GREEN:

[00:03] -- record. This is Robert L. Green in Hollywood and the subject of today’s tape is “Hollywood Costume Design.” There’s no question that the language of clothes is vitally important to the success of films. Before the actor or actress opens her mouth, you do see that they look like, and because costume designing can call for the most subtle mixture of fact and imagination, some of Hollywood’s most creative brains were deployed in that field. Often, films called for realism for instance, and in that case the costume designer had to see that the actors would dress suitably for their roles. And if the studio wanted a historical drama [01:03] or combination of some fiction and some history, then the designer would be required to pay some respect to the clothes people wore in the past. However, at no time were the costume designers ordered or expected to stick the strict interpretation of what was worn at that time because they weren’t supposed to suppress their imagination altogether and finally, of course, came pure designing. For instance, making clothes that were quite out of the reach of the ordinary moviegoer, but creating a sort of glamor and exoticism which is completely important to the
fantasies that Hollywood dreamed up. I think one of the best and most succinct statements made about this particular aura of glamor and exoticism was said by Diana Vreeland [02:03] and so I quote her here because what she commented about was that what we remember most about Hollywood is the glamor and the romance that they gave us -- how they glorified their heroes and worshipped their heroines -- those beautiful women, those handsome men. For Hollywood, everything was larger than life, bigger than anything before or since. The diamonds were bigger. The furs were thicker. The silks, the velvets, satins, chiffons were richer and silkier. There were miles of ostrich feathers, marabou, white fox, and sable -- miles of bugle beads, diamante, and sequins. Hollywood was paid with glitter, shine, and glory. Everything -- everything was an exaggeration of history, fiction, and the whole wide extraordinary world. After all, nothing was too good for Hollywood and for Hollywood, [03:03] nothing was too good for the people. Hollywood was the world’s back porch. At Hollywood’s height, people didn’t travel as much as they do now, but they were still curious about what was going on in the rest of the world and they had a fantasy about what happened in history. Whoever you were -- you could be a secretary in Bavaria, a housewife in South Dakota -- you went to the movies and it was the biggest, most important thing that ever happened in your life. You paid 10 or 25 cents and you
related to Salome, Cleopatra, Camille, or Catherine, empress of all the Russias. To hell with relating to the lady next door. That was the essence of the movies -- the magic wrought by Hollywood design. Can you imagine the excitement of settling down in your seat in one of those mystical city movie palaces, the dazzle of chandeliers, [04:03] the [comp?] that you waded through to get to your seat, those enormous organs that pumped out the music and the flashy stage shows that came on before the movies, and that then up there on the screen was Rudolph Valentino or Gloria Swanson. What a guy -- what a girl. What could be more fantastic? You forgot yourself. You forgot where you were. You dreamed. Your fantasies came to life and those big dramatic moments in the movies that we all remember -- who could be more romantic than Greta Garbo playing Queen Christina? Garbo was unbelievably beautiful no matter what she wore. For Queen Christina, she dressed as a man. By tradition, only men could inherit the throne of Sweden so Christian rode through the snowbound countryside like some wounded cavalier -- or when Mae Murray waltzed with John Gilbert in The Merry Widow and they took that famous dip [05:03] and her bird of paradise plumes almost swept the floor. That was the most dashing and exciting dance sequence in the history of film, at least -- as [Rieland?] says, “I remember it that way.” Or when Scarlett creates from sheer will that dress out of the dining room curtains, the dress
in which she says, “Never, never again will I be hungry” -- the
dress in which she walks away and survives, survives, survives.
That is the real spirit of the American woman. That’s drama.
That’s triumph. That’s Gone with the Wind. “Make it big, do it
right, give it class,” MGM’s motto was the motto of Hollywood.
Nothing was too good for the beautiful women who played those
extraordinary roles. Nothing but the best -- the best lighting
man, the best makeup man, the best hairdresser, the best
dressmaker, all backed up by the producer and director who also
[06:03] backed up the stars. It was all an extraordinary game
of doing everything to utmost perfection. Those people demanded
the top and they got it. That’s why the costumes in the pages
that follow are not just the [allotable?] clothes. The fact is
that they were magnificently designed from the beginning and
beautifully made of superb materials and that’s why there’s
still perfection today. Hollywood overflowed with great
designers -- Adrian, Plunkett, Banton, Sharaff, Rose, Jean
Louis, and many, many others. These costumes made the movies
thick with excitement -- filled them with a dizzying heady
atmosphere. (phone rings) That meant both danger and desire and
sometimes even total charm. What could be more perfect than the
costumes Adrian designed for Marie Antoinette starring Norma
Shearer? They had the most beautiful lame and [07:03] lace and
tulle, with scrolls and festoons designed of total wonderment.
Norma Shearer wore [panyays?] six feet across and skyscraping court wigs that were draped with pearls and masked with roses and diamond stars. Nothing was too good for Adrian. He demanded the most luxurious fabrics and the most sumptuous embroidery. Much of the money the studios brought in at the box office was spent on the costumes -- thousands of yards of silk velvet, forests of [bolts?] of chiffon, cottons of glittering lame. The fabrics they used simply aren’t available anymore and they lavish those extraordinary fabrics not just on the stars but on whole production numbers. They heaped hand embroidery beading and applique on the dresses as if they were nothing and who has ever seen such finishing [08:03] -- such attention to detail? If you think of Travis Banton’s marvelous beaded dresses for Marlene Dietrich in Angel, like a million grains of golden caviar, that is one of the most beautiful dresses ever. Banton, who was Paramount’s big designer, had a great feeling for workmanship. It showed in his designs for Marlene Dietrich and others, and certainly in the dresses he did for Mae West -- dresses on which the embroidery is like a hard crust with the most wonderful detail. Mae West definitely stood for “Thems that has ’em, wears ’em.” She loved the big times. She loved big guys with big muscles -- lots of white fox, lots of ostrich feathers, lots of diamonds, lots of everything. I don’t think you can really understand the effect those designs had on the
actresses until you’ve seen the costumes. [09:03] Can you imagine how they felt surrounded by real chinchilla and satin, and how it must’ve felt to touch the embroidery that was so much like jewels? Why, they must’ve felt like the most important women on earth -- and if you think about it, in a way, they were then. Rieland talks about a photographic sitting for Vogue that Dick Avedon and she did with Plisetskaya -- that’s P-L-I-S-E-T-S-K-A-Y-A -- the Russian ballet dancer. She came to the studio straight from the ballet. It was the middle of the night but it was only -- the only time she could be photographed. She arrived and she looked so tired. All the beauty had gone out of her face, but when she saw the furs we’d brought in and the champagne and the white lilacs, she was another creature. She was transformed. She stretched out her beautiful [10:03] arms to touch the furs and to caress them. She put the sables to her cheek and made a delighted sound, like some small Russian bird -- a dove, perhaps. She didn’t speak English and Rieland didn’t speak Russian. Plisetskaya pointed to the lipsticks and beautiful order on the dressing table and said, “For you. For you.” She was like a hungry child feeding herself with our attention. What she gave to the camera that night -- I think it must’ve been that way for Garbo. What a lot Adrian poured into his clothes for her. Garbo and Adrian were an extraordinary combination. He dressed her as the great heroines of history
and fiction. She never ceased to inspire him and I don’t think you can find more beautiful costumes than those. Once long after Adrian left Hollywood, Rieland had lunch with him. He never mentioned those days at MGM. [11:03] It had broken his heart to leave there. Somehow the subject of Garbo came up and Rieland asked him what gave her that special quality. He thought for a long time and then answered, “She has a very erotic atmosphere.” Think of how much is contained in that one sentence. That was glamorous, romantic Hollywood. (inaudible) love those statements by Rieland? They’re very exact and very accurate, but let’s trace all this. Let’s go back to the statement about realistic films. Well, Hollywood did produce some notably realistic films, and Warner Brothers, for instance, was famous for its realism. But [12:03] if you think about it, Hollywood is principally remembered for the way it ignored reality. What people actually wore -- whether in the present or the past -- was largely lost sight of in the effort to instill films with its own mystique. And certainly, this reached a pitch in the thirties with the creation of such stars as Garbo, Dietrich, Crawford, and Davis. To the studios, actresses were raw material worked on by technicians. The makeup artist and the lighting cameraman would mold the face. The costume designer molded and decorated the body. The rise and the fall and the rise again of the costume designer parallels that of the
star system. You have to understand that in the very early days of holiday -- Hollywood -- [13:03] filmmaking -- I mean even before it was Hollywood when it was being done in New York -- there were no designers. Actors and actresses wore their own clothes. So of course, if ladies had a good wardrobe, they were bound to get more jobs and sometimes better jobs. And of course, the serviceable period costumes could be rented from the many theatrical costumers that served the Broadway stage and the opera and the ballet companies. However, by 1920, most of the production companies had moved from New York to California in the era, I’m sorry -- of the superefficient studio which mass-produced films had begun. In those days, there were no unions. Actresses worked an average of 14 hours a day, six days a week. They no longer had time to go to stores or dressmakers off the studio lot for their gowns [14:03] and if one examines the situation, most films were conceived in a fantasy world far removed from everyday reality and they demanded a special kind of bizarre and sometimes gaudy clothes. Then, there was the additional problem that one doesn’t have in one’s personal life. You needed a kind of expertise to overcome the technical problems. The orthochromatic film that was in general use in those days distorted colors. Reds and yellows, for instance, photographed unnaturally dark. In The Merry Widow, which was made in 1925, Mae Murray wore a dress that
appeared to be black velvet but actually it was carmine and the purest blues faded to white. Costume designing became a specialized role calling for very complex specialized talents. [15:03] Prior to unions, of course, labor and materials were relatively inexpensive and in order to keep up with the frantic schedules, the great number of garments were made on very short notice. In 1912, the Western Costume Company was founded. It was done originally to service Westerns, but of course subsequently it moved into other fields and then of course there were other smaller costumers, but in the 1920s, their stock was limited and studios frequently had to make costumes for the extras as well as the stars. By the end of the decade and the coming of talking pictures, every studio had at least one designer, many sketch artists, wardrobe men and women, and seamstresses. Well of course, you have to realize that as soon as the technology of talking pictures was [16:03] properly developed, it brought a flock of new problems to the designers. In those days, the microphones were fairly crude and those same microphones seemed absolutely determined to pick up every noise except the actors’ voices. The most popular fabrics including tulle, satin, and tissue taffeta had to be eliminated because think about it -- they rustled too much. The consequent concentration on velvets, soft wools, and crepes pushed the designers quickly into the figure-molding lines of the thirties.
Again, the accessories, the jewelries -- the twenties jewelry (phone rings) such as bangle bracelets, ropes of pearls, and even pendant earrings all made terrible noises (laughs) on the soundtrack. [17:03] If jewelry was worn at all, it had to be backed with felt and more often the designers sewed the pearls and rhinestones onto the dresses. Then as technology began to change and expand and color came into film, the development of color films produced new problems. The first Technicolor process using two colors, a salmon pink and a complementary dull green with shades of brown in between -- referred to as “two-strip” -- was introduced in the twenties but did not come into common use until 1929 and ’31. The colors were unnatural. The film was exceedingly grainy and lacking in detail and required enormous amounts of light to photograph. Three-strip Technicolor, first used in [18:03] live-action scenes in 1934, used a dye system of dull red, blue, and yellow -- later changed to magenta, cyan -- that’s C-Y-A-N -- and yellow. When complaints were raised about the two brilliant hues, it produced a very famous Technicolor consultant, Mrs. Natalie Kalmus -- K-A-L-M-U-S -- and of course this restricted costume designers and art directors to the dullest possible colors, especially avoiding red for several years. Films such as The Wizard of Oz led to a relaxation of these rules and Technicolor became very, very garish after a while. Once Technicolor process proved to
be even slightly practical and popular with the public, all studios wanted more color films than the labs could turn out, which is why it took much politicking to get a Technicolor commitment. If films were switched from black and white to color or vice versa at the last moment, designers were faced with recoloring entire wardrobes. For instance, they’d have to re-dye or they’d bleach or replace garments. CinemaScope, introduced in 1953, brought a new set of problems for the designers because the magnifications were so much greater that detail became extremely important, for example. In period costumes, they had to be sewn by hand because when you blow up the figure and the clothes that large, you can see the machine stitching and of course there were no machines in those earlier periods. During the thirties, screen fashions became more simple. They did not -- and should not -- be confused with less extravagant. They were often very extravagant but they also tried to be elegant and they tried to be smart. It was the decade when the ladies of the silver screen had the greatest influence on the attire of women all around the world. The clothes, of course, were too elaborate for the average woman to copy exactly, but she did pick up whatever she could. When Garbo began to sport berets in Private Life, millions of girls started wearing them too. Jean Harlow’s platinum locks started a flurry of hair bleaching while later on, the sensational
appearance of Hedy Lamarr in 1938 caused many others to dye their hair black. The first time that Joan Crawford drastically enlarged the outer corners of [21:03] her upper lip for Sadie Thompson -- and that was 1932 -- she was widely criticized, but then almost universally copied. Even six years later in 1938 when the French magazine Marie Clare -- C-L-A-R-E -- sensibly advised its readers against the Crawford mouth, unless like Crawford they had “hippopotamus eyes” to balance it, it did so to no avail. The vogue for padded shoulders was even more indicative of Hollywood’s role. Legend has it that Crawford and Adrian initiated the trend in 1932 with “Letty Lynton” -- L-Y-N-T-O-N -- while some claim that Schiaparelli had already launched the idea in Paris. Indeed, padded shoulders had already been seen in the work of other Hollywood designers [22:03] a year or two earlier, yet the legend contains a strong measure of truth. It was only when the idea was carried by a big star in a commercial hit that it caught on. The Second World War and its austerity programs cut into the traditional Hollywood dazzle. There was a famous directive that came from Hollywood -- it was known as “L-85" -- which affected all of the Hollywood designers because it made it very clear that Washington, the government, forbad designers the use of such fabric consuming trimmings as patch pockets and cuffs on trousers, while another order set a $5,000 ceiling on new materials for each film. Well, you can
imagine this was not very strictly adhered to. There were virtually no fine fabrics available. [23:03] Those studios with good stores of pre-war fabrics and stock managed very well. The others limped along on sleazy rayons and cottons splashily printed to hide defects in manufacture. Period costumes were unusually updated. I mean, they just changed the dates arbitrarily. Regardless of when they took place, actresses clung to their shoulder pads and if it was set in the last 20 years, producers wanted it played in modern dress so the extras could wear their own clothes and spare the studio the expense of dressing them. Although as the war was drawing to an end -- that was World War I of course -- II, I’m sorry (laughs) -- Edith Head and Irene predicted that skirt hems would go down when the shortages were lifted. The drastic change [24:03] -- the enormous change of Christian Dior’s new look introduced in 1947 -- actually took everybody by surprise and since most studios had a year’s backlog of unreleased films, it was not until 1948 that the new look came onto the screen. Despite the decrease in film production cause by television in the 1950s, most film designers continued to be active because the introduction of such wide screen processes as CinemaScope, VistaVision, and Todd-AO, the increasingly frequent use of color and the proliferation of epic tales all made production details such as costumes more important than ever. By the mid-sixties,
the situation had completely reversed. [25:03] Large-scale musicals and epics had mostly seized production, thus a lot of designers were thrown out of work. The concept of a highly glamorous, beautifully dressed female star became almost totally a thing of the past. Hard reality became the order of the day. Wardrobe for most modern pictures was simply bought in stores. Film stocks and lighting equipment had been perfected to the point where the technical expertise of the designers was not as crucial as it had once been and indeed, many films now carried no designer credits at all. Nowadays, however, designers seem to be regaining some of their former importance. The economic recession of the early seventies greatly increased the number of filmgoers. Individual attractive and even sexually provocative styles are more important than ever. Think about some of the really popular films that had impact on fashion in the past. The popularity of such films as Chinatown in 1974, The Great Gatsby in 1975, and Funny Lady in 1975 started a wave of nostalgic films, each requiring many months of preparation from the designer. Of course, audiences had been reminded of the greatest of the thirties and forties movies and young people had been introduced to them for the first time because of the television screening of these movies. They made audiences very knowledgeable about periods, styles, and modern clothes could no longer be passed off as period costumes. Most film historians
establish 1950 as the end of the “Golden Age of Hollywood.” It is true the coming of television did cause widespread changes in the film industry. Some of these benefited these designers so it would be inappropriate to end the history in the fifties. Instead, the [chronicle?] at each studio’s design department had been carried up to the point when the last of the contract designers left -- a symbolic moment for the demise of the designer’s role. The new influx of talented designers who began their careers after 1950 is another subject and another tape. And one of course has to remember that despite the enormous number of designers, you can’t ignore the fact that thousands of expert seamstresses, cutters and fitters, milliners, wardrobe men and women working long hours with very little reward made the brilliant concepts. The clothes became reality rather than just sketches because of the talents of these unnamed people. I don’t think there’s any argument at all from anyone that the studio that has to be thought of as head and shoulders above all the others for its splendor, quality, especially its costumes, was MGM. For 25 years, it stood at absolutely the pinnacle. It was the most glorious of all the Hollywood studios and of course it was very successful and the great wealth of the studio was displayed in every possible way. The clothes were often extreme in style and unrealistically lavish for the characters who were
wearing them. They reached their zenith in the 1930s under the masterful design of Adrian Rosenberg. Until Adrian came to MGM, the wardrobe department was like a department store with a revolving door or a hotel with a revolving door, with designers coming and going but none staying more than a couple of years. I think it’s very valuable to understand how the role of the designer in the studios were -- grew and changed and developed into the power that it became at the height of the Golden Age.

The first company [30:03] to use the Culver City studio was Triangle, whose designer Peggy Hamilton was very -- probably the first to be put under contract at any studio. She arrived in the summer of 1918 and she designed for Alma Rubens and had the distinction of being the first to design for Gloria Swanson. Early in 1920, Triangle sold the studio to the Goldwyn company and Peggy Hamilton left. She later became the fashion editor of the Los Angeles Times and she did a lot to promote the talent and the work and personalities of the Hollywood designers. The wardrobe of the Goldwyn lot had been under the supervision of Sophie Wachner -- W-A-C-H-N-E-R -- who also ran a very fashionable shop on Hollywood Boulevard. When [31:03] Goldwyn merged with Metro in 1923, Wachner left and Mrs. Ethyl Chaffin -- C-H-A-F-F-I-N -- came from Paramount to design some films ad supervise the other designers. These other designers included the brilliant Erte -- E-R-T-E -- who was already well-known in
the United States for -- because of his Harper’s Bazaar covers. He was brought to Hollywood with great fanfare in March 1925 to work on a film called Paris which was produced in ’26, but as the script was not quite ready, he helped with three others. Somehow, the final garments were never as impressionative as Erte’s bizarre sketches. La Bohème was fraught with disagreements because Erte envisaged Mimi in crisp cottons, while Lillian Gish wanted ragged silks and Renee Adoree -- R-E-N-E-E, capital [32:03] A-D-O-R-E-E -- refused to wear corsets. Erte worked on other films but when the script for Paris finally arrived, it presented what he considered to be a very distorted view of Paris as he knew it and he asked to be released from his contract. Late in 1925, Andre-Ani -- that’s A-N-D-R-E dash -- or hyphen, I guess -- A-N-I -- arrived on the Culver City lot. Many of the Ani films were shared with the team of Maude Mash and Kathleen Kay, fashionable dressmakers who had been brought to MGM to please Mae Murray. The team of Ani, Marsh, and Kay were further enlarged on the first two Garbo films, The Temptress and The Torrent by Max Ree -- R-E-E -- a well-known theatrical designer. [33:03] Of course, if you are honest about it, it’s impossible now to ascertain who did what for whom on these films, although Ree is due credit for Garbo’s mammoth neck-concealing fur coat in The Torrent. Unfortunately, all these designers left within 18 months and MGM had to find
replacements. They used Renee Hubert -- R-E-N-E-E, capital H-U-B-E-R-T -- several times [between?] 1927 and 1933. He designed Marion Davies’s lavish Quality Street in 1927 and also worked on the first two attempts to make Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina into a film starring Greta Garbo. When it was eventually filmed, Hubert was no longer available and the additional costumes needed were designed by Gilbert Clark. Clark had been one of Lady Duff-Gordon’s designers in London and later ran a fashionable shop in New York. He [34:03] was in the words of Howard Greer, “more temperamental than the stars he was called upon to dress” and after Garbo complained bitterly about working with him on The Mysterious Lady in 1928, his option was not picked up. However, David Cox who had been Clark’s assistant stayed on until 1931 and became a fully fledged designer. He did Joan Crawford’s famous beaded Charleston dress for Our Dancing Daughters in 1928 and the rest of her films until the arrival of Adrian. Adrian Rosenberg’s career started in Paris studying design at Parson’s. He went to New York at the invitation of Irving Berlin and then to Hollywood when Natacha Rambova offered him the job of designing What Price Beauty? in 1924. The plot of [35:03] this particular film includes a dream sequence in which the heroine wanders through a highly modernistic beauty parlor and sees models on pedestals all wearing clothes illustrating different “looks.” Myrna Loy, for
instance, as the intellectual type, wears tailored red velvet pajamas and a wig that comes to little points on her forehead. Subsequently, Adrian designed for two Valentino films. Mitchell Leisen, art director for the independent company (phone rings) which Cecil B. DeMille was then forming offered Adrian a contract. Adrian actually stayed at that company for about two years and he did do two of the DeMille epics, *The Road to Yesterday* in 1925 and *The Vulgar Boatman* in 1926. It’s interesting that bouffant skirts were the new fashion at the time *The Vulgar Boatman* was being filmed but DeMille wanted tight dresses which molded the women’s hips, so Adrian created gowns that were tight to the thighs and then exploded into extravagant fullness. Although they received no credit, both Adrian and Mitchell Leisen contributed some costumes to DeMille’s greatest epic, *The King of Kings* in 1927, which was officially designed by Gwen Wakeling and Earl Luick -- L-U-I-C-K. DeMille and his company moved to MGM in the summer of 1928. Now, since their first film *Dynamite* was not to begin shooting for six months, Adrian was assigned to other MGM productions including several with Garbo. *Dynamite* proved to be a rather ordinary assignment but the next DeMille epic, *Madam Satan* in 1930 contained a party sequence on a zeppelin that was one of the wildest things that Adrian ever designed. As the guests entered the party, each recites a verse explaining his
costume. A young woman covered by a few carefully placed fans announces that she is “Miss Movie Fan” while another appears in an enormous Afro wig made of lamb’s wool and says, “Have no fear, my child. I am the call of the wild.” Henry VIII appears with six wives all dressed in sparkling cellophane. Finally, Kay Johnson enters in a black velvet cloak, the back covered with an enormous serpent head rendered in half-inch white and mother of pearl sequins. “Which one of you is man enough to go to hell with Madam Satan?” she asks. The significance of the Madam Satan film -- [38:03] at least the party and the fashion show and the Joan Crawford Our Blushing Brides which were both made in 1930 -- is that they featured what would be the major traits of Adrian’s designing for the rest of his film career.

