

Nicholas Emme

# The Reality of Illusion: Self-Reflexivity in *Show Girl in Hollywood* (1930)

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## Abstract

This article explores the little-seen 1930 Warner Bros. film *Show Girl in Hollywood* as an early example of self-reflexive sound cinema, a behind-the-scenes musical portraying Hollywood through the distortions of fictional storytelling and studio gimmickry. Combining archival research with textual analysis, the article details the film's original intentions as an A-production vehicle for the studio's early sound-era star, Alice White, and its promise to hold up a mirror to Hollywood show business, and compares those intentions to the results: in some cases predictable and trite, in others providing striking insights into early studio system filmmaking. As the movie attempts to show everyday Hollywood life as well as actual film production, it simultaneously and unwittingly documents the logic and motivations of the nascent studio era. White and her film may have been consigned to the periphery of American film history, but their convergence created a compelling document of early sound production as well as the possibilities, limitations, and unintentional revelations of self-reflexive studio-era filmmaking.

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“The silencing of the camera and the introduction of directional mikes combined with this simple tool [the boom] to produce high-quality vocal recording. But like other film technology, the boom did not instantly replace its predecessors. ... *Show Girl in Hollywood* (1930) discloses in its studio shots that the mikes were still hanging from the soundstage rafters.” – Donald Crafton<sup>1</sup>

In 1946, Warner Bros. released the short film *Okay for Sound*, a documentary celebrating the advent of sound twenty years earlier and its rapid dominance of the industry. The short contains clips from famous early Warner Bros. sound films like *Don Juan* (1926) along with documentary footage showing the sound filmmaking process as it had evolved into the 1940s. A conspicuous omission in this celebration of sound filmmaking is *Show Girl in Hollywood*, a 1930 Warner Bros. sound film produced more than fifteen years earlier, just four years after *Don Juan*. An odd hybrid of traditional narrative film with pseudo-

documentary footage, *Show Girl in Hollywood* attempts to give audiences a behind-the-scenes peek at Hollywood, and in the process even show how sound films were made in 1930, most notably in a musical sequence midway through the film that demonstrates sound film production.

Donald Crafton mentions the sequence in *The Talkies*, his seminal book on the early sound era, which is excerpted in the quote at the beginning of this essay. The sequence takes place midway through the film. After a series of comic mishaps, the film's protagonist, Dixie Dugan (Alice White), has landed the lead role in a fictional Hollywood musical, *Rainbow Girl*. In the sequence Crafton mentions, we see Dixie record the film's main musical number, “I've Got My Eye on You.” In an interesting throwback to the silent era for a sound film, a title card explains to the movie audience what is happening (the filming of a musical number) before the movie opens on a studio set. The sequence is a little bit like the more famous recording sequence in *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), without the comic interruptions. With the real camera eye placed behind the action we see not only the performers, including White flanked

by an army of dancers, but the crew and their equipment, including the director, cameramen, and those hanging mikes that Crafton mentions. Although the musical number itself is one of *Show Girl in Hollywood's* highlights, the sequence is equally fixated on the behind-the-scenes action, as it takes great pains to demonstrate, for example, a cameraman in his soundproof booth filming the scene, and reverse-angle shots of the director and other off-camera onlookers. The sequence even cuts to technicians working farther out of view, including a Vitaphone technician carefully monitoring Warner Bros.'s proprietary sound-on-disc recording process.

Important to this discussion, Crafton's brief analysis falls prey to *Show Girl in Hollywood's* often confusing film-within-a-film construction, demonstrating the need for skepticism and careful research when analyzing it. *Show Girl in Hollywood*, as a narrative film, is problematic as a document. As stated above, the props in the scene, the fake cameras and fake director, seem to be merely props, but it's hard to say for sure in every instance. What's certain is that Crafton, by using the sequence's hanging mikes to elicit sound practices of the period, conflates the filming of a staged sequence with the filming of a sequence. Because of the nature of the picture, that's easy to do, yet one is wise to keep in mind that what we are watching is merely a reenactment. We are not looking at the actual filming of a scene. And yet, some parts of it are, in a sense, "real": the performers, for example. Such an acknowledgment raises questions about the mechanical props as well. It's not that Crafton is wrong; those hanging mikes might in fact have been live. But we must also acknowledge that they might have been hanging there for the purpose of looking like they were. Or were they doing double duty, sometimes recording and sometimes not?

