

GOODSPEED MUSICALS

AUDIENCE INSIGHTS

CHASING RAINBOWS

The Road to Oz
A NEW MUSICAL





MICHAEL GENNARO
Executive Director

MICHAEL P. PRICE
Founding Director

presents

CHASING RAINBOWS

Book by
MARC ACITO

Conceived by
TINA MARIE CASAMENTO LIBBY

Musical Adaptation by
DAVID LIBBY

Scenic Design by
KRISTEN ROBINSON

Costume Design by
ELIZABETH CAITLIN WARD

Lighting Design by
KEN BILLINGTON

Wig & Hair Design by
MARK ADAM RAMPMEYER

Creative Consultant/Historian
JOHN FRICKE

Assistant Music Director
WILLIAM J. THOMAS

Arrangements and Original
Orchestrations by
DAVID LIBBY

Orchestrations by
DAN DeLANGE

Sound Design by
JAY HILTON

Production Manager
R. GLEN GRUSMARK

Production Stage Manager
BRADLEY G. SPACHMAN

Casting by
STUART HOWARD & PAUL HARDT

Associate Producer
BOB ALWINE

Line Producer
DONNA LYNN COOPER HILTON

General Manager
RACHEL J. TISCHLER

Music Direction by
MICHAEL O'FLAHERTY

Choreographed by
CHRIS BAILEY

Directed by
TYNE RAFAELI

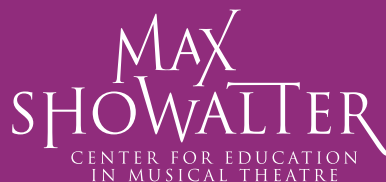
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THE GOODSPEED

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Ruby Rakos as Judy Garland and Michael Wartella as Mickey Rooney. ©Diane Sobolewski.

On a sound stage in 1938, wardrobe puts the final touches on an adolescent Judy Garland for the thirteenth screen test of the day. Judy sports a tall, blonde wig, curly-toed shoes, and many layers of petticoats. Though the production team criticizes her appearance, Judy finds solace in her father's presence.

Flashback to a movie theater in Grand Rapids, Minnesota in 1928 where Frank Gumm cheerily reads his wife Ethel and daughters Mary Jane, Virginia, and Frances "Baby" Gumm to leave Grand Rapids. The Gumms depart with a police escort, though none of the girls know why, and head west for Hollywood. Days of traveling later, the Gumms arrive in Antelope Valley,

California—a far, three-hour cry from Los Angeles where Frank has purchased another movie theater. Finally alone, Ethel and Frank discuss their untimely departure from Grand Rapids, revealing that Frank was caught with another man, causing scandal in their previous home.

Several years later, Frank Gumm says goodnight to his thirteen-year-old daughter, Frances. In the morning, she, her mother, and her sisters will move to Hollywood, while Frank stays in Antelope Valley to run the movie theater even though the business suffers in the wake of the Great Depression. In another private moment between Ethel and Frank, she reveals that he once again caused a scandal that forces them to move. The next morning, Ethel, Mary Jane, Virginia, and Frances head to Hollywood to audition as a sister act with "Baby" Frances in the lead.

On Frances's first day at The Hollywood Professional Children's School, she meets her teacher Ma Lawlor. The classroom is full of child-stars-to-be, including Carl "Alfalfa" Switzer, Judy Turner (later Lana Turner), Joe Yule (later Mickey Rooney), and Shirley Temple. Ethel explains to Ma that Frances intends to be in the movies as soon as she "gets out of this ugly duckling phase." Judy Turner makes a snide remark, and without missing a beat, Joe Yule tells her off. Ethel turns Frances over to Ma along with pills prescribed to help Frances concentrate. Frances approaches Joe to thank him for defending her, and the two immediately hit it off. Frances continues to audition with Ethel at the piano. She sings for Paramount, RKO, and Warners only to be told that she does not suit Hollywood; her voice is too big for her young age.

At home, Judy finds a write-up of the Chicago World's Fair in *Variety*, and the girls once again pack their bags to pursue a career in show business. In Chicago, the Gumm Sisters perform for an audience of one at Café Mexico. Luckily, their audience member tips them off to an opening on the bill at the Oriental Theater across the fairgrounds. The Gumm women race over to the new venue just in time to see George Jessel perform. Unable to help herself, Frances sings along in the wings. Jessel hears her voice, and he brings her out on stage. When he asks her name, he mishears "Gumm" for "glum" and decides that she needs a new name. He lands on "Garland," because it reminds him of Christmas and weddings. Then he invites her, "Miss Garland," to join him in singing the song "Judy."

When Ethel and the girls return home, they are greeted joyously by their father Frank, relocated from Antelope Valley. Joe Yule—now MGM actor Mickey Rooney—calls to invite Frances—now Judy Garland—to a studio party. At the party, Mickey points out Ida "Kay" Koverman, Louis B. Mayer's personal secretary and the first person to impress at Metro. Next he introduces Roger Edens, who leads the band at the party. Roger invites Judy to sing, and she charms the whole room with her big voice.

SHOW SYNOPSIS (CONTINUED)



Ruby Rakos as Judy Garland and
Michael Wartella as Mickey Rooney.
©Diane Sobolewski.

