

Nick Zegarrac's

THE HOLLYWOOD ART

A collection of colorized publicity stills celebrating Hollywood's golden age



TO COLORIZE OR NOT...

A brief appreciation for art and then some

by Nick Zegarac

Colorization: the debate over altering the integrity of images originally produced in black and white is at least three decades old – at least since the advent of home video and its misguided attempts to reintroduce Hollywood's rich and vibrant two tone heritage in flat pasty hues of digitally processed color. For those in the artistic and certainly in the film community, even the slightest suggestion that color be added to 'enhance' monochromatic films has been publicly received with a negativity and a decrying of the process as a bastardization of the artistry in film making. After all, "*you wouldn't paint a moustache on the Mona Lisa...would you?*" Certainly, not!

And no such claim to the contrary will be made herein. The overwhelming attention to detail, lighting, cinematography, portraiture and craftsmanship, the artistry associated with dramatically contrasted black and white images will forever remain the staple and hallmark of an era in that most elusive and ethereal intangible; 'stardom.'

However, in the intervening decades, colorized still images have indeed proven to have their place (if not, along side black and white), particularly from a marketing and presentation standpoint. Colorized publicity stills that depict stars and scenes we, as an audience, have only known to exist and come to appreciate within that secret world painted in light, have been given extended meaning as show box materials for the contemporary home video age. The concept is neither revolutionary nor original. Long before the video evolution, artists were plying their brush strokes to lobby cards and poster art, reinventing the black and white world of the movies in splashing advertising campaigns that drew the paying public into the theater.

What this collection of publicity stills illustrates then, beyond what may be perceived as one man's audacity to tamper with that sacred monochromatic realm of untouchables, is this same man's innate love of that legendary realm: classic Hollywood, a world created – not found; his continued appreciation for '*art for art's sake*,' and, his persistent penchant to daydream in that land beyond the rainbow.

My fervent hope is to rekindle the fondness of youth once spent in sweet oblivious repose in a darkened theater; to indulge the senses in some of the greatest, almost forgotten, treasures of yesteryear, and finally, to serve as a reference point: to inspire and augment that experience of grandeur in North America's longest running illusion: that which we have lovingly coined '*the movies*'...these are my fondest wishes.

- NZ

(cover & this page: Dante's Inferno, 1935: next page: Publicity still for Joan Crawford 1929).

REEL TO REAL

For the price of admission
I can see the future
or revisit the past,
mingling
with the beautiful people
in suspended perfection,
between palpitations
of cheap light
and priceless shadow.
Reconciled in the dark
to a million worlds
without end.

Then turn out the stars,
Fleeting glamour fades
with only lobby cards
and torn ticket stubs
to frame my collective memories.
For those trips
never taken
and roads
yet to be traveled,
with the clackity-clack shutter
set to twenty-four dreams per second,
American cinema, I thank you.



MEN

...the little dears. It seems fitting that this brief journey should begin with the male star on film. For Hollywood's golden era of the dreamboat had far less to do with the quantifiable beefcake status and more than an ounce of that rawest of intangibles – pure animal magnetism. The male legends of film were a diverse cornucopia of thinkers, doers, providers and rascallions. They were cultured, rugged, sophisticated, pure everymen and ethereal creatures of nobility and charm – in short; as eclectic and versatile as their on screen female companions. The Hollywood of today does not seem to furnish such broad strokes in masculinity, perhaps because our modern times fail to understand that 'personality' is not confined to musculature, and is far more engaging and admirable to both men and women than just a pretty puss.



This page: from left, Robert Taylor(1936), Marlon Brando Viva Zapata! (1952), Paul Muni (1932). Next page: the Undisputed king of Hollywood: Clark Gable (1936).



