

**COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION
ON MICROFICHE**

PART VI

**COPYRIGHT © THE TRUSTEES OF COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the Oral History Research Office, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York, New York 10027

MECKLER CORPORATION
11 Ferry Lane West, Westport, CN 06880.

MECKLER LTD.
Grosvenor Gardens House, Grosvenor Gardens, London SW1W OBS, UK.

PREFACE TO THE MICROFORM EDITION

The reader of this oral history memoir is asked to bear in mind:

That this is a transcript of the **spoken word**;

That **permission to quote** for publication must be obtained from this office, Columbia University having been assigned the copyright;

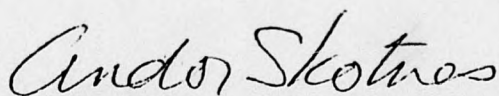
That no representation is made, either by the university or the publishers, as to the **factual accuracy of the memoir**; the scholar must judge for him/herself;

In preparing this edition for micropublication, the best available copy was provided to the publishers.

Oral history transcripts in the Columbia University Collection vary considerably in style and appearance. Most of the early transcripts (1949-1955) were retyped from start to finish after editing by the interviewer, subject to the final approval by the interviewee. Starting in 1956, the first draft--the verbatim transcript--was allowed to stand, with the interviewee's corrections entered by hand. From the early 1980s, with the increasing application of wordprocessing to transcribing, the interviewee's corrections have been more and more often entered into a microcomputer, and a clean, fully corrected copy produced. In some instances over the years, circumstances prevented the interviewee from reviewing his/her transcript. The preface to each interview usually provides such information about each transcript.

Over 1,100 oral histories from the Columbia collection are, at this writing, available on microfiche. A catalog for these may be obtained from Meckler Corporation, 11 Ferry Lane West, Westport, Connecticut 06880 or from Meckler Ltd., Grosvenor Gardens House, Grosvenor Gardens, London SW1W 0BS, UK.

The catalog for the entire Columbia University Collection, containing descriptive information on over 5,000 oral histories, is input to the Research Library Information Network (RLIN) and can be accessed from terminals at most major research libraries. The last published catalog, *THE ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION OF COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY* (1979) edited by Elizabeth B. Mason and Louis M. Starr, is available from this office for \$22.50 postpaid. For a discussion of general research methodology and oral history collections, the reader is referred to "On Using Oral History Collections: An Introduction," by Dr. Ronald J. Grele, director of this office, in *THE JOURNAL OF AMERICAN HISTORY* (September 1987).



Andor Skotnes
Acting Director

January 1988

HOLLYWOOD FILM INDUSTRY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Fred Astaire

Oral History Research Office

Columbia University

1985

Preface

The following oral history memoir is the result of a tape recorded interview with Fred Astaire. The interview took place in Beverly Hills, California on July 29, 1971. It was conducted by Mr. Higham for the Hollywood Film Industry Oral History Project. It is one of a series of interviews documenting the history of the Hollywood film industry.

Mr. Astaire was unable to review and emend this interview. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

VA

Interview with Fred Astaire
in Beverly Hills, California

Interview #1

by

July 29, 1971

Q: Mr. Astaire, first of all I'd like to begin by talking about how you develop a musical. For instance, when you are first signed to do it, how you go about preparing it with your choreographer.

Mr. Astaire: It comes in different ways. I may have some ideas that I want to use, and that makes it somewhat easier, if I have something in advance. Otherwise, you just get around a rehearsal hall and scratch around for ideas, or you get inspired by the music. Oftentimes I would suggest a kind of a number I'd like to do, which is not the easiest thing in the world to give to a composer of note, because they like to think their songs out.

Usually-- well, take Irving Berlin, for instance. He used to think out things that he thought would suit me. And they did most of the time. He was extremely good at that and made it a lot easier for me. A song like "Top Hat" and things like "Isn't This a Lovely Day to be Caught in the Rain". Irving wrote so many

good things for me that-- well, it was just a great joy. But that's one way.

Then I can remember one time I had an idea for a thing with Irving, and it didn't quite go in his groove and he just couldn't figure out how to do it. I said, well, if it doesn't strike you, just forget it.

Now, it works both ways. With all the good, wonderful composers that I have worked with, they always have been a help. They really have.

Q: Do you like to use a mirror?

Astaire: Oh, yes. It's the ideas that are hardest to get. I mean, getting steps is another thing. It all becomes a kind of a chore, if you want to look at it that way, because you're so anxious to make good with it, and nothing seems good enough while you're doing it. And then it's a matter of the survival of certain steps and ideas, as to whether or not you finally end up with them. You know.

Q: How do you care for the problem of recording the taps in a tap dance?

Astaire: Oh, I have done them live, right as we performed them, and also, when the sound facilities were difficult, then I would put them in afterwards. Well, look at the picture and hear the music with earphones in my ears, and then-- . Oh, I haven't done tap dancing for so long. I mean, I haven't really done any tap

dancing for a good many years, you know.

Q: In the great musicals, you normally did it, did you, with synchronization?

Astaire: Most of the time, yes. I have done it live, as I say, a number of times, when it seemed to be the best way to do it. It would be for a kind of a-- where the sound was sure to be good. Sometimes you're on a set and the sound wasn't right, so they want to get it in a better quality. And then we'd do it somewhere else.

Q: But the facilities are quite marvelous. Or were there shortcomings?

Astaire: They were very good, I thought. At that time they were a little new at that type of thing, because I think I was one of the first to come out and do that. But we worked it out so it got to be kind of second nature. Incidentally, it is part of the chore I did not like. By the time I get through performing a number, that's enough of it for me. And then to have to go back and retrace your steps with accuracy, it's a very, very difficult thing to do, especially if you're going through about eight other numbers and songs and dialogue and everything else in the meantime. Because you usually do that technical part of dubbing after the picture is finished, you see. That's a hard thing to do.

Q: Had you worked with choreographer Hermes Pan on the stage?

Astaire: No. No, Hermes was an assistant dance director to Dave

Could when I arrived out here to do a thing called FLYING DOWN TO RIO. And I thought he was a very talented young fellow, and as I went on to a career at RKO, I arranged for him to-- both Ginger and I, he worked with Ginger and me-- and we arranged for him to be the choreographer for a number of our pictures.

Q: Was he enormously inventive?

Astaire: Oh, very good, yes. Hermes is-- he's a very-- I call him the rock. You know, the kind of-- he doesn't make any fuss about anything. He's a very fine gentleman to work with, you know.

Q: Was he a professional dancer originally?

Astaire: Well, I think he did some chorus work. I don't think he-- I really don't know what he did. He may have been in a show. I think he told me he was in a show in New York as a youngster, but then he became a choreographer out here and he's done very well.

Q: Just wondered if in suggesting a series of steps to you, he would dance them for you, or with you?

Astaire: Well, he would-- see, I don't learn people's steps too well. I do a lot of my own, you see, and then I'd get to a place and I'd say, give me something here. I'm in a hole, I can't get out of this, what do you do? And he might show me something that I'd like. Or he'd show me something I didn't like and I'd say, oh no, I can't, I don't like it, no, that won't work or something. You know. So then he'd try something else. I'd say, that's it.

