



Directed by George Cukor
Book of musical play by Alan Jay Lerner
From a play by George Bernard Shaw
Screenplay by Alan Jay Lerner
Produced by Jack L. Warner; James C. Katz (1994 restoration)
Original Music by André Previn
Cinematography by Harry Stradling Sr.
Film Editing by William H. Ziegler
Production Design by Cecil Beaton and Gene Allen
Art Direction by Gene Allen and Cecil Beaton
Costume Design by Cecil Beaton and Michael Neuwirth
Musical play lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner
Music by Frederick Loewe
Choreography by Hermes Pan

Audrey Hepburn...Eliza Doolittle
Rex Harrison...Professor Henry Higgins
Stanley Holloway...Alfred P. Doolittle
Wilfrid Hyde-White...Colonel Hugh Pickering
Gladys Cooper...Mrs. Higgins
Jeremy Brett...Freddy Eynsford-Hill
Theodore Bikel...Zoltan Karpathy
Mona Washbourne...Mrs. Pearce
Isobel Elsom...Mrs. Eynsford-Hill
John Holland...Butler

1965 Academy Awards:

Best Picture – Jack L. Warner
Best Director – George Cukor
Best Actor in a Leading Role – Rex Harrison
Best Cinematography, Color – Harry Stradling Sr.
Best Art Direction – Set Decoration, Color –
Gene Allen, Cecil Beaton, George James Hopkins
Best Costume Design, Color – Cecil Beaton
Best Music, Scoring of Music, Adaptation or Treatment – André Previn
Best Sound – George Groves (Warner Bros. SSD)

GEORGE CUKOR (director) (July 7, 1899, New York City, New York – January 24, 1983, Los Angeles, California) had 66 director credits, among them 1981 *Rich and Famous*, 1976 *The Blue Bird*, 1975 “Love Among the Ruins”, 1972 *Travels with My Aunt*, 1969/*I Justine*, 1964 *My Fair Lady*, 1962 *The Chapman*



Report, 1960 *Let's Make Love*, 1960 *Heller in Pink Tights*, 1957 *Wild Is the Wind*, 1957 *Les Girls*, 1956 *Lust for Life*, 1956 *Bhowani Junction*, 1954 *A Star Is Born*, 1954 *It Should Happen to You*, 1953 *The Actress*, 1952 *Pat and Mike*, 1952 *The Marrying Kind*, 1950 *Born Yesterday*, 1950 *A Life of Her Own*, 1949 *Adam's Rib*, 1949 *Edward, My Son*, 1947 *A Double Life*, 1944 *Gaslight*, 1942 *Keeper of the Flame*, 1940 *The Philadelphia Story*, 1939 *The Women*, 1936 *Camille*, 1936 *Romeo and Juliet*, 1935 *Sylvia Scarlett*, 1935 *David Copperfield*, 1933 *Little Women*, 1933 *Dinner at Eight*, 1932 *Rockabye*, 1932 *A Bill of Divorcement*, 1932 *What Price Hollywood?*, 1931 *Tarnished Lady*, 1930 *The Royal Family of Broadway*, 1930 *The Virtuous Sin*, and 1930 *Grumpy*.

ANDRÉ PREVIN (April 6, 1929, Berlin, Germany) won best scoring, music, adaptation or treatment Oscars for *My Fair Lady* (1964), *Irma la Douce* (1963), *Porgy and Bess* (1959) and *Gigi* (1958). He has 46 film composer credits, among them 1975 *Rollerball*, 1974 “Jennie: Lady Randolph Churchill” (7 episodes), 1970 *The Music Lovers*, 1966 *The Fortune Cookie*, 1965 *Inside Daisy Clover*, 1964 *Kiss Me, Stupid*, 1964 *My Fair Lady*, 1964 *Dead Ringer*, 1963 *Irma la Douce*, 1962 *Two for the Seesaw*, 1962 *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, 1962 *The 4 Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, 1960 *Elmer Gantry*, 1958 *Gigi*, 1956 *The Fastest Gun Alive*, 1955 *Kismet*, 1955 *It's Always Fair Weather*, 1955 *Bad Day at Black Rock*, 1953 *Kiss Me Kate*, 1953

Small Town Girl, 1950 *Three Little Words*, 1950 *Shadow on the Wall*, 1949 *Border Incident*, and 1948 *Tenth Avenue Angel*.

HARRY STRADLING SR. (director of photography) (September 1, 1901, Newark, New Jersey – February 14, 1970, Hollywood, California) won best cinematographer Oscars for *My Fair Lady* (1964) and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1945). He has 139 cinematographer credits, some of which are 1970 *The Owl and the Pussycat*, 1970 *On a Clear Day You Can See Forever*, 1969 *Hello, Dolly!*, 1968 *Funny Girl*, 1965 *How to Murder Your Wife*, 1964 *My Fair Lady*, 1963 *Mary, Mary*, 1962 *Gypsy*, 1962 *Five Finger Exercise*, 1960 *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs*, 1959 *A Summer Place*, 1959 *The Young Philadelphians*, 1958



Auntie Mame, 1958 *Marjorie Morningstar*, 1957 *The Pajama Game*, 1957 *A Face in the Crowd*, 1956 *The Eddy Duchin Story*, 1955/I *Guys and Dolls*, 1954 *Johnny Guitar*, 1953 *A Lion Is in the Streets*, 1952 *Hans Christian Andersen*, 1952 *My Son John*, 1951 *I Want You*, 1951 *A Streetcar Named Desire*, 1951 *Valentino*, 1949 *The Barkleys of Broadway*, 1948 *Easter Parade*, 1946 *Till the Clouds Roll By*, 1945 *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 1944 *Bathing Beauty*, 1944 *Song of Russia*, 1942 *Maisie Gets Her Man*, 1942 *Mr. and Mrs. North*, 1941 *The Corsican Brothers*, 1941 *Suspicion*, 1941 *The Devil and Miss Jones*, 1940 *They Knew What They Wanted*, 1940 *My Son, My Son!*, 1938 *The Citadel*, 1938 *Pygmalion*, 1938 *The Divorce of Lady X*, 1937 *Action for Slander*, 1936 *Wer zuletzt küßt...*, 1936 *Die klugen Frauen*, 1936 *The Bread Peddler*, 1935 *Arènes joyeuses*, 1935 *Carnival in Flanders*, 1934 *La dame aux camellias*, 1934 *Le grand jeu*, 1934 *We Are Not Children*, 1933 *The Ironmaster*, 1932 *Passionnément*, 1932 *Studenten i Paris*, 1930 *Un hombre de suerte*, 1930 *Hearts and Hoofs*, 1930 *America or Bust*, 1930 *Sixteen Sweeties*, 1930 *Ride 'em Cowboy*, 1927 *The Nest*, 1925 *Wandering Fires*, 1922 *How Women Love*, 1922 *Secrets of Paris*, 1922 *Fair Lady*, 1921 *The Great Adventure*, and 1920 *The Devil's Garden*.

CECIL BEATON (Production Design) (January 14, 1904, London, England – January 18, 1980, Broadchalke, Salisbury, Wiltshire, England) won Oscars for Best Art Direction and Best Costume design for this film, and Best Costume Design for *Gigi* (1958). He has 12 costume designer credits: 1964 *My Fair Lady*, 1958 *The Doctor's Dilemma*, 1958 *Gigi*, 1957 *The Truth About Women*, 1948 *Anna Karenina*, 1947 *An Ideal Husband*, 1946 *Beware of Pity*, 1944 *On Approval*, 1942 *The Young Mr. Pitt*, 1941 *The Remarkable Mr. Kipps*, 1941 *Suicide Squadron*, and 1941 *Major Barbara*.

HERMES PAN (choreographer) (December 10, 1909, Memphis, Tennessee – September 19, 1990, Beverly Hills, California) won a Best Dance Direction Oscar for *A Damsel in Distress* (1937). Some of his other 87 titles are 1981 *Aiutami a sognare*, 1968 *Finian's Rainbow*, 1965 *The Great Race*, 1964 *My Fair Lady*, 1963 *The Pink Panther*, 1963 *Cleopatra*, 1961 *Flower Drum Song*, 1961 *The Pleasure of His Company*, 1960 *Can-Can*, 1959

The Blue Angel, 1959 *Porgy and Bess*, 1959 *Never Steal Anything Small*, 1958 *An Evening with Fred Astaire*, 1957 *Pal Joey*, 1957 *Silk Stockings*, 1956 *Meet Me in Las Vegas*, 1955 *Jupiter's Darling*, 1954 *The Student Prince*, 1953 *Kiss Me Kate*, 1953 *The Actress*, 1952 *Lovely to Look at*, 1951 *Footlight*

Varieties, 1950 *For Heaven's Sake*, 1950 *Three Little Words*, 1949 *The Barkleys of Broadway*, 1946 *Blue Skies*, 1945 *State Fair*, 1945 *Diamond Horseshoe*, 1942 *Springtime in the Rockies*, 1942 *Footlight Serenade*, 1942 *My Gal Sal*, 1941 *Sun Valley Serenade*, 1937 *A Damsel in Distress*, 1937 *Stage Door*, 1937 *Shall We Dance*, 1936 *Mary of Scotland*, 1935 *Top Hat*, and 1935 *A Dog of Flanders*.