Later in L.B. Mayer's office, Roger and Kay try to convince Mayer that Judy is "the girl next door" the average person wants to see in movies. Mayer, unable to understand the appeal of the ordinary, maintains that Judy is not right for his studio, but Kay assures Roger with one line: "Just leave it all to me." At home, Ethel and Frank argue again, but Judy stops them when Ida Koverman calls to discuss Judy's contract at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. When Judy and her parents arrive at the gates of MGM, they spot stars such as Jean Harlow, Buddy Ebsen, and Judy's favorite actor, Clark Gable. As the tour ends, Kay ushers Judy to meet her new vocal coach, Roger Edens. Later in the studio two makeup artists aggressively

prepare Judy for the big screen. They discuss changes they will make to her appearance to befit Hollywood movies, particularly ways for her to lose weight.

At home, Judy prepares for her first national radio broadcast. As soon as she leaves the house, Frank collapses. Kay joins Judy at the radio station to tell her that Frank is ill. She assures Judy that he will be fine and that he is at the doctor's office with the radio on to listen to her sing. Judy appears on Hollywood Harry's show, singing "Zing! Went the Strings of my Heart" for her father, who passes away from meningitis listening to his youngest daughter sing on national radio.

At Metro, Kay and Roger enter Mayer's office to convince him to find a role for Judy. However, Mayer prefers the traditional beauty of girls like Edna Mae Durbin, an operatic soprano at MGM around Judy's age. Mayer instructs Kay to "get rid of the fat one," and Judy overhears. Roger assures her that she is not fired and that she is meant for show business.

Later, at Clark Gable's birthday party, Kay reveals that she ended Edna Mae Durbin's MGM contract rather than Judy Garland's. Kay cues Roger, and he introduces Judy Garland to the stage. As she performs, Mayer becomes more and more enamored with her. Kay suggests that Mayer produce a live-action version of Frank L. Baum's The Wonderful Wizard of Oz as a vehicle for Judy. Mayer comes around to the idea for the movie—but he wants a star to carry it. At the premiere of Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, L.B. Mayer announces that MGM will produce *The Wizard of Oz* starring none other than Shirley Temple from Fox Studios. Later in the MGM commissary, Judy and Mickey share a laugh as Kay enters with a gift: a pair of ruby red slippers. Clark Gable refused to be loaned out to Fox in exchange for Shirley Temple, and Mayer finally relents, which allows Judy to star in the film. Judy visits the wardrobe department again, and the designer tells her to lose more weight. L.B. Mayer suggests increasing her diet pill dosage. Despite Ethel's claims that the pills make Judy jittery, Mayer insists they are safe. The pre-production process is overwhelming for Judy, and the costume crew continually makes changes to her appearance. The makeup artist suggests sleeping pills to help with her insomnia.

Suddenly, it is 1938 again, and Judy is doing her thirteenth screen test for *The Wizard of Oz* in the same tall, blonde wig, curly-toed shoes, and many layers of petticoats from the first scene. This time, though, her father is absent. She sings "Over the Rainbow" for the camera only to learn it may be cut from the film entirely. Unable to keep quiet at this news, Judy rips off the wig, revealing her natural hair, and removes the petticoats, exclaiming the truth about Dorothy; she is an average girl in an average place who dreams of more, not a girl who wears her hair in curlers all day. After a moment of consideration, Louis B. Mayer fires the director and sets the production on course to be the classic *The Wizard of Oz*.

FRANCES GUMM (JUDY GARLAND): The youngest of the Gumm sisters who later became the famous Judy Garland. She is a performer hoping to make it in the movies.

FRANK GUMM: Father of the three Gumm sisters and husband to Ethel. Frank owns and operates movie theaters, but his scandalous personal life causes strife in his family.

ETHEL GUMM: Mother of the three Gumm sisters and wife to Frank. Ethel is determined that her daughter Frances will succeed in show business.

MARY JANE GUMM: Frances Gumm's eldest sister and part of the Gumm Sisters act.

VIRGINIA GUMM: The middle Gumm sister and part of the Gumm Sisters act.

BILL GILMORE: The Gumms' neighbor in Antelope Valley, California. Bill Gilmore is very close with Ethel Gumm.

LAURA GILMORE: Bill Gilmore's wife who is confined to a wheelchair. Laura is also the Gumms' neighbor in Antelope Valley.

MA LAWLOR: Frances's teacher at the Hollywood Professional Children's School.

JOE YULE (MICKEY ROONEY): Frances's best friend and fellow MGM actor.

JUDY TURNER (LANA TURNER): One of Frances's classmates at Ma Lawlor's who also signed with MGM.

JIM: A film distributor who delivers reels to Frank's movie theater in Antelope Valley.

GEORGE JESSEL: A vaudeville and movie actor of the early 20th century. Jessel coins Frances's stage name, "Judy Garland."

L.B. MAYER: The head of MGM and the highest-paid man in America. He is very manipulative and always gets his way.

EDNA MAE DURBIN (DEANNA DURBIN): A young singer and actress close in age to Judy Garland who is a classically-trained soprano. She and Judy compete for opportunities in Hollywood.

CLARK GABLE: One of the most famous actors of classic Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer films, most notably the actor who portrayed "Rhett Butler" in *Gone with the Wind*. Also, Judy Garland's favorite actor.

BUDDY EBSEN: The actor who was originally cast as the Scarecrow in *The Wizard of Oz* and was recast as the Tin Man. Ebsen did not appear in the movie at all, as he had a serious allergic reaction to the pure aluminum powder used as face makeup for his Tin Man costume.

GALE SONDERGAARD: The actress who portrayed the original Wicked Witch of the West in *The Wizard of Oz*.

IDA "KAY" KOVERMAN: Louis B. Mayer's personal secretary at MGM and Judy's champion.

ROGER EDENS: Judy's vocal coach and music arranger at MGM and surrogate father.

Ruby Rakos as Judy Garland. ©Diane Sobolewski.