As an early talkie and self-described Hollywood exposé, *Show Girl in Hollywood* is a particularly interesting case study of cinematic authenticity and realism. Among the many questions it raises is whether a narrative film can ever be trusted as document, especially of an emergent industry already thoroughly practiced in the art of deception. *Show Girl in Hollywood*, a sequel, isn't just a behind-the-scenes document, but one at the dawn of the era it hoped to document.

Serendipitously, it is a self-reflexive sound film released the year many film scholars, including Crafton, Douglas Gomery, and Richard Jewell among others, designate as the beginning of the sound era, with the consolidation of the major and minor studios and the industry-wide conversion to sound. Its placement and construction makes the film both rewarding and risky as a document for studying the period. "Hollywood exposed" is the way *Show Girl in Hollywood's* pressbook heralded its release,<sup>2</sup> and it is worth investigating the surprising achievements and inevitable fissures between that promise and the results.

## I.

*Show Girl in Hollywood* billed itself as cinematic tourism of Hollywood filmmaking. Important to this investigation is determining not only how effectively this undertaking was fulfilled, but also how practical and possible it was. This work is particularly important for the sequence Crafton mentions, but also for the film's other attempts to reveal the world of Hollywood in the sound era, a nascent industry still so mysterious and exciting to its patrons. *Show Girl in Hollywood* promises not only production scenes like the musical sequence noted by Crafton, but scenes of Hollywood's ancillary mechanisms, including its facilities, businessmen, and minor functionaries, and of course its stars—actors playing both fictional characters and staged versions of themselves. The movie even contains a brief tourist scene of Hollywood and a



The filming of a filming in *Show Girl in Hollywood*: A reverse-angle shot shows the fictional crew of the fictional film *Rainbow Girl* observing the action during the production.

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Hanging mikes are part of scene in *Show Girl in Hollywood*'s documentary-like demonstration of filmmaking. The scene's construction makes it difficult to know whether some components within the frame, besides the performers dancing on stage, are more than merely props.

mock movie premiere. This impulse to make films about Hollywood continues well into our own era; it can be seen in many better-known films, all of which recall *Show Girl in Hollywood*, from *Singin' in the Rain* to *The Day of the Locust* (1975) to *The Aviator* (2004). And although earlier sound films can be found with similar plots and ideas, such as Paramount's *Glorifying the American Girl* (1929), *Show Girl in Hollywood* is a much more magnified iteration, straining to maximize its behind-the-scenes appeal.

The film's pressbook reveals that the studio pushed the film's gimmick hard to exhibitors and the press, and by extension the public, with much hyperbole. Some of its headlines: "Hollywood Holds Mirror Up to Its Own Life"; "Career of Alice White Like That of Dixie Dugan"; "Alice White as Dixie Dugan Just 'Acted Natural.'" A column titled "Real Stuff" claimed the production,

under director Mervyn LeRoy, allowed various studio employees, from actors to directors to laborers, to accidentally walk on the set—without "getting the customary bawling out." Regardless of whether any of this was true, for page after page the studio emphasized that realism and even reality were at stake, that the film would not only provide a typical story of an ingénue trying to make it as an actress in Hollywood, and not only enhance that story with production techniques aimed at capturing Hollywood behind-the-scenes, but actually intermingle staged fiction with unscripted reality.