So then he'd show me that.

And then the same would happen if I had an idea for a dance and I could do everything but get it started, I'd say, get me started now. I can't get started. When I get started, I can go on with the rest of it. That type of thing. So he'd figure out some kind of a start, and often would be a big help that way. He was very, very helpful in every way, you know.

And very good with girls. He was a very good teacher and coach of girls, like Ginger-- and he worked with Rita Hayworth. Not in a picture with me. I had somebody else to do the pictures I did with Rita. But he did work with her. And, oh, he worked with a number of people. You know, I can't remember too much. I've done so many, I can't remember the details of them.

Q: Did you work very closely with the set designer,

?

Astaire: Yes, I always had to discuss all of that with them. I remember him, of course, very well. And I would always have to discuss the floor and see that it wasn't too sticky or too slippery or too light or too dark or something that scuffing would show up too much. And we got to the point of getting a couple of shocks at one time, I remember. You know, this time give me a floor that won't show some of the scuff marks, because after you start out on a perfectly beautiful shiny floor, and after/half a dozen takes, sometimes you have to go, for technical reasons, a long time on that floor, and it begins to look all scuffed up. And if you get

high with your camera, you look down on this and you see all these scuffs, and they don't look too good. So that was a problem which we found. I found out a light floor showed up less than a dark floor. A dark floor with that shiny-- you know, whatever that compoboard is or whatever the floor was made of, really looked-- just too many marks on it, that's all.

Then we used to put designs, paint designs on the floor. Finally ended up by getting something-- nothing showed like that, but those are little things you have to go through. You don't worry about it when you're on the stage in New York, because it doesn't happen there.

Q: And, of course, you have these mirrors, where you're actually shooting almost directly into a mirror, and your reflection is seen, but the camera isn't.

Astaire: Well, I hadn't done that. I hadn't done anything that-- I haven't really had any what I call mirrors. There's one dance I did solo. It was in-- a picture with Bing Crosby. BLUE SKIES I think it was. And it was called "Putting on the Ritz", and everybody said it was a dance with mirrors. But it was not a dance with mirrors. It was a dance with split screens. And we had twelve-- I think there were twelve figures of me in the background. Each one of us was a separate screen processed in there. Oh, it took months to put it together, before I could see the finished product. But I wanted to do this dance of myself, with the whole chorus and myself in back. You couldn't do that with mirrors, because each

move-- the moves, I can't tell you how complicated, and if I did, it would take you all the time you've got on the album here to tell it. Well, there are so many complicated-- I did a dance on the ceiling which was very complicated in one picture.

Q: Yes. How was that achieved?

Astaire: Well, again, I couldn't describe it really adequately here. I can for you. But the whole room turned, this room. It was a room about this size. And the whole room turned like this, you see, and as it came down, I met it. The camera went with it, you see. The camera and everything went with it. So as I stayed at the bottom, doing whatever I did, and I met this wall as it came to me, when they finally set it on the lower line of the picture, it looked as if I was climbing the wall. And there I was, sticking out like this on the side of the wall, and then I got to the ceiling, I'm upside down.

Complications of that were that things had to be lashed down, and as they tried it the first time, it was like a big iron lung that was built for this thing. It was very-- took quite a while to do. And the turning of it worked by electricity. A fellow pushed buttons and he knew exactly when I'd be there, and then he'd turn it when I wanted to go to the top and look as if I was getting to the top.

Do you understand what I'm saying? It was all described in LIFE. It's in there. It was in that magazine.

So it was one of the things I really liked best of all the

solos that I did, and it worked out because I dreamt it up one night, thinking of how this could be. And then I tried to get it in a picture and it never fit into any picture for, oh, a number of years. A couple of years. And Arthur Freed, who's a producer-- this was at Metro-- liked the idea so much, finally we found a place for it, which was in ROYAL WEDDING. Pan was not on that picture. Nick Castle, I think, worked on it. And Stanley Donen was the director. He was a big help getting that technical side worked out. He's very clever like that.

Q: I'm surprised it didn't bring on an attack of vertigo.

Astaire: Well, it's a funny feeling to be-- if this room was to turn around here now, and all of this is up there and that's down here, it's a very funny feeling, I can tell you that. And it took a knack to look as if-- see, you're fighting the laws of gravity all the time, and to look as if you're really going, there's a tendency for you to look a little unnatural. I had to work on that, to just look as if I was splitting up, you see.

Q: First time around it was hard, was it?

Astaire: Oh, I worked on it till about three weeks before we shot it. Oh, yes. But it was worth it.

Q: How did it come that you were signed to do DANCING LADY with Joan Crawford? How did that invitation come about?

Astaire: This, of course, I've told-- it's been in my book, it's been in everything. When I came to California, I'd just done a

stage play in New York called THE GAY DIVORCEE, and I had just done it in London, and the first movie that I made was FLYING DOWN TO RIO. And while I was waiting for FLYING DOWN TO RIO, Joan Crawford asked if I would go over and do a number with her in DANCING LADY. That's what you asked me, wasn't it? DANCING LADY? And I thought it would be a good idea to get a little film experience before I did this other picture, which was going to be Ginger. And I'd never worked with Ginger before, although I knew her. I'd staged a number for her in one of her shows in New York.

Anyway, I went over there and did a couple of numbers with Joan, and it was a very interesting experience to get going, so that by the time I hit the one I had come out for, I knew a little bit about what it was like making a movie.

Q: You were introduced, weren't you, in the film as Fred Astaire?

Astaire: Yes. Clark Gable. Clark Gable-- I can remember that was a great way to be introduced.

Q: Could you tell it for the tape, how Clark Gable introduced you?

Astaire: Well, I think the scene was-- he was supposedly a dance director. He played the part of a choreographer in that. And she was the star of this musical comedy that they were doing, and he said, oh, I've got Fred Astaire coming out from the East to dance with you. And she said, oh, that'll be fine, or something or other. Of course, then he wrapped his arm and there I was. So I've always thought that was the best way to

be introduced into a movie, by Clark Gable, who was about as big as they could be at that time, as was Joan. You know, great stars that they were.

Q: Now, when you got into FLYING DOWN TO RIO, is the whole thing scripted in terms of the dance sequences or do they have to be separately worked out with the director and the choreographer?

Astaire: The dances were written into these-- you know, the places for the musical numbers, and then it was up to us to decide what kind of a dance we wanted to do in those spots.

I can't remember honestly too much about what happened there. The past to me is the past and I don't go on thinking about it too much.

Q: I would like to ask you, however, about Ginger Rogers and how you worked with her. Was it always a very happy association?

Astaire: I thought so, in spite of what some of the press tried to get into it. I never had any difficulty with Ginger. I don't have difficulty with anybody I work with, because I just don't like it and if that's going to be the case I just don't work. And I never had that. There were things probably some time or other where Ginger and I would disagree on something about what to do or something, but that isn't what you call not getting along. That's the thing you have to do to get your result.

