



*Nick Zegarac's*

# THE HOLLYWOOD ART

Volume II

A COLLECTION OF AIRBRUSHED STILLS FROM HOLLYWOOD'S GOLDEN AGE



*Let us entertain you!*



**Clark Gable** as Harry Van, accompanied by his 'les blondes.' MGM publicity still of Gable's only foray into musical comedy, warbling the delightfully esoteric 'Putting on the Ritz' from **Idiot's Delight** (1939). Robert E. Sherwood Pulitzer Prize-winning play became a searing tragic romantic screwball. Van is a vaudevillian forced to stay in an Alpine resort when the European borders are closed due to the looming war. Van is drawn to Irene (Norma Shearer) the traveling companion of Achille Weber (Edward Arnold). Although sporting a platinum blonde do and a distinct Russian accent, Van realizes that Irene is actually a girl he once romanced in Omaha. Shearer indulges her wicked sense of humor, spoofing Garbo mercilessly as Irene. Despite not being a singer or dancer, Gable proved he could do both in his inimitable trademark style of Hollywood masculinity. In 1939 – widely regarded as the greatest year in films – *Idiot's Delight* was electrifying entertainment. Nearly 70 years later, time has been powerless to diffuse its esoteric charm. (Previous page: *How Green Was My Valley*).

# THEIR VOICES RAISED IN SONGS...

Operatic tenor Mario Lanza made an auspicious debut in **That Midnight Kiss** (MGM 1949), a schmaltzy vehicle from producer Joe Pasternak. A truck driver from New Orleans, the filmic plot capitalized on Lanza's own life circumstances, mixing pop tunes with classical arias and emerging a box office triumph. Here Lanza and soprano Kathryn Grayson shatter the eardrum with 'Love is Music' a song written expressly for the film but based on a few variations from Tchaikovsky's 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony.

Below: his name was Eugene Curran Kelly, a five foot seven self made hooper fresh from Broadway's success, Pal Joey and instantly signed to a seven year contract by producer David O. Selznick. One problem: Selznick had



zero interest in making a musical. Fortunate for Kelly, who migrated to MGM – the tiffany of musical motion picture production companies. There, Kelly's earthy and engaging qualities as a dancer earned him the respect of producer Arthur Freed. There are many classics in Kelly's canon; all taking a backseat to what many consider the greatest musical ever made – **Singin' in the Rain** (1952).

Next page: Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. They made only 9 films together – she opting to develop her skills as a serious actress by 1939; he, merely changing partners frequently to continue the dance. Of their pairings, **Swing Time** (1936), remains the Astaire/Rogers experience to beat. Here, Ginger 'teaches' Fred to trip the light fantastic – a skill he takes to task effortlessly in their pas deux – 'Let Yourself Go.' There is little to suggest the art of tap will progress further from this and no one since to match this pair for flawless on screen artistry.