Such promises can strike the contemporary observer as far-fetched, if not impossible, not to mention against the interests of both studio and film. A typical example is the pressbook claim about unwitting Warner Bros. stars "ambushed" by LeRoy's cameramen in order to capture them

with their guard down, a ludicrous exaggeration. Ambushing a star with a camera without their prior knowledge would have led to some awkward moments in the film, likely breaking the fourth wall. There are no such scenes. There are, however, cameos of Warner Bros. stars, but they are obviously scripted, showing them arriving at the premiere of *Rainbow Girl*, *Show Girl in Hollywood's* fictional film-within-a-film that is created in part during the sequence mentioned by Crafton. The pressbook also finds time to make less grandiose promises that are just as perplexing, such as its claim about “real” sets. The use of Mervyn LeRoy’s office is particularly humorous. In contrast to the ambushed stars, the question here is whether and why audiences would care. It’s doubtful anyone not working at the studio, in other words almost the entirety of the audience, would be able to recognize LeRoy’s desk. But such is the runaway enthusiasm in the film’s promotional efforts.

In another particularly striking pressbook column, “Here We Go At Last Behind the Scenes of Moviedom,” LeRoy calls *Show Girl in Hollywood* “the first [film] that combines with a realistic and human love story an accurate picture of what goes on in the studios.”<sup>3</sup> LeRoy’s later remarks within the same column, recorded, unlike the above, in quotes, are particularly noteworthy:

So far most of the stories with a film studio background have been too burlesque. I think that people are seriously interested in how movies are made, so, while we poke a great deal of fun at famous personalities in the business, we are careful in ‘Show Girl in Hollywood’ to show the making of films and the life of the people accurately. We know it better than any other life; naturally we can portray it realistically.

“Accurately” and “realistically” are problematic adverbs. They suggest actuality or even reality. But accuracy and realism mean different things, and their transition in LeRoy’s commentary, though not necessarily intended to deceive, performs a sleight of words, likely too fast for the casual reader to register. LeRoy’s commentary also has less to do with the finished product than promotional hype. *Show Girl in Hollywood* is mostly a work

of fantasy and entertainment, although, as I will demonstrate later in the essay, accuracy and realism do make rare and surprising appearances.

## II.

One important index of accuracy and realism in *Show Girl in Hollywood* is its star, Alice White. Contrary to studio publicity, her career was not like that of Dixie Dugan. Born in Paterson, New Jersey, on August 26, 1906,<sup>4</sup> White began working in Hollywood in 1926, not as a showgirl, but a script girl.<sup>5</sup> Her good looks got her into just as much trouble, however, as Grace Thornley reported in a December 1929 profile in *Photoplay*. Thornley noted that, during White’s time working at the Pickford Studio, “Mrs. Pickford never liked her. ‘The girl doesn’t wear enough clothes,’ America’s Sweetheart objected. ‘Bosses’ wives had her fired several times.’”<sup>6</sup> However, White’s presence on sets also resulted in various screen tests, which led to some minor roles and a contract with First National Pictures (soon after acquired by Warner Bros.). The studio’s decision to loan her to Paramount for its silent adaptation of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1928) can be argued as White’s big break.<sup>7</sup> Afterward she was starring in pictures for First National, including the original *Show Girl* (1928), a silent-sound hybrid that also followed the adventures of Dixie Dugan, one of a few important roles during that year that helped turn White into a box-office star.

Much like the fictional character Peppy Miller in the recent Oscar-winning silent film *The Artist* (2011), Alice White’s career trajectory is inextricably linked to the advent of sound. One could say it blossomed with the technology. Her initial minor roles were in silent films, leading to starring roles in silent-sound hybrids and eventually all-talking, all-singing, all-dancing musicals that placed her name above the title. Had *Show Girl in Hollywood's* narrative been similar to *The Artist*, Dixie Dugan’s career *would* have resembled Alice White’s, and *Show Girl in Hollywood* might have done better with its promises to expose Hollywood. And by extension, *The Artist*, despite its surprising Oscar wins, might have been less of a fantasy had its makers studied White. Her embodiment of the flapper aesthetic and her career’s rise with sound films, along with her mediocre talent for singing and dancing, suggest that audiences were more impressed by new technology and its association with youth and modernity, and simply associated White with them.