He tried to avoid middle greys as much as possible and contrasted blacks and whites, knowing that these would create the greatest impact within the confines of monochromatic film. It was in line with MGM’s constant use of white on the sets and their emphasis on production values, often to the detriment of the dramatic values of the film. Traditionally, pure blacks and whites were avoided because they were difficult to photograph. White-clad figures went out of focus and had halos, and black registered like the inside of a hole with no detail whatsoever. Navy blues and beige that looked black and white on the screen were often substituted, [39:03] but Adrian insisted that the
real shades were carry more impact and MGM had the time and money to learn how to photograph them. As early as 1931, Peggy Hamilton gave a showing of costumes from Adrian’s films and every single one was black and white. Even Adrian’s working sketches were rendered in the same blacks, whites, and greys that would appear in the film instead of the pretty colors designers usually used. Sometimes the clothes would then be made in bright colors from the monochromatic sketch so the actresses would not get too depressed wearing them. To understand Adrian, you must examine the clothes and recognize that he had a passion for straight lines. Not only did he square shoulders with padding, he often draped the waistlines of his frocks loosely. To fill in the indentation, he created the most severely tailored suits anybody had ever seen. He loved glitter, used sequins in brilliance with abandon. His use of glitter on white organdy or tulle ruffles was so well-known within the industry, it was almost a joke. He used bows constantly -- big ones that stretched across Ann Harding from shoulder to shoulder in Biography of the Bachelor Girl in 1935, scores of black ones on Jean Harlow’s white sleeves in Hold your Man in 1932, almost imperceptible bows stuck on handbags and the back of hats. “Oh, darling, whenever Adrian has a problem with some part of a costume, he sticks a bow over it,” sighed [Louise Rina?]. Adrian was highly productive when even on mammoth
productions like *Marie Antoinette* in 1938 and *The Wizard of Oz*. He designed everything. He designed the extras' clothes and moved so rapidly -- I mean, he could throw out a sketch about every two or three minutes. His work with his superstars was far more exacting and he dealt with each in a different way. When you look at the films now, of course, some of these clothes appear excessively theatrical but you have to remember they were appropriate to MGM’s kind of movies and the stars that MGM created. The most extreme of his designs were usually intended for Joan Crawford. Her whole appearance was an overstatement. She had enormous eyes, and an enlarged mouth. This heady movie star presence overwhelmed conventional clothes and they did not look good on her figure, with its broad shoulders, its long waist, and its short legs. Trying to find a new device to make Crawford’s hips seem narrower, Adrian hit upon the idea of making her shoulders even broader by enveloping them in voluminous ruffles for *Letty Lynton* in 1932. Well of course, by comparison her hips seemed smaller and the costume put them on the fashion map. It’s fascinating to realize that in the movie, the dress is seen very briefly but it caused such a sensation that thousands of copies were made for the retail market. Adrian later was known to have said and repeated frequently, “Who would ever believe that my whole career would rest on Joan Crawford’s shoulders?” After the ruffles came shoulder pads
which not only broadened Crawford’s shoulders but also squared them off. They first appeared in a [tailored?] dress in *Today We Live* in 1933 and then in most of Crawford’s outfits after that. [43:03] Adrian came to the conclusion that the frequent use of close-ups in a film — especially if the face was as extraordinary as that of a Crawford or a Garbo — made it a good idea to keep the important details of a costume above the waist. For forsaking all others, he — in 1934 — he made Crawford a dark coat with a white plait collar that extended beyond her shoulders and rose up behind her head. In 1935, in "No More Ladies" we saw her wearing an enormous starch white collar that looked like two sails and extended so far over her arms that she was unable to get a cigarette up to her mouth. Between 1929 and 1941, [44:03] Adrian dressed and enjoyed working with Greta Garbo. Interesting enough, she had his ideal figure — square shouldered with only the very slightest indentation at the waist and straight hips. There were no curves. There was nothing for him to straighten out. This was very fine for Garbo’s highly stylized modern dress films but for the period films for which he is now best remembered. It took all of Adrian’s expertise to soften her very stark contours. Like Crawford, Garbo had broad shoulders but he did the opposite that he did with Crawford. He designed in such a way to deemphasize Garbo’s shoulders. In her modern dress pictures, he [cheated?] her shoulder seams [45:03]
up and enveloped them in kimono sleeves and other drapery. For Garbo, of course, Adrian was able to create the heroines of history and literature with his clothes. She really depended upon them. She was an actress who recognized and understood the importance of her costumes and how it affected her performance. She would arrive at the set earlier than required -- and that was very early in those days -- but she’s get there early in the morning and she’d put on her costume and she’d stare into her mirror and she would rehearse the day’s scenes until she was satisfied that they were perfect. She would play with them and practice how she could use the sleeves and the skirts, how’d she sit, how she’d move, how she’d lean, how she’d get up from a chair, all using the costume for her own dramatic purpose. For instance, in 1930 a movie called Romance -- well it supposedly took place in the 1850s, although Adrian stylized the concept so much it looked a little like and period of the nineteenth century. He placed a flat Eugenie hat complete with an enormous black plume on Garbo’s head and positioned it at a very steep angle. Well, it took off. I mean a generation of women tired of and helmets -- they Eugenie hat was the answer. With or without the plume, that angle over one eye dominated women’s hats for the rest of the decade. In 1932, Garbo was given the script for Mata Hari, the famous spy of World War I. It was an enjoyable exercise in terms of
costume design -- you know, elaborate beading on velvet and gold mesh, skull caps -- but the most severe historically accurate costumes of Queen Christina in 1933 were far more beautiful. The most famous was a stark black velvet with a plait collar that encircled Garbo’s head. It had sleeves that were tied to just above the elbows where they burst into fullness, the only ornamentation on the costume and a device which filled in her waistline without adding to her shoulders. Anna Karenina in 1935 was an elaborate period book, without any stylization. There’s a famous scene in Anna Karenina on the croquet court and for that scene, [48:03] Adrian surrounded Garbo for the first time in the masses of white ruffles he had often used on both Crawford and [Sheera?]. No longer dramatic and mysterious, Garbo for the moment became lighthearted and truly romantic. (inaudible) thinks that one of the really true examples of Adrian’s great talent and skill and one of the best ways that the costume designer interprets the story through the clothes is done in the move Camille which was done in 1936. It’s fascinating because the standard Adrian blacks and whites are really used very cleverly to indicate the blatant promiscuity of Olympe -- O-L-Y-M-P-E -- played by the famous stage actress Lenore Ulric -- U-L-R-I-C. [49:03] However, Garbo’s clothes in the first sequences are purposefully understated. In that famous scene in the theater, her costume is a modestly
embroidered silk coat trimmed in red fox, while Lenore Ulric wears a fluffy white dress trimmed with enormous black sequins. At the auction, Ulric wears one of the starkest black and white [file costs?] assembles that Adrian ever made. Garbo’s costumes, on the other hand, is a soft lead-grey velvet, profusely but subtly embroidered at the shoulders and the cuffs with steel grey beads. It’s fascinating to look at these -- even the stills -- because the contrast between Marguerite Gautier’s profession as courtesan and her sensual purity of spirit is epitomized by this dress that Garbo wears in the party sequence. [50:03] Adrian gave her his usual trademarks, a white chiffon dress riddled with silver stars and a big black bow at the neckline. But while the other women are decked out in elaborate necklaces and paste diamonds, Garbo wears a heavy gold chain at her neck and wrists, a device intended to emphasize her strength and her refinement. It is an interesting note to recognize that in the Adrian movies, if you look carefully at the jewelry that’s worn, you’ll sometimes see some of the most extraordinary pieces because MGM sent Adrian to Europe to do research and at one time he came back with a museum-quality collection of paste jewelry, which was then copied and used in both Camille and Conquest for Garbo. [51:03] Another star who really benefited greatly from Adrian’s expertise was Jeanette MacDonald, who looked far more attractive in her MGM films as
she ever had before. For The Merry Widow produced in 1934, Adrian’s staff created foundation garments that reshaped her figure magnificently and while Adrian kept the lines of the 1880s for her dresses, he executed them in the wispiest of chiffons and voiles -- V-O-I-L-E-S -- which transmitted light and moved beautifully. As she grew thinner, MacDonald’s face and neck began to look very long so Adrian designed hats that were high off her face and extremely wide. Her wigs now had [52:03] curls at the side to add width to her face and as often as possible, Adrian covered up her neck with high collars or complicated chokers. These --

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GREEN: -- [long?] so Adrian designed hats that were high off her face and extremely wide. Her wigs now had curls at the side to add width to her face and as often as possible, Adrian covered up her neck with high collars or complicated chokers. These particular problems aside, her figure became a dream to dress. With long legs and no hips, she could wear pencil-thin [empire?] gowns that Adrian simply couldn’t put on any of the other stars. In 1938, a film called Sweethearts gave Adrian his first real chance to work in the medium of three-strip Technicolor. Well, it was fabulous to watch him work because
Adrian managed to create as much visual excitement in color [01:00] as he had in black and white, but here there were no sharp contrasts -- interesting point. It didn’t require sharp contrasts, only softly harmonizing colors. The usual difficulties in dealing with Technicolor were magnified in this case because it had been designed as a black and white film and was only technicolored at the last minute when MGM postponed *Northwest Passage*. Rather than copy her natural light brown hair, the studio designed to make Jeanette MacDonald’s wigs a bright red that harmonized well with her sea green eyes. Exhaustive tests were made over and over again until the right shade of orange hair was found and then the hair and the eyes became the central colors around which MacDonald’s whole entire wardrobe was designed. And of course, Adrian who frequently broke rules [02:00] and set up new directions for both costume designers and the fashion world did it again. He totally disregarded the then-popular notion that redheads should absolutely never, never wear pink. Adrian kept MacDonald in a certain pale pink shade throughout much of the picture. It was a metaphor for the character -- a spoiled, bored heroine of a saccharine operetta. The play within the film was a harmless parody of earlier MacDonald [Eddy?] films and the silly pink tulle and gold sequined dress was a parody of all the tulle and sequin dresses that Adrian had made for MacDonald and the others
over the years. Well, certainly Adrian would find himself in
the position of having to design -- and wanting to design -- for
Norma Shearer, whose husband Irving Thalberg was [03:00] the
most important person just below Louis B. Mayer at MGM.
Thalberg cast her as a wealthy adulteress wife in a movie called
Riptide in 1934, which opened with a very glittering ball which
all the guests came dressed as bugs. Adrian designed her siren
clothes with very deep décolletage and very tight biased draping
of her hips and thighs, which if she stood just so could be
highly provocative. Adrian made the biggest fashion news with
Shearer when he put her in a light suit with a dark blouse in
The Divorcee in 1930. Thalberg was of course an excellent
producer and recognized that he didn’t want [04:00] the public
to get tired of Shearer as a seductress, and so he interspersed
some romantic heroine roles for her, such as lead in Romeo and
Juliet in 1936. Oliver Messel, of course -- the celebrated
stage designer -- came from London especially for this
particular film. When he got to MGM, he found that Thalberg had
also assigned Adrian to it, but in the end Messel did all the
sets, all the mends, and more than half of the women’s costumes
including some for Shearer. However, Adrian did design Marie
Antoinette in 1938. That was Shearer’s next film. The only bow
to historical accuracy that Adrian made in this film was that
his costumes do acknowledge the essential shapes of the era.
Otherwise, [05:00] everything else was a flight of exquisite fantasy. So great was the cost of the costumes and the sets that the studio had to compensate by finding a faster director. The final film was opulent beyond compare but sadly unconvincing dramatically. Adrian made Shearer’s [phony?] countess in *Idiot’s Delight* in 1939 a creature of amusingly slinky draperies, but Shearer was noticeably plumper in *The Women* in 1939 so he raised her waistline and made her skirts fuller. Reflecting the enormous impact and interest in *Gone with the Wind*, Shearer wore an 1860s-influenced ballgown, the enormous crinoline harmonizing with her chubby arms. For the climax of the film, Adrian made Shearer in gold [06:00] lame confront Joan Crawford in gold sequins. Shearer got her man back, but Crawford’s glitter out-dazzled her. Jean Harlow -- a great platinum blonde -- had a kind of lovable vulgarity and as a result, Harlow really inspired Adrian’s funniest clothes. In *Red Dust* in 1932, he gave her kimonos that had no sashes or other fastenings and depended on Jean’s arms to keep closed. When she made exclamatory gestures and her arms flew out, the robe would start to separate alarmingly but Harlow always managed to get it back together, even before it was too late. [07:00] There were other glamorous stars at MGM, even though their stays might be brief, that they did get the full Adrian treatment. At the time of her one MGM film *Faithless* in 1932,
Adrian said, “Tallulah Bankhead can wear more silver fox than almost any other woman and still look underdressed.” Constance Bennett, painfully thin, still got her backless evening gowns but it concealed her protruding shoulder blades and smoothed her jagged hip bones. It’s fascinating that Myrna Loy was the only major star at MGM that Adrian did not always dress satisfactorily. Unlike Crawford and Garbo -- whose overwhelming presence needed incredible clothes -- Loy’s acting was powerful in its underplaying. If she wore clothes with too many clever details, they distracted from the subtly of her performance. For instance, Adrian once trimmed the front of her dress with his favorite big, round buttons, but it was fascinating because the time of the film’s preview, [Myrna’s?] husband remarks, “These buttons completely erase your face, Myrna.” I do think that the designs that Adrian did for Loy’s one period film called Parnell made in 1938 were exquisite. But actually, what Loy had was a quiet sophistication. It turned out that that quality was much more suited to the designing talents of Dolly Tree who was MGM’s second-string designer. Dolly Tree was a bright young woman from England who had worked for Fox before coming to MGM in 1934. It’s fascinating. Her first assignments were just films with [acting?] big female star, but later she designed three films for Harlow in her dark blonde period and then two for Judy
Garland. Despite all the attention MGM gave its female stars, the men handled their screen wardrobes in modern dress films themselves, sometimes in consultation with their directors, and then they were reimbursed by the studio. Period men -- military uniforms and other ethnic costumes -- were designed by [Lucier Colter?] who was known as “mother” [10:00] who came to MGM from Universal in 1925. After her death in 1936, Gile Steele began designing for men in period films in 1938 for Marie Antoinette. As the decade drew to a close, the era of glamor at MGM represented by Adrian’s clothes was ending too. Of the new stars, only Hedy Lamarr and Greer Garson were suited to elegant formal clothes. Garbo, Crawford, Shearer, MacDonald, and Loy had all left MGM by 1942. Later in Adrian’s tenure at MGM came The Wizard of Oz in 1939 which utilized his flare for the fantastic more than any other film. He persuaded Technicolor’s Natalie Kalmus to use more bright colors together than Technicolor had permitted since Becky Sharp in 1935. [11:00] When it proved impossible to borrow Shirley Temple for Fox to play Dorothy, Adrian was asked to make Judy Garland appear younger instead. His first idea complete with blonde wig was not a success, so a second dress illustrated was designed. Garland’s naturally high waistline was raised even higher. A long hairpiece covered her breasts and elbow-length sleeves obscure the contours of the sides of her figure. And this
wasn’t so convincing and when MGM finally decided to play Dorothy as an adolescent, the now-familiar blue gingham dress was designed. It had a definite waistline over a tight corset, short sleeves, and much more refined trimmings. [12:00] Adrian was called on again to design for Judy Garland as well as Hedy Lamarr and Lana Turner in the Busby Berkeley spectacular Ziegfeld Girl which was produced in 1941. The You Stepped out of a Dream number was typically high white MGM décor with Turner and Lamarr glistening in yet more additions of the chiffon, tulle, and silver stars special and Judy Garland, covered by a shapely shimmer of silver foil. The Minnie from Trinidad number was far more inventive. Garland’s dress pushed her waistline down almost nine inches while Lamarr carried mammoth orchids in her bust, right hip, and her head as more orchids sprouted from tree trunks in a rainforest. [13:00] But there were trouble in costume paradise at MGM at this point because Adrian was becoming increasingly unsettled at MGM. He had somehow gone through the Depression spending very freely. Now the studio began imposing budgets on him, telling him to use rayons instead of silks just as film revenues began going up. Gradually, he began to lose his autonomy. Sometimes he had to make several sketches before he did one that pleased everybody. George Cukor, a famous director, rejected the entire wardrobe for Two-Faced Woman in 1941 and told Adrian to make simple garments like
those Garbo wore in her private life. [14:00] Adrian apparently complied because he gets the credit for the film, but he knew his era was over and when his contract expired in 1941, he opened his own couture shop and did two highly profitable collections a year. Clothes from his shop appeared on actresses in many films, but he did not again design a picture in the true sense. MGM sought him out for *Lovely to Look At* in 1951 but Adrian made everything in his own workroom and kept his involvement with MGM at a minimum. When Adrian left the studio, there were a number of changes of designers. Dolly Tree left and Howard Shoup -- S-H-O-U-P -- was brought in from Warner’s and Robert Kalloch -- K-A-L-O-C-H -- from Columbia, but neither stayed very long. Robert [15:00] Kalloch’s designs were similar to Adrian’s and he did three films with Lana Turner, two with Greer Garson, and one with Norma Shearer. Shoup stayed on to work under Irene’s supervision and did several films before being drafted into the Air Force. After Adrian left MGM, Irene Lentz Gibbons -- that’s L-E-N-T-Z -- Gibbons came to MGM as supervising designer. She had been a movie extra and piano student who began by making clothes for her friends and eventually became the leading couturier on the West Coast. Stars bought their personal wardrobes from her and began to use her for their films as well. There’s never been anybody that could match Irene’s virtuosity when it came to souffle. Her
soft crepes and chiffons were meant to be worn without brassieres but there was a 16:00 discreet construction underneath which lifted the breast delicately -- augmented them if they were meager and allowed the nipples to show through. She also padded hips when there was a need to. Irene’s fit was so exact that the slightest change in weight caused problems. She was equally renowned for her suits which were tailored full of choice detail yet softly feminine. She had a talent to be able to maintain the glamor that was associated in the best tradition of MGM and at the same time, she did understand the function of clothes as part of the language of the character and the drama. In Weekend at the Waldorf in 1945, 17:00 dramatically it was the epitome of cold insincerity but as a vehicle for Irene’s marvelous clothes, it was absolutely sublime. I mean, it was really remarkable. There’s an extraordinary moment when you see a spiral of jewels placed at one side of Ginger Rogers’s towering pompadour. From the middle came a spray of coque feathers and the finest of veils was draped around her whole head. Cuffs jeweled in the same pattern came down the back of her hands to her fingers and just to top it off, she carried sables. Irene was not versatile. She could relate to actresses like Stanwyck, Loretta Young, Katharine Hepburn, and Joan Crawford because they were women much like Irene herself. They were 18:00 intelligent, sophisticated,
and they had great posture. She had no interest or ability to deal with MGM’s ingénue types, like June Allyson and [Glorietta Havin?] and they were dressed by members of her staff, which included [Kay Dean?] and [Marian Herwood Keys?] while Valles -- V-A-L-L-E-S -- did all the men’s costumes. Her department was particularly weak in perioded musical design and extra help had to be brought in. When the Gaslight in 1943 wardrobe first went into work, it had not been designed at all but rather copied exactly from old engravings. George Cukor was not satisfied and so Irene brought in Madame Barbara Karinska, who had built costumes for ballets and musicals all over Europe. She designed and executed the [19:00] most intricate bustles and flounces MGM had ever seen then stayed on to do the fantastic “Kismet” in 1944. Both times, Irene was listed as the designer but studio employees now say that she really had no part in them at all.

The enormously gifted and talented Irene Sharaff -- S-H-A-R-A-F-F -- was also brought in from Broadway to help with MGM musicals. After for Eleanor -- designing for Eleanor Powell and Lena Horne in I Dood It in 1943, then for Garland and [Rooney?] in Girl Crazy in 1943, Sharaff was given a very different assignment -- very somber Parisian clothes of the 1890s for Madame Curie. Sharaff had a superb sense of color which [20:00] is evident in the Christmas Eve ball in Meet me in St. Louis, 1944. It was her first collaboration with Vincente Minnelli.
At first, there was very strong opposition from the Technicolor consultant of the idea of putting Judy Garland in a deep red velvet dress next to Lucille Bremer in emerald green in a red plush room full of extras and fluffy pastels. Despite their misgivings, it worked well visually and it was highly effective dramatically. It made Garland more passionate than the ingénue she’d been playing and added impact to the [following?] you see in which she sings, “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas.”

