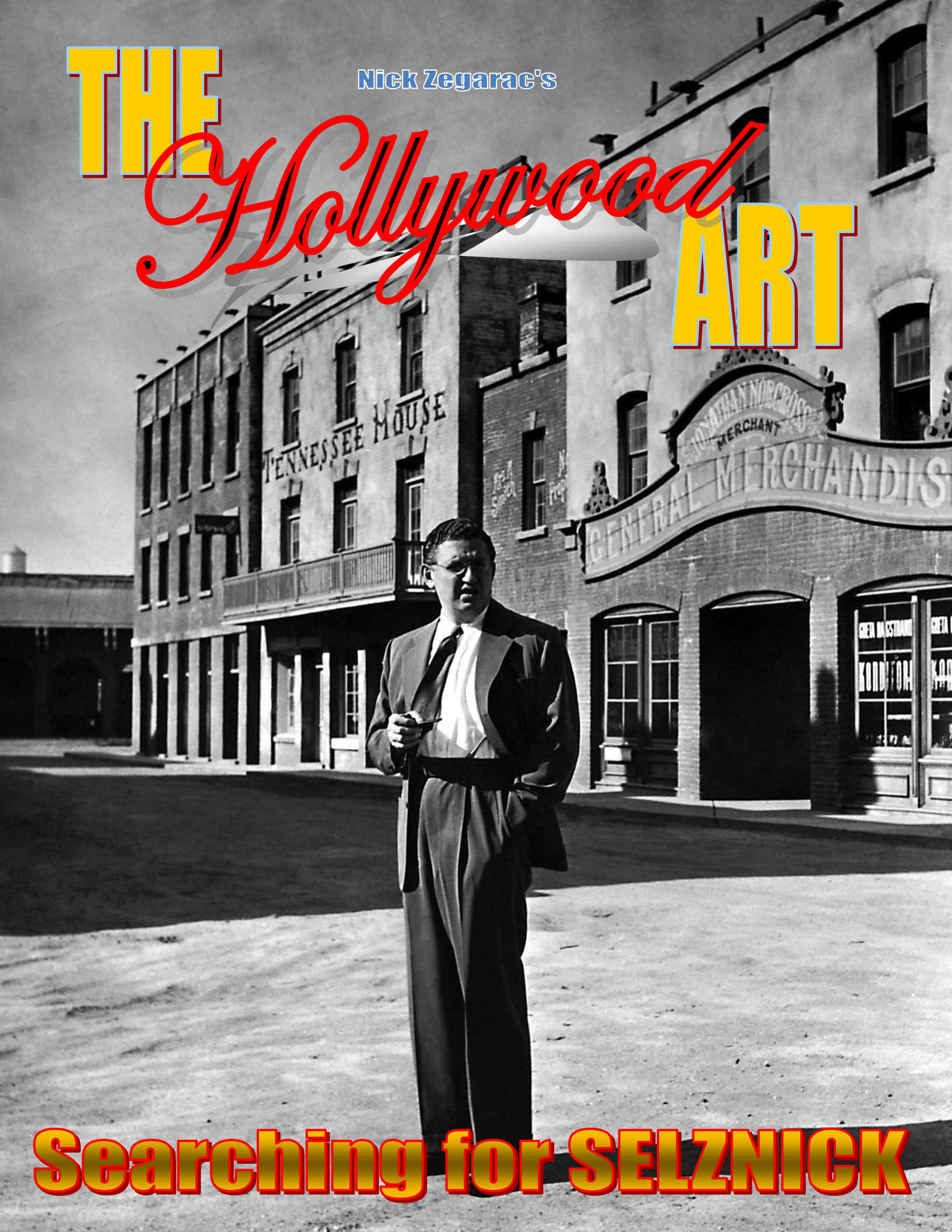


THE

Nick Zegarac's

Hollywood

ART



Searching for SELZNICK



MEN OF VISION

David O. Selznick



*“There are only two kinds of class.
First class and no class.”*

- D.O.S.

In the Spring of 1937 David O. Selznick took an advanced copy of a book with him on holiday to Hawaii. It was a property he had just bought the film rights to via the enthusiasm of his New York publicist Kay Brown. To his ever-lasting dismay Selznick had agreed to buy the film rights for a then unheard of sum of \$50,000.

But the more Selznick read the novel the more it suddenly dawned on him that the story it told was much too long to fit into one 2hr. movie. Selznick, a purist when it came to translating books to film, began to worry. It wasn't often that the aspiring mogul and producer of such immortal screen favorites as **Dinner At Eight** (1933), **David Copperfield** (1935) and **A Tale of Two Cities** (1935) broke into a sweat. But on this occasion, Selznick's palms were wet and sticky.

