

THE

Nick Zegarac's

Hollywood

ART



Puttin' on our sunday clothes...



on the set of 'Hello Dolly!' (1969)

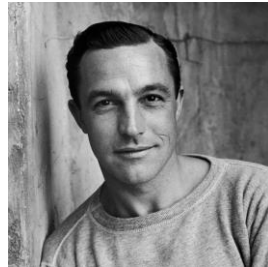
Behind the Smiles



Arranging Everything except debacle on the set of
HELLO DOLLY!

"In the years when Hollywood musicals were a popular genre being churned out in abundance, (Gene) Kelly's ebullient performing prowess and venturesome spirit put him at the head of the pack; now he tends to be remembered as the Astaire-not, a chesty hoofer with a slant smile who danced the Hollywood musical into its coffin."

– John Updike



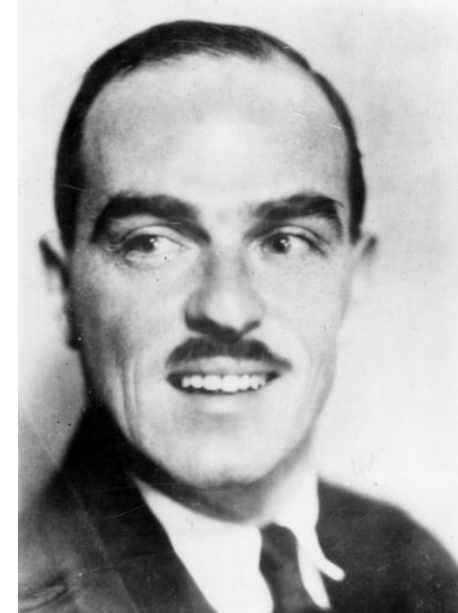
Sadly, Updike's critique of Gene Kelly's allure on the big screen is remarkably on point; particularly fitting as an epitaph to all the backstage chaos the former MGM musical star had to endure on the set of **Hello Dolly!** (1969); an ill-timed all-star musical extravaganza, poorly received by the critics that all but ended Kelly's promising post MGM career as a movie director. In fact, the costly financial burden generated from **Dolly!**'s flop at the box office threatened to push 20th Century Fox's balance sheet back into the red. Yet, removed from all its hype and prestige, Ernest Lehman's revamp of Thornton Wilder's **'The Matchmaker'** remains one of the great American musicals from the latter half of the 20th century.

On stage, **Hello Dolly!** had been a grand old show. Sweeping the Tony Awards in ten categories the play's origins derive from Austrian Johann Nestroy's 1842 play, **Einen Jux will er sich machen** translated by American playwright Thornton Wilder



Impetus of a show: (above left) Carol Channing is flanked by the entire company of Broadway's **Hello Dolly!** to celebrate the show's 1000th performance. On stage the larger-than-life Dolly Gallagher Levi was played by some heavy hitters including Channing and (right) Ginger Rogers, the two posing for this Life Magazine photo in 1966. Opening on Broadway in 1964 **Hello Dolly!** seemed to play forever; all bounce and zing, thus precluding any Hollywood studio from bidding for the rights to produce it as a film. (right) American playwright Thornton Wilder.

Without his play '**The Matchmaker**' there wouldn't have been any **Hello Dolly!** A native of Madison Wisconsin, Wilder traveled the world in his youth, studied in Rome, and taught French, becoming a celebrated playwright and novelist in mid-life – only, it seems, to return to mid-American life and the more quaintly romanticized turn-of-the-century for his inspiration. (below) Shirley MaClaine and Anthony Perkins costarred in the 1958 film version of *The Matchmaker* – a modest effort immeasurably aided by the enigmatic and delightful Shirley Booth (bottom) as the gallivanting matron with a penchant for 'rearranging everything.'



into **The Matchmaker**; a poignant and affecting bit of stagecraft.

A straight forward light-hearted tale, blessed with winning songs by Jerry Herman, the somewhat simplistic plot of **Hello Dolly!** concerns a middle-aged matchmaker employed by wealthy hay and feed merchant, Horace Vandergelder to secure him a bride. After setting Horace up with lady milliner, Irene Malloy, Dolly decides to snag Horace for herself instead. She sends Horace's two unsuspecting clerks, Cornelius Hackl and Barnaby Tucker to court Irene and her perky shop assistant Minnie Fay while baiting the irascible Horace with the phony Countess Ernestina Simple as a prelude to her arrival.



After a humiliating dinner engagement Horace is all set to go back to Yonkers a bachelor. But then he spots his niece, Ermengarde dancing with her fiancé, Ambrose Kemper, an artist whom Horace has forbidden her to see. In the resulting brawl that breaks out at the fashionable – and ironically named - Harmonia Gardens, Horace is disgraced. He returns home, intending to disown Ermengarde and fire his two clerks. Ah, but then comes Dolly – weaving her infectious matchmaking whimsy about to make everything better for everyone, although chiefly for herself. Dolly and Horace marry. Barnaby and Cornelius are made full partners in the business, and, Irene and Minnie become their intended future wives, with the ever-devoted Ermengarde betrothed to Ambrose. So much for plot.