It was necessary to find and deliver additional help for the musicals and period films because the head of the studio was Louis B. Mayer and he much preferred the garish look of the Fox musicals to Sharaff’s tasteful and accurate period work. And without consulting Irene, he hired Helen Rose -- a Fox designer for musicals -- in 1943 but it was over a year before Irene allowed her to work on Ziegfeld Follies in 1946 with Sharaff. Then in ’45, Walter Plunkett arrived to specialize in period and ethnic costumes. Plunkett’s first assignments were small, but then came the epic Green Dolphin Street in 1947 which required months of preparation to furnish the many changes needed by Lana Turner, Donna Reed, and Gladys Cooper. The particular period and setting -- the date -- the 1830s had [22:00] big sleeves flared but not very full skirts and lace slippers. It was an unusual period for films and it was very little in stock for either the extras or the stars. Plunkett
also had to do a lot of research into the dress of the nineteenth century maoris -- M-A-O-R-I-S. Walter Plunkett was able to get along very well with a complicated difficult actress known as Katharine Hepburn. She became his favorite actress and a movie called The Sea of Grass cast her as a wealthy pioneer woman of the 1880s while in Song of Love she portrayed Clara Schumann -- S-C-H-U-M-A-N-N. In 1949, he worked for Hepburn again when he made a rare and highly successful discursion into contemporary fashions doing Adam’s Rib. [23:00] Walter Plunkett also designed the costumes for Summer Holiday but the color scheme was the idea of the director, Rouben Mamoulian -- R-O-U-B-E-N, capital M-A-M-O-U-L-I-A-N. Mamoulian decided to return to the colors people actually wore during the hot summers of the turn of the century -- whites, very pale blues, and greys -- and leave the strong colors to the trees, skies, and red brick of the houses. The bright colors were saved for a scene when Mickey Rooney meets Marilyn Maxwell and gets drunk. The first dress is sickly pink with a little hat carrying one scrawny black feather. As Rooney gets drunker and drunker, Maxwell begins to look more beautiful to him. The dress becomes a [24:00] deeper prettier pink. This continues through four dresses until Rooney is completely inebriated and Maxwell’s dress is deep red, the enormous red hat covered with magnificent plumes. Actually, Walter Plunkett was the last MGM designer to
ever work with Judy Garland. Now Garland was MGM’s top female star of the forties which was -- and but she was also the most difficult to dress. Howard Shoup had designed for Garland when her figure was at its best, fairly slender with a pleasing fullness to her face and arms. Shoup said, “I had her waist cinched in so tight she could hardly breathe, but she wanted me to do it.” But by 1944, Garland was too thin in Meet me in St. Louis and Sharaff had to gather fabric to fill her out. Then, her weight began to fluctuate drastically in the short period between the filming of the two numbers that constituted her brief appearance in Words and Music. She gained about 10 pounds. Helen Rose anticipated this and designed a straight dress that would conceal a gain or loss fairly well, although if you have sharp eyes, you will notice that Garland no longer has her belt on as she slips from the first song into the second. Garland requested Walter Plunkett design all her costumes for Annie Get Your Gun but when Betty Hutton took over the title role, she asked Helen Rose to do her clothes, although Plunkett’s designs for the rest of the cast were retained. Plunkett also did Garland’s last feature for MGM, Summer Stock in 1950. He remembers it by saying, “Judy liked me and I liked her so very much. Her figure was bad then. She was too heavy, she had no waistline, and her hips started under the bust line. I was no genius at modern clothes. She was in a horrible
turmoil and when it was finally over, they knew they needed to do something so after several weeks, she came back with a lovely figure and she did that ‘Get Happy’ number.” Meanwhile, Irene’s position at the studio was becoming precarious. Despite her great success, she was unhappy and drank heavily. Louis B. Mayer did give Irene a new contract in July 1947 but let her resume her retail business on the side and the other designers gradually had to assume her responsibilities. This meant that Helen Rose could broaden her field of experience. As Helen Rose said, “At first I did only musicals, most of which required period costumes. The job suited me perfectly because I wasn’t interested in modern clothes. Irene preferred the Irene Dunnes and the Katharine Hepburns to youngsters like Elizabeth Taylor or Jane Powell, so frequently I was asked to design their pictures.” Rose then began designing modern clothes for established stars like Lana Turner and Barbara Stanwyck too so when the belt tightening began around 1950, it was obvious that there was no justification for keeping Irene. As part of the cutback measures, Valles was allowed to go and Plunkett began designing the men’s costumes as well as the women’s on his films. He often did the men on Rose’s films too, though sometimes anonymously since he did not want to get typed as a men’s designer. There was a designer named Herschel McCoy who shared some films with Helen Rose and he became an expert on
things ancient. [28:00] So he did Quo Vadis and The Prodigal and Julius Caesar on his very own. MGM made a very big decision in the fifties. They decided to continue to place much of the emphasis on glamor for its own sake while other studios were getting more involved in realism. The lines were highly romantic. The padded shoulders and the girdled buttocks were replaced by small waists, long full skirts, and [stoles?]. MGM had a virtual monopoly on the most beautiful women in Hollywood. Elizabeth Taylor, Grace Kelly, Lana Turner, Deborah Kerr, [Sid Charise?] -- what a group -- and Helen Rose glamorized them all. Yard of chiffon and white fox became her trademark, I suppose because Lana Turner wore those in the mad scene of The Bad and the Beautiful in 1952 for which Rose won the black and white Oscar [29:00] that year. The central theme of Designing Women in 1956 -- that of a fashion designer married to a sportswriter -- was Helen Rose’s idea and it gave her a chance to create a luxurious wardrobe for the long lean Lauren Bacall. Rose also designed Grace Kelly’s MGM films and in those days, she recalls, “I loved the period. Grace was beautiful and in love with the price and life was divine. I’ve always been extremely proud that Grace chose me to design her wedding gown, as practically every designer in the world vied for this honor.” The Swan, produced in 1956, is a rare example of MGM allowing Rose to design a true period film. Usually, they tried to avoid
anything that was too realistic. For instance, there’s virtually nothing of the twenties in *Good News* or *Words and Music*. They always wanted it stylized. [30:00] It’s fascinating if you think about Elizabeth Taylor’s earlier movie career because she literally grew up in Helen Rose’s creations, from a teenager in *A Date with Judy* in 1948 through the fresh beauty in love for the first time in *Father of the Bride* in 1950, to the very voluptuous star of *Rhapsody* in 1954. Rose frequently put Elizabeth Taylor in a pure brilliant color and said, “I had to keep her designs very simple so they wouldn’t retract -- detract -- from her face.” Richard Brooks wanted all the sets and costumes of *A Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* to be colorless and Taylor to have only two changes of costume -- slip and a completely plain blouse and skirt. But when Taylor persuaded Brooks to allow [31:00] a third in the last part of the film, Rose designed a beautiful white chiffon gown with a plunging V-neck line showing ample cleavage. Taylor loved the dress and asked Rose to make extra copies and variations for her personal use, and of course the fascinating thing was that -- of course she made them in different colors, in particularly, you know, the violet pastel to match Elizabeth Taylor’s eyes -- and the fan magazines were absolutely filled with the news at that time of Taylor’s romance with Eddie Fisher and pictures of her in Helen Rose’s chiffon dress. Rose received so many requests for
the dress that she decided that it would be very good to go into the wholesale garment business, which she met with great success. So after her contract expired in 1960, she continued to work on her own business but still found time to do occasional films. It is clear that Hollywood frequently manipulates the time periods to suit their own particular sense of what will be effective for the individual script in the film or the individual stars and a very good example was that in 1952, Walter Plunkett got the big costume assignment for the classic musical *Singing in the Rain*. Now at that time, the period of the film was less than 25 years ago, which is considered usually too short a period of time to do realistic accurate costuming. So, Plunkett decided to use the exaggerated modes of the late twenties that were Hollywood’s alone. Plunkett’s hats were true helmets and closures covering the forehead and the ears. When Debbie Reynolds sang “Good Morning,” her blue grey knit had a bolt of yellow lightning up the front, so true of the early radio-crazed days with electrical symbols abounded. And Plunkett when talked to said, “I didn’t have to get any stills. It was all in my memory from when I started at RKO. The [plus fours?] Gene Kelly and Donald O’Connor wore were like outfits I had made up for myself at the time.” And for the chorus girls, he got himself in the same mental attitude that he had for the girls in *Flying Down to Rio*. 
-- total absurdity. Arthur Freed and Stanley Donen had such a
good time (laughs) with all the sketches and all -- the whole
direction that the movie was taking that they decided to [34:00]
put it in a fashion show. Plunkett would design something
outrageous and they would write the verse to sing about it. You
know, it’s the things like “Black is best when you’re in court.
The judge will be impressed, but white is right when you’re a
bride and want to look your best.” And the fashion shows always
had to end with a bride. Vincente Minnelli adored Plunkett and
assigned him to many of his own films. Actually, their first
collaboration began in 1949 with Madame Bovary. Now, everybody
agrees in Hollywood that Minnelli was the most demanding
perfectionist but Plunkett got along with him very well. (phone
rings) (inaudible) Plunkett was fully aware that Minnelli was
enormously demanding but when you saw [35:00] what you actually
accomplished because of his sense of perfection up there on the
screen, then you were very, very proud that you had done it.
It’s interesting that, you know, costume designers of course can
be very sensitive and Minnelli who himself was a designer had a
great sense of responsibility to their interests and for
instance, if a costume designer which [had shown?] Minnelli
(phone rings) that there was something exquisite around the hem
of a skirt, (inaudible). As the director, Minnelli would
arrange for the actress to sit in such a way that the detail
that the costume designer felt strongly about would show.

(phone rings) It’s always marvelous for [36:00] a costume
designer to work with the director who understands completely
the effect and the meaning of the support of the clothes as a
language of itself to communicate the nature of the character.
For instance, Plunkett had the wonderful experience in doing
*Madame Bovary* that Minnelli directed Emma -- played by Jennifer
Jones -- Emma Bovary’s gowns became a symbol of her folly by
having her struggle to get her enormous skirts through the
crammed little rooms she lived in. On Minnelli’s *An American in
Paris* done in 1951, Orry-Kelly did several numbers on all the
women. Walter Plunkett did the black and white ball and all the
men, and Irene Sharaff did a brief series [37:00] of four
costumes in the multiple image sequence which introduced Leslie
Caron and then all of the *American in Paris* ballet -- which
ballet (inaudible) lasted 20 minutes, the longest thing that’s
ever been done in dance anywhere and containing over 500
costumes. The ballet consisted of a series of tableau, each in
the style of a different painted -- Dufy, Toulouse-Lautrec,
Rousseau, Renoir. The designers, of course, received the
Academy Award for best color costume design of 1951. Minnelli
was very enthusiastic about Walter Plunkett’s talent and used
him on other films. You may remember *Some Came Running* with
Shirley MacLaine. Minnelli sent a note to [38:00] -- to
Plunkett which simply said, “Dress her as a poor, simple, misguided little girl.” Plunkett bought a stuffed dog from a toy shop and made it into a purse and made one of her dresses from a silk print of kittens. In 1960, Vincente Minnelli directed Judy Holiday in Bells are Ringing and he asked for a dress for Judy which would catch fire without burning her. Now, Judy and I were very close and she was terrified but she needn’t have been. They put several layers of asbestos between her and the fire. Walter Plunkett’s contract expired but he did stay on for over a year working on How the West was Won in 1963 and he later returned for John Ford’s 7 Women in 1966, after which he simply retired. As the fortunes of MGM declined through the sixties and in the spring of 1969, there was an enormous auction of props and costumes. They still had a few remaining Adrian’s and they brought very high prices and collectors were quick to snatch up the more recent creations of Helen Rose and Walter Plunkett. After that, sound stage 25 was transformed into an enormous store in which the whole stock wardrobe was sold off at bargain prices, and it was interesting that throughout southern California, high schools and colleges for the next several years, MGM costumes of all periods became the everyday wear of students.

END OF AUDIO FILE
GREEN: [00:33] In the history of Hollywood, between the years of 1915 and 1925, the most important film company was Paramount because it had studios both in Hollywood and New York and turned out hundreds of features every single year, and they had an extraordinary assembly line efficiency that made costume designers a necessity several years before any of the other studios thought of employing them. There was no question that there had been tasteful and fashionable clothes seen in films, but most often they were the wardrobe of stars themselves or somebody such as a producer who had great taste. However, it was Paramount’s Cecil B. DeMille who first became totally aware that there was a commercial value of highly exaggerated modes [01:33] and he ordered the wardrobe departments to understand his philosophy which was, “I want clothes that will make people gasp when they see them. Don’t design anything anybody could possibly buy in a store,” and of course the first of the talented Paramount designers was a very pretty young girl named Clare West. She had previous experience. She had worked with D.W. Griffith and was already established at Paramount by the summer of 1918 when Mitchell Leisen arrived to work on the Babylonian costumes for DeMille’s Male and Female which was shot in 1919. And it’s fascinating because West supervised all the Hollywood studio productions for the next several years,
although other designers were brought in for very specific films. It’s true that [02:33] in DeMille’s *Fool’s Paradise* there was an extraordinary dream sequence and in that both Leisen and Natacha Rambova who was married to Rudolph Valentino worked on that sequence but they never got any credit. The Paramount studios in New York -- which were in Astoria -- did not have a contract designer. The costumes at that point were handled by the actresses themselves. What they did was that, you know, they had a budget and they went to New York couturiers and sometimes the Broadway talent -- you know, the people who did the Broadway shows. For instance, Norman [Derell?] did three films there, including Gloria Swanson’s *Zaza* in 1923 and of course, Swanson says that she -- well, she always implies that she really was the designer (laughs) no matter who the person was. [03:33] Her way of putting it was to say, “I was never a doll for anybody to dress up. I told them the kind of thing I wanted for each picture and they got somebody to do it.” Swanson went to France in 1925 to make *Madame Sans-Gene* -- G-E-N-E -- and there she met, of course, Renee Hubert and she loved his costumes so much that she brought him back to Hollywood with her. By 1923, Howard Greer -- who was a New York couturier with a fine business and a fine clientele -- but he had been the creator of the costumes for the Greenwich Village follies, and the show was such a success that he was asked to come out to
Hollywood worked with Clare West on DeMille’s *The Ten Commandments*. And when she left shortly afterwards, Greer remained and became Paramount’s chief designer. [04:33] Greer personally was very theatrical and very flamboyant and very much like his creations, and because the clothes had to be designed so much in advance of the actual release of the picture, Greer once told a reporter in an article, “The clothes we design up here are one year ahead of Paris and two years ahead of manufacturers.” The reporter retorted that some of Greer’s strange clothes are so far ahead of Paris that Paris never catches up with him. In 1926, Greer -- believing that he had the power and the influence -- decided that he would launch a revival of the high waisted [empire?] lines by using them on Betty Compson -- C-O-M-P-S-O-N -- in *Locked Doors* and Pola Negri -- N-E-G-R-I -- in *Good and Naughty*, but never passed the test of recognition. The female public just kept to their low waists. [05:33] It is clear and it should be understood by people -- students -- who want to go into costume design that one of the greatest assets is the ability to understand the very special personalities of the ladies of the theater or ladies of Broadway, ladies of television, ladies of Hollywood, and translate the nature of their personalities into the clothes. Greer once said that, “When I first came to Hollywood, I was frightened to death of Pola Negri. There was a lot of publicity
about what she did to people she didn’t like. Pola frightens more people than any other woman on the screen, yet to me now she is the least terrifying. You simply have to understand her. Pola is really happy only when she’s wearing rags and she’s more particular about the rags than the elaborate gowns, but if Pola’s raiment is to be gorgeous, it must be super-so.” Betty Compson, for instance, is adorable in the [gaman?] sort of clothes, [06:33] something in which she can look the least bit tough, although she actually can wear anything. Lois Wilson, poor girl, seems to never to get out of the Sears Roebuck class. When she’s in a movie, I just simply open catalogues to get the sort of thing the Middle West is wearing. They have to be attractive but not too smart. Perhaps we shouldn’t even bother to make them. Perhaps we’d do better if we just bought them from the catalogs. Then came, of course, the extraordinary entrance to Hollywood in 1924, of [an?] second top designer at Paramount, Travis Banton -- B-A-N-T-O-N. Now, he was brought in for a high fashion picture, The Dressmaker from Paris in 1925. Amusingly enough, [07:33] I met him and -- let’s see. I was eight years old and I met him at the shop of Madam Francis in New York. Madam Francis was essentially a corsetiere and of course, in that period, ladies wore corsets and my mother, who was a Ziegfeld star as well as a famous model went, of course, to Madam Francis for her lingerie and her corsets and at one
point she took me along and Travis was the house designer there. Travis had also achieved some celebrity when Mary Pickford chose a wedding gown that he had designed for her secret marriage to Douglas Fairbanks. During 1925 and 1926, Howard Greer and Travis Banton [08:33] divided the Paramount assignments between them and they became very close friends, but by 1927 when Greer’s four-year contract was up, he decided not to renew it, saying he was tired of always having to think in terms of black and white. He opened his own couture shop where stars sometimes bought clothes for their own and their film wardrobes. Over the years, he did many more films but always without a contract or an association with a specific studio. He remained on a freelance basis. Travis Banton then became very powerful and a new contract signed in 1929 gave him absolute authority over actresses who had no choice but to what to wear -- to understand that what they were going to wear was going to be decided by Travis Banton, and they had to wear whatever he gave them. Edit Head [09:33] told me once over lunch that he was a guard there. Nobody dared oppose him about anything, including the budgets. But even prior to his strength with this particular contract, Banton had been enormously skillful in persuading actresses to adopt his styles and enjoy his clothes. When he went out to do The Dressmaker from Paris, he tangled with Leatrice Joy over the length of her skirts and then he changed Florence Vidor’s minds
about her style of dress. She had thought of herself as very plain, condemned attempts to put her in high fashion clothes as a waste of time. And Banton said to her, “She thought she could not wear them skillfully and that any old thing would do.” He designed the most lavish gowns for her in _The Grand Duchess_ and _The Waiter_ and he convinced her otherwise, but he was almost defeated by Clara Bow, the “it” girl. He adored her. She was charming and amusing and she enchanted Banton, but he found her complete lack of interest in fashion very saddening. She was a common girl and she insisted on wearing high heels and ankle socks with every outfit, including bathing suits and evening gowns. She adorned his most elegant frocks with dreadful taste on jewelry and she was crazy about belts. She just loved belts and so she stuck belts on whatever he designed, frequently ruining the straight lines of his dresses. She was portraying at that point high society types and he tried to explain to her that -- and that women like that would not dress that way, because she did _Dancing Mothers_ in 1926 and followed that with _Children of Divorce_ in which she was a society girl and eventually, he gave her up. She began to put on a lot of weight and he just turned her over to his assistant designer who was Edith Head. It was Banton who created the forerunners of the extreme helmets of the late twenties when he persuaded Evelyn Brent and Louise Brooks to wear cloche hats.
from which he had removed the face-shading brims as well as all other detail in order to show off their beautiful heads and necks. Every designer in Hollywood had his own, you know, personal point of view and one of the things that distinguished Travis Banton from the other designers was that he concentrated essentially on the female body. He was a [12:33] master of drape and he would drape the body in a simple manner that fully accentuated all of its natural beauty. Of course, in those days there wasn’t a star that didn’t have a beautiful body and most of them just knew how to move rather well. He was very different than Adrian, you know. Adrian was at MGM and Banton did not have to create startling devices to distract attention from broad hips and sloping shoulders. Adrian always used sharp contrasts of black and white and -- however, Travis Banton kept his designs to a very close range of tones. Whenever he chose anything to ornament the dress, it provided contrasting textures rather than contrasting color values. He was an enormously perceptive man when it came to understanding the personalities [13:33] and the physical qualities of the stars that he dressed and he would somehow be able to find what was special in each woman, both in her figure and also in her mind, and he was able to exploit those qualities. He was the sort of person that, you know, if he had lunch with one of the stars just once and listened to her and talked with her and asked some questions and
listened again, he would know exactly what she had and what he had to work with. When Carole Lombard first arrived at Paramount, she was a rather loud mouth, vulgar talking -- in those days called a tootsie and -- but Banton looked at her and realized that there was an underlying quality which was extraordinary -- the thing, of course, that we all came to know and love in the later years as she became a great star. He saw things in her that she didn’t even know she had and his clothes absolutely transformed her. She had wonderful posture and she moved superbly and Banton capitalized on Lombard’s stance by giving her heavily beaded biased cut evening gowns, longer in the back and weighted to [dress?] backwards, always molded tightly against her thighs. One of her favorite gowns was designed by Travis Banton for Love before Breakfast in 1936. It had a tightly draped black satin across her thighs with the added emphasis of a big bow on one side just below her hip. She had the kind of figure and movement that could carry that sort of statement. As her career began to grow and develop, her -- you know, her status became much more significant and her meaning to the studio much greater because she began to gain stature as a serious actress and what appeared to have been her strongest point originally, which was a kind of good-natured sexuality, began to move aside slightly and what took its place -- and what was stressed -- was her intelligence and her
extraordinary compassion. The very signature Travis Banton sensual drapery continued in some dresses, but in others were replaced by straight lines and stark simplicity. She had a movie called *Swing High, Swing Low* in 1937 and Banton designed a number of very modest pastel frocks, well cut, and there were no -- no trimmings, save for some barely perceptible ruffles and what he did [16:33] was she had a very high forehead. It was almost too high, as a matter of fact, and what he did was he -- he developed a whole series of quiet little hats with bands under the brim to pair down her much-too-high forehead. I think if you examine all the clothes that he did and all the stars that he dressed, you become terribly aware that Lombard’s clothes represent Banton’s purest designing. He was in his own way just head and heels above everybody else in the studio in that area and they all knew it, so neither Lombard nor her directors ever imposed any ideas on him. Whatever he made, she agreed to wear and although she had the right to reprove wardrobes, she never -- she never used it. She refused to pass approval on his sketches [17:33] and usually did not see the dress until it was ready for the first fitting. She was a loyal lady and she remained fiercely loyal to Banton and made it clear that she would not accept any other designer. Not all his stars were as easy to get along with or felt so strongly about him. It’s hard to believe, but Claudette Colbert started making films
for Paramount New York studios in 1928, but actually Travis Banton didn’t design anything for her until The Man from Yesterday in 1932. Colbert’s an intelligent woman and she had already acquired a knowledge of the cinematic craft and with it, very, very strong, positive -- almost dogmatic -- ideas of how she should be dressed and photographed. [18:33] Part of the problem with that is that, you see, for her early films, there was no costume designer. She had arranged her own wardrobe for all those earlier films and when she met Banton, she did not want to give him any more freedom than she gave her cameramen and she issued him with a long list of materials and styles she would not wear. Well, Banton wasn’t a fool and he did recognize that there was a kind of intense perfectionism in her attitude which touched all aspects of Colbert’s work and because he -- he recognized that and he respected it. Although Banton himself and -- put, you know, certainly the audiences and certainly the head of the studio -- everybody -- everybody thought that Claudette Colbert’s figure was perfect. However, she insisted [19:33] that her waist and hips were too thick and drew attention upward by baring her bosom, for instance in Cleopatra in 1934 and Torch Singer in 1933. When the Hays office was set up and the anti-cleavage rules in 1934 put a stop to this, Banton kept the eye up with an invention which became known in the business as the “Colbert collar.” Colbert had all sorts of
-- and still does -- all sorts of insecurities about her body since she thought her neck was too short and for this reason, seldom wore shoulder-length hair. Thus, Banton developed the Colbert collar which was nothing more than operating with a collar that never closed. It never closed right at the base of her neck, but he extended the collar down an inch or two while making the size of the collar very wide, taking into her shoulders for instance in Cleopatra. [20:33] It’s interesting that Banton began experimenting with shoulder-broadening lines and puffed sleeves on Colbert, just about the same time as Adrian began to broaden Joan Crawford’s shoulders. Colbert wore what can be thought of now as the Letty Lynton dress in The Gilded Lily in 1935 and she was the first star at Paramount to wear shoulder pads. It’s fascinating. There are little, you know -- little tiny moments in designers’ worlds between the films where you have to giggle. For instance, Banton even put little shoulder pads into the shoulders of the otherwise authentic Maid of Salem made in 1938. Most people may have forgotten that Colbert has absolutely beautiful legs and that bit had been the basis of her first fame on Broadway, [21:33] but she refused to expose them on the screen after her DeMille epics and other than a very brief scene in a bathing suit in Bluebeard’s Eighth Wife in 1938. Banton had to keep her legs covered. Of course, we recognize her [use?] of her legs in It
Happened One Night and the unexpected Academy Award performance by Miss Colbert. Banton came to consider Colbert a very close personal friend but they always, always fought over his designs. One of the great Paramount stars at that time and the one that really kept them out of the Depression in terms of box office success was Mae West and Travis Banton always had a great working relationship with her. Mae had a very simple formula -- diamonds, lots of them, and huge hats, feather boas, fox stoles, and vertical panels of like materials or brilliance with darker side panels to slim her down. Now, when either Lombard or Colbert played comedy, they wore the same elegant clothes that they did in the dramas, but Mae’s costumes -- you have to realize -- were intended to be [canned?] and Travis Banton dressed her in six of her eight Paramount films. Edith Head did one and Every Day’s a Holiday in 1938 was designed by Elsa Schiaparelli. I love this story. Mae had no intention to fly to Paris. She said she was too busy and I think she was a little afraid of flying, and so she sent her dress form to Paris to Schiaparelli’s (inaudible) for fittings, but of course when the clothes arrived, they did not fit. You know, the dress dummy was a little more ideal than -- than Mae’s actual figure and a lot of reworking had to be done. That was the end of any long distance arrangement with Paris. Incidentally -- you may or may not know this -- but that
clothing dummy became the basis of Schiaparelli’s perfume, *Shocking*, and of course it’s still used. It became the bottle. So when people buy a bottle of Schiaparelli’s *Shocking*, they are unconsciously supporting the continued immortality of Mae West.