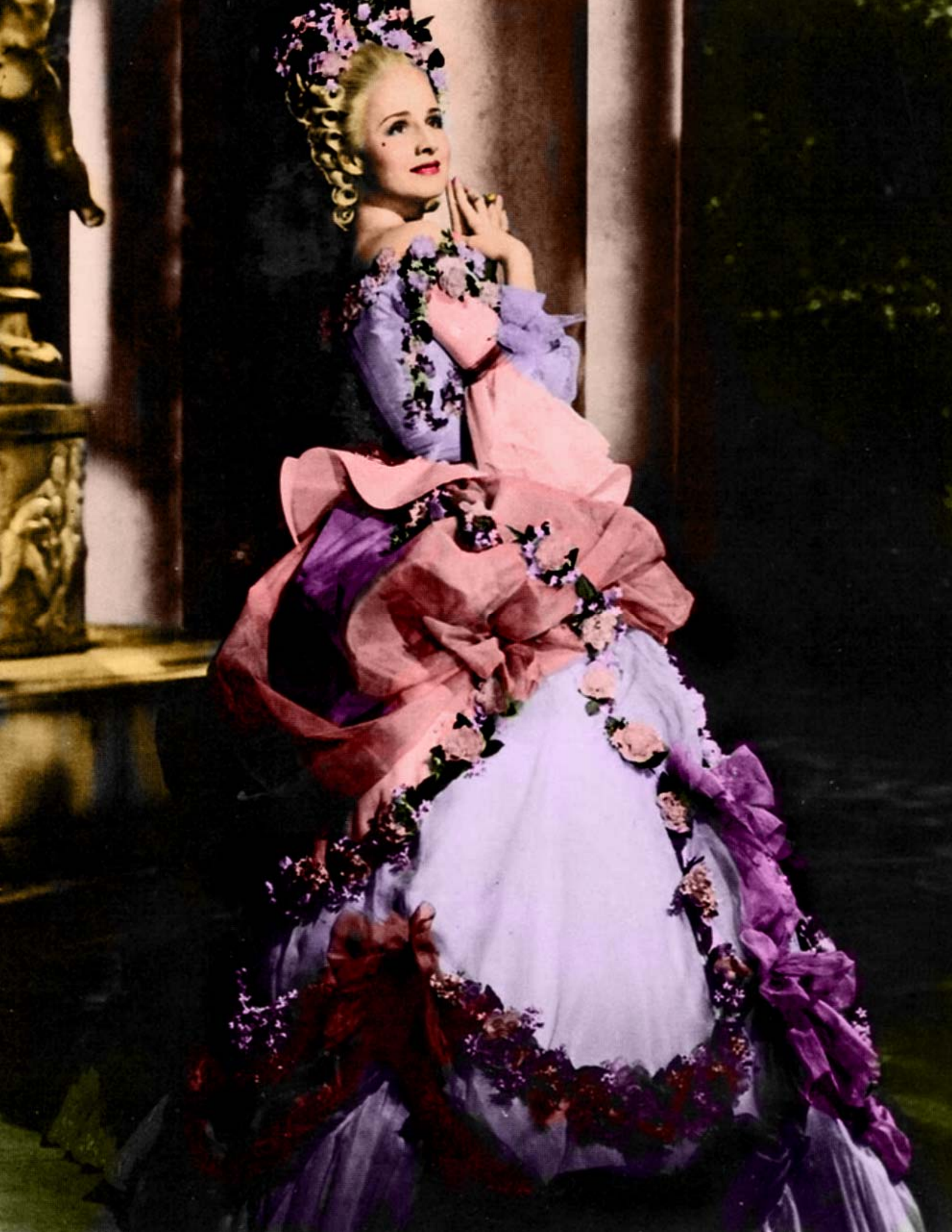
## *The Antoinette Gallery*

**Marie Antoinette (1938): it was the most expensive film to date – a lavished production destined to break box office records – and quite possibly, MGM's coffers to the point of bankruptcy. Midway through acquiring the largest consignment of European furniture and tapestries ever to clear Los Angeles customs, studio mogul L.B. Mayer became very nervous that his production chief, Irving Thalberg was running off with the studio's bottom line. Designed by Thalberg as a showcase vehicle for his wife, actress Norma Shearer (affectionately dubbed as MGM's queen of the lot) – the film was to have been shot in Technicolor. Then tragedy struck.**



**At age 36, Thalberg died of a massive heart attack, Shearer retreated into seclusion and Mayer was left with a colossal egg to lay. Discarding Technicolor, cutting the film's running time from four hours to just barely two and half, and, replacing Thalberg's choice of director with W.S. Van Dyke, Marie Antoinette emerged as mind boggling opulent entertainment, winning accolades from the French government for its authenticity in costume and set design. Immediately following the film's lavish premiere at the Carthay Circle Theater, Mayer pulled Thalberg's plans to roadshow the film and instead released it at 'popular prices.' It made back its production costs, but just barely and convinced Mayer that to spend so recklessly on one film was not desirable – especially if Mayer, the undisputed monarch of MGM deemed it so.**

**(Above: Norma Shearer. Right: Robert Morley as Louie XIV.)**



Previous: the costumes for Marie Antoinette were brilliantly conceived by MGM's resident fashion guru – Gilbert Adrian. Right: Gladys George in a stunning gold ball gown. Below: Norma Shearer in various costumes.



# *Errol Flynn* The Sea Hawk (1940)

He was the resident heartthrob on the Warner Bros. backlot, a man whose private exploits far outweighed his on screen dramatics.