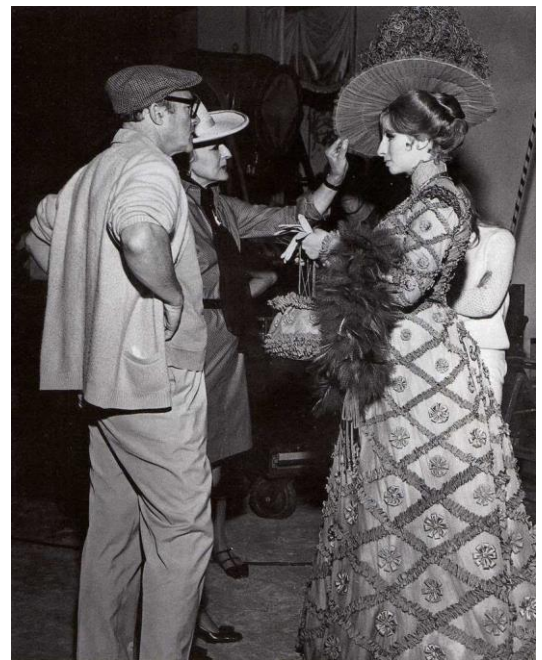


This wafer-thin story was afforded all of the lavish accoutrements Fox could muster. The studio was taking no chances. **Hello Dolly!** would be a spectacle to rival the towering success of Robert Wise's **The Sound of Music** (1965) the movie musical that had all but rescued them from oblivion after the spectacular implosion of **Cleopatra** (1962); the movie

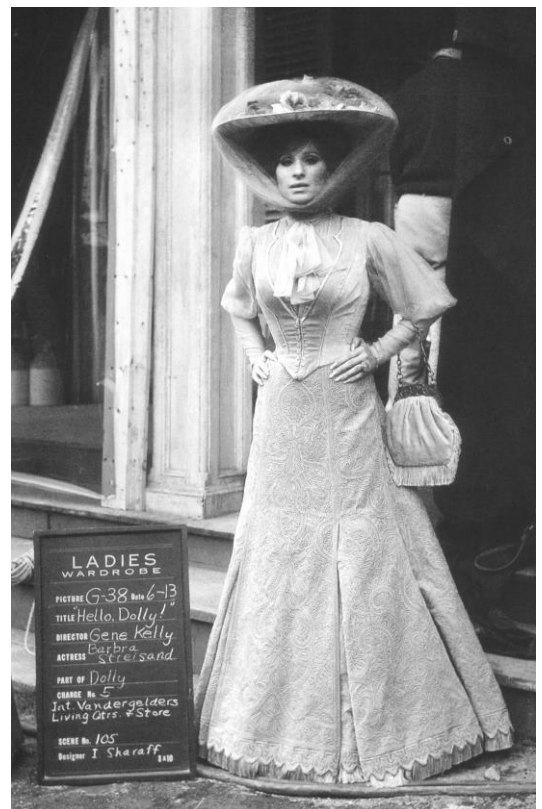


Three for Dolly! (left) Gene Kelly could boast a most impressive pedigree by the time he undertook to make **Hello Dolly!** A dancer, choreographer par excellence in such iconic fare as **Cover Girl** (1944), **Anchors Aweigh** (1945), **An American In Paris** (1951), and, of course, **Singin' In the Rain** (1952), Kelly also proved he had the chops to be a dramatic star in films like **Marjorie Morningstar** (1958) and **Inherit the Wind** (1960). As Kelly aged, he confidently moved behind the director's chair. (middle) Michael Kidd was one of Broadway's most sought after dance choreographers, sporadically committing to films like **Seven Brides for Seven Brothers** (1954) and – as seen here, on the set of Samuel Goldwyn's **Guys and Dolls** (1955). In the 1960s he was responsible for the musical sequences on Fox's ill-fated **Star!** (1968).

On **Hello Dolly!** Kidd gave spirited pace to the red coat Waiter's Gavotte, and an exuberant jaunt through the park during the 'While You're Dancing' number. (right): Gower Champion, together with his wife, Marge, had been groomed by MGM to become the next Fred and Ginger. Regrettably, by the time they made their debut musical at MGM was already on its way out. Although fantastic in their pas deux, the couple's acting also left something to be desired; although both appeared to excellent purpose in MGM's lavish remakes of **Showboat** (1951) and **Roberta** – retitled **Lovely to Look At** (1952). Champion had staged and choreographed the stage **Dolly!** and joined the film, working alongside Kidd to restage sequences for the film.



(right) Kelly and yet another MGM alumni, costume designer Irene Sharaff attend to Streisand's wardrobe on the set. Sharaff had worked on such classic musicals as **Meet Me In St. Louis** (1944), **Brigadoon** (1954), **Guys and Dolls** (1955) and **The King and I** (1956). Her costumes for **Hello Dolly!** are among the most detailed and lavishly appointed turn of the century pieces ever designed for a Hollywood musical. (bottom) Streisand strikes a pose for a photograph of the costume she will wear to greet Horace at his store after the disastrous night before at the Harmonia Gardens. As seen in the finished film this dress was made of elegant coral pink taffeta and hand-embroidered pink silk, a decidedly very princess-esque gown for an otherwise very regal matron indeed.



that had almost bankrupted the studio. In scope, at least, this much was true of **Hello Dolly!** Fox spent a small fortune building opulent sets on the back lot, including a full-sized replica of New York's 14th Street circa 1890, complete with a working elevated train, a stylish Central Park promenade and false fronts covering the executive front offices.