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In LeRoy's autobiography *Mervyn LeRoy: Take One*, he recalled working with White on First National Pictures' 1928 silent comedy *Harold Teen*, remembering her as:

hard to direct, primarily because she was never much of an actress. Poor Alice. You had to tell her everything you wanted her to do, and then go out and practically do it for her. There was a dance scene in the picture, and I wound up waving a handkerchief at her when I wanted her to move one arm or the other. She couldn't remember her movements without that off-camera semaphore system, but she tried hard.<sup>8</sup>

A production photo of LeRoy and White in LeRoy's autobiography working together on *Harold Teen* underscores LeRoy's memory with a caption that reads, "LeRoy (center) demonstrates action for Alice White and Arthur Lake in *Harold Teen*."<sup>9</sup> The "action" being demonstrated is LeRoy showing White how to dunk her pastry into her coffee.

While White might not have been a great actress, an article by Cecil Beaton in a 1931 issue of *Vogue* commented, in hindsight of her career, "her goo-goo eyes and blondined hair" was once "the personification of all for which Hollywood" stood.<sup>10</sup> Warner Bros. promoted her as "America's Girl Friend," and she was known as the studio's blonde competition to Paramount's Clara Bow. Dorothy Manners claimed as much in the August 1929 issue of *Motion Picture Classic*: "Alice is blonde because Clara Bow is a henna head. Running as they are, neck and neck, for whoopee popularity, their respective studios thought it best to vary them as much as possible." In reality there was little rivalry, for it is well known that Bow's career was seriously damaged by her handling in sound pictures while Beaton's opinion that White was the personification of the talkie, would be proved by one hit after another from 1928 to 1930. White's films never lost money. Many were big box office, especially when she was teamed with LeRoy (six times), notably for 1929's *Broadway Babies*, both White and LeRoy's first all-talkie, a musical and, like so many others of the period, a backstage picture about a nightclub singer trying to make it in show business.

It's difficult to extract White's career and study it apart from sound technology and the intense popularity of the musical during the early days of sound. In *Broadway Babies*, for example, White's performance, especially her singing and dancing, is astoundingly ordinary, at times embarrassing, and yet the film netted from domestic and foreign receipts an astonishing \$647,000 after a negative cost of \$142,000.<sup>11</sup> Musicals like *Broadway Babies* were at that time intensely popular, comparable to today's super-hero-themed tent-pole pictures. Warner Bros. produced two other significant Technicolor musicals in 1929: *On with the Show*, an all-star behemoth White sang in that earned approximately \$1,901,000 after a negative cost of \$493,000; and *Gold Diggers of Broadway*, a so-called "lost film" highlighted on Turner Classic Movies' *Fragments* series in 2011, which earned an even more astounding \$3,411,000 after a negative cost of \$532,000. With such returns in mind, Warner Bros. quickly went into production on *Show Girl in Hollywood* in late 1929.

It's reasonable to assume that the studio saw technology as the key to the success of their recent musicals. Sound, color, and larger-than-life plots were all part of their formula. Warner Bros. put the best of everything they had behind *Show Girl in Hollywood*. The cinematographer was Sol Polito, who had lensed the original *Show Girl* and *Broadway Babies*, and would go on to film *42nd Street* (1933), *Gold Diggers of 1933*, *The*



A wide angle shot shows the entire production of "I've Got My Eye on You," a musical number in *Show Girl in Hollywood*'s fictional film-within-a-film *Rainbow Girl*. Viewers must remember that there was also a filmmaking crew behind the one we see.

*Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938), and *Sergeant York* (1941). Polito shot the musical sequence for *Rainbow Girl* in two-strip Technicolor, although the color version of the scene is considered lost. The musical numbers were by the then well-known songwriting team Bud Green and Sammy Stept. And of course LeRoy was brought back to direct; he was the magician Warner Bros. hoped would conjure the same box-office magic of *Broadway Babes*. One can easily imagine the brass at Warner Bros. deciding that adding a layer of behind-the-scenes realism would be as profitable, and as easy, as adding a layer of color.