Marc Acito

MARC ACITO (*Book*) was born on January 11, 1966 in Bayonne, New Jersey. Upon graduating from Westfield High School, Acito enrolled in the musical theatre program at Carnegie Mellon, though he left before graduating. He ultimately completed his degree in Drama with minors in Music and Art at Colorado College in 1990. Acito performed in opera for ten years, mostly in supporting roles, before turning to writing in his early thirties.

Prior to writing for the theatre, Marc Acito was a novelist and a journalist. His novel How I Paid for College: A Novel of Sex, Theft, Friendship and Musical Theatre won the Oregon Book Awards' 2005 Ken Kesey Award for Best Novel, was voted a "Teens Top Ten" by the American Library Association, and was named a *NY Times* Editors' Choice. He adapted How I Paid for College... for the stage in 2012, and the sequel to the novel, Attack of the Theater People, was published in 2008. For four years, Acito's column "The Gospel According to Marc" was self-syndicated to at least eighteen newspapers across the country, and his essays have been published in *The New York Times*, *Portland Monthly*, and on NPR's *All Things Considered*. He is a regular contributor to *Playbill*, and he teaches Story Structure at New York University.

Acito's career continues with successes in the theater. His play *Birds of a Feather* won the Helen Hayes Award for Best New Play in 2012. Also in 2012, his recent Broadway show *Allegiance – A New Musical Inspired by a True Story* starring Lea Salonga and George Takei won the Craig Noel Award for Outstanding New Musical. Recent projects include a concert adaptation of Lerner & Loewe's *Paint Your Wagon* (1951); a new play, *Relativity*, based on the relationship between Albert Einstein and Marian Anderson; and the book for the musical adaptation of E.M. Forester's *A Room with a View*, which premiered in Seattle in 2014. Marc Acito was the first writer to receive two National Alliance for Musical Theatre (NAMT) grants in a single year.

On his varied career from performance to writing, Acito remarked in an interview, "I gave [performing] my best shot. But since being a writer suits me so well, I'm glad it worked out that way. And the skills I learned as a performer serve me well, not only as a writer, but simply in the way I interact with the world."

TINA MARIE CASAMENTO LIBBY (*Concept*) boasts a theater career that spans from directing to performing to teaching. Casamento's directing credits include off-Broadway productions of *Oklahoma!* at the Village Light Opera Group and *The Fantasticks* at Gallery Players, in addition to many partnerships with Infinity Theatre Company. She has performed in National Broadway Tours of *Victor/Victoria* and *Kiss Me, Kate*, as well as a Las Vegas production of *Beauty and the Beast* and regional productions of *Into the Woods* and *Falsettos*. A New York resident, Casamento is one of the top vocal coaches for musical theatre artists, Assistant Casting Director for a number of national tours, and worked with the National Foundation for the Advancement of the Arts for several years.

DAVID LIBBY (*Music Adaptation*) is a music director, composer, and arranger for musical theatre, recording artists, and film. He has music directed productions such as *Shadow Sparrow* at the National Musical Theater Conference at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, *That Other Woman's Child* and *Madame Infamy* at the New York Musical Festival, *The Fantasticks* at Gallery Players, *Little Mary* at the Not for Broadway Festival, and a number of shows at Infinity Theatre Company. Libby has composed scores for short films and other media projects such as Greg Pak's *Mister Green*, named Best Short Film at the SciFi London Film Festival in 2010.



Tina Marie Casamento Libby



David Libby



The Wizard of Oz wardrobe fitting

Judy Garland



Frank and Baby as "Tramps"

Before *Meet Me in St. Louis*, *Easter Parade*, *A Star is Born*, and *Judgment at Nuremberg*. Before *Judy* at Carnegie Hall, at The Palace, at The Palladium. Before the top-rated TV specials and the acclaimed television series. Before the charting singles and record albums and the hundreds of national radio appearances. Before the Tony, Grammy, and special “Oscar” awards, the Golden Globes, the Emmy and Academy Award nominations. Before she was billed—and unequivocally endorsed—as “Miss Show Business” and the “World’s Greatest Entertainer”...

Before all of that, she was simply (if magically) “the little girl with the great big voice.”

She was Judy Garland, and *Chasing Rainbows* is Goodspeed’s unique new musical that tells her life story across those early vaudeville-to-Hollywood years. Conceived by Tina Maria Casamento Libby, the show imaginatively recreates Judy’s world from 1927 to 1938, following her from age five to sixteen. It was the era in which she traversed a show business path that led from her beginnings as an unknown to her status as a theatrical wunderkind, to her passage through the gates of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, and to that iconic role as “Dorothy Gale...from Kansas” in the classic 1939 film version of *The Wizard of Oz*.

Because she was Judy Garland, that pre-Oz period was as fraught with excitement, laughter, drama, and song as all that followed. She debuted on stage at thirty months: Baby Frances Ethel Gumm of Grand Rapids, Minnesota, performing solo and with her two older sisters—and all of them trained by an ambitious mother and doting father. Soon thereafter, the Gumm Family forsook the Midwest for Southern California, and “Baby Gumm’s” increasing series of theater performances with her sisters on the West Coast were augmented by appearances on local radio and in short movie musicals.

From the onset, Baby was the trio’s stand-out. Even then, critics responded to her God-given, prodigious talent, charisma, communicative power, and overwhelming desire to please. The reviews between the late-1920s and the mid-1930s cite her “remarkable work” and her “pip of a low-down voice”—“with twice the charm and genuine ability of all the [movie child stars] put together.” The universal summation was always the same: “Her singing and dancing literally stopped the show.”