Carol Channing, who had debuted **Dolly** on Broadway was still playing her in revivals when 20th Century-Fox decided to green-light the film. Channing had made her own big and splashy musical debut as Muzzy, the scatterbrain socialite in Universal's **Thoroughly Modern Millie** (1967) but was overlooked for the film version of **Hello Dolly!** by executives who just as quickly discarded the other luminaries who had played Dolly on the stage: Betty Grable and Ginger Rogers. This blind-sightedness was hardly unique.

Of the many musicals making the transition from stage to screen throughout the 1960s few, if any, came to the screen with their original casting intact. In some cases the film versions survived this revamp. George Cukor's **My Fair Lady** (1964) as example, endured mostly because it had Cukor's exemplary pacing and Broadway's Rex Harrison to compensate for the fact that a dubbed Audrey Hepburn had stepped into the role of Eliza Doolittle made famous by Julie Andrews – who required no overdubbing at all! But Joshua Logan's **Camelot** (1967) had spectacularly failed to recreate the magic of the Broadway show; most critics agreed, primarily because of its miscasting of Richard Harris and Vanessa Redgrave in roles originated on Broadway by Richard Burton and Julie Andrews.

For a while it looked as though Julie Andrews would never make her film debut. But then Walt Disney hired her for **Mary Poppins**, released the same year as **My Fair Lady** and winning Andrews the Best Actress Academy Award while Audrey Hepburn was not even nominated. On Oscar night, Andrews bravely strode to the podium, saving her final thanks for studio chief Jack Warner – the man who had denied her Eliza Doolittle.

Suddenly, it was Julie Andrews who was in line for more plum musical roles, chiefly in **The Sound of Music** – the part of governess Maria Von Trapp made famous on stage by Mary Martin. Consequently, the filmic **Hello Dolly!** required a singer, something none of the previous stage-bound Dollies had been. And in choosing twenty-three year old Barbra Streisand to play this sassy middle-aged widow Fox quite possibly had the greatest female singer of songs from her generation.

(right) more examples of Irene Sharaff's sumptuous costume design. Top: Barbra Streisand is a feast for the eyes in this purple woolen and silk ensemble Dolly wears to chaperon Horace's ill-fated 'cute meet' with milliner Irene Malloy (Marianne McAndrews). The gown weighed fifteen pounds not including the hat and heavy green suede boots. Streisand sings 'While You're Dancing' and marches in the 14th Street Parade – a difficult feat seemingly effortlessly accomplished in the finished film.

(right bottom) Streisand, somewhat displeased as she poses for this photograph in yet another weighty gown designed by Irene, this one made to resemble a patchwork of materials – the impoverished offerings of a widow living obscurely on a budget. They say 'pain is beauty'. Perhaps, but synched into a corset and bonneted with feathers, wearing woolens and lace brocade, not to mention undergarments stuffed with starched crinoline, particularly in stiflingly humidity and temperatures that regularly topped out at eighty-five degrees seems to be taking its toll.





Her name is

Barbara

“A human being is only interesting if he’s in contact with himself. I learned you have to trust yourself, be what you are, and do what you ought to do the way you should do it. You have got to discover you, what you do, and trust it.”

– Barbra Streisand

20th Century-Fox had a powerful incentive in overlooking Broadway’s Dollys for their film version – chiefly in the overwhelming zeitgeist of critical accolades and success that had accompanied a young woman; the town’s latest golden child - Barbra Streisand. A gifted chanteuse who had dazzled the stage with her Broadway debut in *Funny Girl*; a success she carried over into William Wyler’s big screen adaptation for Columbia/Horizon Pictures in 1968 – and would win the Best Actress Oscar for - Streisand had also achieved unprecedented market saturation as a recording artist and as a regular guest star on well-known television variety hours including *Ed Sullivan* and *The Judy Garland Show*. She had also been starred in her own TV specials; *My Name is Barbra* (1965) and *Color Me Barbra* (1966) proving, as though proof were required, that she could carry the weight of a whole show on her own shoulders.

In choosing Streisand as his Dolly, producer Ernest Lehman and Fox made what seemed to be a very shrewd business decision – hiring a pre-sold talent with a formidable voice and lots of experience. With the tide already shifting away from musicals, Streisand was as guaranteed as box office gold. Her Oscar all but proved it and cemented the filmic Dolly’s reputation as a class act.

There are conflicting views as to exactly who is more responsible for the miserable working relationship between Streisand and costar, Walter Matthau on the set. What is certain - and fact - is that the daily clashes between these two began almost from the moment they arrived to work and quickly thereafter escalated into a level of professional animosity that soon became the stuff of legendary backstage squabbling.



(background): Streisand as she appeared for her TV debut in *Color Me Barbra*
(insert): with Omar Shariff in *Funny Girl* (1968)



Cast as Dolly Levi's cantankerous love interest Horace Vandergelder, Walter Matthau was aware that Streisand had a knack for scene stealing. In point of fact, the stage play is a showcase for just such a powerful and demonstrative female, and that is precisely the quality for which Streisand – even in her early years – was well known.

Temperamental and often short-tempered, Matthau was also perhaps concerned that the film was shaping up to be another '*Streisand*' picture and felt somewhat apprehensive about playing 'second fiddle' to the newcomer whom he regarded primarily as a singer and, by his own estimation, not a terribly fine one at that.

