



**BACKSTAGE PREPARATIONS**—Judy Garland, backstage at Carnegie Hall before her famous 1961 concert. It was one of her few successes in the last decade of her life.



**AMERICA'S SWEETHEART**—Garland in an MGM glamour pose from her heyday, before her physical and psychological slide. (Photos courtesy of *Rainbow: The Stormy Life of Judy Garland*)

## Re-release stirs memories for fans

By J. Dana Haynes  
Arts Editor

"A Star Is Born," Judy Garland and James Mason's 1954 hit musical, has been re-released, complete with footage thought to be lost for 30 years.

When "Star" was first released, it was three hours long. Someone (probably Warner Brothers executives) decided it was too long and instigated major editing without the knowledge or permission of Director George Cukor. The slashed footage was returned to Hollywood where it was presumably melted down for the silver content, never to be seen again.

Enter Ronald Haver, director of the Los Angeles County Art Museum Film Department (and author of "David O. Silznick's Hollywood"). Beginning in 1982, and working in conjunction with Warner Brothers and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Haver poured over every unlabeled film canister in southern California, searching for some of the missing footage.

Surprisingly enough, he succeeded. Not all was salvaged, and the uncovered reels were not all in the same place. However, Haver located the entire sound track and enough missing film to constitute the re-release.

I won't go over the plot of "Star" in any length here. Readers either already know the movie or don't particularly care. Save to say, "A Star Is Born" is the story of hard-drinking movie star Norman Maine (James Mason). Maine discovers struggling singer Esther Blodgett, later called Vicki Lester (Garland) and, with his help, she becomes a star. As her career skyrockets, his plummets, the effects of too much good scotch. Eventually, Maine kills himself to save Blodgett/Lester's career.

It's not the most original plot of all time. In fact, unknown to many people, the '54 "Star" was not the

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### 'A Star Is Born'

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first. It was allegedly based on a story by Adela Rogers St. John, inspired by John Barrymore. It next took form as a 1932 story called "What Price Hollywood" and surfaced next as the movie "A Star Is Born" in 1937, written by Dorothy Parker, Alan Campbell and Robert Carson. Next came the '54 version and finally the Barbara Streisand/Kris Kristofferson version in the 1970's.

The '54 "Star" is also not the most famous picture for either star. Garland's acting was *never* better, but she is more famous for "The Wizard of Oz," among others. And James Mason has done so many movies, and all so good, none stand out above the pack (although this is my favorite performance, tied with Captain Nemo).

The reason many people look so fondly upon "Star" is the parallels between the life of Garland and the life of Norman Maine. In 1954, Garland was just coming off a four-year run of bad luck that included being fired from a studio, a divorce, a rough pregnancy and an attempted suicide.

She drank, ate and used drugs voraciously and was in bad psychological shape (perhaps best described by the movie "Hollywood Out-takes" which was released last summer. The movie shows a clip of Garland singing with Bob Hope's USO show in 1944 and looking a lot like Dorothy Gail of "The Wizard of Oz." The next scene is the opening night bash for "Star," ten years later. Garland appears to have aged forty years).

In one scene of "Star," Garland tells studio-head Oliver Niles (Charles Bickford) how hard it is to watch someone you love slowly kill himself. Can you imagine how hard it must have been for Garland to quote lines that people had been saying about her for years?

In another scene, her best friend/pianist Danny Maguire (wonderfully done by Tommy Noonan) tries to snap her out of her funk after Maine's suicide and Garland lashes back. According to Christopher Finch's *Rain-*

*bow: The Stormy Life of Judy Garland*, Director Cukor approached Garland before the shooting and said "You know what this is about. You really know about this."

Cukor went on to say she lost her head in the scene. "She gets up and screams like somebody out of control, maniacal and terrifying! She had no concern with what she looked like, she went much further than I expected, and I thought it was great."

Seen again, 30 years later, it is great. The pain was real and obvious, as Garland helped Cukor and writer Moss Hart chronicle her own life and foretell her own death. Garland killed herself with an overdose of sleeping pills in 1969.

If you're a Garland fan, and I am, then seeing "A Star Is Born" in any incarnation is a joy. I personally loved the edited version and now I love Haver's creation. Where he couldn't find footage he improvised using still photographs from Cukor's private collection in tandem with the sound track.

Haver has also unearthed a first shooting of the great "The Man That Got Away" song and presents it in truncated form at the beginning of the film. One must assume Haver is as much a Garland fan as a film buff. The hard work, the attention to detail and the painstaking research suggest this.

If you are a fan of older flicks, or musicals or even Judy Garland and/or James Mason, then see "A Star Is Born." It is long and it's anything but original, but "Star" might also be the best release of 1984.

*(Special thanks to my wife and fellow-Garland fan Peggy Conrad Haynes for research assistance.)*