Initial Hollywood interest in The Gumm Sisters seldom went beyond the talking stage, but everything changed when the oldest sibling got married and broke up the act. In short order, then-thirteen-year-old Baby was touted on her own. As a result, the intense determination of her mother finally paid off, and MGM signed the recently-renamed Judy Garland to a long-term pact.

All of this is related in *Chasing Rainbows*, incorporating the cast of real-life characters with whom she interacted: Mickey Rooney, Shirley Temple, Clark Gable, Lana Turner, Deanna Durbin, George Jessel, and Louis B. Mayer among them. Most importantly, the emotionally true script by Marc Acito embraces the behind-the-scenes events that formed and focused Judy Garland: the approbation from her peers and audiences, the initial rejections by corporate Hollywood, the executives who derided her as “not pretty enough” for the movies, the dream-come-true of an MGM contract, and—predominantly—her parents’ troubled marriage and her own desire to succeed...simply in the hope that her achievement and income would stabilize her family.

Best of all, the narrative of *Chasing Rainbows* is happily, frequently interspersed with the classic American popular songs so intrinsic to that time and to the very foundation of Judy Garland’s saga: “Over the Rainbow,” “Dear Mr. Gable: You Made Me Love You,” “Zing! Went the Strings of My Heart,” “Broadway Rhythm,” “I’m Always Chasing Rainbows,” “I Can’t Give You Anything But Love,” and a dozen more. The musical numbers have been evocatively arranged by David Libby.

It’s now safe to say that Judy Garland’s accomplishments and her hold on the imaginations, emotions, and hearts of cross-generational audiences remain unsurpassed—and seldom, if ever, equaled. In song and story, *Chasing Rainbows* recounts her adventures on the road to Oz, and how she became and remains a timeless, cherished, and undeniable entertainment legend.



The Gumm sisters: Mary Jane, Virginia and Frances (Judy Garland).



Frances "Baby" Gumm (aka Judy Garland) circa 1931



Judy's parents Ethel and Frank Gumm

The following was transcribed from a conversation between Goodspeed Musicals' Executive Director Michael Gennaro and show collaborators Tina Marie Casamento, Marc Acito, and David Libby about the process of creating and developing the story of *Chasing Rainbows*.

GENNARO: *Chasing Rainbows* is the story of Judy Garland and her family up until she is cast in *The Wizard of Oz*. All the music, much of which Judy sang herself, is from that period but used in new ways. Personally, I come at Judy Garland differently than most people do. My father was a dancer/choreographer, and while he worked on *The Judy Garland Show* in the sixties, I spent time with her. Shortly thereafter I saw her at the Palace Theatre in New York. To end the show, this incredible, small woman sat on the edge of the stage and sang "Somewhere Over the Rainbow." To this day it is seared into my memory. So, this show came to me through that filter. I read the script; I listened to the music. And I said, "This is something we should do." After speaking with Tina Marie, I realized that we were coming at this from the same place.

CASAMENTO: Judy worked in vaudeville with her family, and the studios did not understand how she fit into the world of Hollywood. All she wanted was to be in pictures!

ACITO: She was the hope of that family, too. In the height of the Depression the family is near bankrupt because the father caused various scandals. They thought, "If this little girl gets a studio contract she could save her family. She could save her parents' marriage." She ends up at MGM where she is routinely bullied—Louis B. Mayer called her "my little hunchback," they put her on diet pills, they put her on sleeping pills. Yet there was this buoyant life-force in her. The first thing everyone always says about Judy is, "You have no idea how funny she was." That always goes missing in portrayals of her story.

CASAMENTO: MGM wanted Judy to be something she was not, and society wanted her beloved father Frank to be something he was not. They shared not only real DNA

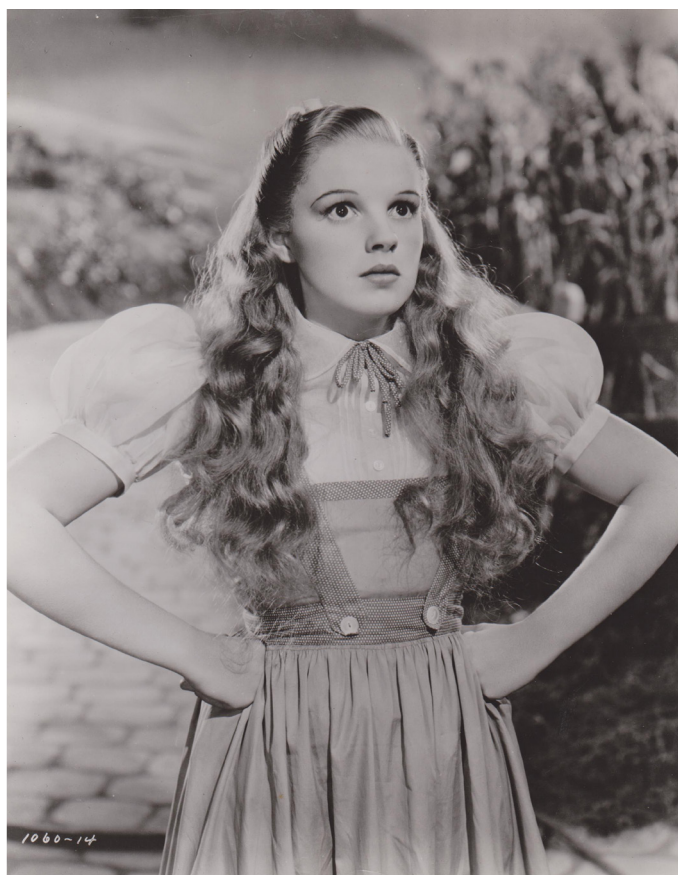
but also a psychological similarity. When I had the idea I went to my husband, David Libby. I was a singer and a performer; he has played a lot of musical theatre but comes from a jazz background. I told him this quote of Judy's: "The history of my life is in my songs." Because of that quote it was very important to me to use her songs from only the pre-Oz era. I focused on the titles and the lyrics, because the songs she sang do tell her story quite perfectly. David and I talked about the music and the emotions of the songs. We had a standing gig on Thursdays. Thursdays were *Chasing Rainbows* days.