As a matter of record, Streisand began the film with at least a hint of optimism shared by Gene Kelly. This was readily diffused however and later all but ruined by Matthau's '*tolerance*' of her rather than respect for her. Reportedly, the breaking point in this artistic struggle of wills derived from an episode where Matthau bluntly told Streisand, "*You haven't the talent of a butterfly's fart!*" adding "*Stop being the whole show!*", to which Streisand curtly reminded Matthau that the title of the film was not '*Hello Walter!*'

Confronted by the press in later years with these 'rumors' of their behind the scenes bickering, Walter Matthau (left) was perhaps more adroit – and certainly more forgiving in his rose-colored glib retort, saying "*I'd love to work with Barbara Streisand again...in something appropriate. Perhaps Macbeth.*"

Gene Kelly, who had looked forward to filming this \$25 million dollar colossus quickly found himself playing the part of the peacekeeper between these feuding costars. He was also not terribly pleased to discover that Streisand had given an interview midway through the shoot in which she stated that although Kelly was an adept technician, by her own estimations he knew absolutely nothing about 'characterization'.

It was the last straw. In the sweltering heat Kelly's own quiet displeasure mounted until, like Matthau, he was quietly left wishing he could go home and forget **Hello Dolly!** even existed.

(top: Walter Matthau as Horace Vandergelder, his scowl more in character with temperaments on the set. (middle) rehearsing 'Before The Parade Passes By' in plain clothes and (bottom) as it appears in the finished film.





"I like the film more every time I see it. And it's a credit to Barbra...she used that kind of pseudo Mae West...she's just so clever. And my God, she sang the hell out of it!"

– Dolly's composer Jerry Herman

It has been forty-four years since Gene Kelly made **Hello Dolly!** A lot has happened in Hollywood since then. Kelly, Walter Matthau and Ernest Lehman are no longer with us; and cinema, poor indeed in their absence. It also seems highly unlikely that at age 70 Barbra Streisand will make another musical – and certainly none quite as lavish or spectacular as **Hello Dolly!**; a stunning product of that bygone era when studios still did everything full scale. Yet **Hello Dolly!** remains fresh, vital and engaging: no small feat considering its arduous production schedule, numerous setbacks and behind-the-scenes feuding that all but wrecked Gene Kelly's one time hopes for a harmonious movie-making experience. Perhaps the secret to **Dolly's** endurance lays in the fact that it was never a 'period' film but a timeless piece of Americana, like **The Music Man**.

Gene Kelly; musical innovator and one of the chief architects who liberated the Hollywood musical from its stogy conventions in the mid-1940s was assigned to direct Hello Dolly! He came to the project with minor misgivings – perhaps slightly intimidated by the elephantine cost of the thing. But Kelly also brought with him a storehouse of expertise – both in front of and behind the camera – from years of collaborative work with co-director Stanley Donen over at MGM.

Yet the Gene Kelly that we all know and love on the screen, that breezy good time Joe Average with toothy white smile, eyes twinkling self-confidence and a flashy bravado, this is decidedly not the Gene Kelly who assumed the director's chair on Hello Dolly! In fact, it was not the Gene Kelly who had managed to create true cinema art over at MGM either. For Kelly was a perfectionist: hard on his costars and crew; hardest most of all on himself, often rehearsing his complex footwork and taps until his feet bled.

(right): Gene Kelly in the role he is remembered best, as matinee idol cum singer, Don Lockwood in **Singin' in the Rain** (1952). (middle) with Cyd Charisse in **Singin' in the Rain** and again, in **Brigadoon** (1954). (bottom): with Dan Dailey and Michael Kidd in **It's Always Fair Weather** (1955).





"I didn't want to be a dancer," Kelly would confess years later, "I just did it to work my way through college. I studied dance in Chicago every summer and taught it all winter. I wasn't worried about getting a job on Broadway. In fact, I got one the first week."

Off camera, Kelly's ego matched his talent. This did not win him any points with MGM's boss, Louis B. Mayer or with Debbie Reynolds who was assigned to him by Mayer for **Singin' in the Rain** (1952) and thereafter relentlessly put through the ringer until she had nailed down her choreography. Today, Kelly is synonymous to us more as the Don Lockwood type he plays in that film, wet under his umbrella but with a charm as laid back as it appeared effortless and easily digestible. Yet, by the late 1950s Kelly's career was already drawing to a close. After 1957's **Les Girls**, he was suddenly considered passé.

Even those who had worked diligently alongside him, like co-director Stanley Donen, had grown weary of his desire to 'hog' the screen. Perhaps nowhere was Kelly's vanity more on display than on the set of **It's Always Fair Weather** (1955) today regarded as a masterpiece but then little more than a minor flop; the second to last of Kelly's Cinemascope musicals. Having rounded out the cast with some weighty talent including Michael Kidd, Kelly made demands as the film's star that succeeded in getting Kidd's solo routine cut. Despite his vanities and his general lack of respect for Mayer, Gene Kelly's days at MGM have long since made him instantly recognizable and this is as it should be. For whatever his shortcomings as a man, as an artist few were as well versed and exceptionally talented as Kelly.

In the interim between Kelly's departure from MGM - that abruptly came about in 1957 - and his resurfacing as **Hello Dolly!**'s director, Gene Kelly had garnered considerable critical praise for his efforts in non-musicals; most noticeably in **Marjorie Morningstar** (1958) and Stanley Kramer's **Inherit the Wind** (1960). Although Kelly continued to appear on television, either as a specialty act or simply to be interviewed about 'the good old days' he had increasingly grown bored with his stalemate until **Hello Dolly!** came around.