No one in the film industry thought much of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With The Wind* when the book was published in 1936. But in less than a month the novel was a runaway best seller. Still, movies about the American Civil War had proven highly unpopular with the paying public.

Selznick may have been a gambler at heart. But even with the book becoming a publishing sensation by the end of its first year, **Gone With The Wind** - the movie - was a very long shot indeed.

TOP: Selznick - portrait of a mogul taken in Oct. 1935, just as Selznick was about to take over the old RKO backlot and rechristen it 'Selznick International'. For nearly a decade Selznick had wanted the autonomy that only owning his own studio could provide. He was tired of working for someone else. He wanted to be his own boss!

MIDDLE: The colonial inspired facade of Selznick International seems to foreshadow the exterior of Twelve Oaks in *Gone With The Wind*. but actually, the book wasn't even published yet at the time Selznick assumed control of the studio. The facade's Boxwood hedges would serve as a matte plate for Mammie, Prissie and Pork's arrival to Scarlett & Rhett's Atlanta Mansion in the film. The mansion, however, was a matte painting.

BOTTOM: MGM contract player Maureen O'Sullivan flies the Union Jack against the Stars & Stripes to mark the beginning of production on GWTW.





TOP LEFT: So happy together? David Selznick married Irene Mayer (daughter of Louis B.) on April 29th, 1930. Borrowing from the title of Ernest Hemmingway's latest novel, the joke around the back lot then was that '*the son-in-law also rises*'. Initially, Selznick claimed he married Irene because she was smarter than any man he knew. Regrettably, a romance between Selznick and Jennifer Jones destroyed not only Selznick's marriage but also Jones' to Robert Walker.

TOP MIDDLE: By the time Jones and Walker costarred together in Selznick's romantic weepy **Since You Went Away** (1944) their marriage was already on very shaky ground. The two would divorce in 1945. Selznick would marry Jones in 1949.

TOP RIGHT: Selznick was determined to handcraft a career for Jennifer Jones on par with the likes of Garbo. 1946's **Duel in the Sun** was conceived as a super-western, in every way meant to be a valiant successor to GWTW. Although ambitiously mounted, the film failed to catch on with the public and was one of the primary reasons why Selznick International eventually slipped into receivership.

LEFT: Selznick in script consultation with Walt Disney? One can only imagine what these two titans in the industry are discussing. This photo was taken in Selznick's office in 1936. Whatever their plans, nothing but this photo op came of them. MIDDLE: Selznick and Production Designer Lyle Wheeler go over some preliminary sketches for Tara on **GWTW**. The painting, one of many by renown historian Wilber Kurtz, seem to highly please both men's artistic sentiment. BOTTOM: The cast of **Dinner At Eight** (1933) enjoy drinks on the set. Selznick was determined to top MGM's previous all star spectacle, **Grand Hotel** (1932) with one of his own. He did just that, earning the respect of his peers and also his father-in-law, MGM's Louis B. Mayer.



After Selznick was forced to sell off his interests in **GWTW** to MGM, and had to sell his studio just to stay alive, there was popular talk in Hollywood that his own audacity and ego had been to blame; the vultures all too quick to pick at his bones even before Selznick was legally declared dead. Today, no one can deny David O. Selznick his hallowed place in cinema history. His motion pictures – the first to carry a producer's credit either directly above or just below the main title - celebrate their producer as auteur. True enough, humility was never Selznick's strong suit. Some would say he had an inability to be humble - just long enough to look good for the newsreel cameras. But there is no denying that at least one movie produced by Selznick has become the benchmark by which all others continue to be judged.



Along the way there were others, each an exemplar of those intangibles: chic good taste and imagination. But it wasn't easy. Selznick often fought with his writers, stars and directors to see that it was his vision getting up there on the silver screen. And while his memos brow beat virtually every department under his command, in the end all his tinkering and toying around was to some great purpose usually fulfilled and almost always confirmed by setting box office registers ringing around the world. For Selznick's artistry had an unmistakable and virulent afterglow all its own.





How to start an American dynasty. TOP LEFT: Lewis J. Selznick poses for posterity circa 1923. He once told his boy's that money was only a means to an end. His advice to Myron and David - "*Spend it! Always be broke!*"

TOP MIDDLE LEFT: Myron Selznick looks up for the cameras while attending the fights. Myron was a ruthless agent in Hollywood. His clients adored him. The studios feared him. He carried something of that loathing inside and drank himself to death in 1944. Myron's downfall would haunt David for the rest of his life.