But I don't even remember too much of that. We danced and we worked and we laughed. We had an awful lot of fun doing what we

did. And there was a time she had a dress on-- that's also stuff that came out in my book-- which was amusing, and so it was worth talking about. A feathered dress that flew all over the place and stuck in my eyes and in my mouth and-- well, it's such an old story I hate to keep repeating it, because it's been told about a hundred times. These feathers were flying all over the place, and we had to stop shooting and start over again. And this happened over and over again. Of course, the press got a hold of that and made a big deal out of it. They said, oh, there's a feather fight over on the stage at RKO. It wasn't a fight. It was just getting a job done, that's all.

Q: Was this in TOP HAT?

Astaire: Yes, I guess it was. It was "Cheek to Cheek" was the song.

Q: Yes. I just wondered, the feathers weren't properly fastened?

Astaire: Well, you get a dress with a whole lot of feathers tied on, some of them are going to fly off. Because we didn't stand still when we were working. We moved around, and I'd get a hold of her dress or something and maneuver her about-- you know, in the dance-- and some of the feathers would come along. So I'd be shaking feathers off me and they were flying. Well, we finally got so there were enough feathers fell off that we got all the loose ones, and the ones that stayed on there survived the test. Oh, boy.

Q: On another occasion,
with her sleeve?

Astaire: Oh, yes. Well, that was another thing that was-- again, a thing that's in my book. I feel a little repetitious here, but if you want me--

Q: I would love you to tell the story.

Astaire: Well, we did a thing called "Let's Face the Music and Dance", and it was a story number at the end of a sort of a ballet type little pantomime thing ahead of it. And we got into this dance, and the dance was about three minutes long and we did it in one take. I mean, just instead of cutting into it and taking angles and so on, we did the whole thing right through, and it was an exhausting situation really.

She had a dress that weighed ten tons, I think it must have weighed, and the sleeves alone weighed a ton and a half apiece, and they hung down, and they were beaded. It was just quite a dress. And we got through and I got to one part of the dance the first take. Her sleeve slapped me right in the face and from then on I didn't know what happened. Really. I just said, oh, that's going to look great, to myself. And we kept going and got off and finished, and I was sort of half groggy, because I was, you know, out of breath and so forth.

So then, of course, they said, well, we'll have to do that again. You know. I said, sure, you know we'll have to do it again. I got slapped by a shovel or something in the middle of the thing. So we did, went at it again and again. We took about eighteen takes of that thing, and finally quit at eight o'clock in the evening.

We worked late in those days. And said, well, that's enough, and we didn't think we had it, and I said, well, that's enough now, let's quit. We'll come back and look at the rushes in the morning. They were in black and white in those days. They came right in, those rushes. And I said, well, we'll pick it up and see what we've got. So we got it in the very first take-- was the one that was good, the one that slapped me in the face with the thing. And we never saw it on the screen. It happened when I guess I was in back of her maybe, as we were turning around, and this came by, and it never showed. So we wasted that whole day knocking ourselves out. I'll always remember that. That was something.

Q: How good was Ginger as a dancer when you first started to work with her?

Astaire: Ginger was a Charleston dancer. That's what she really did, and she hadn't done the type of thing that I'd do. And we had to work on her, and she was such a clever performer that she could fake a lot of things and make it look great. And as she did it, she didn't have to fake so much. She became a very good dancer, as everyone knows, and certainly you can't say too much about Ginger's success. I mean, she was just terrific as a personality and as a performer, and she made her dancing look the best. That's it.

Q: Did you have to do a tremendous amount of rehearsal with her?

Astaire: Oh, yes. Yes. Well, you do with every-- in dancing, you have to rehearse like mad always anyway, no matter how good

you may be. And you finally get it to what you hope is perfection, and then you find out that it isn't, or something like that.

But, as I say, these things were so-- I had so much of this for so long that I can't remember an awful lot of it, and I don't care about whenever I get-- you know.

Q: What was Thornton like to work with?

Astaire: I don't really remember too much about him, except he was a nice director. That was my first picture, I guess, FLYING DOWN TO RIO. Well, it was my second. My first big one, the first one where I had a whole lot to do. And I can remember him being very nice to work with.

Q: Of course, Mark Sandrich, you had a long and very happy association with him?

Astaire: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Mark did a number of pictures after that, as you know. Those are all the old, old ones. I mean, the ones that I really enjoyed were the ones I did later. As I say, you know, I don't remember, I don't sit around and think about what I did in the past. I followed up with so many interesting ones at Metro and Fox and Paramount. I mean, I hit them all around. At Columbia, I think I had a big studio in town.

Q: I just wondered what Sandrich was like?

Astaire: Oh, he was very, very-- I would say he and Pandro Berman-- Pandro Berman was the producer at RKO, who was very responsible.

The two of them were very responsible for the success of Ginger and me, because they did pick-- they went out to get vehicles they thought would suit that particular time. It was kind of a pioneer effort in that field. There weren't many musicals that knew what they were doing at that time. And these had a different touch and everything, and the composers-- Pandro Berman and Mark always had to get the best composers, like Jerome Kern and Gershwin and Berlin. Who else was there? Everybody. I've had them all. They're all so good. To write these musicals for Ginger and me, and that's why I had this bunch of terrific songs, my gosh, that I introduced, because they were written for me.

Q: Also, of course, they were enormously inventive pictures. Unlike the very early musicals, which were very stage bound, your pictures really released these pictures into movies, into the cinema medium.

Astaire: Yes, I think so. The one thing I tried to get rid of quickly-- as I used to say to Pandro Berman, I said, it's all right to do a picture about-- a musical about the stage, because the music comes in sort of natural, but I would like to get away from theatrical plots, if possible. We did that on a number of things. A good many of them at RKO were theatrical, and I think a couple of them weren't. I mean, FOLLOW THE FLEET was not theatrical, but, you know, actors were at work. We did a little kind of a show in that, but-- .

Later on, I got to do-- well, like FUNNY FACE was not--

DADDY LONG LEGS. Well, we'll go on to FINIAN'S RAINBOW and I don't know what all now.

Q: Yes. But you broke right away from the whole tradition of shooting headon to the camera movement a lot of freedom ?

Astaire: Yes. Using the medium as a very necessary thing. Everything becomes pretty static if you try to do it like they do on the stage. There was a time-- a certain dance, I'd say, I'd like to do this all in one piece. It was an exhausting thing to do, because if you didn't get it all right in one thing, you'd have to do the whole darn thing over.

But I like it better when you get off in different angles and try things. For a while we used two or three cameras on a dance, but I gave that up. I'm instrumental in making them give it up, because I just didn't like the way it works out that way. It's much better to come over and get it all fresh from another angle.

There are a lot of technical points about it. In television, for instance, you do a lot with two or three cameras always. They always have that. And it works there. It's a different game, a whole different ballgame, as they say.

Q: The most extraordinary sequences in all of your pictures, I think, is the Bojangles number in SWING TIME, when you dance with the shadows. Is that very difficult to achieve?