(left, top) A tale of two Kellys? (top) circa 1951, all smiles the year **An American in Paris** won Best Picture, the first movie musical to win since 1936's **The Great Ziegfeld**. Kelly had a lot to crow about then, an ascending star at MGM who had his way on the set and his run of MGM's vast back lot to make the kinds of movies he wanted to; Kelly was decidedly in his element. By the end of the decade he would be gone from those hallowed walls and not to return until 1974, as a presenter in the all-star musical anthology movie, **That's Entertainment!**



(left) caught unawares between takes on the set of **Hello Dolly!** Kelly seems more perturbed than pleased, his 'go home' scowl suggesting that things are not progressing at all as he had hoped they would. (bottom) A more imperious Kelly in **Marjorie Morningstar**, and putting himself through jumps for Life Magazine's issue featuring 'A Day With Gene Kelly' in 1956 just as his supremacy at MGM was on the wane.

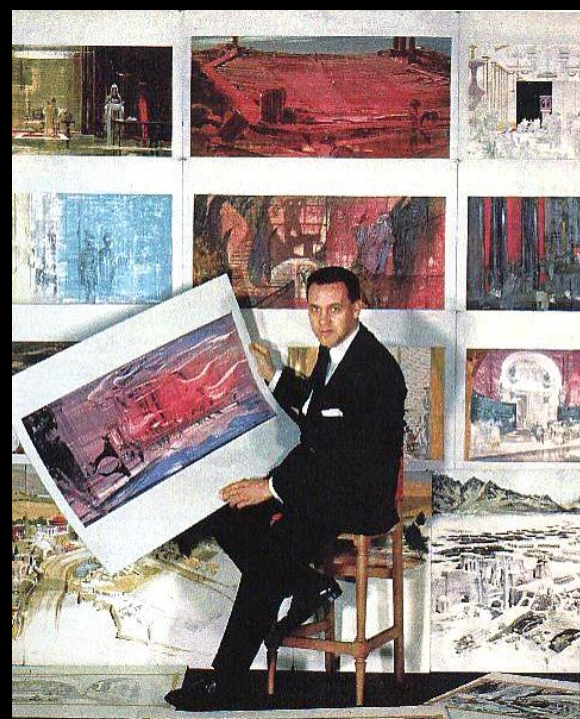




SETTING A STANDARD PRODUCTION DESIGN with 'THE MASTER BUILDER'

When 20th Century Fox threw its hopes and \$25 million behind **Hello Dolly!** their executive logic may have been superseded by more blind faith than wisdom. Although the Hollywood musical continued to yield artistically rich and financially successful movies as **The Music Man** (1962) and **My Fair Lady** (1964), more often than not the public response to these elephantine spectacles was tepid at best. What unexpectedly seemed to click with an audience in **The Sound of Music** (1965) inexplicably failed to catch on in **Dr. Doolittle** (1967) and **Star!** (1968).

As such, musicals were becoming a very risky business, one fraught with the possibility of financial ruin if the enterprise did not come off. And Fox had already been to this well in 1963 with crippling runaway expenses incurred on the non-musical **Cleopatra**. One might have assumed that by 1969 they had learned a valuable lesson about money-dumping on a single project. However, as former Fox executive David Brown once stressed, *"the insanity of Hollywood is far greater than its reality...we never gave up on an idea."*



Generally speaking, the artistic tightrope in translating a Broadway smash to the big screen had best been crossed by retaining as much of what had made the original stage show so successful in the first place, while ever so slightly *'opening up'* the scenery to take advantage of the infinitely greater proscenium and presentation that film production allowed.

In retrospect **Hello Dolly!** is a film brimming with spectacular turn-of-the-century recreations and breathtaking visual splendor concocted by Production Designer John DeCuir. Undaunted, and perhaps driven by a blind perseverance to outdo his previous efforts – even his flops - DeCuir and the artisans and craftsmen at Fox converted the façades of the studio's front offices into four square blocks of New York City, circa 1890 – complete with elegant courtyards and fountains, ornate gingerbread construction and a functioning elevated train.

This expansive and expensive set served as a focal point for the production, as well as showcasing **Hello Dolly!**'s most over-inflated production number; *Before The Parade Passes By*. The number begins with Barbara Streisand contemplating her reintroduction to the world and romance after being a reclusive widow for several years. Streisand sings with throbbing emotion that builds to a crescendo amidst a bevy of willows. From here, the camera wildly pivots to an overhead shot of the New York set brimming with twelve thousands extras recreating the 14th Street Parade.

(top and bottom: DeCuir's exquisitely realized architecture for the impossibly lavish Harmonia Gardens restaurant where much of the second half of **Hello Dolly!** takes place. Consisting of three levels, this lavish set was briefly converted into a functioning restaurant at Fox following the movie's premiere. Regrettably, like all other sets, it was eventually dismantled – portions of it put into service elsewhere.

Keen eyes will easily spot and recognize the fountains, gilded railings and quaintly glowing tea lamps lining the dance floor as reused almost verbatim in Irwin Allen's **The Towering Inferno** (1974) for its Promenade Room – destroyed by a flood and fire in the climax. The glass back panels and curtains also appear briefly in Allen's **The Poseidon Adventure** (1972).

(middle) New York City circa 1890 – or so we're meant to believe. Actually, all of the buildings are false fronts masking the Fox from offices. Much of this set was allowed to deteriorate after filming ended and was regrettably later ruined by a mysterious fire and torn down. A portion, however, continues to survive to this day, clearly visible from the highway as one drives by the studio.