WOMEN

Tough, angelic, haughty and determined: these, among other traits were the hallmarks of Hollywood's celebrated female talent. In an era dominated by "the women's picture," these leading ladies proved themselves a feisty response to depression era hardships and wartime strife. While feminists continue to debate the extent of potency in such portraits of divine domesticity and voraciously déclassé femme fatales, one emphatic tangible about the golden age of the Hollywood heroine reigns supreme: these ladies had much more than 'faces' then...they had guts!



Above: Bette Davis (1940); left Katharine Hepburn (1942), below: Lauren Bacall (1944). Next page: "Queen of the lot" – Norma Shearer (1932).





SPECTACLES

Hollywood's grand penchant for robust fantasy-scapes was unlike anything found in nature and created an impressive canvas of make-believe that has endured long after the sets have been dismantled and the costumes put back into moth balls. What is particularly impressive about the studio system that spawned such output is not so much the quantity (for these were the days of production assembly of mass entertainment), but the impeccable craftsmanship and attention to detail that accompanied each and every production during this incredibly diverse tenure.



Left: Norma Shearer poses for a still from MGM's costliest production to date: **Marie Antoinette** (1938). Below: Wartime patriotism reaches its zenith in Irving Berlin's **This Is The Army** (1943). Next page: Busby Berkeley's sublime swimming pool fantasy, 'By A Waterfall' from *Footlight Parade* (1933).