AUDREY HEPBURN...Eliza Doolittle (May 4, 1929, Ixelles, Belgium – January 20, 1993, Tolochenaz, Switzerland) won the Academy's Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award in 1993. She should have won more. She has 31 acting credits: 1989 *Always*, 1987 "Love Among Thieves", 1981 *They All Laughed*, 1979 *Bloodline*, 1976 *Robin and Marian*, 1967 *Wait Until Dark*, 1967 *Two for the Road*, 1966 *How to Steal a Million*, 1964 *My Fair Lady*, 1964 *Paris When It Sizzles*, 1963 *Charade*, 1961 *The Children's Hour*, 1961 *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, 1960 *The Unforgiven*, 1959 *The Nun's Story*, 1959 *Green Mansions*, 1957 *Love in the Afternoon*, 1957 *Funny Face*, 1957 "Producers' Showcase", 1956 *War and Peace*, 1954 *Sabrina*, 1953 *We Go to Monte Carlo*, 1953 *Roman Holiday*, 1952 "CBS Television Workshop", 1952 *The Secret People*, 1951 *Young Wives' Tale*, 1951 *We Will All Go to Monte Carlo*, 1951 "BBC Sunday-Night Theatre", 1951 *The Lavender Hill Mob*, 1951 *Laughter in Paradise*, and 1951 *One Wild Oat*.

REX HARRISON...Professor Henry Higgins (March 5, 1908, Huyton, Lancashire, England – June 2, 1990, New York City, New York) won a Best Actor Oscar for his role in this film. Some of his other 57 screen acting credits are 79 *Ashanti*, 1977 *Crossed Swords*, 1969 *Staircase*, 1967 *Doctor Dolittle*, 1967 *The Honey Pot*, 1965 *The Agony and the Ecstasy*, 1964 *The Yellow Rolls-Royce*, 1964 *My Fair Lady*, 1963 *Cleopatra*, 1960 *Midnight Lace*, 1955 *Marriage à la Mode*, 1954 *King Richard and the Crusaders*, 1952 *The Four Poster*, 1948 *Unfaithfully*

Yours, 1948 *Escape*, 1947 *The Foxes of Harrow*, 1947 *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*, 1946 *Anna and the King of Siam*, 1945 *Blithe Spirit*, 1941 *Major Barbara*, 1940 *Night Train to Munich*, 1940 *Ten Days in Paris*, 1939 *Continental Express*, 1938 *The Citadel*, 1934 *Leave It to Blanche*, 1934 *Get Your Man*, and 1930 *The Great Game*.

STANLEY HOLLOWAY...Alfred P. Doolittle (October 1, 1890, Manor Park, London, England – January 30, 1982, Littlehampton, England) has 76 acting credits, some of which are 1975 *Journey Into Fear*, 1973 “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde”, 1970 *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*, 1967 “Blandings Castle” (6 episodes), 1966 *The Sandwich Man*, 1965 *Agatha Christie's 'Ten Little Indians'*, 1965 *In Harm's Way*, 1964 *My Fair Lady*, 1964 *Alive and Kicking*, 1962-1963 “Our Man Higgins” (34 episodes), 1961 *Operation Snafu*, 1959 *No Trees in the Street*, 1956 *Jumping for Joy*, 1953 *A Day to Remember*, 1953 *The Beggar's Opera*, 1951 *The Lavender Hill Mob*, 1950 *Midnight Episode*, 1948 *The Winslow Boy*, 1948 *Hamlet*, 1948 *One Night with You*, 1946 *Carnival*, 1946 *Wanted for Murder*, 1945 *Caesar and Cleopatra*, 1945 *Brief Encounter*, 1944 *This Happy Breed*, 1941 *Major Barbara*, 1937 *Cotton Queen*, 1937 *The Vicar of Bray*, 1937 *Song of the Forge*, 1934 *Road House*, 1933 *Sleeping Car*, 1929 *The Co-Optimists*, and 1921 *The Rotters*.

WILFRID HYDE-

WHITE...Colonel Hugh Pickering (May 12, 1903, Bourton-on-the-Water, Gloucestershire, England – May 6, 1991, Woodland Hills, Los Angeles, California) appeared in 158 films and TV series and films, some of which were 1983 *Fanny Hill*, 1982 *The Toy*, 1982 “The Two of Us”, 1982 “Fantasy Island”, 1981 “Buck Rogers in the 25th Century” (11 episodes), 1980 “Father Damien: The Leper Priest”, 1980 *Oh, God! Book II*, 1980 *Xanadu*, 1979-1980 “The Associates” (13 episodes), 1979 *King Solomon's Treasure*, 1978 *The Cat and the Canary*, 1978 *No Longer Alone*, 1978 “Battlestar Galactica”, 1976 “The Great Houdini”, 1972-1976 “Columbo”, 1975 “Get Christie Love!”, 1969 “It Takes a Thief”, 1969 *The Magic Christian*, 1967 “Mission: Impossible”, 1967 “Peyton Place” (13 episodes), 1966 *Bang! Bang! You're Dead!*, 1965 *Agatha Christie's 'Ten Little Indians'*, 1965 “Vacation Playhouse”, 1965 *John Goldfarb, Please Come Home!*, 1964 *My Fair Lady*, 1963 “Twilight Zone”, 1960 *Let's Make Love*, 1959 *Carry on Nurse*, 1957 *Tarzan and the Lost Safari*, 1955 *Quentin Durward*, 1953 *Gilbert and Sullivan*, 1951 *Outcast of the Islands*, 1951 *The Browning Version*, 1949 *The Third Man*, 1948 *Quartet*, 1948 *The Winslow Boy*, 1948 *My Brother's Keeper*, 1946 *Wanted for Murder*, 1946 *Night Boat to Dublin*, 1939 *Me and My Girl*, 1936 *Murder by Rope*, 1935 *Alibi Inn*, 1935 *Admirals All*, and 1934 *Josser on the Farm*.



GLADYS COOPER...Mrs. Higgins (December 18, 1888, Lewisham, London, England – November 17, 1971, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, England) appeared in 71 films and TV series, among them 1972 “The Persuaders!”, 1969 *A Nice Girl Like Me*, 1967 *The Happiest Millionaire*, 1966 “The Girl from U.N.C.L.E.”, 1965 “Emergency-Ward 10”, 1965 “Ben Casey”, 1964-1965 “The Rogues” (24 episodes), 1964 *My Fair Lady*, 1962-1964 “Twilight Zone”, 1963 *The List of Adrian Messenger*, 1962 “The Dick Powell Theatre”, 1962 “Naked City”, 1958 *Separate Tables*, 1957 “Alfred Hitchcock Presents”, 1956 “The Alcoa Hour”, 1949 *Madame Bovary*, 1949 *The Secret Garden*, 1947 *The Bishop's Wife*, 1947 *Green Dolphin Street*, 1944 *Mrs. Parkington*, 1944 *The White Cliffs of Dover*, 1943 *The Song of Bernadette*, 1942 *Now, Voyager*, 1940 *Rebecca*, 1920 *Unmarried*, 1917 *Masks and Faces*, 1914 *Danny Donovan*, the *Gentleman Cracksmen*, and 1913 *The Eleventh Commandment*.

JEREMY BRETT...Freddy Eynsford-Hill (November 3, 1933 in Berkswell Grange, Warwickshire, England – September 12, 1995, London, England) has 69 acting credits, among them 1996 *Moll Flanders*, 1995 *Mad Dogs and Englishmen*, 1994 “The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes” (6 episodes), 1991-1993 “The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes” (9 episodes), 1992 “ITV Telethon”, 1988 “The Hound of the Baskervilles”, 1986-1988 “The Return of Sherlock Holmes” (11 episodes), 1987 “The Sign of Four”, 1984-1985 “The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes” (13 episodes), 1985 “Deceptions”, 1985 “Florence Nightingale”, 1984 “Morte d'Arthur”, 1982 “The Barretts of Wimpole Street”, 1979 “Hart to Hart”, 1979 “Rebecca”, 1978 *The Medusa Touch*, 1978 “The Incredible Hulk”, 1974 “Jennie: Lady Randolph Churchill”, 1973 “The Merchant of Venice”, 1967 “Kenilworth”, 1966-1967 “The Three Musketeers” (10 episodes), 1964 *My Fair Lady*, 1964 *Act of Reprisal*, 1963 *The Very Edge*, 1961 “Beauty and the Beast”, 1956 *War and Peace*, and 1954 *Svengali*.