TOP MIDDLE RIGHT: Marion C. Cooper, Jock Whitney and David Selznick proudly pose for an inaugural photo of the newly formed Selznick International Picture Corp. 1935. Whitney was a wealthy Puritan with an investor's heart and enough money to buy most of Hollywood. Cooper was one of Hollywood's pioneers, the man behind King Kong (1933) and the invention of Cinerama in the 1950s.

TOP RIGHT: the woman who would come to mean the most to David Selznick - author Margaret Mitchell. Mitchell's success with *Gone With The Wind* was a fluke. She had written the novel simply to amuse herself while recovering from a broken leg. When the book became a runaway best seller the reclusive Mitchell found herself an unwilling overnight celebrity. Her life, post publication, would be short-lived and never quite the same.



RIGHT: Director George Cukor was one of Selznick International's very first contract employees. The two had been very close friends since working together at Paramount in the early 1930s. Cukor was Selznick's first pick to direct *GWTW*. Regrettably, they clashed over virtually every conceivable aspect of the film. Although Selznick would remove Cukor from the film (replacing him with Victor Fleming at Clark Gable's request) Cukor and Selznick would remain good friends until Selznick's death in 1965.

RIGHT: Selznick presides over the deal of the decade; the inconceivable loan out of Clark Gable by Louis B. Mayer to star in *GWTW*. David first cajoled, then begged his father-in-law to give him Gable. But Mayer was the real winner. For one and a quarter million he secured the distribution rights to the most profitable film of all time.



RIGHT BOTTOM: In heavy consultation with a very heavy Alfred Hitchcock on the set of *Rebecca* (1940); Selznick's follow up to *GWTW*. With this film Selznick won back to back Oscars for producing two Academy Award winning best pictures. No other producer has ever matched this accomplishment. In later years, Hitch' disowned *Rebecca* as "*not a Hitchcock picture*". The point was well taken. Each time Hitchcock wanted to change an element of the narrative he was vetoed by Selznick. However, both men were forced to make at least one artistic concession. The Breen Censorship Office refused to allow Selznick to have the story's hero, Maxim De Winter commit the crime of murdering his first wife. In the film, Rebecca is said to have struck her head on a piece of ship's tackle instead.

Throughout his career, David O. Selznick would carry with him the angst of a proud scion whose own father had lost everything because he could not compete with the Hollywood dream factories. Unlike his older brother Myron, who sought revenge from the family's financial ruin by virtually inventing the role of the agent, David was determined to show the big bosses that independence from the studio machinery was not only possible, but in fact, was also the best way of making movies. The irony, of course, is that Selznick was tyrannically involved in every facet of the film making process – much more a hands on mogul than say, L.B. Mayer at MGM.

Selznick was born a quiet introspective babe with no hint of the fiery showman that was to follow, in Pittsburgh on May 10, 1902. He was the third child of immigrant jeweler, Lewis J. and his wife Florence. His father was quick to instill all his children with a sense of pride – a quality that Selznick would refine under his own studio banner years later. But Lewis also taught his boy's how to be





TOP LEFT: A poster for 1937's smash hit *The Prisoner of Zenda* starring Ronald Colman. Selznick and Colman had worked together before at MGM on *A Tale of Two Cities* (1935). Both had enjoyed the experience. Furthermore, there was no finer actor working in films, or more popular with audiences except Clark Gable. Colman brought an urbane sophistication to the dual role of Rudolph Rassendyll, an English commoner forced to impersonate the monarch of the province of Zenda after King Rudolph V is kidnapped by rival forces on the eve of his coronation. TOP RIGHT: Ronald Colman is flanked by his loyal subjects, Col. Zapt (C. Aubrey Smith, left) and Captain Fritz Von Tarlenheim (David Niven). A superior swashbuckler produced with exceptional production values, *The Prisoner of Zenda* was an immense achievement that further advanced the name of Selznick as a force to be reckoned with. MGM remade 'Zenda' in color the mid-1950s, but with none of Selznick's flair, imagination or style.

profligate. He was made easily restless and bored. Lewis moved the family to New York in 1912 and within a year lost his business. But he never lost his sense of adventurism and that, coupled with his tenacity to succeed at whatever he tried, were qualities the young David would also take to heart.

David's preteen fascination with classic literature impressed his father much more than his growing appreciation for the then fledgling art of motion pictures. Lewis J. never considered movies an art form. But that didn't stop him from getting involved in the industry, eventually producing a series of shorts. During this same period David learned all he could about the film making process. The more he knew the more he loved it. But in 1923 Lewis J.'s production company went under. Three years later, a deal between his father and Associated Exhibitors all but bankrupted the family.