(laughs) [24:33] If designers are lucky, as Adrian was with Garbo and Crawford, Travis Banton certainly claimed to (sighs) -- immortality in the world of costume art was established by the star known as Marlene Dietrich. Josef von Sternberg -- her husband, director, mentor, Svengali -- created some bizarre vehicles for Dietrich but they did inspire Travis Banton’s most imaginative creations and the fact that those films are still totally exciting and stimulating and offer a level [25:33] of fascination for audiences today, it’s those films that made Travis Banton’s name still a name to conjure with even today.

Lee Garmes -- that’s L-E-E, capital G-A-R-M-E-S -- whose lighting created the classic Dietrich face, Sternberg who coordinated the whole effort with many ideas of his own, and Dietrich herself who took over on the films Sternberg did not direct were all part -- as much as Travis Banton -- as in the formation of the Dietrich image. When we all were introduced to Marlene Dietrich when she played Lola in “The Blue Angel” in 1930, in terms of our values today, she was just plain fat. Everybody [26:33] thought she was kind of perfect for that part as a plump, zaftig sort of low-class tramp, but Banton thought
that Dietrich’s figure had to be changed and he started her on a regime of diet and exercise. With the figure -- the body -- that resulted and dressed in Banton’s clothes, Dietrich became the sleekest siren of the age. The first film that they worked on together was Morocco, 1930, and Banton discovered of course that the key to Dietrich’s personality was that she was the most disciplined woman. It’s, you know -- it’s very Germanic. She had incredible discipline. A number of the dresses were not complete when the shooting began and since Sternberg shot mostly in the evenings, Banton had to schedule fittings at midnight and work until dawn. Dietrich would arrive -- she was pale and unsteady with exhaustion but determined not to release the seamstresses until every little wrinkle had been smoothed. She moved and she stood against the posture of the period. For instance, Kay Francis and Carole Lombard both had the very fashionable slinky pelvis-thrust-forward posture of the era, but Dietrich’s spine was always ramrod straight. Now, soon she was extremely slim -- you know, when you start to go on those diets and lose weight and you can go a little too far -- and Banton began working to give her a softer quality. The result was that her clothing would usually be fussier than any others he designed, with lots of draping of fabric and much use of fur and velvet that would be very unflattering to a heavier figure. As Lola, she would’ve looked a mess if she wore those
same clothes. As the new Dietrich, she looked absolutely stunning. Von Sternberg took Travis Banton aside at the time that they were shooting Dishonored, which was 1931, and asked him to produce a riot of -- of a costume. He wanted something bizarre for the final scene of Dishonored and Banton did it. He produced a really a -- I talk about a riot of contrasting textures that only Dietrich’s personality and carriage could support. You may remember it. She wore a coat with an enormous trimming of monkey fur at the collar and cuffs, [29:33] a small hat entirely covered in feathers with a long black veil with white dots, and a frilly lace jabot -- J-A-B-O-T. When they were ready to shoot The Scarlet Empress in 1934, Banton decided that Dietrich should play Catherine in very ornate gowns with wide hoopskirts. And if you look at the film today, you realize there’s endless fur. Well, the reason for that was the chief of Paramount -- the head honcho -- was Adolph Zukor -- Z-U-K-O-R -- who had once been a furrier and he advised Travis Banton to use fur wherever he could. It would help the fur industry. In this case, it was not [30:33] anachronistic because we were talking about a Catherine of Russia and fur was highly appropriate to not only the mood of the film but the temperature of Russia in the winter. I suppose the weirdest and in some cases the most beautiful garments that Travis Banton ever designed for -- for Dietrich was the last of the Sternberg-Dietrich films, The Devil
is a Woman done in 1935. The Spanish motifs -- which is where this all took place -- were even more inventive than The Scarlet Empress which had been of course Russian. The Devil is a Woman -- if you’re breaking down and analyzing the clothes themselves -- made constant use of seductive diagonal lines. In several changes, [31:33] the 45 degree angle of Dietrich’s hat was repeated in a drape that crossed from her left shoulder to her right hip. Banton found more textures than ever to work with -- black satin ruffles dotted with occasional and enormous sequins. There was a red and white carnation group in Dietrich’s hair, lace panels on her stockings, and abundant, massive fringing. There were enormous combs in her hair, cocked at the 45 degree angle, and spit curls on her forehead. Who knows to this day to what extent Sternberg himself may have entered the design of some of the Dietrich costumes? It’s a hard question to answer as is much is -- how much you photograph the actual films. Certainly, he made the decision that to clothe [32:33] Dietrich’s Concha Perez -- capital P-E-R-E-Z -- in such exaggerated, almost comic (phone rings) terms with his as well as many other specific ideas. In 1969, von Sternberg said, “Well, everybody talks about the 45 degree angle. It was my idea. I placed those hats on her head myself every morning” but Marlene always made herself up. She put on her own eyebrows -- also at a 45 degree angle -- but there’s no question that
everybody agrees that the bulk of the creative work was Travis Banton’s. The last two Travis Banton–Marlene Dietrich films were *Desire* in 1936 and *Angel* in 1937. Now, they were both modern dress stories and they called for what we think of in the business as “straight clothes” and Banton handled them both alike. He did a kind of, you know, ordinate presentation between the clothes that played up Dietrich’s discipline and others that softened her with an emphasis on the latter. For *Desire*, he gave her a fully draped white chiffon gown with the material on the bodice bunched up into a puff under her left jaw. Charles [Lang?] who was the cameraman on that show repeated the very old [maxim le pure?] white could not be photographed and Dietrich absolutely insisted that it must be, and [Lang?] -- you know, sometimes when you push to the corner -- you know, mo-- you know, necessity is the mother of invention and Dietrich’s power was very strong at that time and she said it should be done, and [Lang?] found a way with lighting and filters to reduce the halation to a faint glow which intensified the softening [34:33] qualities of the chiffon, making Dietrich even more beautiful. With the device of the, you know, the bodice bunched up into a puff under her left jaw was such that it could’ve been absolutely disastrous at even the most slender of women, but Dietrich was so extraordinary that it worked beautifully. Then there was another scene where Banton put a
big organdy bow at the neck of a simple white wool dress. It was barely visible, but the bow softened the neckline and it did add bulk, and she needed it (phone rings) that time. She was very slender. When we talk about Dietrich and disciplined outfits, you have to get the picture that -- for instance, there’s an outfit in Desire which is a very masculine suit with a shoulder-padded blue blazer, a man’s white shirt, and a mid-calf [35:33] white duck skirt. The use of a suit in Angel was much softer than -- the fabric was a soft white wool with a rough finish and there was no padding on the shoulders. A much more severe costume for Angel was a two-piece evening suit with yellow beads and red and green cabouchons -- C-A-B-O-U-C-H-O-N-S. Again, the shoulder seam was right at the shoulder line and the sleeves were widened with padding. The cost of this one costume -- including a fur trimmed scarf that was hardly used -- was $8,000. It signaled the end of Travis Banton’s association with Marlene Dietrich in a blaze of glory. They never worked together again. [36:33] There’s no question that Travis Banton’s work was almost uniformly of high quality and he dressed the other Paramount actresses of the thirties with great beauty, and taste, and often restraint. However, as sometimes happens with enormous talent and levels of genius, Travis Banton was a very personally troubled individual. He was -- his behavior became increasingly erratic and as the 1930s began to
move on to the end of the decade -- well, how else to put it?
He drank heavily and sometimes would spend days on end riding
around on the Los Angeles streetcars. I wish we had them today. We don’t; we just have buses. Other times, you know, he just [37:33] turned up inexplicably in San Francisco and Chicago. It was the fact that he was as brilliant as he was that he was able to hold onto his job as long as he did. I mean, typical of the drive and the talent was that at one point when he had disappeared for a couple of weeks, he arrived at his office very early one morning and sketching furiously, designed a whole picture in one morning. This kind of facility and this kind of talent produced its own kind of arrogance. When he was warned, he told the studio he’d be glad to be fired so that he can make more money freelancing and doing collections like Howard Greer. So, the inevitable happens, of course. You know, one goes too far and one is not worth the trouble, despite one’s talent. So when Banton’s contract expired in March of 1938, the studio decided it no longer needed him. [38:33] Marlene Dietrich and Mae West had left and Edith Head, working for a fraction of the salary Banton demanded, could handle the rest. It’s interesting Colbert used Edith Head only once in a film called Zaza in 1938. It was Irene who would be making her personal wardrobe now did her Paramount films and Head was allowed to do the supporting cast. Carole Lombard wrote a note to management about Travis:
“Well, as you know, the past year he’s been a very bad boy and the studio just got fed up with it. That was that. He’s having a little trouble getting something else. I don’t think he appreciated his soft spot.” At the rumors that Edith Head had somehow conspired [39:33] to get Banton’s job, Lombard blew up, “Nonsense! She loved him as much as anybody and if I ever make another picture at Paramount, I want Edith to do all my clothes.” By the autumn of 1938, Edith Head was Paramount’s chief designer. We should talk about Edith Head and her relationship to Paramount. Her career had begun in the summer of 1933 when Howard Greer advertised in the newspaper for sketch artists to help on DeMille’s The Golden Bed. Edith Head’s decision to study drawing was made because she thought eventually she could earn more money by teaching it, but she was an extraordinarily thorough and driven woman and she enrolled at two [40:33] schools and seeing Greer’s ad, what she did was she borrowed drawings from her fellow students, signed them “Head” and applied for the job. Howard Greer declared her the most versatile artist he had ever seen and he hired her immediately. It didn’t take him very long after looking at some of the sketches that she did to realize that she was a fake and -- because her sketching was really very poor -- and he soon caught on to the ruse. However, he kept her on because she was hardworking and bright without displaying enough talent -- at
least enough tangible talent -- to pose any sort of threat to him. So she became an assistant to both Greer and Banton and frequently dressed the male and supporting female characters out of stock wardrobe. When Greer left in 1927, Head began designing some films on her own while continuing to assist Travis Banton and taking over some of Banton’s more difficult actresses. One of those actresses was Nancy [Carol?] whose name seems to have disappeared but she was a marvelous, buoyant, picante, redheaded, charming, short little lady who was a wonderful star at that period in the twenties and thirties and -- but she had temper tantrums and they infuriated Travis Banton. Once after Edith Head and her fitter had spent hours perfecting a dress, Nancy [Carol?] calmly ripped it to shreds right in front of them. I mean, she was a -- a piece of work. There was no big fuss or big publicity or anything else when Head became Paramount’s head designer. The studio had become the least glamorous of Hollywood’s major lots and although Edith Head’s name was on a staggering total of credits each year -- never less [42:33] than 35 films a year between 1937 and 1942 -- the majority of those pictures were the new B pictures Paramount was pushing under the management of William LeBaron -- L-E, capital B-A-R-O-N. Edith Head said, “You could just make it if you worked every day until midnight and weekends.” In some ways, it was easier than today because we knew way in advance
what pictures we were going to do and who would be in them. Dorothy Lamour, Martha Raye, Frances Farmer -- these were all girls who were under contract and Head made many pictures with them so she knew their figures, their likes, and the dislikes, and the studio had an enormous stock of fabrics -- everything that Head could possibly need -- and she never had to go shopping very much. They had some tough directors on the [B's?] but generally weren’t as involved in the clothes as later directors on the larger and more [43:33] important films. In 1939, Edith Head was given a rare opportunity to prove that she could do period costumes -- even recent period, when complete accuracy provided the star was willing to wear it -- and that was a picture called Invitation to Happiness and it starred [Madeline Caroll?] and Irene Dunne. The period, of course, with the dripping hemlines and low waists and the closures of the late twenties and by 1939, they all seemed rather absurd, but Dunne felt the look would make the picture more realistic and Head jumped at the chance to provide it. It’s [44:33] always interesting that there’s that moment in a designer’s life when -- whether it’s a collection on Seventh Avenue or whether it’s a Broadway designing assignment, or a film, or a star -- that determines whether the jump is made from competent to true stardom, and the star who finally made Head an overnight success after 18 years of hard work was Barbara Stanwyck in The Lady Eve
in 1941. Before that film, Barbara Stanwyck was always cast as a kind of Brooklyn/Bronx urban street person, and the roles did not call for high fashion clothes. Designers liked Barbara Stanwyck. They found her to be a warm and appealing person, but she was herself -- personally was rather indifferent towards her clothes. She was slender. She had [45:33] perfect posture and Stanwyck’s figure was better than most of her contemporaries, although she had a long waist and a rather low-slung butt. Previous designers had coped with these figure faults by cheating her waistline up and then hiding the rest under full skirts even when full skirts were unfashionable, but Head was determined to raise Stanwyck’s waist and keep her in straight skirts. She succeeded through the invention of a [self?] belt that was wider in the back than the front and through increased fullness over the bust and sleeves to divert the eye. Aware of the topicality of anything Latin American in the final months before America entered the war, Head very cleverly used Spanish motifs on much of *The Lady Eve* wardrobe, even though [locale?] or the story on board a ship [46:33] really wasn’t very Spanish. Well, the results were pretty sensational and Latin American clothes swept the country. Head had launched a major trend and for the first time, Stanwyck was regarded as a clothes horse and she loved it. She really went way out in her praise of Edith Head and in every interview she gave, she insisted that Edith
Head be assigned of the rest of her future films. In the next seven years, Head was loaned to Goldwyn, Columbia, Universal, Warner Brothers, [Hans Stromberg?] and Enterprise for Stanwyck pictures. Until the advent of the new look after the war, Stanwyck persuaded Edith Head to repeat *The Lady Eve* look over and over and over again. It was a look that she felt totally comfortable in and of course, remember she had received gorgeous press on it. If you examine the two [lays?], it isn’t terribly surprising that they had established a good relationship. The report between Stanwyck and Head was not so surprising since they’re both hardworking and completely dedicated to their professions. Head had a long history at the studios and a long relationship to the stars because she was a corporate team player. For instance, she said, “When I’ve designed a square neckline and a star wants it round, I don’t argue with her.” But it went further than that -- producers and directors found her flexible and versatile. Cameramen and sound recorders, choreographers, and art directors found her sympathetic to their problems and since technicians from all the crafts vote for the Academy Awards, her close collaboration with all members of a crew is one of the reasons she’s won so many Oscars. It’s fascinating that unlike most of the other designers, Edith Head did not do couture or wholesale work. She did do some patterns for a pattern company. And some of her
designs work only in the context of a certain actress in a certain film. Olivia de Havilland, recalling the Head costumes for her two Oscar-winning roles -- in To Each His Own in 1946 and The Heiress, 1949 -- Olivia said, “Every dress was perfect. Just putting them on, I became these women. I knew right where they were in the stories. Edith even came to New York with me before The Heiress and we studies the underwear at the Brooklyn museum so it would be absolutely authentic.” [49:33] Edith Head had the good sense to fight [more?] over characterization in clothes than style and Havilland tells a wonderful story that, “I wanted Edith Head to make me a knitted shawl for my first scene with the fish merchant in The Heiress because Walter Plunkett had given us knitted things in Gone with the Wind and they emphasized Melanie’s modesty and poverty. I thought a knitted shawl would point up Catherine Sloper’s modesty in The Heiress. Well, Edith didn’t agree. She said Catherine was well-to-do and wouldn’t wear anything knitted no matter how modest, but she went ahead and made it up. When I saw the test, I knew she was right.” It cost Edith -- you know, because designers are given a budget for the film so she had to use up some of that budget -- but she was very decent about it [50:33] and she saved the shawl and of course she used it on another actress. As we all know, the motion picture industry’s fortunes improved enormously during the Second World War. Everybody went
to the movies and Edith Head began getting highly prestigious assignments and very important loan-outs. After she worked with Ginger Rogers in *The Major and the Minor* in 1942, she accompanies Rogers to RKO where she also dressed Ingrid Bergman in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in 1943. She had a great sense of what would work. For instance, she gave Bergman an old shirt and pants that she had found in the extra men’s wardrobe. When word of these used garments reached David O. Selznick, he was furious. So, Edith Head nodded her head in agreement. [51:33] All she did was make new ones, then laboriously bleached and re-dyed them, beat them until they looked as worn as the originals. When Veronica Lake came to Paramount, Edith Head was assigned to dress her. It’s fascinating because when Veronica Lake arrived, she had her hair in pigtails. She wore a beret and a pleaded skirt and she looked generally like an 11-year-old schoolgirl. Everybody agrees in Hollywood that transforming Veronica Lake from that little schoolgirl into a slinky siren was one of Head’s greatest successes.