THEODORE BIKE...Zoltan Karpathy (May 2, 1924, Vienna, Austria) has 151 screen and TV acting credits, some of which are 2007 *The Little Traitor*, 2003 “JAG”, 2002 *Crime and Punishment*, 2000 “H.U.D.”, 1997 “Brooklyn South”, 1994 “Law & Order”, 1992 *Crisis in the Kremlin*, 1992 “L.A. Law”, 1990 “City”, 1989 “The Final Days”, 1988 “Beauty and the Beast”, 1987-1988 “Falcon Crest”, 1988 “Buck James”, 1987 “The New Mike Hammer”, 1986 “The Paper Chase”, 1985 “Dynasty”, 1983 “The Love Boat”, 1978-1979 “All in the Family”, 1978 “The Amazing Spider-Man”, 1978 “Police Woman”, 1977 “Columbo”, 1977 “Charlie's Angels”, 1976 “Victory at Entebbe”, 1976 “Little House on the Prairie”, 1976 “Ellery Queen”, 1972 “Cannon”, 1971 “Ironside”, 1969 “Hawaii Five-O”, 1968 “Mission: Impossible”, 1967 “The Diary of Anne Frank”, 1966 *The Russians Are Coming the Russians Are Coming*, 1965 *Sands of the Kalahari*, 1964-1965 “Burke's Law”,

1965 “Gunsmoke”, 1964 *My Fair Lady*, 1964 “Combat!”, 1962 “Route 66”, 1962 “Twilight Zone”, 1959 *The Blue Angel*, 1959 *A Dog of Flanders*, 1958 *I Want to Live!*, 1958 *The Defiant Ones*, 1958 *Fräulein*, 1956 “The Alcoa Hour”, 1956 *Escape from the Iron Curtain*, 1955 “Justice”, 1955 *The Colditz Story*, 1953 *Melba*, 1952 *Moulin Rouge*, 1951 *The African Queen*, 1951 *Island Rescue*, and 1949 *Ein Breira*.

Lerner and Lowe (Wikipedia):

Lerner and Loewe are the duo of lyricist and librettist Alan Jay Lerner and composer Frederick Loewe, known primarily for the music and lyrics of some of Broadway's most successful musical shows, including *My Fair Lady*, *Camelot*, and *Brigadoon*.

Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe, more commonly known as Fritz, met in 1942 at the Lambs Club in New York City where, according to Loewe, he mistakenly took a wrong turn to the men's room and walked past Lerner's table. Having recognized him, he asked if Lerner wrote lyrics and Lerner confirmed Loewe's question.

Lerner claimed to be the more dominant one of partnership, which is supported by interviews with their close friends, saying that he would throw out the first two melodies that Loewe would write to any song even if they were both perfect. He said he always knew, with a little pushing, Loewe was capable of greater work. Loewe also worked perfectly with Lerner, who would agonize for weeks over a lyric. Unlike other collaborators Lerner would work with, Loewe was the most understanding of the time Lerner needed for his lyrics and would never pressure him to complete the work.

Their dynamic partnership is somewhat of a mystery as it is not clear as to why they would end their collaboration only to begin again (until *The Little Prince*, their last work together). After *Brigadoon*, their first major success, Loewe was heard telling his close friends that, as long as he lived, he would never work with Lerner again. But they did work together again, reaching the pinnacle of their partnership with *My Fair Lady*. Interestingly, they only got to work on the adaption of *Pygmalion* (on which *My Fair Lady* is based) after Noel Coward and Rodgers and Hammerstein had passed it up. Again, for unknown reasons, their partnership grew frazzled as they were knee-deep in work with *Camelot*. After *Camelot*, Fritz Loewe retired and swore he would never write another note.

Their last collaboration came with the 1974 musical film, *The Little Prince*, which received mixed reviews but was lauded as one of the team's most cerebral scores.

Regardless of their professional relationship, Lerner and Loewe were close friends and remained so until the end of their lives. Their final public appearance was in December 1985, when they received a Kennedy Center Honor, six months before Lerner's death.

Lerner said this of Loewe: "There will never be another Fritz...Writing will never again be as much fun. A collaboration as intense as ours inescapably had to be complex. But I loved him more than I understood or misunderstood him and I know he loved me more than he understood or misunderstood me."



GEORGE (DEWEY) CUKOR (From *World Film Directors*, Vol. I. Edited by John Wakeman. The H.W. Wilson Co., NY, 1987.)

American director, born in New York City. He was the son of Victor Cukor, who worked in the office of the Manhattan District Attorney, and the former Helen Gross. Cukor grew up at 222 East 68th Street, along with his sister Elsie, his parents and his grandparents. It was his Hungarian-Jewish grandfather who chose his forenames, in an excess of patriotic fervor over Admiral George Dewey's patriotic victory at Manila Bay.

Cukor attended Public High School 82 and DeWitt Clinton High School. A stagestruck kid, he often cut school to watch Broadway matinees from the top balcony but had "a very snobbish attitude towards movies." He joined the Students' Army Training Corps in 1917 and a year later the "postwar army of job seekers." Determined to work in the theatre, he answered newspaper advertisements and was eventually hired as assistant stage manager of the Chicago company of *The Better 'Ole*. In 1920, after further experience in Toronto, Cukor organized a stock company for the Lyceum Theatre in Rochester, New York. He directed it for seven years and then returned to New York City as manager of the old Empire Theatre. It was at that time, working with the likes of Ethel Barrymore, Jeanne Eagels, and Laurette Taylor, that he began to build his reputation as a "woman's director."

In Hollywood, meanwhile, technology had overtaken technique, and the filmmakers found themselves embarked on the sound era with no experience of writing or speaking dialogue. They turned for help to the theatre, importing actors, dramatists, and directors wholesale from Broadway and the London stage. Cukor joined the exodus in 1929, when he went to Paramount as dialogue director of *River of Romance*, based on Booth Tarkington's play *Magnolia*. He worked in the same capacity on Lewis Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front* for Universal, and then Paramount assigned him as director of the Maurice Chevalier-Jeanette MacDonald romantic comedy *One Hour With You*.

"It was very early in the game" for Cukor, and though he did the best he could, "it really wasn't very good." In the end the film's producer, Ernst Lubitsch, took over and reshot virtually everything he had done. For *Grumpy* (1930)—the first

film for which Cukor received directorial credit, Paramount teamed him with a veteran of the silents, Cyril Gardner. Cukor said that he learned a lot from Gardner, but there is no evidence of this in *Grumpy*, a stagey and old-fashioned trifle about a lovably irascible lawyer.

After *The Virtuous Sin* (1930), a “ghastly picture” made in collaboration with Louis Gasnier, Cukor had Gardner again on *The Royal Family of Broadway*, a thinly veiled portrait of the Barrymores adapted from the Ferber-Kaufman play. Like its two predecessors, this was essentially a piece of “canned theatre,” but according to Gary Carney there were signs that here, for the first time, Cukor was beginning “to work out the difference between staging action before the camera and before the proscenium arch,” and he secured some lively performances from a cast headed by Ina Claire and Frederic March.

Cukor’s first solo film for Paramount was also the talkie debut of Tallulah

Bankhead, *Tarnished Lady* (1930). It was adapted by Cukor’s favorite scenarist, Donald Ogden Stewart, from Stewart’s own short story about the sentimental education of a spoiled socialite. This spasmodically witty drama pleased neither the critics nor Cukor himself, and the director expressed scarcely more commitment to his next movie, *Girls About Town*

(1931), a “low-brow farce” with Kay Francis and Lilyan Tashman as two goddiggers on the make. Cukor had meanwhile been engaged in a legal dispute with Paramount over his removal from *One Hour With You*, and at that point he quit the studio and joined RKO, where his friend David O. Selznick had taken over as head of production.

At RKO, Cukor enjoyed far more creative freedom than he had been allowed at Paramount, and his work benefited. His first film there, produced by Selznick, was *What Price Hollywood?* (1932), about the mutually destructive relationship between an alcoholic movie director (Lowell Sherman) and the pretty waitress (Constance Bennett) whom he guides to stardom. Carlos Clarens calls it “the first sound picture to deal with some seriousness with the ethics of the star system.... There are biting little truths about the film industry stated with detachment and precision,” while Constance Bennett’s performance “was Cukor’s first unmistakable success on the screen.” As Clarens says, this picture “serves as a blueprint for the two subsequent versions of *A Star is Born*.”

Cukor had greater success against larger odds when he directed Katherine Hepburn in her debut film, *A Bill of Divorcement* (1932), from a play by Clemence Dane. No one else at RKO knew what to make of Hepburn’s screen test, but Cukor was impressed by her “freshness [and] spirit, and also because she was one of the oddest-looking girls I had ever seen.” He insisted on casting her, and she rewarded him with a performance of star quality.

Hepburn plays Sydney, whose father Hilary (John Barrymore) is supposed to have died in World War I and whose mother (Billie Burke) is about to remarry. In fact, Hilary has spent fifteen years in a mental hospital as a shell-shock victim, and at the beginning of the film he returns. The growing sympathy and tenderness between father and daughter is movingly recorded, and at the end, when Hilary fakes a relapse in order to set his wife free, Sydney sees through the deception and breaks off her own engagement to care for her father.