LIBBY: I wanted to balance the familiar with something new. So we did what Marc refers to as "the modular furniture approach" to writing a musical. We have access to so much music through this catalog that we can take the verse from one song and pop it into a different song. We can write a bridge for a song that needs one. It has been a very creative endeavor, but my approach has been: "Do not mess with the melody." That is the tune everybody knows. Everything else up for grabs: harmony, rhythm, rhythmic feel, accompaniment, texture. That is what we have used primarily to create tone that matches the moment in the story.

ACITO: I heard instantly that David was creating a relationship between the real world and the reel world. The performance numbers are done in the traditional style, but the "offstage" songs, the book numbers integrated into the story, have much more contemporary musical theatre language. It is about the relationship between these two things, and it's proven to be a really fascinating connection.

Can I talk about my connection to Judy? My very first memory of death was in 1969. My father turned to me and said, "Do you remember that girl who played Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*?" I had just seen it for the first time; I was obsessed. I had the album and everything. I said, "Yeah!" And he said, "She's dead." Thus began a lifelong connection between the notion of going over the rainbow and dying. I was alone in this association, but I had a near-death experience as a child, and it was hard to

DEVELOPING CHASING RAINBOWS (CONTINUED)



Judy Garland during the initial filming of *The Wizard of Oz* (with a blonde wig and a pink dress!).

articulate. I came back even more obsessed with *The Wizard of Oz*. I would draw pictures. I read the books. At the age of nine I bought all of the same biographies that Tina Marie was reading in Virginia. I was reading them in New Jersey.

CASAMENTO: At the same time!

ACITO: We were both learning really good vocabulary words like

ACITO & CASAMENTO: Barbiturate, amphetamine...

ACITO: So when Tina Marie and I met, she had been pitching this idea, and a lot

of people were scratching their heads on it. She started talking to me, and I was like, "Stop! I get it! I don't have to do any research, and I completely understand this music and this story the way you do."

CASAMENTO: We also wanted to stop it with a rainbow, because Judy getting this role was such an up moment. Why do we need to rehash everything that happened afterwards, which does not define this woman who is so beloved? She had a strong sense of survival and heart and, my God, that girl was such a natural actress. When you read her biographies you understand all the battles she had to go through to achieve that goal.

ACITO: The thing that convinced me I could write it was the metaphor of the rainbow: that rainbows don't last but neither does the rain. This is a story that actually looks behind the rainbow and looks at the cloud.

There's a very wonderful Goodspeed connection with this, as well. Two years ago the three of us came up here during the snow storm, and we were at the Mercer

Colony. That was the weekend the three of us really became a team.

CASAMENTO: David steps in as the composer element. We all write lyrics and work on the music in a very integrated way. The arrangements are all part of the storytelling process. I got the music rights from this publishing company because I pitched, "Yes, it's about Judy Garland, but we want to meet these other characters from her life." I talked about her father, Frank Gumm, who was a closeted gay man in the 1930s. They were kicked out of their town, and he built a movie theater up from scratch. They would be kicked out again, and he would build another one. "I'm Always Chasing Rainbows" has this lyric: "At the end of the rainbow is happiness/To find it how often I've tried/But my life is a race/Just a wild goose chase/And my dreams have all been denied/Why have I always been a failure?/What can the reason be?/I wonder if my life's to blame/I wonder if it could be me." To me that lyric was about this gay man in the 1930s who had a family he loved and did not know how to fit in. That was the germ of Judy and Frank's relationship; he was the love of her life and her biggest influence.

I also knew once I got the rights to this that I needed somebody to keep the Oz fans and the Judy fans happy. To keep us honest, in a sense. I went to John Fricke.

ACITO: John is the leading authority on Judy Garland and *The Wizard of Oz*.

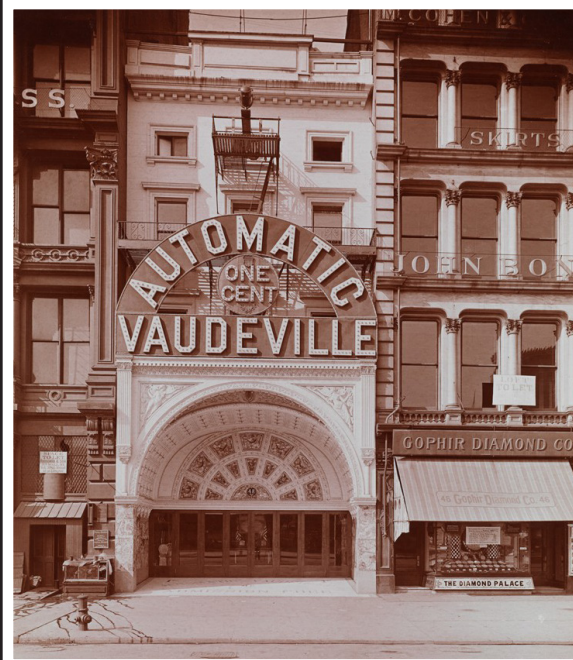
CASAMENTO: After explaining how I wanted to do "I'm Always Chasing Rainbows," he understood that this was not a catalog musical of a character named Judy singing all of her greatest hits. He got it. So John Fricke, who we lovingly call "Frickepedia" because he basically knows everything about Judy Garland, is our historian and creative consultant.