END OF AUDIO FILE

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transforming Veronica Lake from that little schoolgirl into a slinky siren was one of Head’s greatest successes. The Lake hairstyle created by a Paramount hairdresser made the initial impact and Head followed it with sultry gold lame and beaded gowns. Lake’s little girl qualities could also have been counteracted by her admirable bosom, but the Hays office anti-cleavage rules were still enforced and Head had to keep it covered up. Head also had to cover up the fact that Veronica Lake was very pregnant while Sullivan’s Travels, 1943, was being filmed. It was obviously true that Edith Head could not have -- handle everything, so the studio brought in other designers for various assignments. This was not an unfamiliar pattern. Cecil B. DeMille had always brought in outside designers for his films, which relied on splendid costumes for part of their effect. In 1932, there’s marvelous costumes for The Sign of the Cross with the work of Mitchell Leisen -- L-E-I-S-E-N -- and while most of the Paramount staff did Four Frightened People in 1934, Milo Anderson -- M-I-L-O, capital A-N-D-E-R-S-O-N -- was borrowed from Warner’s for This Day and Age in 1934. Leisen refused to come back for Cleopatra in 1934 and DeMille felt the staff [and?] the designers needed [02:00] somebody tougher than Banton to guide the overall effort. In the end, Banton did dress Claudette Colbert superbly and the rest were handled by a committee of talented designers including
Ralph Jester, Shannon Rodgers, Vicki and Natalie Visart -- capital V-I-S-A-R-T. Thousands of costumes had to be made as cheaply as possible. Shannon Rodgers told me that, “We made sleazy little breasts, bras, and skirts on elastic so they could fit anybody.” Most of the Cleopatra committee worked on The Crusades in 1936 but after than, Natalie Visart carried most of the load alone. She recalls, “We had a Technicolor consultant on Northwest Mountain Police in 1940 who told DeMille he could not put red and orange in the same scene. [03:00] DeMille sat and fumed for a moment and then yelled, ‘Well it’s too bad the good Lord up in heaven didn’t have a Technicolor consultant when he made apples and oranges.’” After Visart retired in 1945, DeMille returned to the committee system. Unconquered in 1947 was worked on by Madame Karinska and Gwen Wakeling and Wakeling, Head, Dorothy Jeakins -- J-E-A-K-I-N-S -- and Elois Jenssen -- E-L-O-I-S, capital J-E-N-S-S-E-N -- worked on Samson and Delilah in 1949, which won them the second Oscar for color costume design. After 1949, Edith Head dressed the female principals in all of DeMille’s films, though Jeakins and [Miles?] White and John Jensen and Ralph Jester collaborated at various times. [04:00] It’s fascinating because the same kind of principles operate today. They said, “We had meetings to make sure everything was going together but there really wasn’t much point. If Cecil DeMille liked it, it went in regardless of any
good reasons that the designers might have." Sometimes, Hollywood turned to Broadway and Raoul Pene du Bois -- that’s capital R-A-O-U-L, capital P-E-N-E, small D-U, capital B-O-I-S -- was also brought in and designed costumes and sets for six films in four years. Three of these -- *Lady in the Dark* in 1945; *Frenchman’s Creek*, ’44; *Kitty*, 1945 -- were directed by Mitchell Leisen. With his design background, he was usually loudly dissatisfied with any costumes designed for his films. Characteristically self-effacing, Head [bore?] the abuse with a smile but du Bois did not [05:00] and consequently the three films were riddled with quarrels. Leisen haunted the work rooms, reworking the garments until they bore little resemblance to the original du Bois designs. *Lady in the Dark*, Paramount’s biggest fashion picture ever in a massive, unresolved controversy over who designed what -- however, in the most important dream sequence costume, Ginger Rogers’s dress with the mink skirt linked with red and gold brilliance was designed by Edith Head, working under instructions from Leisen. At the same time, a Beverly Hills couturier named Mary Kay Dodson was given a design contract. Now, her first task was to dress the cast of *Practically Yours* in 1943 while Howard Greer costumed Colbert. Then she shared two films with Edith Head, after which she received many prestigious assignments [06:00] but by 1950, there was not enough work for two full-time designers so her contract
was not renewed. There were less films, of course, made at that time but actually, Edith Head’s opportunities for characterization and costume design was generally better in the 1950s. *Sunset Boulevard* in 1950 showed great restraint. Although the character -- played by Gloria Swanson -- lived in a 1920s house in a world of silent movies, she wore contemporary clothes, hair, and makeup. I love the clothes in that movie because there were [exotic?] and bizarre touches but none would carry to the extent of being camp. Gloria herself wasn’t a fan of the full skirts and petticoats [07:00] of the new look. She was too short for it so we used straight skirts and drapery that showed her beautiful thighs. “I was dressing a star as a star and I’ve never had a picture that was smoother or more enjoyable,” said Edith Head. Head, like all good designers, had to think about the future of fashion -- particularly good designers that design for film because you do have to understand that films -- you know, from the start of the assignment of the designer and the script, and the script development, and script changes, and casting, and then the production, and then the release first run, and then the release, you know, to the second houses and then these days released to television or cable -- you’re talking about a number of years of the full-time -- first-time life [08:00] of the film and if clothes are too extreme then move away too strongly from fashion, they can
indeed defeat everything. So when she was asked to do *A Place in the Sun* -- interesting enough which was made in 1945 but wasn’t release until 1951 -- Edith Head had designed a strapless evening gown for Elizabeth Taylor that turned out to be the last word in fashion when the film was finally released. The bodice was covered with white violets and the skirt was made of miles of white tulle over green satin. Paramount displayed the dress in department stores around the country and so many copies were sold that a fashion writer commented, “If you go to any party this summer, you’ll see at least 10 of them.” In 1953, for George Stevens’s *Shane* -- capital S-H-A-N-E -- [09:00] Edith Head designed the costumes for Alan Ladd and Van Heflin as well as Jean Arthur -- a rare occasion during the fifties when she was asked to dress men, although she had plenty of experience of doing so from her earliest days at Paramount. Many of Edith Head’s assignments -- and this was from 1950s -- were for producer Hal Wallis. Between *Love Letters* in 1945 and *Rooster Cogburn* in 1975, Edith Head had designed nearly all his productions -- a total of over 60 films. Making relatively few films per year, Wallis could play very close attention to every aspect and he had a very different attitude and approach to the way clothes should be. For instance, he just loathed the [10:00] sort of thing that Adrian did, for instance, for Joan Crawford where the character in the script would be a clerk in a
dime store, but she would be dressed in the height of fashion in very expensive fabrics. And Edith Head always felt that if she had any sense of fashion innovation, she would use it somewhere else -- never in a Wallis picture because he would never allow clothes to compete with the performance. In Westerns, she very cleverly began taking period detail off the women until the -- all the clothes belonged to no date at all. Other period films, however -- especially *Summer in Smoke* in 1962 -- had no expense spared to make the clothes accurate, even fussy, because it helped the characterizations. Edith had another very long happy collaboration with Alfred Hitchcock. [11:00] Although in 1946 she had designed the clothes for *Notorious*, it was at Ingrid Bergman’s request -- and Head did not really get to know Hitchcock and his views on the psychological impact of the colors until *Rear Window* in 1954. I had lunch with Edith Head and we talked about what Hitchcock had said to her. And Hitchcock explained it to Edith Head in the following way, “It’s really very simple, Edith. Keep the colors quiet unless we need some dramatic impact. He liked old [nile?] green-greys and when we started *Vertigo* in 1958, I went to Kim Novak’s dressing room and she said, ‘Dear Edith, how nice to meet you. I must tell you the only things I never wear are tailored suits, anything grey, and black pumps. My shoes must be nude to match my stockings.’” [12:00] So Edith Head said, “Well, right here in
the script it says a grey tailored suit and black pumps.” So Edith Head went to Hitchcock and he said, “Don’t worry, Edith,” and of course Miss Novak wore the grey and it was never mentioned again. Edith Head did make a black and emerald green satin evening ensemble for the scene in the restaurant because it was an important story point. Both the characters Kim played wore green. It was the color of death. But other than colors, Hitchcock gives you a lot of room for your own ideas. Alfred Hitchcock’s To Catch a Thief in 1955 with Grace Kelly is Head’s all-time favorite film and certainly her most glamorous. The elegant drapery of the pale blue chiffon with the massive imitation diamond necklace were the perfect metaphor for the classic Hitchcock woman -- passionate, under a cool exterior -- while the balloon-skirted gold lame ball gown and wig proved Head could conjure up the traditional Hollywood splendor. Hitchcock had repeated again, “I want absolutely no strong colors” so Edith used the palest pastels all the way through so that when she appeared in the gold, the climax was all the more effective. Edith Head had strong relationships to people. She really worked very comfortably with all of them because she was no threat. She agreed and was very flexible and agreed to everything and she had a long close relationship with George Seaton -- S-E-A-T-O-N -- who had assigned her to most of his films in the last 25 years. In The Country Girl in
1954, Grace Kelly had to wear the drabbiest possible costumes and at story meetings as the script was being developed, Seaton had very real concerns about Grace Kelly because he said, “We were all worried that Grace would be too beautiful.” But Edith managed to get her a couple of dresses that made her feel plain and depressed just to put them on. Every decade seems to bring new levels of performers, new levels of beauty -- some of the changes are subtle and almost have the quality of a tiny nuance. The 1950s brought a new breed of actress into the Paramount fold and the very versatile Edith Head changed her techniques to accommodate them. [15:00] A perfect example of this is of course the brilliant actress perform known as Audrey Hepburn and it was the strangest kind of body she had and she was -- you know, snake thin, broad-shouldered, miniscule waisted. It was the kind of figure that all designers fantasize about when they’re making their sketches. Now, Head exploited this figure in Roman Holiday in 1953 and Sabrina in 1954. She decided that maybe the thing to do was not to camouflage at all and so she ignored her usual expertise at camouflage. She did not envelop Hepburn’s long neck in chokers, turtlenecks, or furs -- did not hide her collarbone under swathings of chiffon and did not pad her bust line. Even her legs which [16:00] were very muscular because she had been -- Hepburn was a ballet dancer and after years as a dancer, they were very muscular. These were play--
her legs were played up in short, tight toreador pants and her big feet got bigger in flat capezios. The pants and the shoes swept the country. By 1955, Shirley MacLaine came to Paramount. In her first film, *Artists and Models* in 1955, it brought a chance to design a glamorous back costume. Most of her later ones kept the clothes low-key. Then, in 1964, Head was lent to Fox for *What a Way to Go*, which proved to be the most extravagant picture of her career. The plot had MacLaine recounting her six marriages -- each episode, a parody of some film genre. [17:00] One spoofed producer Ross Hunter’s lavish films. MacLaine was enveloped in pale pink, complete with a pink fox muff and towering pink wig. There was a red patent leather gown held together with liquid cement and a spectacular white beaded number with décolletage plunged to the waist. The producer, the director, and the star agreed that the focal point of the film should be Shirley MacLaine’s very shapely and very long legs. Well, the result was of course that Edith Head had to design every skirt very tight. All shoes were backless wherever possible and bathing suits and dance costumes were cut high on the hip. The publicity releases alleged that Edith Head had a million dollar budget [18:00] and the result was the greatest tour de force of her career. By the 1960s, Edith Head’s style became somewhat more flamboyant in keeping with the times. Before this, she had always foresworn bust padding,
thinking it was tacky. Well, we’ve talked about how flexible and versatile she was. The result was she now became an expert in that -- bust padding -- and in her hands, actresses blossomed forth with the most unexpected cleavages. By now, of course, most films were in color and there were more comedies and more high fashion. Edith Head had remained at Paramount because she’d been -- wasn’t lent out because she was just too busy doing films there, but in 1957 [19:00] she did “Witness for the Prosecution” for her old friends Marlene Dietrich and Billy Wilder and was borrowed more frequently in the sixties. She went to Columbia for Pepe in 1960 and an extravaganza which took place all over Mexico and she did 2,500 -- count them -- 2,500 designs. She designed both for Natalie Wood and Shirley MacLaine and their pictures took her to every studio in town. She was borrowed increasingly by Universal where longtime Paramount colleagues Hitchcock, Wallis, and Seaton went in the sixties. When Paramount was purchased in 1967, the studio was shut down and Edith Head left her home of 44 years. Howard Shoup was working on Hotel with her at Warner’s at the time and he said, “You know, we all saw it coming. We felt very sorry for Edith but [20:00] the minute Paramount shut down, she announced she was signing with Universal. She had been planning it all the time and she never let on.” Lucille Ball commented, “Edith never tells.” It’s interesting, since then Paramount
pictures never had a contract designer again but has produced some films notable for their costumes, probably more so than any other studio. Theoni Aldredge did The Great Gatsby and Anthea Sylbert -- A-N-T-H-E-A, S-Y-L-B-E-R-T, Theoni capital T-H-E-O-N-I -- used as her middle initial V, capital A-L-D-R-I-C-H. Just to repeat, Theoni V. Aldredge did The Great Gatsby and Anthea Sylbert did Chinatown, both 1974. In 1975, [21:00] four of the five Oscar nominations were for Paramount films and Head returned once for Elizabeth Taylor’s Ash Wednesday in 1973 -- in that period, the only instance of highly glamorous contemporary clothes in an American produced film. During the 1920s, Warner Brothers was certainly the poorest of the major studios and apart from a few of the rather lush John Barrymore pictures, there wasn’t very much for a designer to do. And of course, in the 1930s, the Warner lot with its very dedicated relationship to reality with its tough, gangster movies and grim social realism seemed to be a poor birth for a talented [22:00] costume designer, but Busby-Berkeley musicals, costume dramas, and glamorous vehicles were all produced at the same time and they were costumed by a designer considered to be one of the best -- certainly the wittiest in the business, Orry-Kelly -- O-R-Y-K-E-L-L-Y. Warner’s fortunes changed and their costume design history began with the enormous success of The Jazz Singer in 1927. They built a new movie palace in Hollywood and employed
Earl Luick as the stage and film designer -- E-A-R-L, capital L-U-I-C-K. Then they brought First National in 1929 and brought over Edward Stevenson as well. The two designers worked amicably together for a year but Stevenson left in a huff over his lack of screen credit in 1931 and Luick left to go to Fox in 1932. This left the studio that had just lured two big stars -- Kay Francis and Ruth Chatterton -- away from Paramount with no suitable designer to dress them. Orry-Kelly was born in Kiama, Australia -- that’s K-I-A-M-A -- and Kelly migrated to New York in 1923 as an actor. Finding roles scarce, he turned to painting murals and then landed a job illustrating titles for Fox movies. He also designed costumes for vaudeville shows. Warner Brothers discovered Kelly when his friend, the actor Cary Grant, showed studio executives some sketches by the artist newly arrived from New York. The studio dropped his first name -- which was Walter -- and added a hyphen to make him sound more exotic as Orry-Kelly. Among his most notable designs as Warner’s were the costumes for Jezebel, Dark Victory, The Little Foxes, and Casablanca. Earlier he had designed the clothes for Katharine Hepburn in Death Takes a Holiday. In 1943, he went to Twentieth Century Fox then to Universal and then to MGM. At the time of his death, he was at work on an autobiography, Women I’ve Undressed and there he wrote, “Hell must be filled with beautiful women and no
mirrors.” Walter Plunkett called him “the greatest of the Hollywood designers.” [25:00] It was the very same Orry-Kelly who jumped into the breach when Kay Francis and Ruth Chatterton were at Warner Brothers and there was no one to dress them. He made his formal debut on Chatterton’s The Rich are Always with Us, which also featured a new young actress named Betty Davis. Within a year, he was joined by Milo Anderson -- certainly Hollywood’s youngest designer. Anderson’s sketches had so impressed Samuel Goldwyn that he gave him the job of designing The Kid from Spain in 1932 when he was only 17 and still at school. That film introduced him to Busby Berkeley who took him along when he moved to Warner Brothers for 42nd Street in 1932. Kelly dressed the principals but Anderson did most of the numbers [26:00] because he best understood Busby Berkeley’s ideas. Kelly was cordial with Anderson and although he took his pick of the assignments, he let Anderson have several top ones too. Orry-Kelly always dressed Betty Davis and Kay Francis while Anderson specialized in Olivia de Havilland, Errol Flynn, and later Ida Lupino and Ann Sheridan. The general tone of the studio was set by Kelly and followed by Anderson -- utter simplicity and high fashion without theatricality. Kelly saw that many of the less successful designers at other studios were copying Adrian’s formula of using black against white and lots of glitter. There was no question that Kelly had the talent to
do strong effects. He had a great knack for [arresting?] effects. His desire to be unique was even greater. He stuck to the middle greys as much as possible and used dull finished wools, velvets, and chiffons. For pure fashion, the ideal actress was Kay Francis. The costumes that he created for her did not have to conceal anything in her figure and the characters she played were so interchangeable, they usually had no bearing on the designs. Her walk -- it was a combination of sex appeal with authority -- and Kelly played this up with simplicity in the constant use of vertical lines to accentuate her slim hips and long legs. She was very impressed when he took a golf skirt pattern with two inverted pleats in the back, dropped it to the floor, and made it into an evening dress. He gave her a pleated white toga and white wig for *I Found Stella Parish* in 1935 [28:00] but there was no such nonsense when she played Florence Nightingale in *The White Angel* in 1936. Her lack of bosom or defined waistline made Francis a little unlikely for hourglass silhouettes, but by using ruffles and corsets, Kelly gave her a lovely nineteenth century image in *I Loved a Woman* and *The House on 56th Street*, both made in 1933. When the studio sought to humiliate her into breaking her contract by putting her in B pictures, Kelly risked trouble by insisting on designing all her films until her contract ended. Actually, Orry-Kelly was a great diplomat. He got along very
well with Ruth Chatterton who had the most extraordinary proclivity towards 1915 era georgette ruffles. He liked Joan Blondell, although he found her figure difficult. She’s too rounded. [29:00] Clothes only clutter her up. Very handy with a needle and thread, Blondell sometimes altered her own garments after Kelly’s final fitting to better show off her assets. There’s always at the studio somebody who is the greatest challenge of them all and in the case of Warner Brothers, that character offered the greatest challenge to the designers was Betty Davis and Orry-Kelly costumed her from 1933 to 1946. She always referred to him as her right hand and depended upon his clothes to define her roles, but as much as she sought out his advice, she often disagreed with it. Kelly was as adept at debate as she was, but they did remain devoted. To the studio, Betty Davis [30:00] was kind of an ugly duckling. They supposed that she had a lack of physical beauty and it was a matter of great concern in the early years of her career. Her hair was bleached, then covered with a platinum wig and makeup drastically altered her face in fashions of 1934. Now, much of this artifice became totally unnecessary by the late 1930s, as her face grew increasingly popular with the public but her figure problems remained. Her neck was long and broad and Kelly usually had to design all kinds of high collars, sometimes using ruffles or big bows. In the 1940s, her shoulder length hair
made her neck seem less long, but Davis liked to change her appearance in each modern dress film so that despite the same voice and face, each role was totally individual. In *Now Voyager* in 1942, she not only kept her hair swept up throughout, but Kelly gave her the kind of V-neck lines used to make short necks seem longer. She was a pro in every sense of the word. She would wear any kind of corset necessary for her period pictures because she strove at accuracy and the discomfort helped her find the proper frame of reference. For her modern roles, however, she refused to wear any garments that were uncomfortable or constrictive and that included most brassieres, with the result that her large bust hung unfashionably low. Kelly frequently demanded of his very capable assistant Leah Rhodes -- R-H-O-D-E-S -- “Give me some way in the design of the costume to break her bosom.” Sometimes, he managed to build some support into the front of the dress, but more often he camouflaged Davis’s matronly look with full sleeves and the addition of bulk higher up. “The Little Foxes” in 1941, for which he was loaned to Goldwyn with Davis, was produced during the brief period when some display of cleavage in period films was allowed and Kelly designed a beautiful white lace evening dress and a corset that restructured Davis magnificently. Hal Wallis was the production chief and he made Orry-Kelly’s work even more difficult than it
would be under ordinary circumstances because Wallis meddled constantly. Davis was hardly a slave to fashion but she wanted to be fashionable to be convincing, as the rich heroines of Dark Victory in 1939 and The Great Lie in 1941. But although full and flared skirts had returned by the late thirties, Wallis [33:00] vetoed them as well as the hats of the period with even the simplest spill onto the forehead. Wallis also meddled in period costumes. He wanted Davis to wear much smaller farthingales in The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex in 1939 than would ever have been correct. In the end, Davis wore small hoops under her skirt for the tests and once those had been approved by Wallis, she wore the correct size hoops for the actual filming. Wallis also vetoed a full skirt design by Orry-Kelly for Olivia de Havilland in It’s Love I’m After in 1938. Kelly did do a few films for Olivia, but the majority were done by Milo Anderson. [34:00] De Havilland said, “I love the romanticism and grace of his costumes. He seemed to get the same quality in the modern ones. When there was no characterization to work with, Milo used my personality. I think he captured me better than any other designer. I always did research on my own and once I came across a dress which had an ivy trimming which I suggested for They Died with Their Boots On in 1941. I wouldn’t have dared to suggest anything to Orry-Kelly.” Milo Anderson designed some costumes for Betty Davis
when Kelly was away in Australia in the army, including the pivotal red -- [actually?] brown for the camera -- satin ball gown for Jezebel in [35:00] 1938, though Kelly had done the rest of the film quite brilliantly before he left. Al Wallis also assigned Anderson to Marlene Dietrich for Man Power in 1940 and Dietrich, who was full of technique -- and according to Anderson who found that she was charming but difficult, "Every time she wanted me to do something I thought was wrong, she’d say, 'Well, Irene does it for me.' About a year later, Irene called me up and said, 'Why did you do that?' Now she keeps saying, 'Well, Milo did it for me.'" By the late 1930s, the workload had become so great that Hal Wallis employed a third designer, [36:00] Howard Shoup -- S-H-O-U-P. Howard’s assignment was to handle the B pictures. Orry-Kelly clearly resented Shoup’s arrival. His simple, succinct comment was, “We need him like a hole in the head,” but perhaps suspected his own position was in jeopardy. Having behaved contemptuously towards Ann Sheridan while she was unknown, he wanted to design all her films when she became famous, although she wanted to continue with Shoup and Anderson. However, you can’t beat the talent and the popularity that Orry-Kelly had with audiences. His skill continued to impress during the early forties. The enormous success of Casablanca in 1942, coupled with the simple [37:00] construction of Kelly’s jumper for Ingrid Bergman made in one of
the standard styles of the war years -- “I wish I had a dime for every time that’s been copied,” he said. In 1940, he also designed what became one of his trademarks -- the dropped waistline. There was a self belt at the normal waistline with the material below clinging tightly to the hips, with the gathers beginning at the hip’s fullest point. The belt kept it from looking too 1920s, yet there was the advantage of a full skirt without bulk at the waist. Davis and de Havilland both wore it several times. In the middle of that wonderful Betty Davis film made in 1942 called Old Acquaintance, Orry-Kelly was drafted and Leah Rhodes finished the film. Kelly, however, did come back a few months later, but the studio had changed. Everybody was comfortable -- satisfied -- with Milo Anderson and Leah Rhodes and aside from the Davis films, Orry-Kelly was no longer needed. He began work on a picture called Doughgirls, but a dispute arose. As far as the studio was concerned, it was the final straw and Kelly was fired. Doughgirls was reassigned to Anderson and Sara trunk -- Saratoga Trunk, sorry -- to Leah Rhodes, who said, “I never wanted to be designer on my own because I couldn’t argue like Orry did,” she said, “but Ingrid Bergman was so sweet it go [so?] that she initialed the sketches hardly looking at them. When I wanted a fitting and she said, ‘What’s the use? They always fit perfectly.’” One remembers with great fondness the year of 1944
and Betty Davis’s marvelous movie Mr. Skeffington. [39:00]
That’s Orry-Kelly. He returned to Warner’s to make the film and
the studio only gave in because they wanted Betty Davis to have
everything she wanted. The film literally was Kelly’s finest
achievement in characterization. It covered the years from 1914
to 1935 and the design was so uncompromisingly accurate. Fanny
Skeffington’s dress progressed gradually from slightly overdone
Lady Duff-Gordon in 1914 to the grotesque [matron?] in The
Country Club in 1935, by which time she has completed separated
her look from conventional fashion. Vincent Sherman, the
director, said, “I never knew Betty to be concerned with looking
good —”