As Gary Carey says, Cukor had by this time “begun to perfect his technique. He broke the continuous stage action into its separate elements but maintained the feeling of flow. Analyzing exactly which part of the action would be in focus moment by moment—the whole stage, a conversation between two people, a private action—he concentrated his camera upon it and then linked it to the next moment by the most functional

editing or graceful camera movement.” The Cukor style was already emerging—an elusive entity defined by Henri Langlois as “knowledge of the world, elegance, distinction of actors chosen, everything in half-tone, suggested and never overstressed.”

Cukor was next called in to rescue *Rockabye*, a “confession film” by George Fitzmaurice, after its disastrous previews. He

reshot this “trashy story” in less than three weeks and concluded, “it was still trashy but seemed all right.” Nor did he express much enthusiasm for his next RKO movie, an adaptation of Somerset Maugham’s brittle satire on Mayfair mores, *Our Betters*. As Cukor said, “it dealt with a world that they didn’t know about in pictures, that of English high society,” and indeed Joel Greenberg complained of “a jarring air of unreality.” Carlos Clarens defends the film on other grounds, however. In Pearl (Constance Bennett), the American heiress who marries a penniless peer and who follows his example of infidelity, Clarens sees “the new American woman asserting her sexual rights.... Even for the permissive pre-Code period, a philandering leading lady who goes unpunished and unremorseful must stand as one of the great emancipated heroines.”

In 1933, Cukor followed Selznick to MGM, where they scored an immediate and sensational success with *Dinner at Eight*, scripted by Herman J. Mankiewicz and Frances Marion from the Ferber-Kaufman play. A comedy-drama of the events leading up to a society dinner, it tells several interlocking stories in a way reminiscent of the previous year’s hit, *Grand Hotel*. Lionel Barrymore, Billie Burke and Madge Evans play the upper-class Jordans, Wallace Beery and Jean Harlow the *nouveaux riches* Packards. Marie Dressler is a fierce society dragon, and John Barrymore, who under Cukor’s direction in *A Bill of Divorcement* had shown unaccustomed restraint and control, here achieved “an authentic poignancy” in his portrayal



of a character much like himself—an alcoholic movie star on the skids.

Cukor was equally successful in his direction of Jean Harlow, who established herself in this “superb ensemble production” as a natural comedienne. Cukor revealed part of the secret of his success as a director of actors in a comment he made about Marie Dressler; he said he at first tried to mold her into “the Ethel Barrymore type,” then came to his senses and gave her her head: “That’s what one must do in pictures. Don’t stand in the way. In films, it’s what you *are* rather than what you act.”

The hit was followed by an even greater one, Cukor’s version of Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* (1933), with an Oscar-winning script by Sarah Y. Mason and Victor Heerman, and splendid sets and costumes by Hobe Erwin and Walter Plunkett respectively. Katherine Hepburn played Jo March, the headstrong Concord girl in Civil War Massachusetts, growing up through good times and bad with her three sisters (Joan Bennett, Frances Dee, and Jean Parker). Gary Carey has called the result “a total triumph of charm and genuine naiveté, perhaps the director’s finest achievement.” Though other recent critics seem to doubt that naiveté is Cukor’s forte, in 1933 this film confirmed his position as a director of the first rank.

Little Women was Cukor’s most successful picture up to that time, and as he said, it typed him as a “literary director.” A whole string of adaptations followed—a mode that was in any case an attractive option in 1933 for studios inclined to avert their eyes from what was happening in the contemporary world. The series began with *David Copperfield* (1935), produced by Selznick and preceded by a trip to England where Selznick and Cukor shot some background footage and took hundreds of stills for the MGM art department. The distinguished novelist Hugh Walpole was called in to write the adaptation.

Cukor decided that “performances were everything” in *David Copperfield*, and he engineered some memorable ones—W.C. Fields’ “vaudevillian” reading of Mr. Micawber, Freddie Bartholomew as a likable young David, Edna May Oliver a formidable Aunt Betsey Trotwood, and Lennox Pawle touching as Mr. Dick. The trouble was that in reducing Dickens’ enormous novel to 135 minutes of screen time, the characters were left as nothing much more than the sum of their eccentricities. Sydney Carrol wrote that the picture “repeats all of [Dickens’] habits of exaggeration, caricature and journalese dialogue. Superbly photographed, magnificently mounted...it enjoys a lot of brilliant acting and suffers from a continuous overemphasis....Never have I been so repelled by goodness in a film or so unattracted by badness.”

All the same, most critics agree that *David Copperfield* was an honorable attempt at an impossible task, and it was another popular success for Cukor, unlike his next movie. *Sylvia*

Scarlett (1936), produced by Pandro S. Berman for RKO, was drawn from a trilogy of novels by Compton Mackenzie and concentrates on an episode in the first of them. Sylvia Scarlett (Katherine Hepburn) masquerades as a boy to escape with her father (Edmund Gwenn), an embezzling bookkeeper, from France to his native England. With an amiable rogue named Jimmy Monkley (Cary Grant) they join a pierrot troupe in Cornwall. In the end, Sylvia’s father dies in pursuit of a woman, Jimmy takes up with another, and Sylvia herself, sadder and wiser, is reconciled to respectability (and femininity) by her love for a handsome artist (Brian Aherne).

Cukor once said that *Sylvia Scarlett* was his favorite picture, “perhaps because we were all so happy while making it.” He didn’t know why it flopped so totally, but recent critics have suggested that contemporary audiences were disturbed by the heroine’s sexual ambiguity and the responses it drew from both male and female characters in the film, which was “edgy and not always pleasant, full of shifts of mood and implications that would have startled [Compton] Mackenzie.” But even contemporary writers conceded that Cary Grant, previously a

conventional romantic lead, had given the performance of his life as the Cockney immoralist Jimmy Monkley, and Cukor lived to see this premature black comedy adopted as a cult movie.

There has been no such resurrection for Cukor’s *Romeo and Juliet* (1936), an MGM prestige production on which Irving Thalberg lavished all of the studio’s resources of money and talent. Cedric Gibbons was the art director, with Oliver Messel imported from Britain as artistic consultant. The photography was by William Daniels and the choreography by Agnes De

Mille, but nothing could prevent the film from turning into what one critic called an “empty pageant”—least of all its aging lovers, Leslie Howard and Norma Shearer. The director remarked that “*Romeo and Juliet* was Thalberg’s production and it lost one million dollars for the studio.”

According to Cukor, *Camille* (1937) “was also Thalberg’s picture, though his name did not appear on the credits.” Cukor’s respect for Greta Garbo as a fellow professional shines through all he has said about her—she always knew what she was doing...she was all there on the screen.” Many critics maintain that as an actress Garbo achieved her apotheosis in what Pauline Kael called her “sublime, ironic performance” as Marguerite Gauthier, the *grande couturesse* who renounces her one true love (Robert Taylor) for the sake of his career but is reunited with him for one of the cinema’s most glorious death scenes.

“I never allowed myself to be called an *auteur*,” Cukor said once. “I have too much respect for writers to presume such a title.” And elsewhere he insisted that “a director must never overwhelm a picture, he must serve it.” Because of this generous



humility, the great distinction and elegance of Cukor's style were not recognized until late in his career. Thus we find Otis Ferguson, a distinguished contemporary reviewer of *Camille*, expressing his surprise that the ancient melodrama should have come "to such insistent life on the day's screen." Ferguson acknowledged that "the life of the times grows up so unobtrusively around the people as they take their dramatic position in the story, so that the complexities of an unfamiliar code of living and way of life become the simple background." But it seems not to have occurred to him that this unobtrusive miracle was the achievement of a master; Cukor is commended for no more than "a firm and straight-out piece of film work."

Returning to the sophisticated comedy of his earlier films, Cukor made what some regard as the most accomplished of all his movies of the 30s, *Holiday* (1938). He had the services of Donald Ogden Stewart, adapting a play by Philip Barry, and two stars with whom he was wholly in sympathy—Katherine Hepburn as Linda Seton, bored and frustrated daughter of despotic snobs, and Cary Grant as the exuberantly anarchic Johnny Case, who comes to the Seton mansion as suitor to Linda's spoiled young sister. Lew Ayres plays Linda's brother Noel, who escapes from his parents' domination into alcoholism just as Linda does into her old playroom. The heart of the film is the long, lyrical, funny scene in which Johnny, a truant from his own engagement party, greets the new year with Linda and a few friends at an alternative celebration in the playroom, waltzing by moonlight to a music-box tune.

"In Cukor's hands," wrote Carlos Clarens, *Holiday* becomes "a modern American fable, full of social and moral implications, delicate choices and unspoken kinships, a most Rohmerian film...Cukor's favorite situation—the outsider breaking into an alien closed circle, and the heroine stirring into awareness...are conveyed in *Holiday* with grace and subtlety by means of twin, complementary courses through the Seton mansion, each floor defining a moment of moral development of the characters...*Holiday* may be the talkiest picture of its year. But talk never dislocates the image, still a shade too neutral for partisans of eye cinema at all costs."