Astaire: Yes, it was, it was. It was another one of those tough

things, as those trick things are. That was again different screens. I had to make a screen of the . There were three fellows in the back of me. You remember the three shadows? Well, they were all separate shots processed into one. And one of them-- and I can remember one thing-- one of them walked off while the others kept dancing.

And all this-- the trick department deserves a medal for that. I've had that in every studio I've been. They've just done wonderful trick work for me. Like the one I mentioned before, the split screens of BLUE SKIES. Well, I usually liked a thing like that. I liked trick numbers. I had a very good number at Paramount too, where I danced on a piano and all over the place. It was in a picture which wasn't too prominent. It was called LET'S DANCE, with Betty Hutton. And there were some good numbers in that. The picture itself was a little-- not quite one of the better ones.

I loved doing them all. You see, I enjoyed doing them. They all feel like the best. The one that you're doing is, you know, this is the best. That's the way to do it. Each time I start a movie, I think it's going to be the best one I've ever done. And if I don't think that, I can't start it. And I get around to feeling that. Otherwise, I wouldn't take it. It still is that way, but, of course, you don't get that result you always want. You try, but you don't get it.

Q: Did you work very closely with Irene Castle on THE STORY OF VERNON AND IRENE CASTLE?

Astaire: She was there as a technical adviser and I didn't have

to work with her. I knew Irene quite well. I actually staged a dance for her when she went off by-- after her husband died some years before that. She went into vaudeville and asked me to put on some dances for her. So I did that. But I never danced with her actually, except to show her something. She was bigger. Pretty tall. And I never worked with her.

But she and Vernon were idols of my sister and me when we were starting out, because they were terrific, the Castles. I don't think anybody in this generation knows anything about that at all. They can't imagine the size of their popularity. Without any television and without any radio or anything else that I can remember to help them at all, they just became world famous. You must have read about that. That's something you'd be too young to know about.

Q: I know about it though. And she-- of course, she had products named after her.

Astaire: Oh, yes. And she bobbed her hair and caused another one of those hair wave-- success waves. I mean, everybody bobbed their hair. And then along come the Beatles and they didn't bob their's, they let it grow and then bobbed-- whatever it is, and they started something. I don't think we have to even think about it now. It's here and that's it.

Q: Did she like the picture? Irene Castle?

Astaire: I don't think she did too much. I don't think she liked it too much. She objected to some things in it. Ask Ginger about

that. I think what Irene objected to were some of the clothes that were worn. She didn't go for them. And they were supposedly patterned after some of the things she wore, but I think there was-- I don't know, there was some little thing, I don't know what that was. Whenever I hear about those, I get out of the way, because it didn't concern me, so I said, all right, you worry about it.

Q: I suppose when you're preparing these numbers, you have to be very careful that your dancing partner has very easy clothes, that you don't unravel around you or become--

Astaire: That has to all be taken into consideration, I should say it does. I've had all sorts of problems like that. Dresses that would restrict the girl's movements or would get in my way or wrap around my legs. In certain steps they'd all be all over me and it looks as if I have half the dress on. And those things are-- I'd always watch before we'd start. Before we got into shooting something, I'd try it out and try it out pretty carefully before I'd go to work with it.

Q: How did it come about that you moved away from RKO? Was there a change in the vogue for that type of musical at that time, or did you just feel that you wanted a change of scene? How did that come about?

Astaire: Well, I'd been there so long. I'd had a contract there so long, and I was glad to go to-- I think I went to Metro right from there. And I liked Metro and they were anxious to have me.

It was kind of like you do anything else. I didn't want to stay the rest of my life at RKO, you know. But RKO did very well while I was there.

Then Metro was an interesting experience. Then, of course, I did them at Paramount, and as I told you, at Columbia and everywhere. Fox.

Q: They had wonderful resources, didn't they, in terms of direction and sets?

Astaire: Yes, they had a much bigger facility there. The equipment was newer and everything else. I found Fox a very good studio too. They were very good. The one I did there I enjoyed very much.

Q: They had some of the finest technical equipment in the industry at Fox.

Astaire: Yes, I guess they did. There was never any question about getting something done very well at Fox. I just did one picture there.

Q: Did you enjoy working with Judy Garland on EASTER PARADE?

Astaire: Oh, yes. Of course. She was-- well, she was probably one of the greatest performers. I think that's everyone's feeling about Judy. She had been ill and she came-- well, the story of that, the one I did the first one I did with her, was EASTER PARADE, and Gene Kelly was supposed to do it, but then he broke his leg. And I had retired at that point, you see. And he asked me, he

called me up and asked me to take it over. And I said, well, I'm through, I've retired. I did a-- well, what would you call it? A pre-Sinatra retirement thing in '48. And I was at that point. I was forty-nine years old. I think you get that feeling when you're around that age and have done a whole lot of things. You just say, oh, I don't want to worry about things any more.

Anyway, by that time I was ready to come and do something that was worth doing, and that sounded like a good thing. We had to re-write the script a good deal for the way I would do it. And Judy was anxious to have me, so that was the inspiration for that. And so I came out of retirement, and she was well at that point and worked very hard and very well.

And after that was over, we were supposed to do another, but we never got to it, because she got ill again and cancelled. And then again we tried. We were going to do one. And then she didn't make that either. She was a very unusual gal, as everyone knows. It was one of the great thrills, to work with Judy. She could do things. Anything. Without rehearsing. She could learn fast and do everything better than most people that-- you know, in a musical you do rehearse a lot, and she was all ready to rehearse when she was right, and she just picked it up quickly. She was very amusing too. A great sense of humor.

Q: Was she very nervous?

Astaire: No. I didn't think she was.

Q: It's often said that she lacked confidence, that she had to be

constantly reassured.

Astaire: She never acted that way with me. She seemed to be right ready for the whole job in EASTER PARADE. The other ones I can't talk about, because she didn't make those, you see. She started to and then she didn't show up and we had to replace her. I mean, once Ginger came in and took her part. You know, in THE BARKLEYS OF BROADWAY.

Q: Now was that based on any actual people, THE BARKLEYS OF BROADWAY?

Astaire: I don't think so. It was Comden and Green's book, and they-- I think they patterned it after-- I don't know how you'd say it. It couldn't be the Lunts, because they were the husband and wife team of great renown, but they weren't musicals. I don't know who this could have been. I think they just concocted a story that they thought-- along those lines, which would suit Judy and me. Of course, Judy never made it, so-- then Ginger did. The picture did pretty well, I think.

Q: Did she call it a persuasion to come back and work with you again or was she delighted to do so?

Astaire: Ginger was very glad to do it. I hadn't made a picture with her for ten years, and I didn't think it was too good an idea, to come and make a revival of a team that had done that well together, you know. I've always felt that way. But then this came up and we decided, and she decided, that it's a good thing to do, and so we did it. She was happy to come too. We were very glad

that she did.

Q: Well, it was a good picture.

Astaire: It was a good movie, I thought.