END OF AUDIO FILE

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GREEN: [00:03] Testing, one, two, three. Testing, one. Just
to recap, Vincent Sherman, the director, said, “I never knew
Betty to be concerned with looking good per se, only when
interpreting the character she saw her. Orry-Kelly always
talked the clothes over with me as well as Betty and I felt he
got it just right.” In 1945, the studio decided that they ought
to have a well-known couturier, and so they hired Bernard
Newman. Well, it’s interesting because his second fling in
pictures was more disastrous than his first, which had been at
RKO, and ended by [01:03] 1947. Bette Davis agreed to work with him on *Deception* in 19—*Deception*, which was made in 1946. She was pregnant and he did not conceal it very well. Clad in a bathrobe for one angry scene, she was forced to keep her arms folded all the way through in order to add enough bulge to her upper torso to conceal the bulge below. In 1946, Newman began to work with Joan Crawford on *Humoresque*. It’s interesting to know that, of course, when *Mildred Pierce* was made, Crawford, you know, begged for the part and got it at a reduced salary and she hated the way she looked, but she really was in position at that time — she had no power to do anything about it. But as we all know, she won an Oscar for her performance and so could now dictate to the designer. [02:03] After several weeks and two complete wardrobes, there was soon not a single garment she felt she could wear. Everybody was getting quite desperate, and so Crawford brought him one of her own dresses — a white beaded evening gown with enormously padded shoulders, which her dressmaker Sheila O’Brien had designed and made to Crawford’s specifications. Now, Sheila O’Brien tells the column the story, “With those pads, her shoulders measured the same as Clark Gable’s. The producer was desperate and was saying, ‘I’d give anything to get her out of those shoulder pads,’ so I created a scheme. Every night after the whole crew had gone home, I’d take apart the whole shoulder seam, remove one-eighth inch of
the pad, and remake the sleeve. Since it was done so gradually, she never noticed.” For the next 10 years, Sheila O’Brien designed all Crawford’s pictures, except Torch Song in 1952, which was done by Helen Rose. Sometimes you have to be aware that movie stars have little to do with the current fashion, direction, or trends, and the new look had very little effect on Crawford. She lengthened and widened her skirts but kept her shoulder pads until well into the 1950s. Sheila O’Brien, of course -- like most fashion designers -- loves any part that allows a great span of wardrobe and a great difference in what people can wear, and in this case, of course, it was extraordinary because her favorite assignment was The Damned Don’t Cry!, made in 1951, because the character changed from a factory worker to a very sophisticated lady, and in 1953, Sheila O’Brien went on to found the Designers Guild. In 1945, William Travilla -- T-R-A-V-I-L-A -- joined the Warner’s staff. His best work was done for the Adventures of Don Juan. Leah Rhodes and Marjorie Best were already working on it when he was brought in to redesign Errol Flynn’s wardrobe because Flynn decided that he would not wear any more padded trunks or big ruffs. As Travilla says, “I created a look that was mostly fictitious but Flynn liked it. Colors which they didn’t have in the Renaissance -- or very small ruffs, no trunks, long jackets which covered his rump, no puffy sleeves. Marj Best was very
good about it. She changed enough of the extras with small parts so that Flynn wouldn’t stick out like a sore thumb.” Now of course, this meant that the Warner’s payroll carried three designers instead of two [05:03] but Leah Rhodes was extraordinarily thrifty and able to make all kinds of things happen and work without spending additional money. What appeared to be the gold beads on Viveca Lindfors’s blue dress were really just chains off of electric lights. I made her ruffs out of woven horse hair and pearls rather than cotton lace that gets sturdy and has to be washed and re-starched. The three designers won the first Oscar for the best colored costume design. Warner’s had been borrowing Edith Head from Paramount since 1942 to dress Barbara Stanwyck. In 1948, she also dressed Betty Davis for June Bride as an impeccably dressed businesswoman. Davis liked the longer, fuller skirts of the new look and she went along with the uncomfortable boned bodices and brassieres because she knew that was what the character should wear. [06:03] Meanwhile, of course, Leah Rhodes and Milo Anderson continued to dress the big Warner stars of the early fifties. Doris Day and Jane Wyman, Rose remembers. Doris Day had a slight little bump on -- in the line of her shoulder from the collarbone. After she cut her hair short, we were told to make sure it was always covered. All her bathing suits and evening dresses had to have straps at the place or a necklace.
Rhodes left in 1952 because as she explained, “I was doing three or four pictures at once. I wanted to do fewer pictures and make them better.” And Anderson left in 1953 for wholesale designing and interior decorating saying that the glamor had gone out of the business. Well, they still had Howard Shoup and Moss Mabry -- M-A-R-B-Y -- [07:03] on hand and they used outside talent for their biggest design job for years -- A Star is Born, 1954. Well, from the very beginning, that movie was plagued with problems. (telephone rings) There were rumors all over town that over $100,000 had been spent on costumes that were made and then not used because of changes in the script -- changes in Garland’s mind and drastic changes in her weight. Nobody could be sure who designed what for whom and when because Mary Ann Nyberg left halfway through, Jean Louis who replaced her seems to have done most of the second half, including the black satin for the Academy Awards ceremony and the gold brocade and fox fur for this is -- the famous “This is Mrs. Norman [08:03] Maine” scene filmed when Garland was very thin. She was thinner still when Irene Sharaff, who was brought in to design the many costumes for the added [boninger trunk?] sequence. Working within the highly stylize concepts of the numbers, Sharaff created many optical illusions to improve Garland’s figure. When Auntie Mame was done in 1958, it was of course necessary to have somebody who really could do high fashion
because that was the nature of the character and Orry-Kelly returned to Warner’s at the request of Rosalind Russell, the star of the movie. The movie shows his extraordinary imagination, and this side of his [talent?] would be featured in most of his remaining films. It’s very evident, for instance, in the costume which Marilyn Monroe adored in Some Like it Hot, made in 1959. [09:03] We all remember it because it was made of nude souffle draped on the bodice to lift her breast and push her tummy in, and covered with jet and crystal beads. It was so slightly beaded over her breast that her nipples were not covered and Billy Wilder had to light her with a single spot that left that area strategically in darkness. Marilyn Monroe wanted to make her other clothes more revealing but Kelly argued it was wrong for the character. “Sugarcane,” he said, “is the kind of girl who will go so far and no further,” he argued.

Orry-Kelly had a rather violent temper and it was vitriolic in the sense that he became bitchy and vicious, and it didn’t cool down as he got older. In 1959, [10:03] he tried to have a public feud with Edith Head via Hedda Hopper’s newspaper column, but Head wouldn’t respond so of course it failed. When he worked with Shelley Winters in The Chapman Report in 1962, she decided not to have the fitting that Kelly had reluctantly gone to her trailer for. He became enraged. He grabbed the side of the trailer and shook it until the terrified Winters was forced
to run outside. That’s a scene I would’ve like to have observed. Jack Warner and George Cukor both wanted Kelly to design *My Fair Lady* in 1964, but there was nothing they could do because the deal with Lerner and Loewe stipulated Cecil Beaton. Well, I think we should be grateful that that was so because Beaton’s handling of the assignment was splendid, enormously publicized and of course he won the Academy Award. Viewed today, it had a perceptible [11:03] early sixties flavor. Beaton complained about the lack of suitable women extras for the Ascot scene, but what he did to them -- the fishtail eyeliner, the hair teased and lacquered -- losing the charming fuzziness of the [De la Paix?] seems inaccurate and uninspired 10 years later. Audrey Hepburn’s Ascot hat was magnificent in the audacity of its size and skill of construction, but her other costumes are somewhat overly simplified. Howard Shoup maintains that although on Orry-Kelly’s birth certificate, cancer was listed as the cause of his death on February 27, 1964, that the real cause was a broken heart over losing *My Fair Lady*. This led Howard Shoup as the longest tenured of the Warner designers. Returning in 1948, Shoup was not again under contract to [12:03] Warner’s but he worked there so steadily during the following 20 years that he only had time for three outside films. He did a lot of the big glamor pictures of the 1950s such as *The Young at Heart* in 1954 with Doris Day and
Serenade in 1956 with Joan Fontaine and Mario Lanza. The late fifties brought a new emphasis on youth to Warner Brothers and Shoup immediately adjusted to this. He was flexible. Natalie Wood and Suzanne Pleshette were never concerned about whether it made them look better. They just wanted it to be right and accurate. Hotel in 1967 was the last film that Howard Shoup designed, although Edith Head dressed Merle Oberon for it and then Howard retired. He’s only worked in two films since then at the request of an old friend, [Ray Stark?], who knew he had worked for [Ziegfeld?]. Howard Shoup helped with “Funny Girl” in 1968, although Barbara Streisand was costumed by Irene Sharaff. Then Suzanne Pleshette asked him to do her clothes for “If it’s Sunday, this must be Belgium” in 1969. Since Howard Shoup left Warner Brothers, all designers had been contracted on one film at a time -- which is the classic thing that’s happening in Hollywood all over the place. Recent important costume assignments at Warner’s have include John Trucott’s Camelot in 1968 and Theadora van Runkle’s Bonnie and Clyde in 1965 and of course Mame in 1974. [14:03] Fox was one of the oldest of the Hollywood studios because it was founded in 1914 but it was really meaningless as far as costume design was concerned, until in 1935 when Darryl Zanuck arrived and the various production departments, including the wardrobe, became well-organized and it was 10 years after that in 1945 that
Charles [Lamar?] arrived and gave the Fox ladies a definitive look that everybody began to recognize. Fox was really never identified with any particular designer in the way that MGM was associated with Adrian and Paramount with Edith Head, and the reason for that was that they never lasted very long. The history goes something like this: Sophie Wachner -- W-A-C-H-N-E-R -- [15:03] who originally was with MGM was the first person to operate a cohesive wardrobe in the mid-1920s but while she was there, Fox brought in outside designers for films -- Adrian, Kathleen Kay, Edward Stevenson, Dolly Tree, David Cox, and Russell Patterson all came for very short periods. Earl Luick, for instance, came to do some of Fox’s most prestigious films including Cavalcade in 1935 and this was an interesting twist. One of the producers had a wife who had a great deal of style. Her name was Rita [Calfman?] and she was rather an elegant society lady, and she relied on sketch artists to do the actual designing and brought whole collections from Hattie Carnegie which she copied for the films, but she did put it all together for -- in a rather highly styled manner that was eminently serviceable and actually worked rather well. [16:03] Helen [Host?] -- Helen Rose, sorry -- started her career as one of [Calfman’s?] sketchers. She had two or three young people and we -- they’d sit in a room. She’d come in and say, “Give me a black chiffon” or “We need an 1890s dress” and we’d draw some
ideas. We never knew what pictures they were for. In 1933, Royer -- R-O-Y-E-R -- who specialized in foreign and dual language films was given a seven-year contract, but the wardrobe department remained disorganized and the parade of designers continued to pass through it. Renee Hubert -- H-U-B-E-R-T -- came with Gloria Swanson in 1934 to do *Music in the Air* and stayed to do 15 films in nine months. William [Landberg?] and Charles Le Maire also both came for a short period in '34 but in the same year, Fox took a new lease of life when it merged with Twentieth Century [17:03] Productions. Twentieth Century Productions had been organized by Joseph Schenck -- S-C-H-E-N-C-K -- and Darrel F. Zanuck -- Z-A-N-U-C-K -- in 1932. It had, before this, used the Goldwyn wardrobe department and the Goldwyn designer Omar Kiam as much as possible. Kiam had designed lavish costume [ethics?] like *Cardinal Richelieu* in 1934 and *Folies Bergere* in 1935, which was Merle Oberon’s first American film. Her face was highly lacquered and exotic-looking and Kiam capitalized on her voluptuous figure by keeping her as much as possible in low-cut evening gowns and negligees of shiny fabrics. When Kiam was not available, Darrel Zanuck hired Gwen Wakeling -- W-A-K-E-L-I-N-G -- a talent freelance designer. [18:03] She had done *The House of Rothschild*, one of the most coveted design assignments of the year. It contained beautiful (inaudible) gowns and many gracefully worn by a very blonde
Loretta Young -- all kinds of uniforms and traditional Jewish clothes. The final sequence was in the newly introduced three-stripped Technicolor -- still very crude -- but it was a big improvement on the earlier two-color process. The colors of the dyes were still blue, yellow, and brownish red rather than the cyan, yellow, and magenta which were introduced in 1936 -- cyan being C-Y-A-N. As part of the merger, Zanuck made Arthur Levy general manager of the new Twentieth Century Fox wardrobe. Some of the Fox designers left, but Ray stayed on, leaving -- put Gwen Wakeling under contract. Together, they formed very highly productive department. They worked separately on their own films but managed to be good friends. They both did modern fashions and period costumes, and they did them equally well so that Levy could assign any picture to either one of them while [Doroia?] usually handled the big costume [epics?]. He remembers, “It seems Darrel Zanuck became a historian and wanted to film every great person’s life. He did a lot of them.” Although Zanuck was primarily interested in story values and had no interest in cultivating glamor queens like Crawford and [Sheera?], he did have one of Hollywood’s most beautiful women in Loretta Young. Her proportions and posture were perfect. Nothing had to be camouflaged. She was highly interested in her clothes and very clever about them. It’s always interesting to understand how stars related to the costume department. [20:03]
Royer remembers with a good deal of affection that while Gwen Wakeling and he were working on Loretta Young’s screen wardrobes, she always ran in a few personal items that were made by Irene that she wanted the studio to pay for. Young preferred soft figure moldering -- molding -- drapery to [specific?] instructions it were becoming fashionable in the late 1930s. Wakeling cut her day dresses on the bias for pictures like *Ladies in Love* in 1936 and made many evening gowns of chiffon or tulle. One of her designers for *Wife, Husband, and Friend* in 1939 had a beige satin underslip covered with varying thickness of black souffle. Royer says, “Among all the rubbish, we had Loretta and that made life bearable.” Loretta had to work very hard to learn how to wear period clothes because very often, contemporary women don’t do them very well at all, turning her hoopskirts sideways to get through doors gracefully. For instance, if you watch her in *Suez*, made in 1938, she really has those enormous skirts but she moves beautifully. She practiced sitting in her *Story of Alexander Graham Bell* bustles until she mastered the art and could carry the weight with ease. She always had a full-length mirror placed right next to the camera and before each scene, she checked her lighting and arranged the luminous skirts and decorations to show the costumes off most advantageously. (coughs) Both of the designers, Wakeling and Royer, dress Alice Faye, who was easy,
although her figure was difficult because it was ahead of its time. Faye had the kind of proportions that other Fox actresses 20 years later were struggled with -- bust pads and waist cinchers and girdles to achieve the big bosom, small waist, and a flat derriere. Faye had deep resentment when her plume and spangle type roles as well as her figure caused her to be compared with Mae West. To play down her bust in the modern dress films, Wakeling and Royer both frequently gave her dresses of black wool crepe, which did not reflect light and was usually not used in films. Her curves at the sides were still evident, but the dull wool flattened her contours. Wakeling and Royer cut across her bosom with vertical and diagonal lines and put eye-catching detail at the neck or below the waist. They used puff sleeves and ruffs of leather or tulle as camouflage. It’s interesting that Royer designed Shirley Temple’s clothes for Baby 1935, but when Zanuck sold the highly popular designs to a manufacturer, it was the Temples who received most of the money. It was Shirley Temple’s mother and father who had insisted on this arrangement as soon as she realized her daughter’s impact on juvenile fashion. In order to save money -- and particularly when there were difficult times -- the studios would use clothes over and over again. If you had any sort of a series like Mr. [Mokle?] or Charlie Chan, the characters wore the same clothes in film after film and stock
was used as much as possible. Late in 1939, Royer and Wakeling left to form a partnership and open shop and Travis Banton, the highly paid designer who had been with Paramount was signed up instead. Wakeling then decided to return to Fox during 1941, although she did not stay there very long because as she complained, “There were too many pictures and never enough time.” Neither did Travis Banton stay with Fox for very long. During his two-year contract, he was assigned most of the color films. He also made Alice Faye into a stunning Lillian Russell in 1940. For once, the period costumes allowed her hourglass figure to be emphasized rather than disguised. Especially at that point, since the Hays office was briefly allowing some display of cleavage, providing the décolleté was true to the period. Banton always had a special affinity for the hourglass figure and the bustle. As early as 1929, he had constructed beautiful bustles on [Fay Rust?] — Fay Wray — for Four Feathers and following Lillian Russell, he was to do the same for Kay Francis and Baxter and [Arlene Waylan?] and Charlie [Zant?] in 1941. In 1941, he also did That Night in Rio, and he designed beautiful clothes for Alice Faye. He gave her a voluptuous evening gown of draped [lame?] and masses of jewels. It was one of his most beautiful creations and suited her figure perfectly, but it was not Faye’s image of herself. So when Wakeling returned to Fox while Banton was working on Faye’s
costume for her next film, *Weekend in Havana*, Faye made the studio reassign her wardrobe to her. As a result, the gowns were not as stunning as Banton’s but Faye felt [26:03] comfortable wearing them and they adroitly concealed the fact that she was pregnant. One of the things that I admired enormously was Travis Banton’s work on the movie *Blood and Sand*, made in 1941. Reversing the colors that are usually associated with good and evil, he put the evil Rita Hayworth in a tightly draped white dress in the seduction scene and a hot pink one in the tango scene, contrasting with Linda Darnell’s innocent blues and traditional Spanish shapes. Charles Le Maire was brought in to straighten everything out in 1943. [27:03] (inaudible) to bring in outside designers and one of the most interesting was Bonnie Cashin. He brought her in for *The Keys of the Kingdom* in 1943 and *Laura* in 1944. *Laura* was just another black and white modern dress picture that nobody at the studio was very excited about, but Cashin made Gene Tierney’s sudden appearance in the middle of the film very striking by putting her in a revival of the cloche hat. It was very similar to the styles of 1929-30 -- it had a very wide brim which hung down to her collar at the back, covering her hair while in the front, the brim is folded back over the crown to reveal Tierney’s partition brow. The downward lines were rather solid and very productive, and when Laura appeared wearing it, the audience thought she was
something special. Cashin was also very interested in ethnic clothing, so Le Maire assigned her to Anna and the King of Siam in 1946. [28:03] Le Maire, who of course was the administrator of the costumes department, occasionally designed some pictures and when Billy Rose’s Diamond Horseshoe in 1945 was made, the producer insisted that Le Maire design the film, since he had actually worked for Billy Rose at the diamond horse show, the real one, in New York. Le Maire did not have time for the entire film but he did the opening and closing numbers. And George Seaton remembers how kind he was because they brought in Margaret Dumont -- you know, the elegant society lady in all of the Marx Brothers pictures -- and Le Maire, you know, although it was a tiny part -- a very bit part -- Le Maire treated her like an empress. He even [29:03] made sketches of the dresses he had in stock so she would think he was designing something just for her. Le Maire had a rough time with Betty Grable who became very difficult. Well, she was married to Harry James and she lost interest in her career after the birth of her daughters. She refused to work with any of the Fox contract’s designers on The Dolly Sisters in 1945, but fortunately, Le Maire was suddenly asked to give Orry-Kelly a job by Joseph Schenck. The Technicolor absurdity of a Betty Grable picture was as far removed from the grim black and white reality of the standard Warner fare as anything could possibly be, but Kelly
loved the assignment and constructed the spangled and plumes for Grable and June Haver brilliantly. However, he didn’t work so well with her on *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* when he had to try and tone down her brassy image and during the next collaboration, *Mother Wore Tights*, [30:03] Grable had her own way throughout. Get this -- although the film was set in 1900-1920, Grable insisted on showing as much of her legs as possible, wearing pastel pumps, nude hose, and mid-calf skirts with slips, often looking completely contemporary except for her slightly lower hems. After that, Kelly just would not work with her. Renee Hubert was ranked with Walter Plunkett as the industry’s most respected expert on period work, but he did as many modern dress films as period in his career. State Fair was in modern dress, though Hubert -- Hubert conceived it in fairytale terms. Centennial Summer, set in 1876, demonstrates his period talent. [31:03] Although the styles are copied faithfully, Hubert made the colors brighter and used lighter weight materials because, as he explained, the actresses couldn’t walk naturally and in true heavy dresses of the actual period. At the request of Bette Davis, Edith Head was brought into design her wardrobe for *All about Eve*. Le Maire supervised and designed the rest of the cast’s clothes. The film is a classic example of how unremarkable clothes can subconsciously strengthen the characterization in the minds of the viewer.
Together, Head and Le Maire decided that Anne Baxter’s Eve would be a drab little wren until the party scene when wearing one of Margo’s castoff dresses, her behavior begins to betray her ploy. [32:03] Of course, Betty Davis always had ideas as to how she should dress and certainly there was no exception in the character of Margo -- stylish but a little overdone was what she wanted. When Head suggested that Davis should wear mostly (inaudible) -- the divan. Although that business was not on the script, Betty Davis had decided how she’d play the scene, and so she said to Edith Head, “Now you make the skirt full enough for me to do that.” When the suit was made and tested, Davis asked Head for a different blouse. She wanted one with frills at the neck because she envisioned that Margot’s final insults would be shot in such a tight close-up that only her neck would show and she wanted something that would [33:03] seem to indicate her femininity. It’s true, however, in the actual shot, Joe Mankiewicz, the director, used a longer shot, not a close-up.