As David Thomson succinctly puts it, Cukor's "abiding preoccupation is theatricality and the various human postures between acting and lying." A great many of his films, from *The Royal Family of Broadway* on, deal directly with the theatre or the movie industry, and *Zaza* (1939) has been called "a stylish memoir of French music-halls at the turn of the century." Its heroine (Claudette Colbert) is a music-hall star whose talent, deepened by suffering when she renounces her married lover (Herbert Marshall) wins her a revered place in the legitimate theatre. The film has earned comparisons with Jean Renoir's *French Cancan*, both on account of its theme and because Cukor shares Renoir's delight in the interaction of illusion and reality.

Cukor spent over a year in pre-production work for *Gone With the Wind*, scouting locations and testing scores of actresses for the role of Scarlett, as well as shooting half-a-dozen

scenes. Why Selznick then fired Cukor and replaced him with Victor Fleming is still a matter of speculation, but it now seems clear that, even after Cukor had left the film, he secretly continued to coach Vivien Leigh and Olivia de Havilland in their roles, and that virtually all the sequences he had shot were retained in the final cut. It was characteristic of Cukor that for years he denied these claims, too proud or too professional to scrabble for a little glory.

Instead, Cukor went back to MGM and scored a success of his own with *The Women* (1940), adapted by Anita Loos, Jane Murfin, and Scott Fitzgerald (uncredited) from Clare Boothe's bitchy play about a woman (Norma Shearer) maneuvered by her "friends" into a divorce she doesn't want. This misogynistic comedy was not one of Cukor's own favorites, but its craftsmanship is impeccable. A curiosity of the piece is that the

erring husband is never seen, and neither is any other male, even on the street. There are nevertheless over a hundred speaking parts in the film. Each sharply differentiated, and Cukor drew a memorable performance from Joan Crawford as the "other woman."

Joan Crawford starred in Cukor's next picture, *Susan and God* (1940), an "uneasy satire" that is one of the director's weakest films. His fortunes temporarily revived with the phenomenal success of *The Philadelphia Story* (1940), like *Holiday* based on a Philip Barry play, adapted by Donald Ogden Stewart, and starring Katherine Hepburn and Cary Grant. Hepburn (for whom Barry had written the part) plays Tray Lord, a vulnerable but arrogant socialite who rejects her husband Dexter (Grant) and becomes engaged to a priggish social

climber. Dexter retaliates by introducing into her household a reporter (James Stewart) from a gossip magazine who contrives to melt Tracy's icy exterior before quixotically surrendering her to her first husband.

Cukor elected to gamble everything on his splendid cast and witty script, effacing himself in a *mise-en-scène* so discreet as to be virtually invisible. John Howard Reid complained that the "breezy opening, with its swift editing and rapid tracking is built on the same formula as *The Women*," but thereafter both pace and camera bog down in a welter of overlong dialogue." The film nevertheless earned Oscars for its script and for James Stewart's performance, as well as a sheaf of nominations, several lesser award, and great deal of money. Its sophisticated excellence was underlined by comparison with Charles Walters' plodding musical remake *High Society* (1956), and it remains a model of high comedy style.

"The prettiest sight in this pretty world of ours is that of the privileged classes enjoying their privileges" says a character in *The Philadelphia Story*. However ironically spoken, the line reflects an insouciance that was unacceptable in the crisis atmosphere of the 1940s, a decade in which Cukor seemed on the whole ill at ease. It began for him with *A Woman's Face* (1941), a remake of Gustaf Molander's *En kvinnas ansiketei*, about a disfigured woman criminal rehabilitated by plastic surgery. Joan Crawford played Anna Holm, the role created by Ingrid



Bergman, and there is a magnificently malign performance from Conrad Veidt as the heroine's decadent lover Barrington.

It seems that Cukor, faced with a banal script. Decided to indulge himself for once in a bravura display of technique. Inspired perhaps by the presence of Conrad Veidt he and his cameraman Robert Planck plunged into the Expressionist chiaroscuro, low camera angles, and semi-abstraction. From the opening courtroom scene (where witnesses give differing accounts of the events leading up to Anna's murder of Barrington). The flashbacks to the events described are, as Joel Greenberg wrote, "slow dissolves of one image over another—a silently closing door, a hotel glimpsed through the trees, an elaborate birthday cake." Greenberg goes on: "The famous sequence of the removal of ...[Anna's] bandages after the operation is completely in silence; no dialogue at all is used in the cablecar scene in which Crawford is tempted to hurl Barrington's nephew over the side, the whole emotional conflict being conveyed by cutting, natural sound, and facial expression."

This intermittently powerful curiosity was followed by the disastrous *Two-Faced Woman* (1941), with Greta Garbo as a newly married wife who, discovering her husband's adultery, masquerades as her own libidinous twin to seduce him into fidelity. The Catholic Church was outraged by the moral implications of this old story, and MGM timidly inserted ameliorating scenes that made nonsense of the plot. The picture flopped, and Garbo, already disenchanted with the movies, quit them forever.

Cukor's unsought reputation as a "woman's director" was further damaged when a "rehashed farce" called *Her Cardboard Lover* (1942), another failure, put paid to the already failing career of Norma Shearer. At that point Cukor was inducted as a private into the army Signal Corps and posted to the studio in Astoria, New York, where he had begun his career thirteen years earlier. He reportedly billeted himself in a Manhattan Hotel, rising at 5 A.M. to arrive in good time at the studio where he made a training film—incomprehensible to its director—called *Resistance and Ohm's Law* (1943).

Honorably discharged from the army on account of his age, Cukor directed the first, most serious (and least successful) of his series of films teaming Katherine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy, *Keeper of the Flame* (1943), scripted by Donald Ogden Stewart from the novel by I.A.R. Wylie, is about a celebrated journalist (Tracy) investigating the mysterious death of a great American patriot. He becomes suspicious of the dead man's widow (Hepburn) but falls in love with her anyway, learning that she has indeed allowed her husband to die in an accident that she could have averted, but only to prevent him from leading a fascist coup d'état and to preserve his legend for the faithful. Gene D. Phillips has noted the subtlety of the visual metaphors of obfuscation and concealment in this somberly lit *film noir*, but Louis B. Mayer walked out on its Radio City premiere, infuriated by its leftish political implications. The screenplay was later used

in evidence against Donald Ogden Stewart by the House Un-American Activities Committee, which blacklisted him, but Cukor himself seems to have regarded the film as no more than a psychological thriller.

And his next picture was an exercise in what he defined as "Victorian melodrama pure and simple." This was *Gaslight* (1948), a second screen version of Patrick Hamilton's play made only four years after the first—Thorald Dickinson's taut and stylish adaptation was bought up and suppressed by MGM to make way for its own big-budget movie. A fact that brought a sour note into many of the British reviews. Cukor, of course, had no hand in this transaction, and it subsequently emerged that some prints of the Dickinson version had survived MGM's vandalism.

Gaslight (tactfully retitled *Murder in Thornton Square* for British release) tells the story of a murderer (Charles Boyer) in Victorian England who marries an innocent young woman (Ingrid Bergman), settles into the dark house on Thornton Square, and with cold, systematic efficiency sets out to drive her

insane. "Instead of shocks and surprise," wrote Carlos Clarens, "Cukor works insidiously through detail and mood, usually ahead of the script.... The house is no mere element of décor but a third protagonist, upholstered, stifling, a closed world. Cukor's master touch is in the way he assigns various charges of tension to each level, and the



vertical suspense this generates is uniquely filmic and disturbing." Such qualities, and the excellent performances of Boyer and Bergman mollified those who resented the suppression of the Dickensian version, though James Agee criticized the movie's perverse hint of complicity between tormentor and tormented, finding it morally questionable in a melodrama.

After *Winged Victory* (1944), a patriotic drama whose banality Cukor acknowledged, came *A Double Life* (1947), the first of his collaborations with the scenarists Ruth Gordon and Garson Kanin. Their only melodrama, it features a deranged matinee idol (Ronald Coleman) who is so carried away by his roles that he commits a real murder during an extended run of *Othello*. Cukor enjoyed filming the New York theatrical background, showing that he was by now as much at home on location as in the studio, but the movie is scarcely to be taken seriously (even though it brought Coleman his only Oscar). And *Edward My Son* (1949), from the play by Robert Morley and Noel Langley, interesting for Cukor's highly theatrical use of long takes, was ruined by the miscasting of both its principals, Spencer Tracy and Deborah Kerr.

Cukor used Tracy again in *Adam's Rib* (1949) along with Katherine Hepburn, and he also continued to use very long takes (one of over seven minutes without a cut), having decided that this technique "was better to build the intensity of a scene." The film is the second of the seven scripted for Cukor by Ruth

Gordon and/or her husband Garson Kanin, most of them comedies and all but *A Double Life* centering on a woman who in one way or another oversteps the bounds of the existing social system.

Adam's Rib has Tracy as a male chauvinist district attorney and Hepburn as his wife, a defense lawyer with whom he clashes in and out of court over the case of Doris Attinger (played by Judy Holliday with such charm that she almost stole the film). Doris is a deceived wife who has taken a few shots at her husband (Tom Ewell), and Hepburn wins her acquittal (and almost loses her husband) by turning the court into a theatre and demonstrating through role reversal that accepted morality depends on sexual bias. The theatrical motif is carried through the film in such devices as the use of stage curtains to separate the scenes in court from those in the lawyers' home. Witty and entertaining as it is, this is not the best of the Tracy-Hepburn comedies, being weakened by some domestic passages that are only rescued from whimsy by the tough and acerbic style of its perfectly matched stars.