(middle) shooting on the grounds of West Point – nature's scenery augmented by a church designed by DeCuir. Seen for mere moments in the finished film the church was built as a three-sided free-standing set.





In and of itself the spectacle of the parade is stifling; an ever-changing cornucopia of grand Americana; its pantheon of marching bands, jugglers, military men, women's Temperance Movement marchers, firefighters and even a fleeting glimpse of the trademark Clydesdales pulling a carriage of Anheuser-Busch lager, resurrect the glory of the Victorian age in all its stately bric a brac.

Designer, John DeCuir, who had previously conceived and supervised the building of lavish palace sets for Fox's **Cleopatra** (1963), once again lives up to the nickname writer/director Joseph L. Mankewicz had bestowed on him as *'the master builder.'* Shifting focus from exteriors – both on the Fox back lot and in Yonkers (properly aged and restored to its turn-of-the-century splendor) – DeCuir's regal interiors for the Harmonia Gardens restaurant became even more sumptuousness by direct comparison, surpassing all expectations. The Harmonia Gardens set is cavernous and multi-tiered with ornate architecture, potted palm finery, curled ostrich feathers and gurgling fountains.



As on stage, the third act of the film is almost entirely played out on this one titanic set, Streisand in elegant gold brocade cooing to a waiting flock of red-coated waiters. Jazz great, Louis Armstrong, who had previously had a big hit single repurposing the film's title song for his band, briefly appeared in this same sequence as band conductor of the Harmonia Gardens orchestra.



In all, the title song is justly celebrated on film. However, in that moment the film also reminds us that Hello Dolly! is a product of the 1960s - not a vintage time capsule from the otherwise gilded age it seeks to extol. When the film was finally in the can, both Gene Kelly and John DeCuir could at least take pride in knowing that a grand old stage warhorse had been sufficiently gussied up for the cameras.

(top): another view of DeCuir's outdoor New York set with the parade in full flourish. (middle): an overhead view of the Harmonia Garden's plush interior. (middle): Streisand performs the title number at the restaurant.



(bottom): the secret life of objects? Don't look too closely or you might recognize the statuary, gilded fence (far left) and fountain (left) in these B&W stills taken from Irwin Allen's **The Towering Inferno** (1974) as having come from another century - six years earlier inside the Harmonia Gardens. The vintage cash register at the bar (bottom left) is the same one found in Vandergelder's Hay and Feed, presumably in Yonkers – actually another set built on the Fox back lot. Hollywood's history has always been fragmented. But when you know where to look it isn't all that difficult to find the extraordinary hidden in the everyday.



Leaving everything to...history?

“Every good and excellent thing in the world stands moment to moment on the razor edge of danger and must be fought for.”

– Thornton Wilder

1969 was hardly a banner year for movie musicals. But it yielded a magnificent show stopper in **Hello Dolly!** The film’s pedigree is impeccable. That all this pixie dust and starlight should have come to not at the box office was a genuine disappointment for all concerned, and a real strain on Fox’s bottom line. In truth, the fault was not in the film but in the changed mood of cinema lovers whose tastes had migrated to grittier, ‘real’ entertainments. Lest we forget that 1969 was the year that the X-rated **Midnight Cowboy** took home the Best Picture Oscar.

From this vantage, **Hello Dolly!** must have appeared ever more the quaint relic from another bygone era in filmmaking, faintly wreaking of formaldehyde. This is indeed a shame, because unlike most over-produced and undernourished musical spectacles from the 1960s, **Hello Dolly!** is hardly as weighty and never boring, even if it is as elephantine as all the rest.

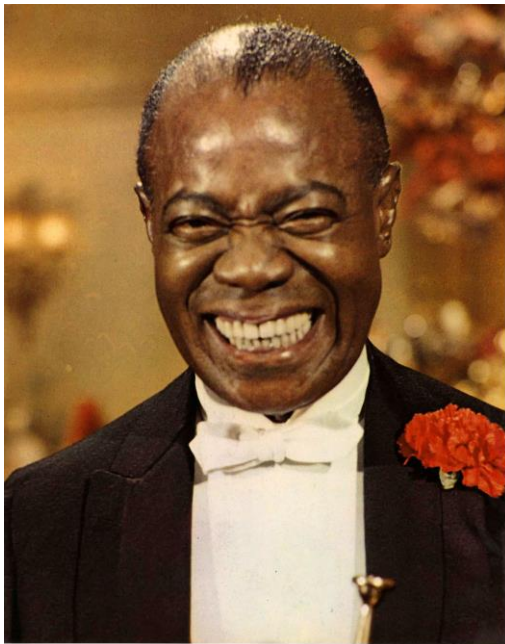
Amidst the intricately realized patina of John DeCuir’s Production Design the tender charm and wit infused throughout Ernest Lehman’s screenplay should have been as decorous to film fans. Yet, two great misfires prevented **Hello Dolly!** from becoming anything more than a costly footnote on the Fox ledgers. First, the warm and fuzzy afterglow of **The Sound of Music** (1965) was still in effect, causing studio executives to repeatedly look the other way and produce more musicals with the understanding that they would simply continue to yield more profits. Regrettably, the Hollywood musical had run its course by 1969.

Twenty-two year old art student Richard Amsel – whose evocative drawings would eventually come to symbolize the best in movie poster art over the next two decades – won Fox’s open call to design a memorably stylish, impressionistic poster for **Hello Dolly!** It was the first, and arguably last good press the film received.