Q: I particularly liked the Scottish number.

Astaire: Yes, that was a nice number, wasn't it? I liked that too. I don't know how many people appreciate that, because it was pretty calm and easygoing type of thing. I never heard too much said about that number. I particularly liked it too. I'm glad to hear that you did.

Q: What I like about your pictures is that they have an extraordinary air of informality. You never feel everything's being wheeled laboriously into place. It has a feeling of naturalness.

Astaire: Well, I'm glad that comes off, because I think that's what we aimed to do. I don't like jumping into a number for no reason. I like it to happen, not to say they dragged a number in here. It's just part of the show, part of the plot, so you don't say-- there's nothing that hits you in the face too hard, you know. That's what we tried to do.

Q: Yes, the dancing seems to come out of some natural exuberance expressed in a scene.

Astaire: Yes, and it's hard-- it's not easy to get a dance into a plot. But our's were light and there were all excuses. And, of

course, some of these musicals, later on they began to accept more readily that the leading man is liable to go into a dance, you know. On the stage it was a different thing, but when you did it in the movie, a lot of times-- they started when I first came into the movie thing, they used to say, well, where's the music coming from? Where's the music? Why was the music-- ? I say, well, it's coming from the sound track. You know. Some producers and directors of the older school, they say, well, you've gotta have a phonograph on there to make a reason for the music. I said, no. I said, there's an orchestra in the pit in the theater, but it's not on the stage, it's in the pit. You hear the music, you don't care where it's coming from. It's part of the show. You think you dream it. It's a dream type of thing. We used to talk about that. And eventually they just gave up, didn't have to worry about where the music came from.

Q: They were totally realistically minded?

Astaire: Well, it was the formation of a medium. They didn't know quite what you could do with the movie. I think by now they've found out. Oh, brother, have they found out!

Q: I knew that there was a scene in ZIEGFELD FOLLIES, which finally was filmed, in which you had some major problems. Can you recall that? It was a scene involving dancing through clouds, I think, or

.

Astaire: That was never in the picture. That was one of the most

ridiculous Metro extravaganza things. The producers, we all laughed about it. But it was a great big thing. Bubbles came up all over the place and there were girls fainting up on the sides of the set. They were all these beautiful Follies-- I guess it was the ZIEGFELD FOLLIES that that was in. Yes. And as I say, all these beautiful Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Ziegfeld beauties were all planted up along the sides of this great wall of rocks that was around this place that filled up with bubbles. I don't know why, but that was what it was. And I know that when I danced in there with-- gosh, I can't remember who I danced in there with.

Q: Lucille Bremer?

Astaire: Could have been Lucille, but I had some kind of a feeling that Cyd Charisse, because she was also in the picture. But I'm not sure. But anyway, it probably was Lucille.

Anyway, we arrived in evening clothes in this place, and all of a sudden it filled up with bubbles and we ended up dancing with bubbles up to our necks. Well, look, it was positively ridiculous. And it never was in the picture. They cut it out. The girls had fainted up there from the fumes of these bubbles, which had some sort of acid in them. You just wouldn't believe what a crazy thing it was, but they didn't and tried everything, and I give them a hundred per cent for that at Metro. Boy, cost didn't mean anything. They really threw it in.

Arthur Freed was a generous, generous fellow about it. If he didn't think a number was good-- excuse me for deviating a minute.

In one of the pictures I did there, I did a whole solo, which took two or three days to shoot, and he didn't like the set and he didn't like what I wore for it. It was in a picture that didn't amount to much either. I can't think of the name of it. He insisted on doing that whole number over, because-- I was dressed as a bartender or something. It was-- oh, darn it, I can't remember the name of it. It was called THE BELLE OF NEW YORK, and I thought it was going to be kind of a good movie. I really did. There were a lot of very cleverly thought out things, but the movie didn't quite make it.

But he insisted upon doing this whole number over. Well, now this cost a fortune. And I wasn't in a particular mood to go and do it over. It was a number called "I Want To Be A Dancing Man". It was a good song, a good type of sand dance and everything else. And he loved it, and he just said, I'm not going to let that get by.

TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO

Astaire: the way it was made. This was the one thing that bothered me. And I know Arthur Freed was crazy about it. And Ludwig Bemelmans, the writer-- it was a kind of a top effort, and it was Arthur's favorite project at the moment, that moment. He had a couple of things going there, but that was his baby. And we all worked very hard to do what we could about it. He had some extremely attractive sets and effects in there. And who directed it? Minelli directed it. And I know-- it comes to

me every now and then thinking about that, because it was really an ambitious effort.

And then there was a religious problem in there of some sort that got in the way, and in order to get it-- see, the plot involved a religious thing-- and in order to get that out, they had to cut out the whole idea of the piece, as I remember it. They cut out about, oh, a quarter of the picture towards the end, because it didn't-- it couldn't be otherwise.

I was so disappointed. It was not a success, the picture. You know that.

Q: I know. It was overlooked entirely.

Astaire: Well, it had to be, because-- well, you liked it. I know someone else that liked it too. But I don't think it ever finished. I think it left everybody wondering, well, what's that all about, you know, kind of at the end.

Q: The Coffee Time seems just wonderful.

Astaire: Well, yes. But, you see, that's a dance number, and that's that. And then the other thing, that enormous rock moving ballet, which was-- I don't know what we called that, but one of the first of those big ballet-type things that were done. "Will You Marry Me" was one of the songs in it.

I don't know, the picture just-- I feel like saying, why do you have to get so unlucky with a film, because that was something that should have happened and it didn't.

Q: It was very original.

Astaire: Well, it was. It had a really good touch to it, but it wasn't carried out right, that's all I can say.

Q: Lucille Bremer fascinates me, because she didn't appear to have been before much of a professional dancer. Did you have to-- ? What was her background?

Astaire: Oh, she was a dancer. She was a dancer. She worked in one of those cafes, the Silver Slipper, in New York. That's where they got her from, I think, and they were going to make a movie star out of her, which they did. And she retired and got married and moved to Mexico. She was a beautiful dancer.

Of course, I did another thing with Lucille. I did the ZIEGFELD POLLIES. I did a Chinese dance in that too.

Q: "Limehouse Blues"?

Astaire: "Limehouse Blues", yes. And she was a terrific dancer. I thought she was no novice at it. She knew all about that.

Q: I suppose of the dancers you worked with, apart from Ginger Rogers, Rita Hayworth was probably the most accomplished, was she not?

Astaire: Well, Rita was just simply a beautiful dancer. I have to praise these girls, because they're all that good. I keep saying, oh, they're wonderful, but Rita was a wonderful dancer, just wonderful, and she-- you know, her father was my friend. I

knew him before she was born. And it was a funny kind of a thing. I met him when I was in vaudeville. Played on a bill with him. He was a headline act with his sister, the Cansinos. And my sister and I were on the same bill as a smaller act, and I got to be sort of a good friend of Eduardo.