Not even Cukor could do much to enliven Lana Turner's numb performance in *A Life of Her Own* (1950), about the rise and fall of a cover girl, but in *Born Yesterday*, released the same year, he launched a new star in Judy Holliday, who had played the female lead in Garson Kanin's original play. She is Billie Dawn, a near-illiterate ex-chorine and mistress of a crooked millionaire (Broderick Crawford) who hires a liberal journalist (William Holden) to teach her a little class and gets his comeuppance when she learns to think for herself. Asked about his log takes and sometimes immobile camera, Cukor replied simply that "if the scenes are funny in themselves, you don't need to play about with them."

Judy Holliday earned an Oscar for her funny and touching performance in *Born Yesterday*. . . Cukor's *What Price Hollywood* (1932) had been remade five years later by William Wellman as *A Star Is Born*, in which the protagonists are both movie stars whose marriage goes on the rocks because one of them (Janet Gaynor) is on the way up and the other (Frederic March) is on the way down. In 1954 Cukor, who was normally "wary of doing remakes," made the second, musical version of *A Star Is Born* with a new script by Moss Hart and songs by Harold Arlen and Ira Gershwin. James Mason played Norman Maine, the screen idol who declines through drink to suicide, and the role of his wife Vicki went to Judy Garland, making a comeback in her first dramatic part. After being replaced by Betty Hutton in *Annie Get Your Gun*. Nervous as she understandably was, and overweight, she gave with Cukor's patient encouragement one of the truest and most moving performances in the history of the screen musical.

A Star Is Born was Cukor's first film in color, and here, as in many of his later pictures, he had the assistance of photographer George Hoyningen-Huene, who was responsible

for the subtle coordination of color in sets, costumes, and photography. Cukor was also working for the first time with Cinemascope, for in which, he was told, he must keep the action at the center of the screen and "line up the actors right in front of the camera at all times." He ignored this advice, moving the action all over the wide screen—Cukor later said that he was inspired by reproductions in art books in which only one detail of a broad panorama was highlighted. The result, as Gary Carey wrote, "was that much of the intimacy, fluidity, and selectivity which had been lost in the first wide-screen films was here recaptured." And when Garland sings "The Man Who Got Away" in a small nightclub after hours, and Cukor follows her in what Douglas McVay called "overwhelming hand-held camera plunges," they created what has been claimed as the best song number ever filmed.



The long "Born in a Trunk" production number was directed not by Cukor but by his choreographer Richard Barstow, and it brought the film's running time to some three hours. After Cukor had left for Pakistan to direct *Bhowani Junction*, Warners cut important scenes without consulting him. "Mangled" as it was, *A Star Is Born* is regarded by many as "one of the greatest flawed movies ever made," and Cukor's masterpiece.

Bhowani Junction (1956), from the novel by John Masters, is set in 1947 during the British withdrawal from India and stars Ava Gardner in one of her best performances as an Anglo-Indian nurse who has to decide where her racial (and sexual) loyalties belong. It is Cukor's only epic, but so expert in its handling of crowd scenes, riots, and train wrecks that it earned comparison with the work of Cecil B. DeMille. It was followed by an agreeable but relatively conventional backstage musical, *Les Girls* (1957). With songs by Cole Porter. Kay Kendall plays a former showgirl whose memoirs of a European trip with Gene Kelly are disputed by another member of the troupe (Tain Elg); the pair bring their conflicting recollections before a judge in a way reminiscent of *The Marrying Kind*.

The gap between fact and fantasy is also the theme of *Wild Is the Wind* (1957), in which Nevada rancher Anthony Quinn imports his dead wife's sister (Anna Magnani) from Italy as a replacement spouse, but fails to value her for herself until she has an affair with his adopted son (Anthony Franciosa). Most critics thought that Cukor had failed to suppress Magnani's habit of overacting in this "tearful tirade," but he had no problems at all with another Italian star, Sophia Loren, in *Heller in Pink Tights* (1960). . . .

Let's Make Love (1960) also centers on the theatre and its illusions. Yves Montand plays a billionaire who, hearing that he is being lampooned in a Greenwich Village revue, attends incognito and falls in love with one of the performers (Marilyn Monroe). Taking him for a starving actor, she gets him a job in the show, where he is required to impersonate himself, gets singing lessons from Bing Crosby, and is reprimanded for failing

to carry conviction in his entirely heartfelt love-song—a neat comment on the relationship between emotion and artifice. . . .

Warner Brothers spent \$17 million on its screen version of *My Fair Lady* (1964), the triumphant Lerner and Lowe musical based on Shaw's *Pygmalion*. "I didn't try to tamper with *My Fair Lady*, Cukor said. "It was perfect on stage. It had cinema effects, like dissolves. On the contrary, I tried to preserve the theatrical aspect of certain scenes, like the Ascot number." Rex Harrison played Professor Higgins, and Audrey Hepburn was a magical and radiant Eliza Doolittle. As Carlos Clarens wrote, Cukor was "hamstrung from all sides by the play's success and by the sheer opulence of the undertaking," and there were some who thought the film more stolid and less filmic than the stage version. The movie was nonetheless Cukor's most honored and financially successful film, bringing him his first and only Oscar as best director, and garnering seven other Academy Awards as well (including best film), among numerous other honors.

Cukor was less at home with *Justine* (1969), a mélange of sexual ambiguity and labyrinthine deception set in the hothouse world of Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria*, and featuring Anouk Aimée, Dirk Bogarde, Anna Karina, and Philippe Noiret, among others. . . . Three years later, when he had become (with Hitchcock) the oldest working director in the American cinema, Cukor adapted another distinguished English novel for the screen, Graham Greene's *Travels With My Aunt*. . . . In 1975 Cukor turned his attention to television in *Love Among the Ruins*, set in Edwardian London and starring Katherine Hepburn and Lawrence Olivier as aging former lovers in whom the long-dormant spark is happily rekindled. It carried off Emmy awards for best direction, best actor and actress, best script (James Costigan), and best production design (Carmen Dillon). *The Bluebird* (1976) was a less satisfactory departure—a musical version of Maeterlick's fable made in Leningrad as a Russian-American coproduction. Cukor liked the Russians but not their ancient equipment, their inadequate technicians, their food, or their weather. And in spite of a cast that included Elizabeth Taylor, Jane Fonda, and Ava Gardner, the film was a failure.

Cukor made another television film with Hepburn, an unexceptional version of Emlyn Williams' *The Corn Is Green* (1979) and then, at the age of eighty-one, went before the cameras for the last time as the director of *Rich and Famous*, a \$10 million updating of Vincent Sherman's Bette Davis-Miriam Hopkins vehicle *Old Acquaintance*. Cukor's film opens in 1959, with Jacqueline Bisset and Candice Bergen as Liz and Merry, the college roommates whose careers we then follow through the years. . . . Most reviewers enjoyed the package in which Candice Bergen emerged under Cukor's direction as "one of the screen's most arresting comedians."

Thus to the very end of his career Cukor continued to be admired above all as a director of actresses, in spite of debts owed to his sympathetic guidance by John Barrymore, Cary Grant, James Stewart, Ronald Coleman, Aldo Ray, and Jack Lemmon, among other male stars. It is probably true to say (as Carlos Clarens has) that "the Cukor values are best embodied in women" and that (to quote Gary Carey) "the women in Cukor's

films are always superior to the men" and are seen "less from a man's point of view than from the view of women themselves."

Because the "Man's point of view" prevailed unchallenged in the cinema for the first thirty years of Cukor's very long career, he was undervalued by serious critics, who deplored the "frivolity" of his subjects, his refusal to espouse populist causes, his "steady rejection of the tragic." The situation was exacerbated by his own modest insistence that he was an interpretive rather than a "creative" director, and especially by his lack of interest in montage, which was for so long held to be the essence of cinema. As Richard Roud wrote at the time of Cukor's death in 1983, his rehabilitation, "his access to his rightful place in the history of the cinema had to await these two post-war developments: the first the realization that *mise-en-scène* was at least as important as montage and the second that women and their problems are as important as men and theirs." Roud concluded that it was "only in the past two decades that George Cukor came to be recognized as one of our greatest directors."

A plump and stocky man for most of his life and an "elfin wisp" in his last years, Cukor was buoyant and witty, a lover of "food, comfort, and opulence" who never married. He lived throughout most of his movie career in a Hollywood mansion whose famous oval drawing room was the scene of many equally famous parties (including the legendary tête-à-tête he contrived for two of his favorite women, Mae West and Greta Garbo). He continued to see every new film of promise up to the time of his death, though he seemed increasingly impatient of the "amateurism" of the modern cinema as opposed to the solid craftsmanship provided—for all its limitations—by the studio system. But he never ceased to believe that "anyone who looks at something special in a very original way makes you see it that way forever." He received the D. W. Griffith Award in 1981 and a Golden Lion (for life achievement) at Venice in 1982.