(Right) views from the back lot. (Top): There’s a lot of down time on movie sets and **Hello Dolly!** was no exception. Here Barbra Streisand cuddles her young son while she waits to shoot her arrival at Vandergelder’s in Yonkers. Most of **Hello Dolly!** was shot on sets in Hollywood. But the production did travel to Yonkers and also to West Point. Little Jason Gould seems to be taking it all in stride.

(Middle) On the Fox back lot things don’t seem quite so rosy for either mother or her tot. (Bottom) Rehearsing the hilarious double entendre dinner. Dolly tells Horace “*You salt your beets and I’ll salt mine! I am not some Irene Malloy you can bride with some chocolate covered peanuts...unshelled. Here Horace, let me cut your wings.*” When Horace replies that he doesn’t wish his wings to be cut, Dolly replies, “*No man does Horace...no man does!*”





As Dolly Levi, Barbra Streisand bore some of her harshest – though largely unwarranted negative notices from the critics. While it is certain that at the age of 26, Streisand was not old enough to embody Thornton Wilder’s middle-aged widow who can fix practically anything, Streisand’s interpretation of Dolly remains one of the most genuine and engaging aspects of the film. Beneath Streisand’s bombast, what had on stage been mimicked by Carol Channing and others as an overblown caricature of the nosy dowager, on screen reverted to a genuine and often sincere woman of flesh and blood.

What Streisand lacked in years she made up for with heart and her golden voice that, as Jerry Herman later agreed, really ‘sang the hell’ out of his score. The warmth she renders in ‘Love is Only Love’ (a castoff from Herman’s **Mame**), the thriving powerhouse when Streisand belts out ‘Put on Your Sunday Clothes’ and, of course, when she arrives at the Harmonia Gardens to champion her return with the red-coated waiters for the iconic title track – these moments throb with a musical intensity and sincerity that none of the Broadway Dollies had.

(Top left: Louis Armstrong poses, alone and with Barbra Streisand for his cameo as the conductor of the Harmonia Gardens orchestra. In 1963, Armstrong made a demo of the title song to help promote the Broadway show. Instead, it became a huge hit in its own right, the biggest of his career, even knocking The Beatles out of their uninterrupted streak of No. 1 hits. Armstrong would die in 1971, age 69.

(middle) Dolly Levi – twenty-eight and three quarter clerks taught how to dance...and how as Michael Crawford illustrates at the start of ‘While You’re Dancing’. (middle): Crawford again, this time with Marianne McAndrews as Miss Irene Malloy – Horace Vandergelder’s ex-fiancée. Asked if he can put his arm around her if he tells her the truth, Irene replies, “*Good heavens, you could do that even if you lied to me.*” (bottom): Horace Vandergelder extols the virtues of having a mistress looking after things in ‘It Takes A Woman’, accompanied by Crawford and Danny Lockin cast as Barnaby Tucker, Cornelius Hackl’s partner in crime.





With so much going for it, and, so much riding on the film's success, **Hello Dolly!** ought to have hit pay dirt with a bull's eye. Instead, the film proved to be Fox's most cataclysmic misfire since **Cleopatra**. In a last ditch effort to secure renewed interest and box office, Fox campaigned hard for a slew of Academy Award nominations. The film's failure to win all but two statuettes cemented **Hello Dolly!**'s reputation as a colossal bomb and relegated it to truncated, commercial-interrupted viewings on late night television.

Yet, **Hello Dolly!** is not at all like any other musical failure from its' vintage. The story – though quaint and dated by some standards is no more or less fundamentally flawed than, say, **'Singin' in the Rain'**; its 'boy meets girl' love story just happening to take place well past the prime of youth, and in fact, into the sunset of its protagonist's lives. Horace and Dolly are not spring chickens, but neither is either a candidate for the drooling geriatric sect confined to a ward at Bellvue. If anything, **Hello Dolly!** offers us a vision of love at its sweetest, beyond the kitsch and coo of young lovers holding hands – although these are also represented in its subplot involving Horace's clerks and his niece, Ermargarde.

(Top left): the course of true love? Having encouraged Cornelius and Barnaby to intrude on Irene and Minnie at their millenary at precisely the moment when she and Horace are set to arrive, Dolly attempts to diffuse the situation by telling Horace that there is no man hiding in Irene's cupboard. In point of fact, Cornelius is inside and proves it by sneezing when Dolly's feather boa tickles his nose. Turning to Horace, Dolly smugly replies "God Bless you!"

(Top right): Wow, wow, wow, fellas! Dolly has finally made good on her scheming. She weds Horace Vandergelder in a lavish ceremony filmed on the lawns at West Point military academy. Earlier in the shoot the weather prognosticator hurriedly told Gene Kelly that he needed to turn his entire schedule around to avoid the rainy season. Kelly did, and it proceeded to rain practically every day while they were on location. (Right): Gene Kelly walks Barbra through the final steps Dolly must make to reach the altar where Walter Matthau is waiting.

(Right): striking an imperious pose in her wedding finery for the grand finale. After all the setbacks and delays in weather Streisand, like her costars, was merely happy to be going back to California. Streisand would appear in only three more musicals after **Hello Dolly!**: **On A Clear Day You Can See Forever** (1970), **A Star is Born** (1976) and **Yentl** (1983).



And what does it matter anyway, when Dolly herself is remarkably fresh and frank, moving effortlessly through three hours of slapstick while making the most of every set piece, costumed and brimming full of charm laden dialogue.

