was first released, its imagery, music, and dialog remain a part of the American (and the greater English-speaking world's) lexicon. It's one of the few films to come out of Hollywood that can truly be called timeless.

*Babes in Arms* had its world premiere at Grauman's Chinese Theatre in Hollywood on October 10, 1939. The star-studded event was highlighted by Garland placing her hand and footprints in cement in the forecourt. She was the seventy-fourth star to receive this honor. As if anyone needed proof, this was the sign that she was now a true movie star. The film was a hit



Garland puts her hand and footprints in the forecourt of Grauman's Chinese Theatre on October 10, 1939, assisted by Mickey Rooney and a Grauman's staff member. *Photofest*.



MGM promotional portrait, 1939. From the author's collection.

and eclipsed *Oz* at the box office and in initial popularity. It spawned a series of Garland/Rooney "Let's Put on a Show!" musicals, all produced by Freed, that lasted as late as 1943's *Girl Crazy* (the last of the series). Rooney even received an Oscar nomination for Best Actor. Garland was relegated to the honorary award category as the recipient of a "juvenile" miniature Oscar for her work in 1939 in *The Wizard of Oz* and *Babes in Arms*. She was also one of only two women to make the top ten box office list, the other being Bette Davis.

For the rest of 1939 and into early 1940, Garland enjoyed a period of relative inactivity. She had been working almost non-stop for the past eighteen months, and this lull must have been a welcome respite. Her only major activity from September 1939 through early February 1940 was a recording session for Decca Records on October 16 and a return to her weekly appearances on the NBC Radio show *The Pepsodent Show Starring Bob Hope*. December saw a few person-

al appearances due to the holiday season, including attending the opening of the Arrowhead Springs Hotel in Palm Springs, California, which was broadcast over the radio. She sang “Comes Love.” On December 22, Garland and Rooney participated in a Christmas party/show at the Los Angeles Coliseum. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, Garland was introduced by Santa Claus and sang “Silent Night.” Also on the bill was the latest iteration of the Meglin Kiddies troupe, as noted in that same *Times* article: “Singing, dancing, comic and acrobatic groups of children from Ethel Meglin studios next held the spotlight on the large outdoor stage.” Just a few years prior, Garland would have been one of those nameless children; now she was one of the top stars supported by the group. It’s not a big stretch of the imagination to think that Ethel Meglin might have told the children backstage, “See Judy Garland? She was part of our group; now look at her. You, too, can become a big star if you work hard enough.”

Garland was also hitting the nightclub circuit and dating older men, which didn’t make MGM very happy. Staying out until the early morning was the opposite of MGM’s carefully crafted image of her as America’s Sweetheart. One news blurb reported, “Judy Garland is going for the gay life in a big way. You can view her these evenings up to 2 or 3 a.m. in local night haunts,” noting that MGM “protested” her actions. Garland is quoted as saying, “It’s not in my contract when I have to go to bed. And until I have another picture to make, I’ll go to bed when I like.”<sup>24</sup>

One appearance in December 1939 received some press and is an early example of Garland’s lifelong passion and charity toward ailing and special needs children. On December 2, 1939, Garland and her sister Sue visited a young girl in the Santa Ana, California, hospital. According to the papers, the girl, Natalie Norris, was recuperating from “a major operation” (the details of the operation were not given). Her condition was critical for several days, and at one point she had a “nightmare of delirium” in which she thought she was Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*. Her doctor thought a call from Judy would help her recovery. An in-person visit was arranged, and Garland gifted the girl a set of photos (two signed by Garland as Dorothy), a doll, some books, and a personal performance of “Over the Rainbow.” The story was picked up by several columnists, complete with a photo of Garland and her sister outside the hospital, and was



Red-haired Judy Garland, left, contemplates a picture of eight-year-old Natalie Norris, as she and her sister, Sue, right, paid a visit to St. Joseph hospital with Mrs. Philip Norris, center, mother of the stricken child Natalie. In her arms Judy holds a bouquet that had been presented to her by Natalie, who is recovering from a major operation at the hospital. Earlier in her illness Natalie had babbled of “Dorothy”, central figure in “The Wizard of Oz,” played by Miss Garland, and Judy had promised to call on the sick girl. A 16-cylinder limousine brought the visitors to the hospital.

Garland and her sister Sue (Mary Jane) pose with Mrs. Philip Norris while visiting Natalie Norris in the hospital, December 1939. From the author’s collection.



Jackie Cooper escorts Garland out on the town, probably taking her to a rendezvous with Artie Shaw, circa early 1940. From the collection of Michael Siewert.

mentioned as late as early 1940. The *Oz* publicity photos that Garland gave to the girl are the only known surviving *Oz* promotional photos that Garland signed as Dorothy.

### **ARTIE SHAW**

The lull in activity at this time gave Garland time to obsess over her latest romantic crush: musician and bandleader Artie Shaw. They first met in New York in 1938 when Garland was on her personal appearance tour. Later, during the filming of *The Wizard of Oz*, on February 10, 1939, Garland attended Shaw's opening at the Palomar nightclub in Hollywood. In the middle of his performance, Shaw collapsed. He was being treated for a recent strep throat infection with sulfanilamide. It turned out he was allergic to sulfa-based medicines. He was hospitalized, and it was then discovered that he had the blood disease agranulocytosis. Garland insisted on visiting him in the hospital multiple times. He woke up to see her face staring at him: "That absolutely marvelous little face, with

Pages 98 - 406 is not included in this sample