From *Who the Devil Made It?*. Peter Bogdanovich. Ballantine Books, NY, 1997.

Interview April 27, 1969. I asked him when he decided to be a director.

GC: Well, that is an extraordinary thing; first of all, I was very, very lucky: in some obscure, dark way I always knew I wanted to be a director I didn't know what a director did and I'd never met a director. I was very young, thirteen or fourteen, and when I told my family—it was a very nice, respectable family, fortunately (I came from New York), and the poor things wanted me to become a lawyer—naturally they were baffled and very worried. I said to them: "I want to be a director," and they didn't know what directors did—they'd never heard of them. To say in those dim days, to a perfectly ordinary family, "I want to be a director," was as though a young man today said, "Well, Dad, I want to become a pusher or a bookie." Because it wasn't respectable in those days. I don't think the financial gain was as well-known as it is now—that's what made it respectable. Besides, now it's *the* thing to be a director: there's nobody I know whose children or grandchildren aren't studying cinema. . . .

PB: *Did you want to be a movie director?*

GC: No, no—stage director. I was rather snooty about movies. I was very arty and wanted to be in the theatre. I was crazy about the theatre. I wasn't a very good student and, since I lived in New York, I could go to the theatre a great deal. I went to the theatre from the age of twelve—rather accounts for large gaps in my education—and I was very swept in by the theatre; I loved the theatre. And I *was* in the theatre for a great many years. Then, when talkies came, they wanted people who knew something about what they called *titles*—reading lines—and a lot of us were shipped out here in chains, and the tougher ones of us stayed here....

PB: *You never really returned to the theatre either.*

GC: No, I'll tell you why. I did make an abortive attempt a few years ago, and I disliked it very much. I think the role of the stage director is *not* terribly interesting, whereas a movie director's job is much more interesting, much more comprehensive, and he affects the work much more.

PB: *And that's why you didn't go back.*

GC: It never occurred to me—I never *wanted* to go back—and I was persuaded to go back, which was a disaster. It's all on such a small scale. I'd just done a picture in India [*Bhowani Junction*, 1956] where I would say, "Well, yes, run those four railroads through and then we'll have five thousand people and they'll riot." Now I'm back working for the theatre and they said, "Listen, that tray—they want sixty dollars and we are only going to pay fifty." And it depressed me thoroughly: I was sitting at the Taft Hotel, and sitting backstage at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre, and I was wondering, "What the hell am I doing here?" And that was that....

PB: *But you hadn't been a movie fan?*

GC: Not particularly; I did like D.W. Griffith, and I liked the ordinary things that rather arty young people liked at that time.

PB: *Eisenstein?*

GC: No, I never really understood what [Sergei] Eisenstein was about. When I came in he had a book out [*Film Sense and Film Form*] and I've never really understood it. I saw the pictures he did and I was very impressed with them, but I never really understood what his theory was. And I pity the poor young people who are required to study that....

PB: *When you first came out here, you co-directed some films.*

GC: First I was a dialog director, because they were completely unfamiliar with sound out here. And what happened: all they'd learned in silent pictures they abandoned, all the technique of moving the cameras. They were sort of in a panic, and the camera would remain stationary. They really had no experience with dialog, and a great many of the actors had

lamentable voices; they had no stage experience either. There was quite a different system, a different way of acting in pictures, and they couldn't blend the both of them. I think now there is a whole system of movie acting for talkies.

But something very interesting: in the silent pictures, one thing that was absolutely invaluable—they were absolutely on the level. They really believed what they did—they did it without any pretentiousness and without any nonsense. And the people who'd had silent training—like Ronald Coleman—were quite extraordinary. They were sincere. There is some of that tradition remaining. Then there is a kind of other tradition which is rather pompous and fancy, and everybody acting all over the place which I don't like very much. You can't be phony in a picture because the camera's right up close to you—and looks right through you.

PB: *How did you learn movie technique, or were there not things that you had to learn?*

GC: There were an awful lot. There are things I'm still learning. It just took me thirty years to learn it. And I try not to be dazzled by the new techniques. Unless you are an absolute master of technique, I think it's playing around. You know, when talkies first came in they were fascinated by sound—they had frying eggs and they had this and that—and then people became infatuated with the movement of camera; I believe, the big thing right now is to move a hand-held camera. I think the director and his camerawork should not intrude on the story. You should never move the camera unless you have to; you should remain unostentatious; because if you do a lot of fancy footwork, maybe they notice you as a director, but I think it hurts the story.

PB: *Your direction is very subtle and so is your camera work. That's a distinctive quality to your pictures.*

GC: I'm happy to say so. One isn't aware of the movement of the camera.

PB: *When you got the Oscar for My Fair Lady [1964], I felt it was about time, and that it was typical of the Academy to give the award to the right person for the wrong picture.*

GC: Well, don't you think rewards throughout life go that way? Isn't it simple cause-and-effect. The old motion picture code was: if you committed adultery or some other crime, the next day you broke your leg; there was always "crime and punishment." It wasn't quite as *simple* as that, maybe, about getting awards. I think by and large the awards are quite *just*. I suppose *My Fair Lady* was a very impressive picture. Getting it might have been an accumulation because of others, but I think the Academy Awards are—in the last analysis—very just and very *perceptive* in a way. Sometimes they seem rather emotional and foolish. To get back to *me*, I thought *My Fair Lady* was very well done. ...



PB: *Yes, but there's many other pictures you've done that are better. or just as good, for which you didn't win a thing.*
 GC: Well, thank you very much. I agree with you, probably. There was one occasion—this was the days when people knew after the votes had been counted—and remember it was for the year *Little Women* was up....

PB: *Was it your idea to cast Audrey Hepburn in My Fair Lady, rather than Julie Andrews, who originated the role?*

GC: No, Audrey was already cast, but I was delighted with her and the way she played it. . . . I've never understood—now I'm contradicting myself—why she was never given more recognition for that performance, which I thought was absolutely lovely.

PB: *Do you think it was everybody was feeling sorry for Julie Andrews?*

GC: That she'd been done out of it, yes. And then there was some very nasty business with the lady whose profession it is to double the voices [singer Marni Nixon]—all so petty and such nonsense—but she made herself a great martyr. That was her *job*, because people knew Audrey wasn't a singer. Although she *did* sing parts of it.

PB: *On My Fair Lady, you reversed the usual order of shooting with close-ups.*

GC: That's a method of working. Usually you pay the lady the compliment; when you do over-the-shoulder scenes, usually you do it first for photographic reasons, and to make it easier and more comfortable for her. You shoot over the leading man onto her face and then you shoot the other way onto his. I found with Rex Harrison that after say, five takes, you could see that he was trying too hard and it didn't have the spontaneity. Audrey Hepburn, on the other hand, the more often she did it, the better she was. So we would do Rex's close-ups first and then Audrey would play it with him and have the benefit of these extra times. Soon she'd become easier and easier. Then, when we went onto her, we'd got the good performance out of Rex. He *played* it just as well but it didn't have that fine edge that it would have in his first five or six. That's another thing you've got to know—as I said before: *when* to catch a person. Spencer Tracy swore he was not going to improve after the first three or four; he *would* rather bellyache if he had to do more. Garbo felt that after five times she'd had it. By that time it would affect her. Some people just improve and love to do it, get easier and better and more relaxed. I haven't worked with Katherine Hepburn for years but she always liked to do it a great deal. In fact, in her first picture there was a scene where she had to eat scrambled eggs and I don't know how many times we did it: twenty-some times—and she had to eat the eggs each time. I can tell you she never looked at a scrambled egg after that. . . .

PB: *Have you found yourself typed as a certain kind of director at certain times in your life?*

GC: At *this* moment I hope I'm not going to be typed as an old gentleman: that's the present fear. No, when I first came out here—I was from the New York Theatre and I was rather funny—they thought I had no heart, that I was very sophisticated, and just there with the wisecracks; therefore I was typed as rather brittle and hard. Then, for one period, I did costume things and I was considered as a costume director; then I did sad, sob pictures and they said, "Oh, well, he's *this*..." There are certain things you cannot do: you have no sympathy for, no understanding, no leaning toward. I think one should do the kind of thing that you think in your heart of hearts you do a little differently, or a little

better, than somebody else. But there is always that tendency—you know the stuff about my being "a woman's director" because it's much easier to pigeonhole people. That's what one should fight always—people's evaluation of you: know your own evaluation of yourself.

PB: *You've spent almost all of your career working within the Hollywood system; what are your feelings about that and about working in a*

town you obviously have affection for.