David Selznick's bright-eyed optimism for the movie business won him limited work during this dark moment in the family's personal history. His haughty and often ferocious temperament did not. After making a bitter enemy of L.B. Mayer, David turned to Nicholas Schenk, Mayer's New York boss for a reprieve. He was forcibly appointed by Schenk as a lowly reader in MGM's story department. Although his rise to prominence as Harry Rapf's personal assistant came swiftly, equally meteoric was Selznick's lamentable fall from grace after he refused to offer an apology to MGM's V.P Irving Thalberg. David chose instead to walk out of the studio rather than kowtow to Thalberg's authority.

His own career in movies seemed to be over even before it had begun. But Selznick did not remain unemployed for long, largely through the interventions of personal friend, rising director, William Wellman, who finagled a deal for Selznick at Paramount in 1928. Installed once more in the writer's department, Selznick began to work his magic on scripts he felt were being given short shrift. He also became mired in the laborious process of acquiring and developing sound facilities for the studio.



In retrospect, Selznick's marriage to Irene may seem mercenary at best, or worse, as outright revenge for being snubbed by Mayer over at MGM. Either way, the engagement and subsequent union did little to slow down the pace of Selznick's responsibilities at Paramount. During his tenure, Selznick became acquainted with several men who would eventually come to make up the creative entourage he would take with him to start his own studio. These Selznick International alumni included directors John Cromwell and George Cukor, Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack – the latter two providing Selznick with his first accredited mega success as the producer of **King Kong** (1933) – though that venture would come not at Paramount, but through another migration – this time to Keith-Albee-Orpheum (RKO) Studios.



Selznick's decampment to RKO had been perceived as a precursor to striking out on his own as an independent with film pioneer Lewis J. Milestone. But this venture was ill-timed. RKO was in a state of financial panic – hit badly by the Great Depression and mildly threatening its contract players and staff with a complete shutdown. Wary of loaning out capital to the film industry, banks balked at Selznick's pitch – a blow softened considerably when Merian C. Cooper announced that he had secured the means to produce **King Kong**.

Kong was a bright spot that helped keep RKO in the black. Even before conceptualization on the film had begun, Selznick found himself producing **What Price Hollywood?** (1932) for the studio; a precursor to the original **A Star is Born** (1937) which Selznick would later make under his own studio banner. Selznick also cemented his working relationship with director George Cukor on his next project – the enchanting melodrama **A Bill of Divorcement** (1932) starring Katharine Hepburn and John Barrymore. Hepburn – an irritant to authority figures even then, nevertheless proved to have Selznick's complete backing and trust. Neither was misplaced and Selznick quickly arranged for her to star in a version of **Little Women** (1933), also distributed by RKO and another smashing success. By all accounts Selznick's career was on the upswing.



TOP: the title card from RKO's mammoth spectacle, **King Kong** (1933) with Selznick's name as producer boldly emblazoned underneath. Selznick's producer credit was the first ever to be given such prominence. In later years Selznick's name would also top many a movie marquee.

MIDDLE: Kong threatens to annihilate an army of biplanes atop the Empire State Building in the film's climactic showdown. Kong was a marvel of start/stop animation and in motion puppetry. The realism and personality infused in the character by SFX creator Willis O'Brien has never been equaled.

BOTTOM: Actress Fay Wray cringes at her first sight of the eighth wonder of the world.



TOP LEFT: MGM's wunderkind producer, Irving G. Thalberg. It is rumored that David Selznick added the 'O.' to his name for flourish to compete with Thalberg's name. Unlike the 'G', which stood for Grant, the 'O' in Selznick's name stood for nothing.

CENTRE: Thalberg's wife, actress Norma Shearer, as Juliet, emotes to Leslie Howard's Romeo in Thalberg's personally supervised production of **Romeo & Juliet** (1936). Thalberg took great care to craft his wife's career throughout the 1930s. This was to be his final accomplishment before dying prematurely of a heart attack at the age of 37. Selznick, who had once shared L.B. Mayer's opinion that Thalberg was spending far too much time on molding Norma's career would make the same mistake ten years later with his own female muse, Jennifer Jones. Despite the unhealthy competition between these two men, Selznick had already been gone from MGM a full year at the time of Thalberg's death and had already produced **The Garden of Allah**, a lavish Technicolor spectacle starring Marlene Dietrich. Although the film was not a great financial success, it proved to be artistically sound nevertheless. The next year Selznick would have his cake and be able to eat it too with the monumental popularity of **A Star Is Born** (1937).