VAUDEVILLE, NICKELODEON, AND HOLLYWOOD



Marcus Loew

Since the early days of silent film production, there has been a two-way flow of talent and expertise between vaudeville and film. Vaudeville, the “common-man’s entertainment,” came first and has a history dating back to the early 1880s, over time developing regional and national circuits for professional and amateur performers. The shows were modular and made up of individual, stand-alone acts cleverly arranged by the theater house’s producer to keep the audience engaged for the right amount of time. Each act was quick, punchy, and well-rehearsed. Many vaudeville performers spent their entire careers perfecting a single act that would be their trademark. As film began to gain traction as an industry in the 1920s, many vaudeville producers saw an opportunity to diversify even further. One such producer was Marcus Loew.



The Automatic Vaudeville Company

Marcus Loew was born and raised on New York City’s Lower East Side by a poor Polish immigrant family. He left school at a young age and worked his way up in the fur trading business. Through personal connections and savvy business strategies—and after filing for bankruptcy following his first solo venture at age nineteen—he managed to grow his business into a profitable one. In 1903, one of Loew’s competitors in the fur trade, Adolph Zukor, founded the Automatic Vaudeville Company. This new company managed storefront penny arcades consisting of coin-operated machines that allowed individual viewers to

watch the earliest “moving pictures,” most of which starred vaudeville performers and their trademark acts, for just a penny. Noting his friendly competitor’s success, Loew invested in Zukor’s company and learned about the burgeoning film industry. The next year, Loew branched out to begin his own penny arcade venture, the People’s Vaudeville Company.

Under the People’s Vaudeville Company, Loew purchased a number of storefronts in New York City and converted them to penny arcades. His New York operation secure, Loew expanded west to Cincinnati, Ohio. While on a business trip in Cincinnati, Loew visited a theater in Kentucky with a variation on the penny arcade: one room devoted to individual penny machines and a separate room for public showings of longer features at the price of five cents. The “nickelodeon” was the first movie house of the early 1900s—a precursor to the movie houses of Frank Gumm’s generation. Loew brought this new feature back to New York City and his original penny arcade, purchasing a screen and projector for the upstairs room and setting up 110 chairs for viewing. The nickelodeon attracted five thousand visitors on the first day alone. Eventually Loew saw the opportunity to further hybridize his shows by dispersing live vaudeville acts between film showings to keep the audience’s interest, averaging between five and seven performances a day. By 1907 he had purchased an old vaudeville house in Brooklyn, renamed it the “Royal,” and programmed a regular schedule alternating film screenings and vaudeville acts. Loew was not the only movie house proprietor to adopt this model. In fact, the Gumm Sisters started out by performing their sister act between film features at Frank Gumm’s movie house in their hometown of Grand Rapids, Minnesota in the mid-twenties.

After several years successfully operating under this hybrid model, Loew branched out once again, this time taking control of operations and booking for William Morris’s vaudeville circuit. Now he had direct access to vaudeville performers through his own company rather than working through a booking agent. Predictably, his company continued to grow and acquire theaters across the country. Like Loew, his former partner and close friend Adolph Zukor continued to succeed in the industry as well as stay one step ahead of Loew conceptually. While Loew enjoyed the opportunities afforded by the William Morris circuit, Zukor formed his own film production company called Famous Players. He then merged Famous Players with the

GLOSSARY:

Vertical Integration: In the world of cinema, a vertically integrated film company produces, distributes and exhibits their own films.

Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Company and a small production and distribution company called Paramount Pictures to form the Famous Players-Lasky Corporation.

Zukor's was the first company to **vertically integrate** production with direct distribution the way the classic Hollywood studios would operate into the 1950s. While this type of savvy operation proved rewarding for companies large enough to do so, it hurt proprietors of small movie houses and distribution companies, like Frank Gumm and his distributor Jim, as the prices for reels were higher for theaters outside of the big studios' domains. Learning from his competitor's successes, and wanting to avoid falling the way of Mr. Gumm and other small theater owners, Loew acquired Metro Pictures in 1920 in order to produce and distribute his own movies for his own theaters. In 1924, Loew merged Metro Pictures with Goldwyn Pictures and Louis B. Mayer Productions to create the iconic Hollywood studio, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

Throughout the duration of its life, MGM and other Hollywood studios like it would borrow and steal from vaudeville—concepts and talent alike. In 1912 in the earlier days of film production, Mack Sennett of Keystone Studios hired a number of vaudeville performers for his early comedies, including Charlie Chaplin. When Sennett hired Chaplin, who had been a relatively unsuccessful live performer with the Karno Troupe, he became an overnight sensation, and vaudevillians followed him to film by the score. Arthur Freed, who produced the majority of MGM's classic musical comedies, also got his start in vaudeville by writing musical material for the Marx Brothers. Even the likes of Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, and Gene Kelly had their formative performance experiences in vaudeville houses.