### III.

The implementation of reality did not go as smoothly as hoped in *Show Girl in Hollywood*. The result feels more like a stitched together series of ideas than a seamless story—ideas that include faux-documentary interludes as well as narrative concepts meant to convey the real lives of stars and would-be stars. Dixie's story begins with a performance at a New York nightclub, where she's spotted and sweet-talked by a rakish movie producer who invites her to Hollywood. Her boyfriend, stage-writer Jimmy Doyle (Jack Mulhall), threatens never to speak to her again if she goes through with her plans. Dixie's response is quaint today, but seems meant as a sly product placement: "But I'll be speaking to you, and all the rest of the world, on the Vitaphone." (As stated earlier, the Vitaphone was Warner Bros.'s sound technology.) Dixie's adventure to Hollywood results in a sometimes clumsily arranged medley of scenes, including more self-advertising for the studio, screwball comedy, and brief moments of genuine pathos as the film makes intermittent attempts to convey what it might be like for a showgirl like Dixie navigating Hollywood. Moments of realism are scarce, but moments of camp are plenty.

Following Dixie's nightclub announcement about the Vitaphone, the movie segues into a Hollywood bus tour, a sequence combining studio processing shots and footage of Hollywood landmarks like the Roosevelt Hotel. At the end of the tour (we don't know if Dixie was on it), Dixie walks up to the main door

of the Superb Picture Corporation. Its logo resembles Warner Bros.'s, but evidently it isn't superb enough to afford a gate to stop her. Letting herself in, Dixie quickly talks her way into the office of the studio's production chief. She demands the contract promised in New York, but the studio boss explains that she's just one of many girls given many such empty promises. He even shows her a room next to his office, filled with hopeful-looking girls who resemble Dixie, one of the few moments when the film delivers self-reflexive commentary, if not the reality of Hollywood.

Temporarily put off, Dixie runs into Donna Harris (Blanche Sweet), a famous star from the silent era who offers to give her a ride. Harris takes Dixie to her palatial home, where she provides the film's most candid, self-reflexive commentary. She admits that most of the rooms in her mansion are empty, and that despite her success she's already washed up in a career that values youth above all else. "When you're thirty-two," she tells Dixie, "you're older than those hills out there." To emphasize her point, Harris launches into a musical number, "There's a Tear for Every Smile in Hollywood," which is quite a depressing song for a musical comedy about making it in Hollywood, with lyrics describing the ephemeral nature of stardom. It would be comically maudlin if it were not so true to life. Sweet, like the fictional Harris, once ranked among the biggest of the silent era stars. *Show Girl in Hollywood's* pressbook billed the role as her comeback, emphasizing it as the first opportunity for her fans to hear her sing. Ironic that, as she would be singing about her real life, making the song extremely poignant. It was also prescient, stating in 1930 what film scholars would later conclude about the period. In his book *The Golden Age of Cinema*, Rick Jewell has a section titled "The Star as Business Commodity," where he uses Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks as examples of silent-era stars whose age caught up with them more than sound. Pickford and Fairbanks, Jewell writes, "found it imperative but impossible to alter their screen personas. ... With such salutary examples to learn from, studio executives recognized that a premium would always be

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placed on youth, and therefore were constantly on the lookout for fresh personalities who might be molded into stars."<sup>12</sup> These are the exact sentiments, set to music, in Sweet's song.

### IV.

*Show Girl in Hollywood* tries to cram every frame of its seventy-seven minutes with Hollywood moments, as we have seen, with varying results. But no attempt is as interesting as the filming of "I've Got My Eye on You," the musical number mentioned by Crafton that Dixie stars in for the fictional *Rainbow Girl*. Due in part to its construction during the culminating moment of sound filmmaking, there is no other sequence quite like it in film history. Close analysis reveals both impressive special-effects and rewarding theoretical implications, as wide-ranging as they are enigmatic.