RIGHT: An exhausted Selznick on the verge of physical collapse. Throughout the arduous shooting schedule on **Gone With The Wind** (1939), Selznick had been popping Benzedrine like candy to keep up with the pace of the production. Chronically wired for most of the film's shoot, and that of the subsequent **Rebecca**(1940), the abuse of the prescription drug eventually began to take its toll. Coupled with his mounting financial woes on **Duel in the Sun** (1946) and perennial friction with Alfred Hitchcock on the set of **Spellbound** (1945), by the mid-1940s both Selznick's health and his fortunes were in steep decline.

However, the most seismic event in Selznick's career that year was neither the debut of **Kong** nor the devastating earthquake that had hit Long Beach, killing hundreds. It was rather, Selznick's return to MGM – with his record of past indiscretions expunged. With George Cukor directing, Selznick would produce the studio's biggest blockbuster to date; the all-star melodrama; **Dinner at Eight**. In truth, Selznick doubted his own sanity in returning under the auspicious reign of L.B. Mayer and, at one point, even asked Mayer to release him from his contract. Mayer did not. With Irving Thalberg convalescing after a near fatal heart attack, Mayer needed a strong producer at MGM's helm.

Although Selznick grumbled consistently throughout his second Metro tenure, his stay produced many worthy examples of film art including **Dancing Lady** (1933), **Viva Villa!**(1934); Garbo's definitive version of **Anna Karenina** and the best of Dickens' **A Tale of Two Cities** and **David Copperfield** (all made in 1935). Of these, **Anna Karenina** gave Selznick the most grief – not on the set, but in preproduction – as the Breen censors refused to allow Selznick to include a scene directly ripped from the pages of the novel.

However, another tiff near the end of completion on **A Tale of Two Cities** resulted in Selznick making a clean break with MGM in the spring of 1935. He moved to the old RKO-Pathe back lot with the blessing and financial backing of former UA president Al Lichtman and more financial aid provided by wealthy playboy John Hay (Jock) Whitney. Selznick inaugurated Selznick International Pictures in October of that year with a press release that, in hindsight at least, seems apropos for the direction Hollywood would eventually be heading after 1949 and government intervention into the studio's misperceived autonomy.



NOTHING VENTURED NOTHING GAINED

Striking out on his own with 'Selznick International'

"The day of mass production has ended...it has become, in the making of good pictures, so essential for a producer to collaborate on every inch of script, to be available for every conference and go over all details of production that it is physically impossible for him to give his best efforts to more than a limited number of pictures.

Audiences are smarter than we give them credit for, and they have become much more selective in their choices of pictures they will pay to see....they don't like being 'played down to' so our new company...will play up to our prospective audiences.

My object as a producer has always been to make the finer things and to leave the trash to the other fellows. I firmly believe that the future of pictures lies in producing stories of high caliber." – typical Selznick: setting lofty standards and expectations for himself while bandying about the work of his contemporaries as inferiority personified."

- D.O.S.

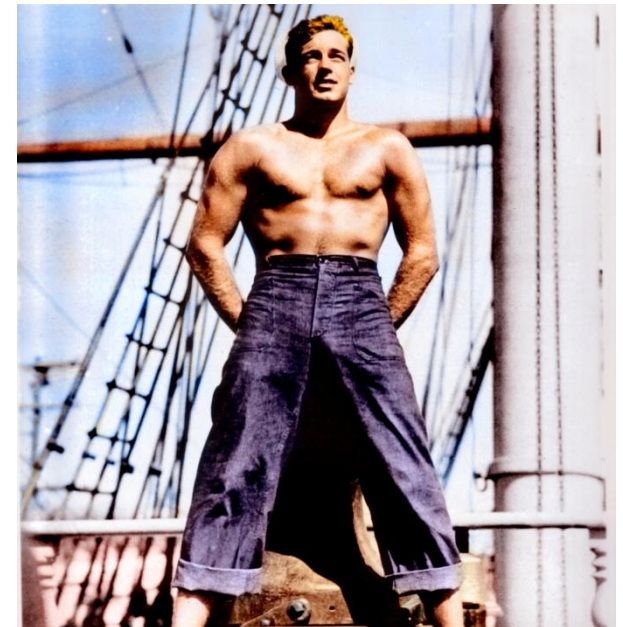
As Selznick dictated this edict to a group of reporters in the Fall of 1935 he could be proud of his many accomplishments in the industry thus far. They included some of the finest motion pictures made at MGM and elsewhere, featuring some of the most beloved talent of their generation. His staff at Selznick International were comprised mostly of people who had impressed him from his tenure at MGM. Others, like his private secretary, Marcella Bannett, had been with him since the beginning of his career. But each member of Selznick's staff had been handpicked because they had made contributions along the way to Selznick's ever-rising reputation as a producer of quality.

TOP: the most famous placard in all of Hollywood, accompanied at the start of every feature produced at Selznick International with a flourish of chiming bells and then a bombastic fanfare composed by Alfred Newman.