Then time lapsed and all of a sudden I find myself working opposite his daughter. It was a kind of a funny thing, because at that point I was-- what was I? I was only about forty then, I guess, and she was about twenty-one. But she was delightful. She's a very, very clever girl. She was mainly a Spanish dancer when she started. I think she had training of all kinds of dances. Not particularly tap, but she-- we did one kind of jazz number. She could do it very well. But not a tap dance. She wasn't a tap dancer.

Q: Just to flashback temporarily, I did recently see in a compilation film on television an absolutely stunning "Foggy Day in London Town". I haven't seen the complete movie, but that sequence was wonderfully shot. Incredibly well done. Directed by George Stevens.

Astaire: Oh, that. Well, there was no dance in it.

Q: No, it was just a wonderful scene.

Astaire: That I remember vaguely. I remember the song, of course, because it's kind of an extraordinary song to have had written for you. I always think it's a classic, that song. And for me-- he wrote it for me. A lot of people thought that Sinatra was the

introducer of that song, and it was me. Anyway, there were other songs in that-- that was again a picture-- DAMSEL IN DISTRESS, wasn't it? Another picture that wasn't quite one of the most illustrious ones that I did, but it had terrific music. And that was also the first one I did away from Ginger, which caused kind of a furor.

Q: Certainly your parting was not the result of a feud with Ginger Rogers?

Astaire: Oh, no. It caused a furor. It made the public mad because we didn't work together. Oh, no, she wanted to do acting on her own. She went out and she won an Academy Award. Who's right, you know. Ginger.

No, she was-- it was just what you do. People don't go on forever doing things. I mean, that's what I admire about the Beatles. They said, that's it, forget it, we're not going to do it. They're smart, very smart to do that. It's when you hang in until you hang yourself is when you make your mistakes.

Q: FUNNY FACE is a superb musical, I think.

Astaire: I liked it very much and I loved Audrey. She was just about one of the most lovely people that you could ever meet or work with. My goodness.

So I enjoyed all those things that came my way and there were a lot of them.

Q: Her training mainly being in ballet teach ballet and so forth?

Astaire: She had in the past been a dancer, as she told me, but she sort of hadn't danced for quite a while by the time we worked together. She particularly asked for me for that picture. Otherwise, I never would have made it. I wouldn't have been-- they didn't-- you know, it wasn't a thing they were making for me. They had her and she said, well, I'll do it if you get Fred Astaiah. And that was the biggest compliment you can get, you know. At that point, I didn't really-- I think I was thinking about not doing too many things, and when I heard that she wanted me, I said, gee whiz, I certainly hope that that can be arranged.

And then there was a question about whether it was going to be done at Metro or where. See, Roger [redacted] was the promoter of that, and he was at Metro. And then Metro couldn't do it on account of her rights at somewhere else and I don't know what all. It all ended up by us doing it at Paramount. I just went along. I said, you find out where to do it, baby, I'm certainly doing it. I'm doing it with that one.

And so we did have a good time. We shot some of it in Paris. Those are very happy memories that I have about that one.

Q: You did some actual dance sequences on Paris locations, didn't you?

Astaire: Oh, yes. We were way out-- the famous line that she said. Again, I'm quoting again, whichever thing that I think is in my book. This is like a resume of my book. We waited and waited to do this dance, which was "He loves and she loves". I

think that's what the song was. And the dance out in the beautiful meadow in the outskirts of Paris. And it rained and rained and rained while we were there. We couldn't shoot at all for about two weeks. And we shot around that number, and the field got muddier and muckier, and finally we went out and we just had to shoot, and the sun was shining and the rains were over, we hoped. And they were. But the field was muddy. So we had this-- it was difficult to work in.

And little Audrey, she said, "Here I have waited twenty yeahs to dahnce with Fred Astaiah, and what do I get? Mud!" My favorite remark of all times. She's just a great-- gosh, she's cute.

Q: Seems amazing that they could shoot at foot level at all,
those dance movements at
all.

Astaire: Well, we found some dry spots and put some lamps, some heat lamps, on it, and where we worked we finally got it into order so we could shoot, because we were running out of time. We'd been over there for so long waiting to do the things that had to be done. One of the things in that was a fashion show, that was supposed to have been in the-- in some location. Anyway, we were outdoors in the middle of this Jardin Tuileries or whatever it is, and this rain started to come down. So Stanley Doren: says, shoot it, shoot it. So I had the raincoat. I put the raincoat on, but Audrey was a model in that thing and she just got out there and got this dress soaking wet, and we used it in the picture, which

was a good effect really.

Q: It was marvelous. ?

Astaire: She was good.

Q: ?

Astaire: Yes, I thought it was very good. I loved a lot of the picture. I thought it was fine.

Q: ?

Astaire: Yes, I did. Actually, you know, I gave-- Stanley Donen ^{did} was the first all-director picture that he /was done with me, which was ROYAL WEDDING. I mean, I didn't give it to him, but I suggested he should do it. I'd love to have him do it, or something. So I know him pretty well. Because he had come over with Gene Kelly a lot and he'd been I think assistant on a couple of pictures. Not assistant director. Yes, I guess he was. He was choreographer for a while too.

Q: Yes. He was ON THE TOWN, of course. "Singing in the Rain".

Astaire: That's right. That's right.

Q: He wasn't a choreographer when you worked with him, was he?

Astaire: No. No, but he would always be ready to help on things. There's a choreographer on FUNNY FACE-- who was it?

Q: SILK STOCKINGS I liked very much. A musical version of--

a reworking of NINOTCHKA.

Astaire: Yes. I liked the picture really, more than I think the public did. You know, it played at the Music Hall in New York for a long run and got a very good play. But I think the studio kind of expected to have a great big bonanza with it and they just didn't have it. It's a picture that probably made good or made some money, but you look a little too far sometimes. These studios, they always want a blockbuster and then are disappointed to a certain extent, I think.

But Mamoulian was the director of that and I remember I enjoyed working with him. Pan was on that. There were some things in it I would like to have not done. I did a couple of things that annoyed me a little bit.

Q: A couple of scenes you didn't like?

Astaire: Well, I didn't like the way I sang one of the songs. "Ritz Rollin' Rock"-- I hated the way I did it. I thought the dance was good, but I didn't like the way I sang it. It just makes you shudder when you see something like that. You know-- oh, why did I do that?

This happened also a couple of times in-- that kind of thing happened a couple of times in FUNNY FACE. I had some good things that I thought worked out well in that. The bullfight dance with my raincoat and that kind of-- very complicated, very tricky, and it worked out fine.

And then I saw a couple of scenes that I thought I looked awful,

and I hated what I did. Well, maybe no one else paid that much attention or something. But you get that awful shock every once in a while. You say, oh, my God, I can't see this picture again now, because if I have to see that, I'll-- so I never look at it now. It's on the air every now and then. I never see it.

Q: Cyd Charisse was very tall, wasn't she?

Astaire: Not too tall. I worked quite comfortably with her. She's kind of strong, and when she comes at you, you know she's coming at you. You know. She's a beautiful girl and a wonderful dancer. My goodness, she can dance.

Q: Very athletic?