While many performers of the early Hollywood era got their starts in vaudeville, film was the medium capable of bringing them to stardom. Vaudeville's model inherently offered opportunity to a variety of performers, with modular line-ups involving artists of different genres from dance and music to magic and freak-show acts. Without it, later media industries—radio, television, and film—would not have flourished with talents like Mickey Rooney, Shirley Temple, and, of course, Judy Garland. However, there is less room at the top in film than there was in vaudeville. Film, to some extent, has always relied on singular star power and name recognition for box office performance, whereas the variety of appearances was the allure of vaudeville. As child talents like Rooney, Temple, and Garland became more valuable commodities in film, vaudeville slowly died off and gave way to movie houses in the wake of the Great Depression. Film studios ultimately dominated the talent pool and completely redefined the entertainment industry.



Mickey Rooney, Judy Garland, and L.B. Mayer

THE REAL CHARACTERS OF JUDY GARLAND'S HOLLYWOOD



Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney in *Love Finds Andy Hardy* (1938).

MICKEY ROONEY's relationship with Judy Garland dates all the way back to when they were named "Joe Yule" and "Frances Gumm," respectively. They met in Hollywood at Ma Lawlor's Professional School when they were child performers fresh off the vaudeville circuit auditioning for movie studios. Joe and Frances had much in common: both had been professional performers since they were at least two years old, they were a match for wits, and both children had contributed substantially to their families' incomes since infancy. By adolescence, both Rooney and Garland were the primary breadwinners of their households, a common burden for child stars of the Great Depression era.

When both actors signed contracts at MGM their friendship solidified, and they were best friends through their studio years and into adulthood. Their first movie together was *Thoroughbreds Don't Cry* in 1937, followed by *Love Finds Andy Hardy* in 1938. Their first blockbuster musical together was *Babes in Arms* in 1939, which ignited a long on- and off-screen partnership between the two talents. Building on the success of *Babes in Arms* to promote Judy's starring role in *The Wizard of Oz*, Mickey and Judy toured the country together making live appearances to attract audiences. Toward the end of Judy Garland's career, when she launched *The Judy Garland Show* in 1963, she insisted that Mickey Rooney be the first guest on the pilot episode; it was a rousing success. In the late sixties, Rooney called Garland with a plan to open "The Mickey and Judy Schools of Musical Comedy" across the country, training aspiring young performers to dance, act, and sing the way they had their whole lives. By this time,

however, Judy Garland's addiction and health had worsened, and, though Rooney attempted to bring her back to California just days earlier, she passed away before any of their plans came to fruition. Rooney's relationship with Garland warranted two whole chapters and countless anecdotes in his 1991 autobiography, *Life's Too Short*.

DEANNA DURBIN, originally Edna Mae Durbin, was a Canadian singer and movie actress of the 1930s and '40s. She and Judy Garland were pitted against each other from the start, both girls contracted by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer the same year and cast alongside each other in a short film that served as their joint screen test, *Every Sunday*. Edna Mae was a legitimate opera soprano, and MGM contracted her to play Mme Schumann-Heink as a child in a movie about the opera star's life. Unfortunately, the movie was canceled upon Schumann-Heink's passing, and Edna Mae was left on an MGM contract without a project. Thus came the idea to create a short for her and Judy Garland, juxtaposing the operatic Edna Mae and jazzy vocals of Judy. There is much debate surrounding Durbin's exit from MGM. Some reports say L.B. Mayer vaguely instructed his secretary Ida "Kay" Koverman to "get rid of the fat one," and Koverman mistook his meaning, firing Durbin instead of the intended Garland. Other reports say Koverman intentionally defied Mayer in letting Durbin go over Garland. Still others assert that Mayer intended to fire Durbin and retain Garland all along. Regardless of which story may be true, Durbin left MGM, and Universal Pictures immediately signed her to their roster of stars, changed her name from "Edna Mae" to "Deanna," and cast her in a new film. Ironically, the role at Universal was originally intended for Judy Garland, but she was unavailable to take the contract due to her filming schedule at MGM. Deanna and Judy both made regular radio appearances on Eddie Cantor and Al Jolson's shows, respectively, throughout their early careers. Durbin, while the most successful woman in show business at the height of her career, retired at age twenty-nine in 1949 and withdrew from public life. She married producer-director Charles Henri David in 1950 and moved to France where she passed away in 2013.



Judy Garland, Mickey Rooney and Deanna Durbin



CLICK HERE to watch a scene from *Love Finds Andy Hardy* with Judy, Mickey and Lana Turner

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F6pv8dg076M>



Judy Garland and Roger Edens

ROGER EDENS was at once Judy Garland's vocal coach, composer and arranger, and surrogate father. A southerner with roots in Texas and Virginia, Edens arrived in Hollywood by way of Broadway with his close friend and collaborator, Ethel Merman. Prior to Edens, Merman's accompanist and vocal arranger was a man named Al Siegal. One evening in 1930 in New York, Siegal suffered a heart attack on stage during a performance with Merman. Roger Edens played in the pit that night with the Red Nichols

Orchestra. Realizing the situation, Edens jumped out of the pit onto the stage and filled in for Siegal for the remainder of the performance. This was the beginning of his friendship with Ethel Merman. When Merman decided to make the move to Hollywood, Edens followed her. Shortly after his cross-continent move, Edens met Arthur Freed of MGM studios. A Broadway

producer had contacted Freed to get his daughter an audition for MGM. Freed obliged, but when the producer called after the girl's audition, Freed responded: "Your daughter's nice, but I want to hire the piano player." This was the beginning of MGM's Arthur Freed Unit; the group of composers, arrangers, and producers who would be responsible for MGM's most successful movie musicals with Roger Edens at

the epicenter for 20 years. Once Edens became Judy Garland's vocal coach, he also mentored her personally as she navigated the film industry. He prepared her voice and her wardrobe for tours and appearances, and he wrote special material for her live and film performances. In the wake of her father's untimely death and her strained relationship with her mother, Roger Edens stepped into Judy Garland's life as a mentor and role model into adulthood.