GC: Yes, I think there are a great many things. I've found that I can function in this climate; technically one is bedazzled here. There is a *spirit* about making pictures in Hollywood—everybody being really involved—that I like very much. I may be sentimental about this. People get good salaries, but they realize that if the picture's good they're all going to profit by it. I've been places where people are just interested in working a certain amount of hours and that's it, and they're rather tough about it. Of course sometimes people are coddled a little too much; sometimes it's a little too slick, too carefully done. But you can do anything you like—I've never felt any real constraints in Hollywood. There are all sorts of crimes in Hollywood—of taste and various things—but I think a lot of the criticism is envy. And I think all this about bad taste is a lot of nonsense, too—there can be good taste *and* bad taste. Jean Renoir said: "Oh, years ago, all Hollywood pictures were great." I said, "Oh, no, not really." But what he meant was there was a get-up-and-go to them; there was a vitality to them.

Roger Ebert:

"My Fair Lady" is the best and most unlikely of musicals, during which I cannot decide if I am happier when the characters are talking or when they are singing. The songs are literate and beloved; some romantic, some comic, some nonsense, some surprisingly philosophical, every single one wonderful. The dialogue by Alan Jay Lerner wisely retains a great deal of "Pygmalion" by George Bernard Shaw, himself inspired by Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.



This fusion functions at such an elevation of sophistication and wit that when poor smitten Freddy sings "On the Street Where You Live," a song that would distinguish any other musical, this one drops Freddy entirely rather than risk another such simplistic outburst. His sincerity seems childlike compared with the emotional fencing match between the guarded Higgins and the wary Eliza. It is characteristic that in a musical that has love as its buried theme, no one ever kisses, or seems about to.

The story involves a meeting of two egos, one belonging to the linguist Henry Higgins, the other, no less titanic, to the flower girl Eliza Doolittle. It is often mistakenly said that they collaborate because Higgins (Rex Harrison) decides to improve Eliza's Cockney accent. In fact it is Eliza (Audrey Hepburn) who takes the initiative, presenting herself at Henry's bachelor quarters to sign up for lessons: "I know what lessons cost as well as you do, and I'm ready to pay."



Even in this early scene, it is Eliza's will that drives the plot; Higgins might have tinkered forever with his phonetic alphabet and his recording devices if Eliza hadn't insisted on action. She took seriously his boast the night before, in Covent Garden: "You see this creature with her curbstone English? The English that will keep her in the gutter till the end of her days? Well, sir, in six months, I could pass her off as a duchess at an Embassy Ball. I could even get her a job as a lady's maid or a shop assistant, which requires better English." The final twist, typical Shavian paradox, is what Eliza hears, and it supplies her inspiration: "I want to be a lady in a flower shop instead of sellin' at the corner of Tottenham Court Road. But they won't take me unless I can talk more genteel."

It is her ambition, not Henry's, that sets the plot in motion, including the professor's bet with his fellow linguist Pickering, who says he'll pay for the lessons if Higgins can transform her speech. Higgins' response will thrum below the action for most of the play: "You know, it's almost irresistible. She's so deliciously low. So horribly dirty." If Henry will teach Eliza to improve her speech, she will try to teach him decency and awaken his better nature.

It is unnecessary to summarize the plot or list the songs; if you are not familiar with both, you are culturally illiterate, although in six months I could pass you off as a critic at Cannes, or even a clerk in a good video store, which requires better taste.

It is difficult to discuss George Cukor's 1964 film as it actually exists because, even now, an impenetrable thicket of legend and gossip obscures its greatness. Many viewers would rather discuss the film that wasn't made, the one that would have starred Julie Andrews, who made the role of Eliza her own on the stage. Casting Audrey Hepburn was seen as a snub of Andrews, and so

it was; producer and studio head Jack L. Warner chose Hepburn for her greater box-office appeal, and was prepared to offer the role to Elizabeth Taylor if Hepburn turned it down.

One of the best-known items in the history of movie trivia is that Hepburn did not sing her own songs, but was dubbed by the gifted Marni Nixon. So notorious became this dubbing, so egregious was it made to appear, that although "My Fair Lady" was nominated for 12 Oscars and won eight (including best picture, actor, director and cinematography), Hepburn was not even nominated for best actress; Julie Andrews was, the same year, for "Mary Poppins," and she won.

At this remove, can we step back and take a fresh look at the controversy? True, Hepburn did not sing her own songs

(although she performed some of the intros and outros), and there was endless comment on moments when the lip-syncing was not perfect. But the dubbing of singing voices was commonplace at the time, and Nixon herself also dubbed Deborah Kerr ("The King and I") and Natalie Wood ("West Side Story"). Even actors who did their own singing were lip-syncing to their own pre-recorded dubs (and an occasional uncredited assist). I learn from Robert Harris, who restored "My Fair Lady" in 1993, that this was apparently the first musical to use any form of live recording of the music, although "only of Mr. Harrison, who refused to mouth to playbacks. His early model wireless microphone can be seen as a rather inflated tie during his musical numbers." Harrison's lips are therefore always in perfect sync, as opposed to everyone else in this film and all previous musicals.

That Hepburn did not do her own singing obscures her triumph, which is that she did her own acting. "My Fair Lady," with its dialogue drawn from Shaw, was trickier and more challenging than most other stage musicals; the dialogue not only incorporated Shavian theory, wit and ideology, but required Eliza to master a transition from Cockney to the Queen's English. All of this Hepburn does flawlessly and with heedless confidence, in a performance that contains great passion. Consider the scenes where she finally explodes at Higgins' misogynist disregard, returns to the streets of Covent Garden, and finds she fits in nowhere. "I sold flowers," she tells Henry late in their crisis. "I didn't sell myself. Now you've made a lady of me, I'm not fit to sell anything else."

It is typical of Shaw, admirable of Lerner and Loewe, and remarkable of Hollywood, that the film stays true to the original material, and Higgins doesn't cave in during a soppy rewritten "happy ending." Astonished that the ungrateful Eliza has stalked out of his home, Higgins asks in a song, "Why can't a woman be more like a man?" He tracks her to her mother's house, where the aristocratic Mrs. Higgins (Gladys Cooper) orders him to behave himself. "What?" he asks his mother. "Do you mean to say that

I'm to put on my Sunday manners for this thing that I created out of the squashed cabbage leaves of Covent Garden?" Yes, she does. Higgins realizes he loves Eliza, but even in the play's famous last line he perseveres as a defiant bachelor: "Eliza? Where the devil are my slippers?" It remains an open question for me, at the final curtain, whether Eliza stays to listen to what he says next.

Apart from the wonders of its words and music, "My Fair Lady" is a visual triumph. Cukor made use above all of Cecil Beaton, a photographer and costume designer, who had been production designer on only one previous film ("Gigi," 1958). He and cinematographer Harry Stradling, who both won Oscars, bring the film a combination of sumptuousness and detail, from the stylization of the famous Ascot scene to the countless intriguing devices in Higgins' book-lined study.

The supporting performances include Wilfred Hyde-White as the decent Pickering, speaking up for Eliza; and Stanley Holloway as her father, Alfred P. Doolittle, according to Higgins "the most original moral philosopher in England." Doolittle was originally to have been played in the movie by Jimmy Cagney; he might have been good, but might have been a distraction, and Holloway with his ravaged demeanor is perfect.

What distinguishes "My Fair Lady" above all is that it actually says something. It says it in a film of pointed words, unforgettable music and glorious images, but it says it. Bernard Shaw's "Pygmalion" was a socialist attack on the British class system, and on the truth (as true when the film was made as when Shaw wrote his play) that an Englishman's destiny was largely determined by his accent. It allowed others to place him, and to keep him in his place.

Eliza's escape from the "lower classes," engineered by Higgins, is a revolutionary act, dramatizing how "superiority" was inherited, not earned. It is a lesson that resonates for all societies, and the genius of "My Fair Lady" is that it is both a great entertainment and a great polemic. It is still not sufficiently appreciated what influence it had on the creation of feminism and class-consciousness in the years bridging 1914 when "Pygmalion" premiered, 1956 when the musical premiered, and 1964 when the film premiered. It was actually about something. As Eliza assures the serenely superior Henry Higgins, who stood for a class, a time and an attitude:

They can still rule with land without you.
Windsor Castle will stand without you.
And without much ado we can all muddle through without you.

SPRING 2012 BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS XXIV (TENTATIVE)

Jan 17 Victor Sjöström, **The Phantom Carriage** 1921
Jan 24 William A. Wellman, **The Public Enemy** 1931
Jan 31 Merian C. Cooper, **King Kong** 1933
Feb 7 Ernst Lubitsch, **To Be or Not to Be**, 1942
Feb 14 Luchino Visconti, **Senso** 1954
Feb 21 Stanley Kubrick, **Paths of Glory** 1957
Feb 29 Sidney Lumet, **12 Angry Men** 1957
Mar 6 Satyajit Ray, **The Music Room** 1958
Mar 13 spring break
Mar 20 Clint Eastwood, **The Outlaw Josey Wales** 1975
Mar 27 John Woo, **The Killer** 1989
Apr 3 Krzysztof Kieslowski, Kieslowski, **Red** 1994
Apr 10 Terrence Malick, **Thin Red Line** 1998
Apr 17 Fernando Meirelles **City of God**, 2003
Apr 24 Christopher Nolan, **The Dark Knight** 2008

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