Astaire: Yes. But I had a couple of things where I had to lift her and catch her and do things and it worked out. It just shows that you can do things. I'm not too good a lifter of women. You know, dancing. What do you call? Ballet type of lifts and things. But I had one thing where she was up on kind of a platform and she had to leap down into my arms. And Pan was the choreographer on that, and if it hadn't been for Pan, I don't think I ever would have done it. He said, oh, you can do it, you can do it, and he showed me kind of a way to do it. And I did it. I got her, and I was so pleased. He always used to beat me down and get me to do something that I thought I couldn't do, which I was grateful for.

Q: And the main force of Cyd Charisse must have been quite powerful.

Astaire: Well, yes. You know, she's not a big, gross girl or

anything like that, but she is bigger than other girls that I had worked with. She was a bit stronger and she just was a very strong dancer, you know. It's hard to describe that.

Q: Again going out of sequence, I did want to mention THE BAND WAGON, which was skipped over earlier. Because it seemed to me, looking through a list of numbers, and they all seemed to be in the stage show of BAND WAGON. Many of them, anyway.

Astaire: It had nothing to do with the stage show of BAND WAGON actually, except the title. It was nothing like that, and THE BAND WAGON was a pure review. Just one sketch and numbers and things after another.

THE BAND WAGON I thought was one of the better musicals that had ever been made, and it got awfully good notices and had a long run in New York. I think the Music Hall did very well with it. I think all those things-- I remember, there were some good dance numbers in that, and Jack Buchanan, of course, was a friend of mine, who I first met when I went to England years ago, and he was one of the raging successes of the London stage at that time. And he was in a thing called BATTLING BUTLER, and I always admired him a lot. And finally, as years go by-- I mean, here he is, he's over there doing a picture that I'm in, which I really got a kick out of working with him. And he wasn't well at that time either, and he didn't last much long after that, you know.

Q: Yes, I saw it last week, and it was a marvelous movie, but he looked very unwell throughout.

Astaire: Yes. Well, he wasn't well. Well, Jack is a bit older than we know at the time. I think he's a good bit older than I am. And that's gettin' pretty old, you know. (LAUGHTER) But that was then. That was done like-- what? Was it ten years ago? When did we do that?

Q: Yes. Late forties.

Astaire: Late forties. Was it twenty? Wow! Well, I think Jack must have been probably-- let's see, Jack must have been sixty then. At that point-- what was it, forties? See, I would have been forty-- was it '48?

Q: '49.

Astaire: '49. Well, I was about fifty years old then. But I was considerably healthier than he was, of course, and I still am. Thank goodness. At seventy-two, which I now am. I keep thinking that Jack could easily have been even older than ten years older, because when I first went to England and saw him, I was only probably-- at that point, I was probably only twenty something. And he was probably pretty close to fifteen years older than I am, so maybe he was about sixty-five then. I know I tired him out by doing one dance number we did together. And he got pretty tired and I got worried about him. But we had a good time though, and the show worked out well.

Q: It seemed to be based on the kind of insane productions, that sometimes everything went appropriately awry and was very pretentious.

Astaire: Yes. Yes. Well, Minelli, of course, he could do that. He knows how to do that. We had some wild things in there. That shooting. Oh, there are many instances that happened during that show, because Minelli was amusing to work with. I'll always remember one thing. There was a comedy woman doing a kind of a bit part in the scene with me, in the amusement center, where I did a shoeshine number. This woman was in one of the segments of that, and she was a big, tall character woman, and he was telling her how to do it and she was doing it not quite the way-- and then he kept on telling her. Then she finally said to him, well, if you let me do it once, maybe you'll find out how I can do it. And, of course, she really put him away, you see. He closed up.

That's all he ever said to her. He finally got what she did, and then after it was over he said, you know, the worst of it is, she was absolutely right. Oh, he's terrific.

Q: I remember a wonderful scene in (OFF MIKE)
production spectacularly wrong.

Astaire: Oh, that. Oh, yes. Yes, I remember. Gosh, you know, I got a little mixed up. That was at that-- yes, it was a big show. Oscar Levant was in there too.

Q: It was a huge production. It was a huge one.

Astaire: It was.

Q: FINIAN'S RAINBOW I really think is a magnificent picture. I wonder what you thought about it.

Astaire: Well, I felt about it, I'll tell you that, because I don't think that it ever came off right, you see. I liked it. Doing it was one of the greatest things to do. As I say, I do things because I think I'm going to like them, and I wouldn't have taken it if I didn't know that I wanted to do it, and it was that, the best thing that you can do.

And as we did it and we did it and we did it and so forth and everything, we just loved the whole thing. And then the picture comes out and gets slammed all over the place by various critics, which I'm not saying is wrong. They could easily feel that way about it. I began to say it just didn't work right, that's all.

Now we had a problem with an old vehicle like that, as to whether or not it's going to hold up twenty years ago. I never saw the musical show. I know it was a big hit musical. And it was done a different way. It was done in sort of a stylized way or something, on one set. It wasn't actual scenery or something, which we finally did in the movie. Played it-- in order to make it unbelievably believable, they went to the extent of getting a crazy sliding scene down some mountains in the very first part. Finian arriving with his daughter in America and walking to this place where the gold is supposed to be.

And I thought that didn't work out quite the way they tried to. They did get out of reality with that, but then they go right into reality and it jarred an awful lot of people. And they-- oh, why do they make everything so crummy. Some petty reviewer somewhere-- oh, it looks so crummy, everything looks so crummy.

Well, you're not supposed to look like dressed-up little dolls in this thing. Finian is an Irishman and he was dressed-- I was delighted with what I wore. I wasn't a .
We were very careful about how to get them so as they wouldn't look down, down.

So, anyway-- well, you mentioned you liked it, and a lot of people did. But too many people didn't, and it was held back for a whole year before it was released. That is where I think the mistake was made. And it was made into a hard ticket picture. It never should have been made into a hard ticket road show type picture. See, it was made-- we finished it in the September of whatever year that was, and instead of coming out the following Easter or summer or the following quick release, they waited a whole year, from September into, well, late-- a whole year went by from the time we made it. And by that time, that whole thing that it was written about, which was a story of the black and white situation to a certain extent, had all changed, and a lot of critics took exception to this. Well, it doesn't work that way any more. We're not worried about that. You know.

And you'd get that everywhere. Then every once in a while you'd find somebody who loved it, like you did. I thought it was too long. It didn't have to be too long. And the reason it was long was because they decided to make a hard ticket picture out of it, and in order to do that they have to run two hours and forty minutes or something, with an intermission.

Now if they'd had just a full release of no intermission and

on a regular wide screen-- not Todd-AO. It cost a million dollars or so to make it into Todd-AO. You know, it's just a waste. It would have looked fine as a big screen picture, and not make such a pretentious effort with it. But they just fell in love with it. They thought they had another SOUND OF MUSIC. You know, this is in the wake of the SOUND OF MUSIC. It came with fourteen big special hard ticket movies running at the same time. And after that, there were no hard ticket pictures running any more, or hardly any. I mean, I don't think-- once in a while-- I don't think even-- I guess PATTON was the last one that was-- . See, we just hit the worse luck imaginable with that picture.