While **CLARK GABLE's** personal interaction with Judy Garland was relatively minimal, his influence on her was quite profound. Gable began his career as a stage actor and did not appear in movies until he signed a contract with MGM at thirty years old in 1931. He won the Academy Award for Best Actor in 1934 for his portrayal of Peter Warne in *It Happened One Night*, though his best-known role was Rhett Butler in *Gone with the Wind* in 1939. Gable was one of the most consistent box office performers in history, and the American Film Institute named him the seventh-greatest male star of classic American cinema. Clark Gable was Judy Garland's favorite actor, and she was always taken with him when she encountered him on the Metro lot. Knowing her affinity for Gable, Roger Edens wrote a bit for Judy to perform at his birthday party, ♪ "**Dear Mr. Gable/You Made Me Love You.**" As depicted in *Chasing Rainbows*, this performance was the turning point for her relationship with L.B. Mayer and for her MGM career. Later, Gable gifted Garland a charm bracelet, though many say this was a stunt staged by Metro as a display of camaraderie and admiration between their actors.



Judy Garland and Clark Gable

SCIENCE FINDS, INDUSTRY APPLIES, MAN CONFORMS



As a young girl, Judy Garland and her sisters sang and danced in a vaudeville act as *The Gumm Sisters*. Their performance at the Chicago World's Fair in 1934 was a significant turning point in Judy's career. Read more about the Chicago World's Fair Century of Progress Exposition and its impact on industry and vaudeville below.

Designed with this motto in mind, the Chicago World's Fair Century of Progress Exposition of 1933 was an international exhibition showcasing culture and technology from all over the globe. Through connections in Congress, the organizers of the Fair—brothers Rufus C. and Charles G. Dawes—invited foreign governments to participate in cultural displays to introduce fairgoers to their countries' customs and traditions. Chicago residents and visitors from around

the country could experience the world by touring the fairgrounds or through articles and stories told in the media, such as the article Frances Gumm discovers in an edition of *Variety* in *Chasing Rainbows*. President Franklin D. Roosevelt remarked that the fair came "at a time when the world need[ed] nothing so much as a better

mutual understanding of the peoples of the earth." The true attractions, however, were the technology and industry displays.

The Dawes brothers sought to uplift the average American who was pessimistic in the darkest years of the Great Depression. The World's Fair was an opportunity to inspire citizens toward progress, consumerism, and national optimism. Displays of futuristic model homes equipped with modern appliances such as dishwashers and air conditioning forecasted easier living conditions. Even car companies such as Ford and General Motors had exhibits dedicated to their companies; GM's building sported a fully-functioning assembly line that educated observers on the process of building a car from start to finish. By allowing fairgoers to glimpse into a future of ease and household luxury and to better understand the coming technological advances, Fair organizers hoped to provide an optimistic view of what was to come.

In addition to fixed displays, the Century of Progress Exposition was a coveted performance opportunity for amateur and professional artists across the nation. Sally Rand's perhaps infamous fan dance was a popular event, but the World's Fair also offered attractions such as an Enchanted Isle for children, freak shows, and vaudeville acts—such as the Gumm Sisters and George Jessel—to entertain guests. All throughout the Fair, public spaces were used as performance spaces and stages, infusing entertainment into the fairgoer's experience. For example, Frances Gumm and her sisters likely performed for passersby on the boardwalk that overlooked a quiet lagoon built specifically for the World's Fair. In *Chasing Rainbows*, the sisters also perform in the international part of the exposition, with shows in both Café Mexico and the Oriental Theater.

The 1933 Chicago World's Fair was so successful that President Roosevelt encouraged the Dawes brothers to reopen the Fair in 1934. They did, and by the time it closed nearly forty million people had visited the Century of Progress Exposition.



CLICK HERE to watch a technicolor short about the Chicago World's Fair

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QGfRgU4cPrY>



The Ford building at the Chicago World's Fair

- Marc Acito discovered musical theatre at a visual arts camp when he was nine years old. He wandered into a musical theatre class and has been studying it ever since.
- During a stretch in late the 1930s, Deanna Durbin's films grossed seventeen percent of Universal Studio's overall revenue. It was rumored that her films alone saved Universal from bankruptcy, though this has never been proven.
- MGM and most other major Hollywood studios habitually rewrote the lives of their stars. The studios had images in mind for each of their actors, and they published fabricated biographies for publicity purposes. Judy Garland, Mickey Rooney, Shirley Temple, and Deanna Durbin all confirmed that their studio biographies were falsified in later interviews and autobiographies.
- Prior to becoming L.B. Mayer's personal secretary at MGM, Ida "Kay" Koverman was the confidential secretary to Herbert Hoover. She earned \$250 per week for the thirty years she worked for Mayer; she never asked for a raise, and he never offered one.
- MGM exercised great control over its biggest stars under L.B. Mayer's leadership. He controlled the stars' public images, perceived ages, diets, relationships, name changes, and physical appearances. In her late teens, Judy Garland sought refuge from living with her mother and rented an apartment with a girl friend. She was heartbroken to discover her roommate had been paid by MGM to report her every move to the studio.
- Clark Gable threatened to boycott the Atlanta premiere of *Gone with the Wind* because co-star and close friend Hattie McDaniel was not allowed to attend due to Georgia's segregation laws. He ultimately did attend the premiere but only at her insistence.
- Each of the principal cast members in *The Wizard of Oz* was a former vaudeville performer.



Ida "Kay" Koverman

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