The sequence takes place about halfway through the picture. After a series of comical Hollywood mishaps, Dixie secures a starring role in *Rainbow Girl*, and this sequence is the film's big musical production, a number reminiscent of the introduction to *Gold Diggers of 1933* (also directed by LeRoy). Because this is a scene about the production of a film scene (not, as in *Gold Diggers*, the production of a stage number), the relationship between production and production-within-a-production is quite different and much more complicated. As noted earlier, the scene provides *Show Girl in Hollywood* one of the big musical numbers required by the genre. As part of the film's behind-the-scenes construction, it also allows the audience to see one being made, or at least an approximation. Just as we might see a stage production being performed in a film like *Gold Diggers*, we witness something similar here. The differences, however, are significant, most notably the doubling of the filmmaking apparatus. One must always bear in mind that there are two sets of information, within the frame and beyond it, and that the one we can see is always suspect. We see cameras, directors, cast, crew, and equipment. Most are obviously actors and props, but some, like Crafton's hanging mikes, are more difficult to interpret. Then there are the doubles outside the frame that we can't see, the real cast, crew, and, of course, more equipment. The equipment, especially the sound equipment, is the trickiest piece of the puzzle.

While Crafton isn't necessarily wrong about his observation of the hanging mikes, his assessment doesn't acknowledge several complications and uncertainties. There are mikes on screen just as there are cameras. We know the cameras we can see are not real, in the sense that they are not filming what we are watching. What about the mikes? Are they recording what we are hearing? Are any of the components in the frame of the off-screen cameras real in that sense? Crafton, in assessing the hanging mikes, seems to assume that they, unlike the prop cameras and prop director, are not only part of the scene but functioning components. But it is also possible that the mikes are merely props, that just as there is an invisible camera behind the camera on the screen, there are invisible mikes behind the visible ones. And perhaps they are of a different sort.

In fact, we know at the very least that the mikes on screen are not the only mikes, for the simple reason that Alice White is not singing into them. On October 28, 1929, when production notes were being made and re-writes assembled for *Show Girl in Hollywood's* shooting script,<sup>13</sup> Warner Bros. studio manager Hal B. Wallis sent the studio's attorney Roy Obringer a somewhat anxious-sounding memo inquiring about the legality of voice-doubling White.<sup>14</sup> Voice-doubling is an early sound recording technique for film where a performer out of camera range sings as the filmed actress lip-synchs. Obringer responded in the affirmative (while warning Wallis that his idea for dubbing White on records would not fly, because it would be "a fraud upon the public"),<sup>15</sup> which means the singer of "I've Got My Eye on You" was not Alice White. Even though audiences so far had been willing to overlook White's mediocre performing abilities, *Show Girl in Hollywood's* producers were not taking any chances. White had been allowed to do her own singing in previous musicals, but not this time, curiously for a film about taking audiences into the filmmaking process.

The sequence contains other footage remarkable for a film released in early 1930, including a rare scene featuring technicians carefully capturing Dixie's performance on the Vitaphone sound-on-disc recording process. But, like the hanging mikes, we have to wonder whether this is actual footage of the actual technicians recording the sound information simultaneous to the recording of the image. It is edited together to appear so. It gives the illusion the sequence is all one take, but common sense suggests such a feat



Alice White as Dixie Dugan steps in synch with a stage full of dancers in *Show Girl in Hollywood's* fictional filming sequence. The movie attempted to reveal how films were made, as in this shot of a cameraman and his camera in their soundproof booth, demonstrating sound-film production techniques of 1929, the year the film was produced.

would be impossible in 1930, a guess that research confirms, although some scholars studying the film have been fooled into assuming otherwise.<sup>16</sup>

For most films such details would escape inquiry. Cross-cutting had been an established practice for decades. *Show Girl in Hollywood* is unusual because of its placement in 1930 and its attempt to document the sound filmmaking process. While all films create the illusion that what the audience is seeing is actually taking place, *Show Girl in Hollywood* arguably creates a space containing questions about the ability to recreate reality, about authenticity and “truth” within a cinematic document. Studying the film shows such things exist, insofar as they can be discovered, almost exclusively in the documentation of a film’s production, not ever on the screen. Despite Crafton’s assertion, there’s no telling what *Show Girl in Hollywood* discloses. A film promising to reveal the filmmaking process is constructed by that process, labor which is itself operating behind the scenes,

and possibly manipulating what is being documented. It is especially the attempt to get behind the camera (or behind the mikes) that creates this elusive, ephemeral space: any filmmaking process being filmed for a fictional, narrative film is suspect. It is choreographed and fabricated, an illusion, or, at best, reality wrought from illusion. The unique construction of *Show Girl in Hollywood's* filming sequence is particularly problematic. It’s impossible to tell from the film itself whether what we are seeing is real or staged, or, as in the mikes, staged and yet real. The filming of anything, even another production, indicates the production filming it and another hidden point of view—another camera, another crew, another level of carefully prepared production—that would theoretically extend into infinity with every attempt to document the documentation. Despite its scenes of a film crew filming a scene, *Show Girl in Hollywood* suggests that a narrative film can never truly get behind the camera.