I think if we could have gotten twenty minutes out of the picture in the right spots, which could have easily been done, the story would have been different. They would have made money. They haven't made any money with the picture.

Q: Where was it shot?

Astaire: Warner Brothers. Yes, in the back lot, most all the location stuff.

I ran into another sequence. Can I deviate back to another? There was a picture called THE PLEASURE OF HIS COMPANY. We started to shoot that-- whatever year it was, it's ten years ago now, I guess, I don't know. And we got halfway through it and the actors' strike took place. Now, nobody had expected this to happen, naturally. We had to stop in the middle of shooting that. The whole-- everybody-- , the director, and

everybody, the producer, they had another picture to do. They went to Europe and did it. Whatever that was. It had nothing to do with the strike here. They came back a year later to finish the picture we had started before. Now, you can't do that with any-- really, it just doesn't work. Everything changes. And little Debbie Reynolds, who was playing my daughter at that point, had just had a divorce and had married Harry , who has four children. She now has about eight children. And she's coming to play my daughter who's going to be married. Well, the public was just saturated with the news of this thing. It couldn't have done the picture or her any good. I love Debbie, she's a wonderful little actress, but that couldn't do it any good, to put those pieces together. 'Cause that was a vehicle that I really was delighted to do and I wanted to play it at least on the same line that Cyril Ritchard had done it, which was the devil-may-care fellow. He wouldn't care what his ex-wife was.

They had a very pretty wife, named Lilli Palmer, in there for me. She shouldn't have been a pretty wife. She should have been a hawk like she was on the stage. He came back, he didn't want anything to do with her. All he wanted to do was use her. He moves in-- as you know what the plot was. He moves in the house and he takes over and he does all these things, which was funny.

But they wanted to warm this picture up. They got a very pretty lady like Lilli, for me to come back and wish that I had never done all these things. And I looked with longing eyes, wishing that my whole family life had been different. Which killed the whole piece.

It took all the sophistication out of it. Everything. You see what I mean? In that picture. While it ran at the Music Hall and did all right and everything and certain people thought it was okay, it wasn't the picture that we started out to do.

Anyway, I don't know what-- well, you've got a whole-- I don't know what you've got here. You've got a production. You can probably use about four minutes in the whole piece, can't you?

Q: ON THE BEACH, of course, was quite a departure?

Astaire: Oh, I loved that. I loved doing that. And that was another one that didn't work quite out. You see, these

..

Are you on?

Q: Yes. Do you want to go off?

Astaire: No, I loved ON THE BEACH. These are some of the most thrilling moments I've had in my career, because working with Stanley Kramer meant an awful lot to me, and he wanted me so much for that thing, and I think I came off okay in it.

Again, the picture did not get where everybody wished it would get. I'm not the one who knows why, but for some reason or other some people hated it. It may have been too long, one of those things. Somebody said, oh, but it was so long and drawn out. Well, maybe it was. I don't know. That's not my game. At that particular point, it wasn't my fault, or anything that I could do.

ON THE BEACH was one of my favorite things of all time, as I've

said. I love dramatic work. I wish I could do it. I don't think I do it too great, and it's not easy when you get to an age like mine to find roles that are worth doing. I mean, unless you want to do some small cameo here or there, and I don't really like that.

To do a real good dramatic role with Stanley Kramer was something that I was really deeply rewarded about, because-- and Greg Peck, of course, was in it. I had a great time working with Greg.

Well, I've had an awful lot of great successes and I had some disappointments, that I suppose are only in line. But you don't understand why you get them, because it seems so-- I thought that would be something that at least would be a very big hit picture. I didn't know how good I'd be in it, or make in it, but I thought that picture would be a big hit and it wasn't.

Q: Did you like your visit to Australia?

Astaire: Oh, I did. Three months in Melbourne, I should say I did. Very, very interesting. That's like a dream. I mean, I loved it. I just did a picture called-- recently, a couple of years ago, in Italy, called MIDAS RUN, which never got off the ground. It sort of ran a week here and a week there and I had a ball making it. I played a Secret Service agent in Her Majesty's Service. You never saw that picture, I don't think?

Q: No.

Astaire: Well, the picture was messed up. It wasn't at all what we started out to do. And I'm not going to blame it--

Q: Do you see Ginger Rogers nowadays at all?

Astaire: I haven't seen her-- I did see her a few months ago. She was at a restaurant here and we talked. She's a good gal.

Q: Thank you very much.

Astaire: Thank you.

INDEX

Berlin, Irving 1-2,
 Berman, Pandro 14-15
 Bremer, Lucille 25, 28
 Buchanan, Jack 36-37

 Castle, Irene 17-19
 Charisse, Cyd 25, 36-36
 Crawford, Joan 9

 Donan, Stanley 8, 32-33

 Freed, Arthur 8, 25-26
 Freeland, Thornton 16

 Gable, Clark 9-10
 Garland, Judy 20-22

 Hayworth, Rita 5, 28-29
 Hepburn, Audrey 30-33

 Kramer, Stanley 43-44

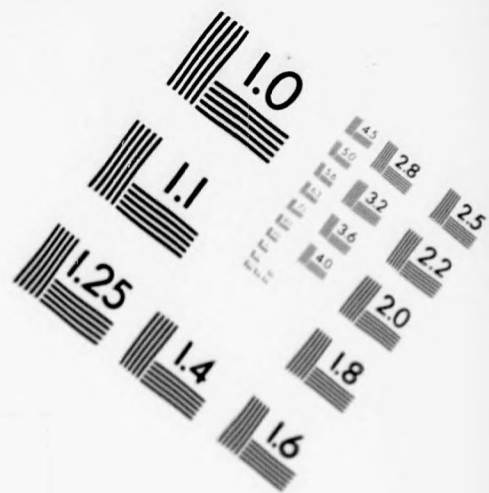
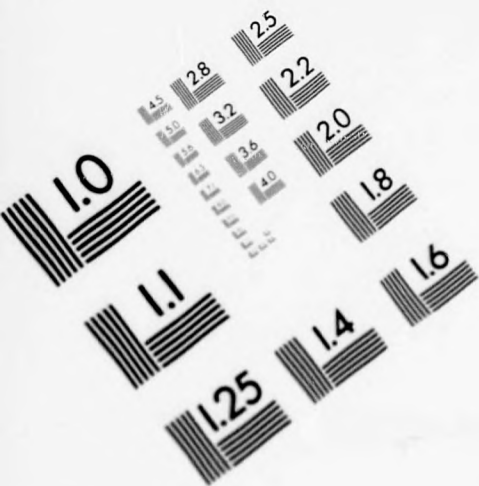
 Minelli, Vincent 26, 38

 Pan, Hermes 3-5, 8, 34-35

 Reynolds, Debbie 42

 Rogers, Ginger 4-5, 9-13, 22-23, 45

 Sandrich, Mark 14-15



24:1