In hindsight, **Hello Dolly!** is not the final nail in the musical's coffin but a grand old gal waving goodbye to an era in Hollywood history n'er likely to return; not with a tear caught in her eye, but with gallant 'so long from so long ago' outpouring of staggering talent and pizzazz.

The heavy-handedness plaguing so many 60s' musicals like **Oliver!** (1968) **Doctor Doolittle** (1967), **Camelot** (1967) and **Paint Your Wagon** (1969) is wholly absent from **Dolly!**'s artistic mélange and credit herein must go mostly to Gene Kelly. All the behind the scenes angst and consternation aside, Kelly delivers a jovial film that never once appears to be straining or dull. And then, of course, there is Barbra Streisand; uncannily unique among stars and quite unlike any Dolly having gone before her or since; quite simply – a class act.

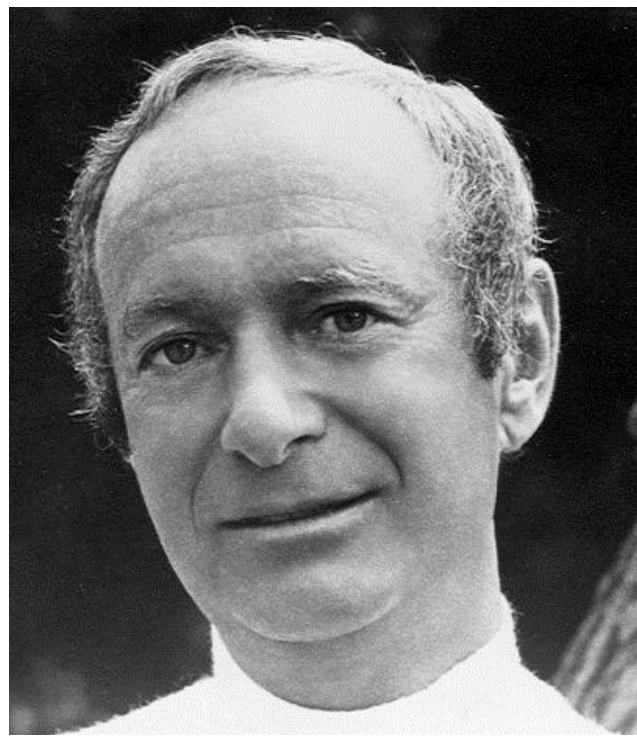
Personal animosities between costars Streisand and Matthau that all but crippled the atmosphere behind the scenes are nowhere to be found in the performances as represented on the screen. Rather, there is a quaint sugary sweetness that is never turns to saccharine; a patina even of goodwill that permeates the entire production, particularly as Horace's heart melts under the duress of Dolly's unapologetic plotting to make him her own.

(Top): Screenwriter Ernest Lehman was a brilliant constructionist, equally adept at writing his own original material as he was at doing superb adaptations of time-honored material and hit stage plays. Lehman's creativity knew no bounds. His first screenplay for **Executive Suite** was a stunning success, followed by his adaptation of the sublime romantic comedy, **Sabrina**, then the superbly esoteric **The Sweet Smell of Success** and finally, Hitchcock's ultimate wrong man thriller, **North by Northwest** (1959).

Lehman also adapted **West Side Story** and **The Sound of Music** for the big screen. After **Dolly!** he tried his hand at directing **Portnoy's Complaint** – a flop. His 1976 screenplay for **Family Plot** earned Lehman a second Edgar Award – his first, also for a Hitchcock movie: **North by Northwest**.

(Middle): striking a demure pose just outside of Yonkers. The heat was interminable and the dress heavy but Streisand, the trooper, made both seem the height of chic good taste and elegance. Here she seems genuinely imbued with Dolly's spirit for whimsy and reflection, casting a faraway look down the Hudson that suggests memories of happier times Dolly is determined will once more be hers for the asking.

(Bottom: 'To town we'll trot to a smoky spot where the girls are as hot as the view!' Dolly boards the train, encouraging the exuberant folk of Yonkers, including Ambrose, Ermengarde, Cornelius and Barnaby to do the same. 'Put on Your Sunday Clothes' is a standout amongst **Hello Dolly!**'s many musical offerings; a buoyant tune that chugs along with all the voracity of a steam locomotive. Women and adventure – New York promised it all. Perhaps it still does. All aboard! 'We're gonna find adventure in the evening air!'



Hence, the branding of **Hello Dolly!** as a flop seems premature. If anything, time has proven the film to be one of the last great artistic achievements in the musical genre. And, as time wears on, its stature and reputation have only continued to grow. Is **Hello Dolly!** a perfectly realized musical entertainment? Arguably - no.

Costars Michael Crawford and Tommy Tune – both formidable talents in their own right and cast as Cornelius Hackl and Ambrose Kemper respectively, are all but wasted in the film. Marianne McAndrews lip sync to her own singing of 'Ribbons Down My Back' is hopelessly out of sync, while E.J. Peaker (Minnie Faye) and Danny Lockin (Barnaby Tucker) are barely stick figure cutouts.

However, these oversights are slight and do not hamper the story that remains an extremely solid effort put forth by all concerned. As a result, **Hello Dolly!** continues to dazzle and delight. It remains, unquestionably, one of the last great hurrahs from a decade that officially marked the end of the golden age of Hollywood film-making and the studio system that fostered such enduring masterworks of artistry as this. Hence, in the final analysis *"it's so nice to have 'her' back where she belongs! Hello Dolly!"*