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### End Notes

1 Donald Crafton, *The Talkies: American Cinema's Transition to Sound, 1926-1931* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 242, 244.

2 First National Pictures and Vitaphone pressbook for *Show Girl in Hollywood*, Wisconsin Center for Film and Research Cinema Pressbooks Guide, Microfilm, Reel 15, Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles, CA. All future reference to promotional materials regarding *Show Girl in Hollywood* should be assumed to be cited same, unless otherwise noted.

3 Buster Keaton's first sound film deserves mention here, for even though it was a silent-sound hybrid, it was a behind-the-scenes look at Hollywood with a similar plot to *Show Girl in Hollywood*, released less than one month previous. Hubbard Keavy, "Movie Making Subject for Films Now: Two Stories with Studios as Locales Ready, Two Others Being Prepared for Release Alice White and Buster Keaton Have Leads in Films Concerning the Players," *The Sun (1837-1985)*, March 30, 1930, sec. MR2. (The article calls the picture *On the Set*, suggesting the possibility the title was later changed. *Free and Easy* is title as recorded in the AFI Catalog.)

4 Leonard Greenwood, "First Noticed by Charlie Chaplin: Former Actress Alice White Dies," *Los Angeles Times*, February 26, 1983, C18.

5 Core Collection, Alice White Clipping File, Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles, CA.

6 Core Collection 51, USC Cinematic Arts Library, Los Angeles, CA.

7 Although I was unable to discover exactly how much *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* produced for Paramount and thereby confirm a correlation between box office and the film's effect on White's career, her screen credits and newspaper accounts support the argument that the picture helped make White a star. *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* was released January 1928; *Harold Teen*, White's first starring role for First National, was released just three months later and was followed by a string of hits that included the original *Show Girl*. For commentary a year after *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* was released, see also Mayme Peak, "WHICH WILL BE FAMOUS AND WHICH FORGOTTEN TWO YEARS HENCE?: The New Crop of Baby Stars Has Been Picked by Publicity Crowd at Hollywood-How and Why They Do It-What It Means to Be Chosen One of the Baby Stars and What It Means to Be Overlooked," *Daily Boston Globe* January 20, 1929, B2.

8 Mervyn LeRoy and Richard Kleiner, *Mervyn Le Roy: Take One, by Mervyn LeRoy, as Told to Dick Kleiner, Foreword by Jack L. Warner* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1974), 89-90.

9 Ibid, n. p.

10 Cecil Beaton, "Features: Hollywood Goes Refined," ed. Edna Woolman Chase, *Vogue* 77, no. 12 (1931): 34.

11 William Schaefer Collection, USC Cinematic Arts Library, Los Angeles, CA. From here all reference to profits and losses on Warner Bros.-First National films should be assumed to be cited from the William Schaefer Collection, unless otherwise noted.

12 Richard B. Jewell, *The Golden Age of Cinema: Hollywood, 1929-1945* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 250-51.

13 File #2231, Warner Bros. Archives, Los Angeles, CA.

14 File #2728A, Warner Bros. Archives, Los Angeles, CA.

15 Ibid.

16 In his 1995 book, *A Song in the Dark: The Birth of the Musical Film*, Richard Barrios asserts (whereas Crafton only implies) that the entire scene was done with one take, a dubious claim he supports with "production records for *Show Girl in Hollywood*" found at "USC/WB Archive." The production notes in file 2231 at the USC Warner Archive, however, make no mention of the scene being filmed in one take. Richard Barrios, *A Song in the Dark: The Birth of the Musical Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 221.