MIDDLE: Tara for **Gone With The Wind**. For years, MGM tour guides would refer to a colonial mansion on their own back lot as the one used for the film. But no, Selznick had the bucolic white brick farmhouse built on his lot. And there it stood until the late 1960s when, in a state of extreme decay, it was bulldozed to the ground to make way for a housing development.

MIDDLE: Leslie Howard and Ingrid Bergman in **Intermezzo**, a remake of the Swedish film of the same name that had impressed Selznick. He brought its star (Bergman) to Hollywood, one of the rare few who became legendary after being given Selznick's star treatment.

BOTTOM: Beefcake Guy Madison was groomed to become the next big star in the Selznick stable. Selznick featured Madison in **Since You Went Away** (1944) as a gum-chewing Seabee. But it became rather obvious from this debut that Madison's appeal lay more in his glistening pectorals than his acting prowess. Although Madison continued to find work in Hollywood, most of it was in television, then perceived as the poor stepchild to the movies. Grooming Madison for stardom proved an expensive aside for Selznick, further straining the studios already strapped resources.





ABOVE: Two views of greatness on display. LEFT: Vivien Leigh listens intently to director Victor Fleming on the set of **Gone With The Wind**. Leigh preferred George Cukor's kindness to Fleming crass showmanship. Cukor was renowned throughout the industry as a woman's director, and proved it by directing an all-star female line up in MGM's **The Women** that same year. By contrast, Fleming was a man's man and a favorite of Clark Gable (seated next to Leigh). The two got along famously. Fleming and Leigh, however, frequently came to tearful blows on the set, and judging by the mood on the faces of all concerned herein it looks as though another bout is about to begin. Gable's scowl perhaps suggests a renewed contempt for his leading lady. The two were hardly friendly to one another throughout filming.

RIGHT: Leigh and Selznick, all smiles on Oscar night. The actress was the soul of brevity, wit and charm as she accepted her Best Actress statuette, dedicating her performance to "that figure in which all points of **Gone With The Wind** meet, Mr. David Selznick." Selznick's own speech to mark his Best Picture Oscar did not survive for posterity, perhaps because he never had time in the interim between making the film and its premiere to think of something meaningful to say except 'thank you'.

Taking his cue from Loews Incorporated Selznick also kept a New York office headed by Katharine Brown, who had absolute autonomy to pursue and purchase any and all story ideas that might be considered filmable. The first of these was **Little Lord Fauntleroy** (1935) a film that borrowed its stars, Freddie Bartholomew and Mickey Rooney from MGM. Selznick had hoped to one day cultivate a small but lucrative stable of his own stars but this was never to be.

Although he would in fact make feeble attempts to transform the careers of Rhonda Fleming and Guy Madison - as well as launch the career of his second wife, Jennifer Jones (even though Jones' greatest success occurred outside of Selznick's domain) Selznick's greatest assets from this period were undoubtedly Vivien Leigh and Ingrid Bergman (both already well established in their respective countries before coming to America, the former actually 'discovered' and brought to David's attention by his brother Myron for the role of Scarlett O'Hara).

At about this same time, Selznick made several attempts to re-introduce Technicolor to live action films. Although Walt Disney had had great success employing color for his **Silly Symphony** animated series, RKO's first big budget Technicolor feature, **Becky Sharp** (1933) had been a colossal failure. Selznick's first attempt at a color feature **The Garden of Allah** (1936) fared marginally better at the box office, although it was hardly the box office dynamo Selznick had hoped for. The fault lay more in the script than the photography. '**Garden**' was a maudlin romance between a psychologically scarred monk who renounces his vows (played by Charles Boyer) and the beautiful foreigner he meets on his journey to the desert (Marlene Dietrich). But Selznick was not willing to concede defeat just yet. Instead he rebounded with his next Technicolor feature, **A Star Is Born** (1937).

After beginning production on the first sound (and undeniably best) version of Anthony Hope's classic swashbuckler, **The Prisoner of Zenda** (1937) Selznick embarked on what would prove to be his all too brief golden period. He became a star maker - discovering Ingrid Bergman and casting her opposite British matinee idol Leslie Howard in **Intermezzo** (1939), a classic love story. During this period Selznick also discovered a



ABOVE: One miss and a hit. LEFT: on location in Utah's Mojave Desert for **The Garden of Allah**. Charles Boyer and Marlene Dietrich, (extreme left) are almost eclipsed by this mirage of camera crew and cumbersome lighting equipment. Shooting outside the studio wasn't cheap, and the disappointing returns at the box office convinced Selznick to temporarily think - if not smaller - than more insularly when planning his next Technicolor feature.