Never taken seriously as an actor – despite the fact that he was a damn good one - Flynn's reputation as a rascal of considerable sexual prowess was forever cemented into Hollywood lore following his exoneration from rape charges involving two underage girls. The moniker, 'in like Flynn' was forever detested by Flynn, who increasingly plied his insecurities with alcohol and a morphine addiction that eventually got the better of him.

*"They've great respect for the dead in Hollywood," Flynn once mused, "but none for the living."*

He died prematurely of a heart attack in Vancouver on Oct. 14, 1959. His legacy as an actor only recently unearthed as genuine and formidable - beyond the fights.

**TRIVIA:** Tragedy struck again when Flynn's son, Sean – an aspiring actor – was captured and executed by the Khmer Rouge while serving his country in Cambodia.







*“The ape objects!”* – William Powell

It was a brilliant bit of ensemble casting: William Powell (left) as Bill Chandler - the hard bitten realist with a penchant for doing damage control; Jean Harlow as embittered 'almost' bride Gladys Benton - perpetually engaged to a commitment shy newspaper editor; Myrna Loy society gadabout Connie Allenbury - the object of a very public law suit and Spencer Tracy, as Warren Haggerty the editor in question - attempting rather unsuccessfully to pull all the strings. The ball of yarn effectively unraveled in Jack Conway's **Libeled Lady** (1936). Only the combined efforts of these stellar talents and MGM's sterling production values could pull off such a marvelous coup of theatrics and come up smelling like a rose. Of the performances, Powell's remains the standout - astute, wry and comedic to veritable insanity. His 'fly fishing' sequence remains a high water mark.



***“Oh! Wise guy, eh?!?”*** – one of many trademark Stoogisms

The most successful comedy team in the history of slapstick: Moe (left) and Curly Howard (centre) with Larry Fine (right), more readily referred to simply as The Three Stooges. Beginning their career with resident ‘straight’ man Ted Healy the stooges made their break from Vaudeville stage to screen – doing several years of bit work with Healy in support before forging out on their own in a series on two reel shorts at Columbia’s poverty row. Instantly recognizable from their debut in the rhyming ‘Woman Haters (1932) – the trio became famous for their violent outbursts of which Curly was usually the recipient of Moe and Larry’s varying wrath. Although everyone has their own favorite, the overwhelming consensus is usually with Curly – his shaved pate prematurely aging his goofy façade and his priceless expressions married to a ‘nyuk nyuk nyuk’ and a bit of visual comedy that never failed to send the masses laughing for more. In 1949 Curly suffered a stroke. He was replaced by brother, Shemp, and later by a pair of Curly knock offs. “We’re the best in the country,” Moe once declared. “But how are you in the city?” Larry glibly replies. As an act, The Stooges proved they could hold their own wherever and whenever they played.

# About the artist:

Nick Zegarac is a freelance writer/editor and graphics artist from Windsor Ontario, whose love of classic Hollywood stars and movies was inculcated at the tender age of nine while quietly absorbing the greats of filmdom through the modest portions of his family's black and white television set.

Since then Zegarac has managed to pen nine screenplays, 2 currently under consideration, as well as write several dozen lengthy pieces on Hollywood's history. He is the administrator of 'The Hollywood Art' and online resource for all things classic Hollywood, a contributing DVD reviewer for Mediascreen.com and a devote worshiper of 'the good ol' days' – which he readily acknowledges "probably never truly existed to begin with. Still it's hard to shake the allure of that timeless illusion – its tiffany like settings where the beautiful people continue to mingle in elegant repose. Why can't life be more like the movies?"

Indeed, why not? Zegarac's reincarnations of the 'good ol' days' offer a revisionist take on what might have been if Technicolor had been king only a decade or two earlier and the technology of the day rivaled that overwhelming swell of talents that sadly we shall not see the likes of again.

To sleep then, perchance to daydream in the mythology of legends that continue to endure. To encourage everyone to embrace the golden age of Hollywood stars, this has been Zegarac's fondest wish. He continues to celebrate the past as more than mere prologue – as enduring untouchable resilient art.

*"They say a classic never dies. I hope that much is true."* - NZ



A ZEGARAC INTERNATIONAL SPECIAL PROJECT



Colorizations @ Nick Zegarac 2006 (all rights reserved).