The best-dressed -- the best-known dressed for the -- is the party scene dress and that happened as a happy accident. Made up the night before it was needed, there was no time for fitting and Edith Head was absolutely horrified when Betty Davis put it on. It was too big and the top slid off her shoulders. Davis laughed and said she liked it better that way. Edith Head and Charlie Le Maire shared the Oscar for best black and white
design for the film in 1951. [34:03] (inaudible) joins Fox, everybody was very pleased because he was really very good, and most of the pictures that he got were the Errol Flynn type movies because of his great success at Warner’s with Errol Flynn, so he was assigned to mostly male pictures and then he was assigned to Betty Grable in Meet me after the Show in 1951 and for the “Heat Wave in Alaska” number, Travilla dressed her in a strapless black bathing suit trimmed with ermine tails and earmuffs. And he said, “That did it as far as Hollywood concerned.” He was then stuck forever with sex symbols. Once Marilyn Monroe became a star, all of her costumes were designed by William Travilla. What he has to say about Monroe is fascinating and should be paid [35:03] attention to, “Sex symbols can be difficult because they know their appeal is based on just one thing and they have to keep that before the public at all times.” Marilyn Monroe exploited her body in her walk constantly. She had crooked legs and weak ankles and her buttocks naturally swayed from side to side when she walked. When she saw the response it got, she exaggerated it and insisted on tight skirts to play it up and her directors obligingly photographed her from the back whenever they could. Only twice did she wear full skirts in Monkey Business in ’52 so she could stick her leg on the couch next to Cary Grant and pull the skirt up to reveal her stocking and in The Seven Year Itch
in 1955 so it could blow up with the breeze from the subway. Monroe knew that her legs were not up to the Grable standard beauty, but she was always managed to pose them advantageously even for the wardrobe department tests. [36:03] Coping with her breasts was an engineering problem. Travilla had to solve it with every costume. Monroe and Jane Russell could be photographed in public showing as much cleavage as they liked, but Fox was afraid to release any films or stills of them showing cleavage. Travilla also had to wire the inside of each dress to keep their breasts from bouncing when they walked or danced. When you watch the “Little Girl from Little Rock” number in Gentlemen Prefer Blondes in 1953, it’s fascinating because they shake all over the place but their bosoms don’t budge. The costume Travilla designed for “Diamonds are a Girl’s Best Friend” was a further triumph in wires and souffle. Monroe was to become a giant necklace, seemingly nude except for [37:03] bands of black velvet and masses of rhinestones. The costume cost over $5,000 in materials and expert labor necessary to die the souffle to match her flesh, construct an elaborate network of wires, and apply the stones. It did not break any rules since there was no cleavage and the breasts were firmly anchored in place, but the notoriety of the calendar was by then so great that Fox was considered shutting down the film and Travilla was told to make another absolutely sexless costume for
Monroe. He made it of shocking pink upholstery satin lined with felt to make it even stiffer, but on Monroe it moved sensually anyway. You couldn’t defeat her sensuality no matter what you put on her. Sometimes there’s a conflict between what — where fashion is going and what stars want and in the case of How to Marry a Millionaire, the [38:03] second cinema [scope?] film made in 1953, they had a real problem because the girls -- all three of them, Marilyn Monroe, Betty Grable, and Lauren Bacall -- refused to wear (telephone rings) -- dictate of full skirts, even though they made waistlines seem smaller. Even one of the stars wanted the slimmest possible skirts. Well, of course, Le Maire as head of the costume department didn’t want it to appear as though Twentieth Century Fox’s designers were ignorant of fashion trends, so he called a meeting. Grable finally agreed to wear a can-can petticoat under a very full blue (inaudible) dress in the first scenes. Bacall wore a full-skirted printed shirt waist in the fashion show and a couple of her others flared, but Monroe was completely intransigent and she insisted on tight skirts. [39:03] (inaudible) was told that the best fittings that she ever had were the clothes that she put on at the time that she made Anna and the King of Siam. Now usually, (inaudible) on the screen of course read that, you know, costumes supervision by Charles Le Maire, costumes designed by whoever the designer was, but when they brought in Irene Sharaff
to do *Call me Madam* in 1953, she said, “Absolutely not.” She refused to let Le Maire have any screen credit and did the whole film without consulting him. It was a beautiful job.

Ethel Merman introduced as a snappy tight-skirted in (inaudible) scene, gradually let her clothes take on a softer peasant flavor. Having designed the stage version of *The King and I*, Irene Sharaff returned to Fox for the film in 1956. Deborah Kerr, who had some objections to the design said, “Irene Sharaff is a brilliant woman. I did think, however, that those hoopskirts were terribly big and that the engravings of the period exaggerated their size the way our fashion illustrations today elongate the figure, but she insisted that she had some actual measurements of hoops. The hoops were made of metal and were extremely heavy but that gave the skirts a flow they wouldn’t have had if they hadn’t been [cane?]. I had to put foam rubber pads on my hips in the ‘Shall we Dance’ number to keep from injuring myself with the hoops.” Sharaff also came to design Elizabeth Taylor’s splendid robes for the massive *Cleopatra* in 1963. Susan Hayward had a well-known temperament and -- but she was very loyal to Le Maire and Le Maire always described her by saying, “Susie was first and foremost a wife and mother and when things weren’t going well at home, she’d get edgy at the studio,” but she did throw herself passionately into her role as the crippled singer Jane Froman in
With a Song in my Heart. Jane Froman spent a week with Le Maire describing the kind of clothes she had worn before and after her accident. Although Le Maire made no exact duplicates, everything was correct for the period. Froman taught Hayward how she sang, and although it was Froman’s voice on the tracks, Hayward belted the songs out when she filmed the numbers. This so impressed Le Maire that he made the waistline of the dresses tight and clingy so the expansion and contraction of her stomach muscles would show. One of my favorite people in Hollywood, Dorothy Jeakins -- J-E-A-K-I-N-S -- who had been a sketch artist at Fox in 1938 -- returned for three years in the early 1950s. She had a particularly good eye for color. “You give Dorothy a piece of cloth and she would strip it, re-dye it, and over-dye it until she gets just the color she has in mind,” said Edith Head, who worked with her on DeMille epics at Paramount. She designed Niagara in 1953 which included the famous magenta dress in which Marilyn Monroe sang “Kiss Me.” She came back again for South Pacific in 1958 and Sound of Music in 1965, both of which she had earlier created on Broadway. She was requested by Marilyn Monroe for Let’s Make Love in ’60 and Mel Brooks for Young Frankenstein in 1974. [In that?] same year, 1954, Renee Hubert came back to Fox at the request of Merle Oberon. He received Oscar nominations for it as well as his last two Fox pictures, both filmed in Europe. Desiree was the picture that
he came back to Fox for on a (inaudible) in 1956 and The Visit in 1961. [44:03] When Darrel Zanuck left in 1957 and Buddy Adler took over, the budget for sets and costumes was reduced. When his contract was up, Charlie Le Maire left in 1959. He did return for Susan Hayward’s Marriage Go Round in ’60 and Jennifer Jones’s Tender is the Night in ’62. Because Le Maire’s first project with Jennifer Jones, Love is a Many-Splendored Thing in 1955 had won him an Oscar, and although [tender’s] designer was Pierre [Bellemare?], Le Maire stepped in for re-fittings and other works as a favor to Jones. After Le Maire’s departure, there were fewer pictures calling for the kind of enormous wardrobes his department had once routinely provided. Fox’s last great [epic?], Cleopatra in 1963 lost [45:03] so much money for the studio, and despite excellent costuming the studios lost, two musicals -- Star designed by Donald Brooks in 1968 and Hello Dolly designed by Irene Sharaff in 1969 -- shared the same fate. The company’s most recent blockbuster, The Towering Inferno, did however show a significant return to high fashion elegance in Paul Zastupnevich’s designs -- that’s Z-A-S-T-U-P-N-E-V-I-C-H-S. In the history of Hollywood, there’s never been a studio that made more noteworthy films but lived in a near state of bankruptcy than the 30 years of RKO, which of course meant that designers had to be realistic [46:03] rather than opulent. The RKO wardrobe department and Walter Plunkett’s career as a
designer began the same time in 1926, although actually RKO was a very small studio then known as FBO. At first, Walter Plunkett just rented clothes and made budget estimations. FBO made many two reel comedies about policemen or secretaries and Plunkett realized that in the long run, buying uniforms was less expensive than renting them and that making frocks was cheaper than buying them, so he hired seamstresses and set up a work room. FBO also made a lot of Westerns and because the wild shirts and pants needed could not be purchased, Plunkett had to begin to make those clothes too. As a result, unlike most designers, he learned about male clothes as well as female. Plunkett had no formal training and had to learn by observation and practical experience, but soon his department was making everything that the studio needed. Talking pictures brought a series of mergers and the studio was renamed RKO and William LeBaron became the head of production. LeBaron instituted marvelous movies like Río Ríta in 1929. The movie introduced Plunkett to two-color television and he made tele--I’m sorry -- two-color Technicolor (laughs) and he made Bebe Daniels’s dress that was watermelon pink, trimmed in turquoise. Bebe Daniels was always anxious to have lots of rhinestones and cloth of gold so he made a dress that was cloth of gold from the top of her mantilla to her feet. He saw the picture recently and it was hysterical, but at the time everybody
thought it was beautiful. The camera didn’t get the actual color of it, but it had the metallic quality. Cimarron in 1931 was Plunkett’s first big costume picture -- a marvelous movie called -- starring Irene Dunne and Wesley Ruggles was the director and he was very skeptical when Walter Plunkett showed him a sketch with the 1890s leg o’ mutton sleeves. They knew that audiences were not used to seeing anything as extreme as that, yet they wanted the film to be correct. Eventually, the sleeves featured in the dialogue. At the first reaction in -- to them in the film, Dunne says, “Well, in Chicago they say that they’ll be even bigger by fall.”[49:03] Dunne was a fine actress but she was initially rather stocky and awkward in her movements, but by the time Plunkett put her in period costumes -- again for Stingaree in 1934 and The Age of Innocence in 1935 -- she had slimmed down and learned to carry the heavy dresses gracefully. For a short while in 1932, after Walter Plunkett had a dispute with RKO, he worked for a Western costume and Ann Harding, for instance, was dressed by Irene for The Animal Kingdom in ’32. Dolores del Rio asked Irene to do her costumes for Flying down to Rio in 1933, but Plunkett who had returned design for Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers [50:03] in 1934, Plunkett dressed Rogers again for The Gay Divorcee and remembers, “Ginger wanted more ornate stuff. Fred wanted simple things that moved just right. And the Director Mark Sandrich
who at the side of the camera had strong ideas -- some of the sketches I had to revise five or six times before I got one they all agreed on, and for Ginger, you always had to slip into her dressing room just before she shot the first scene in a new dress to make sure she didn’t stick a flower in her air and add more jewelry.” Although Katharine Hepburn’s debut film at RKO, *Bill of Divorcement* in 1932, was designed by Josette de Lima -- that’s small D-E, capital L-I-M-A -- during Plunkett’s absence from RKO, he worked on three films with Kate Hepburn in 1933, including *Little Women*, [51:03] in which he proved a match for the Hepburn spirit, and Hepburn -- for instance, Hepburn came for a preliminary meeting and borrowed a hoopskirt to practice her walk, but after one fitting did not come in again. Shooting started with only two dresses finished. When the assistant director had expressed concern, Hepburn snapped, “So what?” Plunkett, usually mild-mannered retaliated, “From the way you’re starting, you’ll soon be a worse bitch than Constance Bennett.” Hepburn thought this was hysterically funny and laughed, “Darling, I’ll be up at noon every day. I don’t need lunch. We’ll get everything fitted.” Plunkett emphasized the poverty in *Little Women* in several ways. He made the sisters exchange their clothes and used cheap calicos and rough-knitted shawls and mittens. Another problem for him was to make the 22-year-old Joan Bennett into a convincing 10-year-old, [52:03] which
was made more difficult when he learned that Bennett was also pregnant! By 1935, Plunkett’s position at RKO was highly unsatisfactory. I was not --

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GREEN: -- and rough-knitted shawls and mittens. Another problem for him was to make the 22-year-old Joan Bennett into a convincing 10-year-old, which was made more difficult when he learned that Bennett was also pregnant! By 1935, Plunkett’s position at RKO was highly unsatisfactory, “I was not only the designer but manager of the wardrobe department. (telephone rings) I had the payroll -- the hiring and firing of seamstresses -- and the budget to look after as well.” (inaudible) the fact that he also had to make his own sketches and do the clothes. There was no contract -- no screen credit -- and most of the time, he was earning about $75 a week. The best pictures were being given to Bernard Newman, so Plunkett decided to say, “Up yours” and left and went off to New York in the wholesale business. [01:00] Bernard Newman, who was a couturier in New York, came to RKO in 1934. Irene Dunne had suggested him because she knew him and had recommended him to the studio when it started playing the high fashion Roberta in 1935. Roberta was about a fashion designer and of course had a
great fashion show in it and it was necessary to have somebody who could do convincing couturier clothes. It was interesting because RKO didn’t need and could -- certainly could not afford at that time another full-time designer, but it contracted Newman with great fanfare and told the press that he spent a quarter of a million dollars on the costumes. Actually, I don’t think he spent that much but the fashions were fabulous. The -- at the end of the show, it [02:00] revealed Newman’s fascination with the wet look. Ginger Rogers wore a fantastic wet seal gown of black slipper satin that fitted her like a coat of paint. Ironically, Irene Dunne did not fare so well. Drapes of white satin crossed over her chest to make it look fuller and it only succeeded in making her back look hunched, though Newman did give her a very attractive little wig which -- heavily pomaded -- as part of the favored wet look. Newman stayed on at RKO through both 1935 and ’36 and he did two more with Astaire and Rogers. He got along very well with them because he understood a very simple truth -- that they had very real problems in terms of wardrobe as dancers, and he understood that better than other designers. If you examine the rather, you know, erotic “Let’s [03:00] Face the Music and Dance” number in Follow the Fleet, you have to recognize that for pure grace of line and movement, that gown was the most beautiful of all. It was a pale grey chiffon covered with crystal beads. The weight of the skirt
when motionless made it cling tightly to Rogers’s body but when she danced, it opened just like a flower, and expert lighting made it transparent, showing her beautiful legs. The sleeves were constructed in the same way and at one point, hit Astaire’s face with its strong force and the skirt battered both of the partners’ legs unmercifully, but when you look at it in the finished film, it’s superb. When Plunkett left, Newman was assigned all those routine RKO assignments and he was totally unsuited for that because, you know, he was essentially a couturier and Newman’s talent was that -- that he drape material on the actresses until he got some sort of an idea. The result was that of course as the stars got very tired standing there and the studio couldn’t spare them for the time that it took. When he thought that he had what he wanted, he’d make the sketch but, you know, he kept changing that -- those sketches and they were called back and they were draped again and they stood. It was not very satisfactory and he found it very difficult after having set the standard of the figure of Ginger Rogers which absolutely superb -- to have to reconcile himself to designing clothes for stars that did not have superb figures. And so, he finally quit RKO and recommended that his sketch artist, Edward Stevenson replace him. Stevenson at that point had been in the business about a dozen years and suddenly he found himself as the head designer at RKO, which was
now more than ever a very poor studio. He said, “I didn’t have the scripts of the stars for such fabulous clothes. I always tried to design clothes that supported the script and didn’t detract from it.” Lucille Ball adored him and her loyalty to Stevenson was lifelong, and she spoke of the early days at RKO, “Well, he didn’t try to please everybody. He read the script and he understood the character I was playing and he stuck to his guns when somebody wanted to change it. I made those B pictures so fast we were usually working on two or three wardrobes at once. Poor as RKO was in most respects, they always made clothes for me rather than buy them.” [06:00] Stevenson did have a few lavish assignments and one of those was to dress Lily Pons, the famous opera star, in That Girl from Paris. It was a movie made in 1936. At that point, she was being courted by Andre Kostelanetz whom she later married and he sent her an orchid every day, which she wanted to stick on her costume, whether it was appropriate or not -- but in general, RKO’s limited number of glamorous assignments eluded Stevenson. When Katie Hepburn did Mary of Scotland, she demanded and got Plunkett brought back from New York and -- and used him for all of her period films, and she used Muriel King for Stage Door and Howard Greer for Bringing up Baby in 1938. [07:00] When Plunkett returned to Hollywood in ’36, it was really too specialized in period costumes and he set up a freelance
business and RKO came after him to ask him to design the clothes for *The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle* which was made in 1939 with Ginger Rogers. If you remember, that was the last of the continuing films that Astaire and Rogers made -- they both wanted to go and do other things with their careers and everyone thought they would never dance together again, but 10 years later, as you know, they did make another film, *The Barkleys of Broadway*. Now, Irene Castle, of course, had been a -- both a popular dancer but she had been a fashion [08:00] force in that First World War era and Plunkett wisely followed her clothes as closely as possible, adapting them of course to Rogers’ movements in the dances and the needs of the camera. Well, it got complicated because Irene Castle felt, you know, this was her life story and was very, very important to her and it turned out that in exchange for the film rights, RKO had guaranteed her the right to design Rogers’s wardrobe. Well, the studio worked out some kind of compromise which was that she -- meaning Irene Castle -- and Rogers could have a fitting on each dress without Plunkett being present. To get around this, Plunkett and Rogers had secret meetings and then at the fitting, Rogers would suggest to Mrs. Castle all the things she and Plunkett had decided upon. Then, Rogers [09:00] wanted her hair at its usual shoulder length instead of in the Castle bob. Irene Castle was one of the first women to bob her hair and the Castle bob was a
very popular haircut. And Rogers said, “Absolutely not.” She refused to cut it or wear a wig. Finally, she compromised by curling it up as tightly as possible. In the end, Mrs. Castle was credited for Rogers’s clothes and Plunkett for the rest. So much for fashion designer credits on the screen -- you never know. In the (inaudible) years, Rogers worked with a lot of designers but most frequently with Renie -- R-E-N-I-E -- who had originally been hired in 1937 to do the RKO B pictures. Renie was a woman and she had designed many wild numbers for Lupe Velez -- V-E-L-E-Z -- Mexican spitfire series and Wendy Barrie, [10:00] [Saint?] and Falcon series, and she’d also done some A assignments. She had been friendly with Ginger Rogers for years and when Rogers decided to dye her hair brown and toned out both her brassiness and her glamor, she enlisted Renie. Tom, Dick, and Harry, which was made in 1941, had so many clothes that they weren’t all made when they started shooting the movie and the only time they could fit was every night after shooting. Of course, Rogers by that time was exhausted and would complain but usually she was a good sport. She was concerned about the good of the picture and as designers have always felt, one would really rather have that than deal with somebody who just doesn’t care about clothes at all and treats the designer as somebody that’s just a nuisance. Rogers continued to want to work with different designers and she used Irene for Lucky Partners in
1940, Edith Head for Tender Comrade in 1943, [11:00] and Leslie [Morris?] for Once Upon a Honeymoon in 1943 also. Edward Stevenson continued to dress the RKO less obedient ladies. He had costumed Joan Fontaine for several films and was pleased to see her return for Suspicion in 1941, now a big star after Rebecca in 1940. She had always been slender but at this point she was reed-thin and --