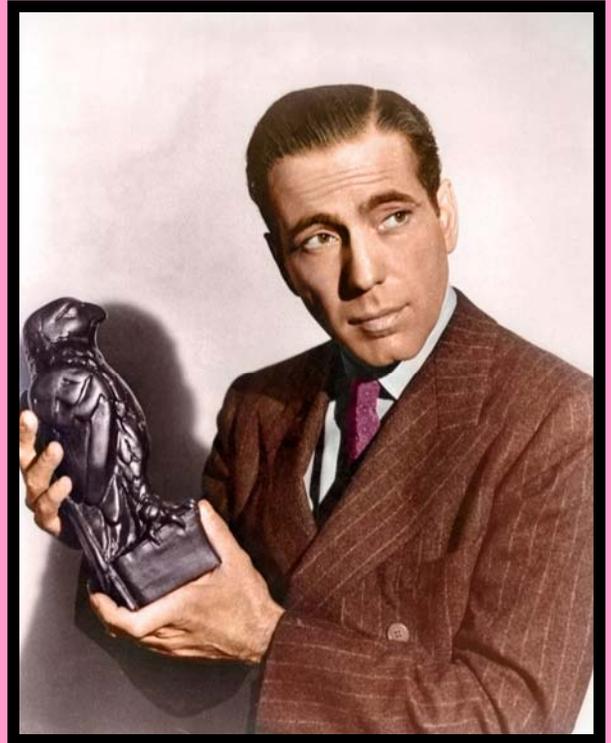


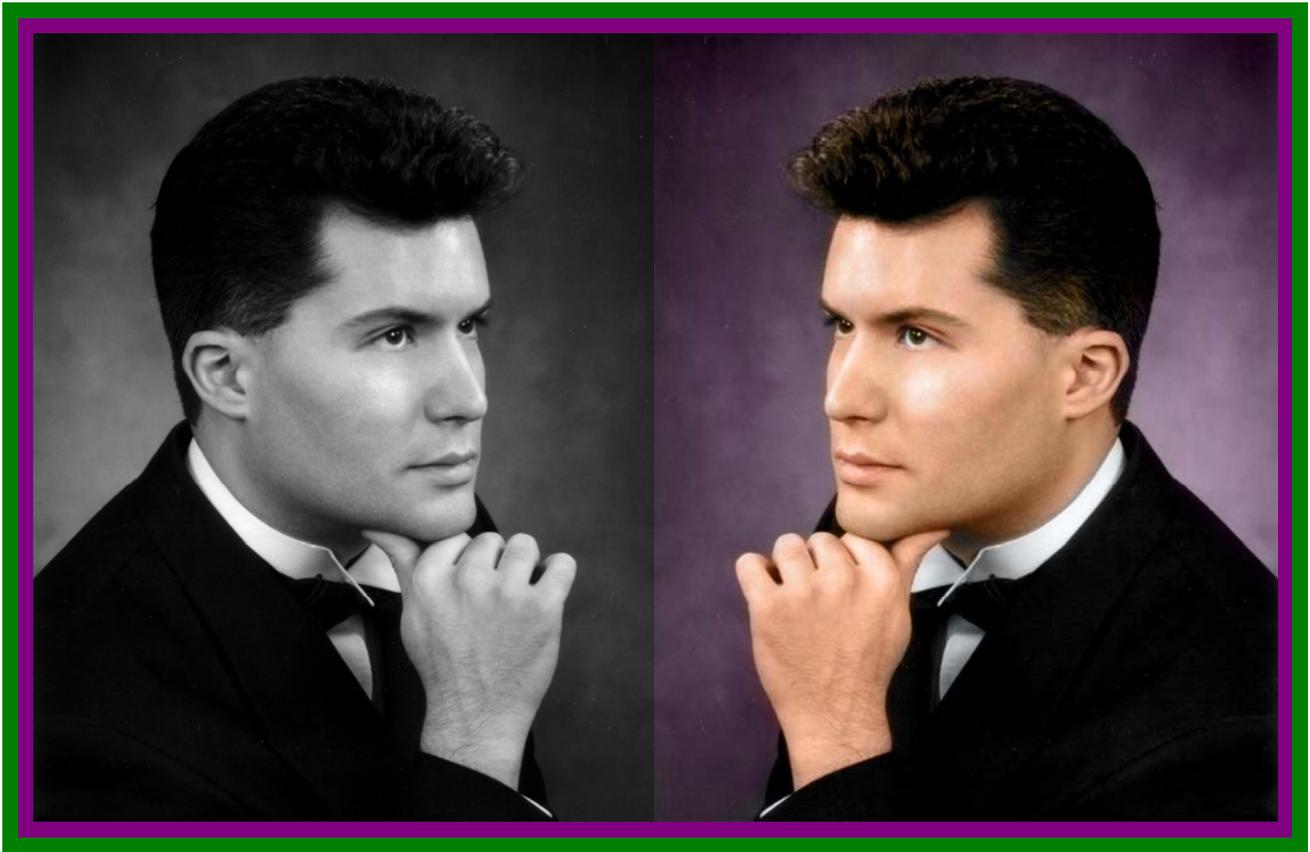


*The stuff that dreams are
made of . . .*

In the roughly **100** years of filmed entertainment Hollywood, that Mecca that began as a sleepy horizon in the west, has produced many enthralling adventures, jolly comedies, exhilarating musicals and stirring melodramas. The wellspring of talent drawn forth from the California desert has proven an oasis for the dreamer of cotton-candied delights spun from thin air, and for the lover in whose eternal thirst that seemingly endless cavalcade of life - greater than life itself - continues to quench our respect, admiration and gratitude for stunning artistic achievement.

We shall not see the likes of such a parade of faces again. The times are unsuitable for their sort of regality. But we are blessed beyond words for the moments that endure, long after the footlights have come up. To misquote Shakespeare, ***“to sleep then, perchance to dream”*** and bask in the art that was vintage Hollywood.





About the artist...

Nick Zegarac is a freelance writer, editor and layout/graphics artist whose enduring love of classic Hollywood was instilled at an early age, sitting in front of the television in his parent's living room and basking in the afterglow of stars like Garbo, Spencer Tracy, William Powell and Myrna Loy. His thesis "Empowerment or Imprisonment" examined the tenuous relationship between female protagonists of the golden age and their more contemporary counterparts. He has written many articles on the subject of star power vs. celebrity culture. Currently, Zegarac is seeking representation for several screenplays and a book project on the studio system. His most recent publishing credits include articles on pop culture for Retort, Image and DVD reviews for Mediascreen and DVD Beaver.





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