RIGHT: an exuberant Janet Gaynor, as Esther Bloggett, graciously accepts her Academy Award in Selznick International's **A Star Is Born** (1937). The quintessential Cinderella story about Hollywood corrupting an innocent, in mere moments Esther's elation will turn to vinegar as her drunken husband, Norma Maine (Fredric March) arrives to embarrass himself and steal this moment of victory away from her.

lucrative sideline in the film business - 'packaging' a property – basically gathering talent together both in front of and behind the camera, combining them with a solid script, then marketing the whole affair to an outside production company under a distribution deal for a handsome fee, designed to maximize his profits with a minimal amount of personal investment.

But by far, Selznick's greatest achievement of the period – and arguably, ever – was his acquiescence to produce a property brought to his attention by Katharine Brown: **Gone With The Wind**. Selznick had initially balked at the prospect of transforming this lengthy work into a film – first, because he had been working backward from the assumption that civil war pictures were 'box office poison', and second, because he had no female star under contract suitable for the lead. However, when Brown attempted to market the property to Pioneer Pictures instead, ego kicked in and Selznick quickly acquired the rights to the novel for a then record \$50,000.

The woes in developing **Gone With The Wind** for the screen are too numerous to explore at any great length herein. No brief summation would adequately suffice. However, a few key points bear on the subsequent history of David Selznick and thus deserve inclusion. First, the project became a catalyst for a professional rift between Selznick and long time associate – director George Cukor. The two had worked successfully on several projects at MGM. At the start of shooting GWTW Selznick had expressed complete faith in Cukor's abilities to deliver an expertly tailored melodrama. However, the daily rushes lacked the spark of excitement that Selznick had expected to see on the screen. With more money invested on a single project (nearly two million) Selznick could not afford to wait in the hope that Cukor would eventually rise up to the challenge. Instead, Victor Fleming was brought in from MGM to take over the project.

Perhaps because he realized the enormity of his undertaking too late to turn back, Selznick was much more heavily involved on GWTW throughout its gestation and beyond, to the Atlanta premiere. His almost daily conflicts ran the gamut from fussing over Walter Plunkett's costume designs to critiquing Vivien Leigh's southern dialect and amplexness of her bosom.

During these strenuous months, Selznick discovered Bensedrine, the popular over-the-counter sleep remedy he readily took to settle down after pulling fifteen hour days at the studio. Unfortunately, Selznick became chronically



Above: Alfred Hitchcock critiques Joan Fontaine during rehearsals on the set of **Rebecca** (1940). Fontaine was not Hitchcock's first choice to star in his American debut and initially he resented having the actress foisted upon him by Selznick. But like most decisions Selznick was making during this period in his career, it was the right one for the film. Fontaine turned in a brilliantly understated performance as the insecure second wife of a millionaire who may have murdered his first wife in a jealous rage. Although she did not win the Best Actress Oscar for this performance, Fontaine would win it for another Hitchcock film, **Suspicion** (made at RKO) the following year.

dependent on the drug. He would continue to use it to steady his nerves until his death. But that demise was still many years removed from his present and Selznick was far more concerned with his national campaign to find the ideal Scarlett O'Hara. This search for Scarlett quickly became the most publicized in Hollywood lore. Every actress tested for the role. Some, like Lucille Ball and Tallulah Bankhead were long shots at best. But for a long while Selznick had almost convinced himself that Paulette Goddard was his Scarlett O'Hara. His eventual discovery of Vivien Leigh, thanks to brother Myron was arguably, the find of the decade.

But there was little time, if any, to wallow in his good fortune. Selznick had persuaded British director Alfred Hitchcock to sign an American contract under the false pretext of producing a film based on the Titanic disaster – a folly probably never taken seriously by Selznick since he had too little time and revenue to invest in another costly production. Instead, Selznick began preproduction on Daphne du Maurier's **Rebecca** (1940) as **Gone With**



ABOVE LEFT: Gala days in Dixie: the Loews Grand in Atlanta hosts the world premiere of *GWTW*. Millions lined the streets in anticipation of seeing Clark Gable (with Carol Lombard on his arm, no less), Vivien Leigh and Olivia De Havilland in person. The mayor declared the day an official holiday, followed by a week's worth of proud cotillions and elegant balls to commemorate the Civil War. Hollywood, and indeed Atlanta, would never know such glory again.