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GREEN: Fontaine was -- had always been slender, but at this particular point, she was reed-thin and Edward Stevenson was thrilled to be able to forget any tricks to slim the body and was able to give Fontaine suits with straight-as-arrow skirts and a nightgown full of [fattening tucks?] and pleats for her fatal glass-of-milk scene. Welles then asked Stevenson to do two films. Citizen Kane in 1941 was a very exciting assignment. (telephone rings) As Welles wanted very accurate period clothes and the women that he cast were, you know, professional Broadway actresses rather than the usual movie stars with -- who came, you know, with notions of what they would and would not wear. The result was that Stevenson assumed that it was common knowledge [01:00] that the film was about William Randolph Hearst and Marion Davies, especially since Welles supplied him
with dozens of stills of Marion Davies used as research in designing Dorothy Commingore’s -- C-O-M-M-I-N-G-O-R-E -- costumes. And of course, he was always terribly amused when Orson Welles denied that the movie hadn’t anything to do with William Randolph Hearst or Marion Davies. Filming was well underway when Dorothy Commingore confessed that she was pregnant. Orson Welles managed to hide this by having her seated behind tables or lying down until the climactic scene in which she left Kane, which had to be played standing up full figure. Letting out the seams ruined the authenticity of her early 1930s outfit and then when that did not completely hide [02:00] the pregnancy, Stevenson gave Commingore an enormous muff to carry. It created a bit of a continuity problem since Citizen Kane and his wife were supposed to be in Florida in summer and it would be unlikely that she’d be carrying a big muff, but there was no other solution. In 1945, RKO made its first three-strip Technicolor film, The Spanish Main, and Stevenson had a ball with the new medium. He just loved it. The only costume problem concerned Maureen O’Hara and her bosom. Although her gowns were low-cut, Stevenson had checked that no cleavage showed. However, during filming the front office angrily complained that there was definite space between her breasts. When Stevenson confronted O’Hara, she admitted she had a method of dealing with the [censors?] -- she grasped [03:00]
the waistband and pulled down it, and the same time taking a deep breath until her breasts almost popped out of the dress. Seeing how much trouble this would cause Stevenson, she agreed to behave. Edward Stevenson’s last big assignment was to pad up the now very slender Irene Dunne into a buxom peasant in *I Remember Mama* in 1948 while Giles -- G-I-L-E -- steel costumed the men. It was a tough job because Irene Dunne had facial features that were rather patrician and it was quite difficult to transform her into an early, earthy Norwegian mother. Exhaustive tests were made, but eventually the simplistic effects were achieved. In 1949, Howard Hughes assumed control of [04:00] RKO and shut the studio down. Renie had left in 1947 and Stevenson only stayed on the payroll for a few months until his contract expired when he went to Fox. Hughes’ favorite designer had been Howard Greer since the days of Jean Harlow’s *Hell’s Angels* in 1930 and so he sent all his special protégée such as Janet Leigh in *Holiday Affair* to Howard Greer. But when Ava Gardner insisted on Michael Woulfe -- that’s W-O-U-L-F-E -- for *My Forbidden Past* in 1951, Hughes began to entrust him with all the RKO stars, even Jane Russell. Unfortunately for Woulfe, most of those RKO scripts were very trite and Hughes’s concept of women was quite vulgar. [05:00] Woulfe was ordered to accentuate Jane Russell’s breasts and keep them on display at all times, regardless of day or evening, appropriate to the plot.
or not. Every change had the same low décolletage and every skirt had to be tight. She made a movie called Macao -- M-A-C-A-O -- in 1952 and Josef von Sternberg was determined to give Russell a new image, and he told Woulfe to keep her covered up. Howard Hughes was furious when he saw the test and Woulfe had to design an entire new wardrobe. Only the famous gold mesh dress was retained. Woulfe later designed Russell’s notorious dancing costume in The French Line in 1954. Jane Russell was remarkable. Through all of the controversy and despite her religious activities, she remained quite unperturbed. She looked at it as a job and her private life was another thing. She was a great gal but more of a tomboy at heart than anything else. Jane Russell’s legs were very long and she had -- she had a very short waistline. Woulfe used many tricks to elongate her waist, including a wide black belt which had a greater diameter along the bottom so that it could be worn around her hips. He used the same idea on Jean Simmons, for she was also short-waisted and once Judy Garland borrowed such a Woulfe-designed dress from Simmons, Garland asked Woulfe to design gowns for the three big premiers of A Star is Born. Not only had she put on weight since the end of the film, she was also pregnant and wanted to keep it a secret. One of her best-known costumes was a fitted black velvet dress with a broad neckband of pink satin heavily beaded with crystal. He made a
flat little pillbox hat of the satin, which dripped crystal beads \([07:00]\) to draw the eye upwards and make the costume start at the top of her head rather than neckline, and she carried a black fox muff. When Hughes sold his RKO interest in 1955, Woulfe joined his Howard Hughes Productions. The new owners kept up production for just over a year and employed freelance designers, including Edward Stevenson, who returned for Ginger Rogers’s *The First Traveling Sales Lady*, made in ’56, and Renie, who did the very last RKO film, *The Girl Most Likely* in 1958.

In 1958, Desilu Productions, half owned by Lucille Ball, bought the studio property. For Stevenson, the 10 years designing of *I Love Lucy* with Lucille Ball was heaven. Lucy’s wild antics gave him a chance to design marvelous but pretty fashions -- showgirl outfits and weird disguises. \([08:00]\) One of his favorite costumes was a deceptively simple looking shirt that was lined with net so that Lucy could drop a dozen eggs inside and then dance a tango with Desi Arnaz. Edward Stevenson’s last film was *The Facts of Life*, made in 1960 for which he shared an Oscar with Edith Head. Lucille Ball recalled, “It was my first film in some time and I wanted Eddy Stevenson but the producers wanted Edith Head, who I enjoy working with too, so I didn’t argue. Edith was very good about it. She said, ‘The work rooms at Paramount are busy, so why don’t you make the costumes up at Desilu and have Eddy supervise?’ Eddy came to every fitting.
He’s a genius at tiny changes that make a big difference and he bought all of the accessories.” Edith made sure he got credit despite his failing health and Lucille Ball offered to retire him on full salary for life. Stevenson did not want to retire. Lucy’s clothes grew even more fashionable as the character became more affluent and in the later years, Stevenson’s also costumes guests as Ethel Merman and Joan Crawford. In 1968, he died but he was still working. Soon, Desilu was sold to Gulf and Western, and the lot merged with adjoining Paramount. RKO wardrobe was no more, c’est fini.

It should be understood that in the very early days of the film industry, Columbia, Universal, and United Artists were very often referred to as “the little three” and the reason for that was they didn’t own any theater chains. In a way, you could them as “the little three” to the area of costume design as well. There’s no question that Columbia and Universal both had highly talented designers. There were seldom any major female stars on the lot to make them famous. Among the United Artists producers was Selznick and Goldwyn, both of whom paid enormous attention to production values, including costumes, but neither unit turned out many films. For Columbia, hiring a costume designer was absolutely out of the question. They were poor -- poverty days of the twenties. Actresses playing leading roles were given money to go out and
buy things and Elizabeth [Courtley?] would refit them at the back of the studio if necessary. When Frank Capra began bringing in major stars for his films, a designer was needed and Edward Stevenson was engaged to dress Jean Harlow and Loretta Young in *Platinum Blonde* in 1931 and Barbara Stanwyck and Nils Asther in *The Bitter Tea of General Yen* in 1933. The studio had no sewing room and Stevenson had to install himself and a seamstress in a vacant garage. In 1933, Robert Kalloch -- K-A-L-L-O-C-H -- came in as Columbia’s first contract designer. He had designed for Anna Pavlova and Mary Garden and worked with such famous couturiers as Lady Duff-Gordon and Madam Francis where he shared the designing responsibilities with Travis Banton. Banton’s talent had influenced Kalloch and a lot of Kalloch’s designs resembled Travis Banton’s work, but he was somewhat less conservative. Banton was essentially pure brilliant fashion. Kalloch was much more imaginative. Banton’s most loyal stars, Carole Lombard and [Cody Cobell?] always demanded him when they were loaned to other studios, but they were very happy with Kalloch’s clothes at Columbia and indeed made Universal borrow Kalloch for *Imitation of Life* in 1934. His best and most typical film was Leo McCarey’s *The Awful Truth* in 1937. There, he had (laughs) a marvelous moment because he was able to dress the usually dignified and stately Irene Dunne in clothes that were highly fashionable but each
change had some aspect that was exaggerated to the point of being funny. The pants of her lounging pajamas, for instance, dragged on the floor behind her for at least a foot and Dunne played this up further by acting as if they impeded her walk. Kalloch left -- this always happens, you know, when you’re that good. Somebody else wants you -- and so MGM stole him away from Columbia in 1941 and Harry Cohn who was the head of Columbia was not in any hurry to get another contract designer. The bulk of the studio [art?] but it was still B pictures and they could be dressed from department stores and costume hire companies. There were no top women stars under exclusive contract and the big-name freelancing ladies always arrived [13:00] with a designer. For instance, Irene Dunne brought Howard Greer for *Penny Serenade* in ’41. Rosalyn Russell used Travis Banton for *What a Woman* in 1943, and Joan Bennett, Marlene Dietrich, and Loretta Young all went to [Bullocks wool?] share where Irene made exclusive designs for their films. When Rita Hayworth began to reach superstar status, she too was glamorized by Irene in dresses that became very famous, such as the gown of white lace appliqued over nude souffle in *You Were Never Lovelier* in 1942. Then, Irene was contracted by MGM and Columbia had to make other arrangements. When they decided to make *Covergirl* in 1943, the studio’s first Technicolor film and the best fashion picture of the war years, three designers were enlisted --
Travis Banton to do most of Rita’s chic fashion, Gwen Wakeling to do the turn-of-the-century flashback, and Muriel King to design the major supporting roles while coordinating all the purchased clothes for the endless parade of fashionable women. Walter Plunkett was always very honest about the impact and the influence of Travis Banton and he said, “The rest of us always watched Banton because he was always a couple of years ahead of the fashion trend.” Evening gowns in the war years usually had to be high-necked and sleeved in order to cover the shoulder pads that made the silhouette of that era, but Banton used strapless gowns held up by bones or wires on Hayworth as often as possible. It’s interesting because if you recognize the history of fashion, it was Christian Dior who would make this strapless bodice one of the cornerstones of his new look. But Travis Banton had used it four years earlier. In Covergirl, Hayworth wore such a strapless gown -- a grey chiffon bordered with fox fur, a true Banton touch -- the trimming the same color as the dress but in a different texture. Banton stayed on to dress Merle Oberon in Columbia’s next Technicolor feature, A Song to Remember in ’45 while Plunkett dressed the rest of the cast. With Merle Oberon’s white skin, black hair, and deep red lipstick, Oberon was a stunning subject for color and Banton repeated black, white, and red as often as he could in her costumes. Columbia finally decided that they
needed a contract designer and offered the job to Jean Louis. Well, his clothes were not unlike Banton’s. They were very soft, supple, and very feminine. His first assignment was Together Again in 1945 with Irene Dunne who liked working with him. [Sheer?] once explained that, [16:00] “I never knew a designer who understood the importance of the close-up as much as Jean. He always made necklines that were different and interesting without drawing undue attention.” Jean Louis’ first encounter with Rita Hayworth was Tonight and Every Night in 1945. She was pregnant and the samba, You Excite Me was moved up to the beginning of shooting while she could still wear the bare midriff costume Jean Louis created. By the end, she was wearing a very flowing cloak. The film was also Jean Louis’s first excursion into Technicolor and there still were problems. The Technicolor people insisted that you couldn’t have a real red -- that it had to be muddy with umber dye, and they still were having a lot of trouble with blues that come out way too bright. So everything had to be color-tested and adjustments made and then months later, we’d see a release print and it was quite different. They shot both exteriors and interiors in the same costumes [17:00] and the differing lights meant that the clothes simply didn’t match. They looked like different outfits. In Gilda in 1946, Jean Louis had a technical problem of a different nature. Especially for the now-legendary Put the
Blame on Mame number which was filmed soon after the birth of her daughter Rebecca, a cinch would have kept her from bending at the waist so Jean Louis designed a tie which crossed over her stomach so tightly that it held it in, ending with a soft bow on the top. Keeping the strapless top up was another problem, since the usual bones would have bent in the vigorous motion of the dance. Jean Louis used [bars?] of plastic. He softened them over a gas flame and shaped her to her dress form. No matter how she moved, they didn’t give [18:00] at all. A very different technique was used for Kim Novak. When she wore a strapless dress, she would not have any bone. She wanted it soft so to keep it out, she had the idea to glue it with spirit gum. She would rip it off and it would rip her skin and tear the dress too -- not so good to fix it to shoot the day after.

One of Jean Louis’s most impressive assignments was to create a glamorous Judy Holiday for Born Yesterday. Judy was a great friend of mine and she was totally disinterested in clothes. Jean Louis said, “She came in to be dressed for the tests. We did the best we could but it didn’t look glamorous, but as the camera started, that woman became all glamor. That is the great actress. The studio kept telling her to lose weight but then her mother would come up and say, ‘You’re not eating enough’ so I cinched her [19:00] so tight, she almost fainted when she stood up. Fortunately, the dresses were longer then and we were
able to use dark hose.” His most elaborate costume picture -- because he rarely got a chance to do them -- was Song without End made in 1960. The director, Charles Vidor -- V-I-D-O-R -- insisted that the 1850 gowns be simplified, modernized, and worn with no petticoats. Capucine -- C-A-P-U-C-I-N-E -- had shot only two or three sequences and Genevieve Page not at all well [Veto?] died and was replaced by George [Kufor?]. For [Kufor?], detail is all-important so the women got their petticoats back. Jean Louis left Columbia in 1961 to freelance and to design a highly prestigious wholesale line. He returned to Colombia for Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner? in ’67 and again [20:00] for Lost Horizon in ’71 and 40 Carats in ’73. Since then, Columbia has hired freelance designers for their lavish costume films. Barbara Streisand had been the reason for most of these. Irene Sharaff came for Funny Girl in ’68 and The Way we Were in ’74, which she did with Moss Mabry -- that’s M-A-B-R-Y -- and Ray Aghayan -- A-G-H-A-Y-T-A-N -- and Bob Mackie were hired for Funny Lady in 1975. Studios simply don’t have fulltime designers under contract any longer and it just doesn’t pay them -- (inaudible) is a name you should know about. [21:00] She came into the fold in 1926 and she designed the very important production of John Stahl’s -- S-T-A-H-L-S -- Backstreet in 1932, for which Universal borrowed Irene Dunne. Now the approach was very interesting because the aging of the character was done
through makeup and hairstyles while the clothes remained essentially thirties, but with longer skirts and more trimming. When Backstreet was made -- re-made -- in 1941, the costumes, again by Vera West with Muriel King, fell into recognizable periods. West did perfectly attractive clothes, but as soon as any of her actresses became important enough, they used other designers. She did dress Marlene Dietrich in Destry Rides Again in 1939, but Irene Dunne did not use her again after Showboat in 1936 but went to Howard Greer. West did design all the Deanna Durbin pictures from ’37 to ’41, but after that the studio gave Durbin the highest paid designers, including Irene, Greer, Adrian, and Plunkett. Vera West left Universal early in 1947 to go into her own business. Walter [Wanger?] had brought Travis Banton to Universal for the opulent Night in Paradise in 1945 with Merle Oberon and Turhan Bey -- T-U-R-N-H-A-N, capital B-E-Y -- and Banton remained for a few films. After starting A Double Life in 1948, he was replaced by Yvonne Wood. She recalls, “They needed a dressing gown for Signe Hasso” -- S-I-G-N-E, capital H-A-S-S-O -- and he designed a pale chiffon with fox cuffs, but they said they didn’t want that kind of thing. It had to be completely modern. Banton was so stubborn he ordered the fox from the furriers anyway. They had to take him off the picture. [23:00] Banton was then assigned Letters from an Unknown Woman in 1948, which was much better suited to his
talents since it was a romantic period story. He was able to relate to Joan Fontaine perfectly. Like Dietrich and Lombard, she was blonde, graceful, and really beautiful. Orry-Kelly had also been brought into Universal to design for Fontaine in another period drama, *Ivy* in 1947, when he dressed her in enormous hats and dotted veils. [Roth Hunter?] gave Irene her last film job. Most of his productions were designed by Jean Louis who was freelancing by then. He gave Doris Day a sophisticated glamor that revived her career and gave Lana Turner some of her most glorious clothes. The last of the Hunter soap operas -- *Madame X* in 1965 -- proved to be one of the few times [24:00] in recent memory a designer has had to contend with a star too glamorous for her role. Supposedly, Lana Turner’s mother-in-law, Constance Bennett, looked about the same age -- thinner than Turner and wearing a cinch as well, Bennett warned, “Don’t try to age me with makeup. I’m going to do this the way I am.” And Jean Louis draped chiffons and soft sweaters. Bennett looks as beautiful as any time in her career. In ’68, Universal announced that it had contracted Edith Head. Between 1968 and ’75, she designed 10 films for the studio and had been loaned out for a number more, as well as endlessly publicizing Universal products in the press and on the air. Now, we take a look at United Artists. United Artists had released films in many different independent producers,
including of course the founding artist Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, Joseph Schenck, Samuel Goldwyn, and David O. Selznick, but they each [25:00] employed designers of their own. In the very beginning in the early twenties, Douglas Fairbanks understood the value of costume and he placed great importance on them. Mitchell Leisen first worked for him on Robinhood in 1922 and found that Western costume, then only a few years old, had almost nothing in stock for the Middle Ages. Leisen had to make up hundreds of chain male armors. They were knitted hemp yarn, silver leafed, each with a unique set of tabard, shield, and banner. He designed hundreds of dresses for the ladies of the court and set up a small factory to make them. Many thousands of costumes were also needed for The Thief of Baghdad in 1923, an oriental fantasy for which no existing costumes would suffice. Leisen also worked for Mary Pickford and he recalled, “We really spent money on Dorothy Vernon of Haddon Hall in 1924. Mary found out that [Bland Sweet?] had just made a Renaissance-era film [26:00] that supposedly had a gown costing $25,000. Mary wanted one that cost even more. I gave her one that cost $32,000. It was embroidered with real seed pearls.” Pickford returned to (inaudible) [roles?] for a while but then she went to Howard Greer’s shop for Coquette in 1929 and asked Adrian to design her clothes for Secrets in 1933 while Milo Anderson dressed the rest of the cast. Joseph Schenck kept
Anderson on for Joan Crawford’s *Rain* in 1932 and told him to furnish her two changes as cheaply as possible. Anderson bought a very simple black dress and a cheap black and white gingham suit at a department store. It was miles too big except in the shoulders, so we altered the rest for her and I made the hat. I was so green then I didn’t realize that when a dress is used as many days as that, there must be several doubles, especially when it has to get wet and dirty. Suddenly, they needed another copy and I went to the store and they didn’t have any. I couldn’t find the material anywhere and finally we had to paint the [check?], [sew?] some white cotton, which ended up costing a fortune. Goldwyn used various designers on a short-term basis, including Coco Chanel came from France for three films, Adrian and Omar Kiam — who despite his name was American and rumored to be a relative of Sam Goldwyn’s. David O. Selznick who joined the United Artists [fold?] in 1934 used designers. He employed Sophie Wachner, [Erna Stridon?], Travis Banton, and Omar Kiam. Then having worked with him at RKO, Selznick engaged Walter Plunkett to design *Gone with the Wind*. Although the movie was released by MGM, it was totally produced at Selznick’s studio. Plunkett went to Atlanta to research and through Margaret Mitchell’s help was even allowed to cut material from the seams of garments in order to find the closest possible match in modern fabrics. When Selznick began
testing for Scarlett O’Hara, Plunkett had to garb each of the candidates and use whatever dresses he could find in stock. When it looked as though Paulette Goddard would get the role, special clothes were designed and fitted and tests were made for wigs to lower her hairline. There were endless tests made of Clark Gable in various sized white hats, until the one most flattering to his large head was found. Gable insisted that his usual tailor, Eddy Schmidt -- S-C-H-M-I-D-T -- be allowed to make his costumes. Schmidt wanted big shoulder pads to balance Gable’s head and Plunkett did not. Eventually, they both compromised and Plunkett says that it’s -- that he’s glad of it now because it set Gable apart from the rest of the men.

Gable’s typical [worldliness?] suited the part. As everybody knows by now, Vivien Leigh was cast very [29:00] soon before they started shooting and so Plunkett had to rush to get her first costumes ready. Vivien Leigh wore the same green sprigged dress in the first scene as she would wear in the barbeque sequence and when Selznick decided to reshoot the opening scene, he also asked Plunkett to design a different dress for Leigh. There were actually 27 copies of the battered calico dress Leigh wore for the Burning of Atlanta sequence, a pair in each stage of disintegration. Plunkett had to prepare several sketches for the dress made from the green curtains before he found the idea that was satisfactory to all concerned. From there, the drapery
was made to conform to the dress. In the original Technicolor prints, the material was a brighter green than it has appeared in the recent revivals. Plunkett has always said, “I don’t think it was my best work or even the biggest thing I ever did. There were [30:00] more designs for *Singing in the Rain*, *Raintree County*, and *How the West was Won*. After all, Olivia de Havilland had only two changes before Melanie went into mourning, but that picture of course will go on forever and that green dress because it makes a story point. It’s probably the most famous costume in the history of motion pictures. I’m very glad I did it” and Mr. Plunkett, we’re all very glad that you did it.

END OF AUDIO FILE