RIGHT: Still valiantly trying to resurrect the film career of his second wife, Jennifer Jones, Selznick mounted what would ultimately be his last studio bound production: *Portrait of Jennie* (1947). Selznick had hoped that the re-teaming of Joseph Cotten and Jones (the two had co-starred briefly in *Since You Went Away*, and later in *Love Letters* to good reviews and box office) who set cash registers ringing around the world. To this end, Selznick poured his resources into, and delivered, an ambitious, though arguably leaden romantic fantasy about a struggling painter who finds his muse in the ghost flower of a girl who has been dead for more than a century. Both Cotten and Jones gave beautifully subtle performances. The moody photography by Joseph H. August and Lee Garmes lending an air of the supernatural to the piece. In the end, however, the film did not come off as it should. *Portrait of Jennie* was the expensive flop that ended Selznick's career as head of Selznick International.

The Wind was nearing completion. Financial strain and complete bankruptcy were narrowly averted only after Jock Whitney came to the rescue with much needed backing to see the company through.

By the end of 1940, Selznick could be proud of all this quiet chaos. He had two of the most successful films in general release at the same time and both **Gone With The Wind** and **Rebecca** proved winners at Oscar time. It was, at once, the beginning and the end of David O. Selznick's flourishing career. For although Selznick retained Hitchcock's services throughout the decade – producing two of his most enduring suspense classics (**Spellbound**, and **The Paradine Case** as well as farming out Hitchcock to RKO for **Notorious**) – Selznick's desire to produce the next '*Gone With The Wind*' eventually led him on a wild goose chase that would consume and destroy the rest of his career and his life.

Most certainly, audience expectations were in place for another 'big' movie after **GWTW** and Selznick did – with varying degrees of success – attempt to meet those expectations head on; first with the popular war time weepy **Since You Went Away** (1942) and later, with the absurdly lavish western/melodrama; **Duel in the Sun** (1945). Only the former made money. The latter proved, at least in hindsight, to be the final film to carry Selznick's unmistakable hallmark of attention to every detail.

With the last of the Selznick/Hitchcock collaborations **The Paradine Case** (1947) also proving an expensive disappointment, and **Portrait of Jennie** (1947) a colossal mistake for all concerned – Selznick entered the declining period of his career as a largely forgotten man. Mounting debts forced his divestment of the studio and a complete liquidation of his interests in **Gone With The Wind** to MGM. Selznick would make one last stab at



immortality with a remake of Hemmingway's **A Farewell to Arms** (1957). But once again fate was against him. Jennifer Jones and Rock Hudson were woefully miscast and the film, produced for 20th Century-Fox effectively brought down the curtain on David Selznick's career. He retired from film making, reluctantly content to watch the Hollywood he had worked so diligently to shape go off without him.

On June 22, 1965, David O. Selznick died of a coronary occlusion at the age of 65. Ironically, the biggest obstacle he had faced in his waning years as a producer was his own legacy. Unable to cast off that high polished romanticism that had served him so consistently throughout the 1930s and early 40s, Selznick's later films increasingly fell out of touch with audience expectations.

In thought and execution, Selznick too seemed almost unable to comprehend how the world of movies had dramatically changed around him while his attitude toward them had not...could not, and finally...did not. For David O. Selznick – his was a final act of looking back to a happier time, all too heady and brief, but perhaps best summed up in a speech he delivered to eager young, and star struck, minds listening at the University of Rochester in 1940:

“To you who feel the burning urge to influence the modes and manners, the social and political ideologies of the future through the medium of the motion picture, I say, here is a challenge, here is a frontier that is and always will be crying for the courage and the energy and the initiative and the genius of American youth. Here is the Southwest Passage to fame and fortune and influence! Here is the El Dorado of the heart, the soul and the mind.”

The man and the world that he occupied have passed...but his legacy lives on.

LEFT: Two views of Hollywood's dying breed. TOP: Selznick looking deflated and forlorn with a backdrop from his remake of **A Farewell to Arms** and a copy of the ill-fated script in his hand. The film was directed by John Huston. But the script by Selznick and Ben Hecht veered wildly away from Ernest Hemmingway's original novel. Usually a purist where literature was concerned, Selznick's meddling in the final draft and the constant bickering between himself and Huston resulted in a film mired in narrative contradictions.

BOTTOM: Selznick at the peak of his powers in 1941, still riding the crest of financial and critical success from **GWTW** and **Rebecca** and looking forward to his future alliances with Hitchcock. From this glowing panacea, the mogul could not have foreseen that by the end of the decade he would be forced into receivership. By 1960, Selznick was out of Hollywood altogether - barely remembered by anyone in the industry or beyond, except the fortunate few he continued to call his friends.

The Selznicks (David and Jennifer Jones) entertained and spent quiet evenings together in their Beverly Hills mansion. But for all intensive purposes, the last ten years of David's life was spent reclusively out of the spotlight, a sad footnote to what had once been a career bursting with the promise of more great things to come.

