

= LeRoy Prinz =

LeRoy Jerome Prinz (July 14 , 1895 ? September 15 , 1983) was an American choreographer , director and producer , who was involved in the production of dozens of motion pictures , mainly for Paramount Pictures and Warner Brothers , from 1929 through 1958 , and also choreographed Broadway musicals . He was nominated three times for the Academy Award for Best Dance Direction in the 1930s , and won the Golden Globe in 1958 .

Among the films whose dances he choreographed were Show Boat (1936) , Yankee Doodle Dandy (1942) , Rhapsody in Blue (1945) , and South Pacific (1958) .

= = Early life and military service = =

LeRoy Jerome Prinz was born in St. Joseph , Missouri . His grandfather was a dancing master , and his father taught ballroom dancing etiquette to young men and women at Prinz 's Academy in St. Joseph . According to one account , he was sent to reform school after chasing his stepmother with a carving knife .

In newspaper profiles , he claimed that after running away from boarding school at the age of 15 , he " hopped a freight " and came to New York City , where , in 1911 , he began a song and dance act , " Prinz and Buck , " with a young black man he met along the way . Later that year , he told interviewers , he went on a ship to Europe as a cabin boy , jumped ship , and traveled around Europe " introducing the American strut step " in return for meals and lodging . In Marseilles he joined the French Foreign Legion , serving as a bugler in Algiers . He also represented a rubber company in St. Louis and Kansas City .

After the outbreak of World War I , he returned to France , was trained as a pilot , and served in the French aviation corps and Captain Eddie Rickenbacker 's 94th Aero Squadron . He was with the 94th from November 1917 to June 1918 , when he switched to the 27th Aero Squadron , where he stayed until November 1918 . At the 27th his duties included working at the Aircraft Acceptance Park test facility at Orly . Prinz subsequently told journalists that he crashed 14 to 18 airplanes , was nicknamed " America 's German Ace " as a result , (he was also called " Crash Ace Prinz) and that he was wounded in the war and carried a silver plate in his head from his last plane crash . In an October 1918 article , war correspondent George Seldes described how Prinz was separated from his flight on his first venture into German territory , and returned home with minor injuries after a perilous journey .

= = Career = =

According to his obituary in the Los Angeles Times , Prinz returned to the U.S. in 1919 and studied theater at Northwestern University . After graduation from Northwestern , the newspaper reported , Prinz returned to France and worked as a choreographer for the Folies Bergère in Paris .

A November 1919 St. Louis Post @-@ Dispatch report states that Prinz was employed in the aeronautical portion of an American Legion show , also featuring actor William S. Hart , that was touring the area . The newspaper gives Prinz 's rank as captain and states that he was a flight partner of Quentin Roosevelt . A Wisconsin newspaper reported in 1921 that Prinz , which it said had " danced with Al Jolson , " was teaching dance at a vacation camp for wounded veterans . The newspaper said that Prinz himself had " fallen 3000 feet " but had recovered .

In various newspaper profiles , Prinz claimed that he worked as a dancer at a bordello in Omaha , as an aviation instructor for the Mexican government , and that he ferried ammunition for the Nicaraguan rebel leader , Augusto César Sandino . He told interviewers that he worked for gangster Jim Colosimo 's restaurant in Chicago , and that he produced stage shows for Al Capone . He claimed in a 1945 New York Times profile that Capone hired him to book entertainment and stage floor shows at eighteen Chicago nightclubs . Prinz left Chicago and worked as a dance director in New York , Florida , Mexico and Cuba . His employers included Earl Carroll , Broadway 's Shubert family , Tex Guinan and Philadelphia bootlegger Boo Hoo Hoff . He choreographed Earl Carroll 's

Vanities of 1930 and other Broadway shows between 1929 and 1933 .

His first employment in films was in 1931 by director Cecil B. DeMille , who employed him as dance director . While filming Cleopatra (1934) , Prinz clashed with DeMille 's niece Agnes de Mille , who was brought in to choreograph dance sequences . According to Agnes deMille 's biographer , her uncle always deferred to the " reliable but pedestrian " Prinz , even after agreeing to his niece 's flamboyant dances in advance . Agnes deMille left the film .

He directed dance sequences for dozens of Paramount Pictures movies between 1933 and 1941 , when he became dance director of Warner Brothers , where he staged all of Warner 's musical sequences for the next sixteen years . He worked in over 150 films , mainly as a choreographer , among them The Desert Song (1929) , Tea for Two (1950) , and The Jazz Singer (1952) , a remake of the first sound movie .

In the 1940s he worked on the first Bing Crosby and Bob Hope " Road " movie , Road to Singapore (1940) , at Paramount . His first major assignment at Warner Brothers was the 1942 George M. Cohan biographical movie Yankee Doodle Dandy , starring James Cagney in the title role . In 1944 he choreographed a " ballet in jive " sequence in the service musical Hollywood Canteen , featuring Broadway dancer Joan McCracken . Prinz played himself directing the sequence in a brief cameo appearance .

McCracken , who came to Hollywood after winning acclaim in the 1943 production of Oklahoma ! , was deeply discouraged by her experiences filming the Hollywood Canteen number and did not like working with Prinz . As a choreographer he made no effort to integrate his dances into specific story lines , or to choreograph specific dance steps . This resulted deep disillusionment for McCracken , whose Oklahoma ! dances were choreographed by Agnes de Mille , since Prinz was not able to support or advance McCracken 's artistic development . However , he gave her latitude to incorporate ballet in her dance routine , and Prinz did not object to her ideas .

Prinz worked again with James Cagney , eight years after Yankee Doodle Dandy , on West Point Story , also starring Virginia Mayo and Doris Day . He ceased working in films after choreographing the Boar 's Tooth Ceremonial dance sequence in the 1958 film adaptation of South Pacific .

Later in life he was owner of his own production company , vice president of an advertising agency , and a producer of benefit programs in Hollywood . He counted among his friends Ronald Reagan , whom he knew from their days working together at Warner Brothers , and he choreographed entertainment at the 1976 Republican National Convention and at several presidential inaugurations . Reagan called him from the White House when Prinz was in the hospital shortly before he died . At the 1976 convention , he came up with the idea of playing " The Star @-@ Spangled Banner " when convention organizers wanted to silence unruly delegates .

Prinz was a " notorious self @-@ promoter " , and told stories about himself that were sometimes dubious . Columnist Michael Coakley recounted in a late @-@ life profile of Prinz that editors of The Saturday Evening Post once were able to verify 90 percent of what they were told by Prinz , who sent them a telegraph saying " That 's great . Don 't believe 50 percent of it myself . " In a Los Angeles Times profile late in life , Prinz ' claimed " at least partial credit " in popularizing the Charleston and rumba , which became popular after appearing in his movies .

= = Awards = =

Prinz was nominated in the long @-@ defunct category of Best Dance Direction during the 1937 Academy Awards , for a Bing Crosby film he choreographed at Paramount , Waikiki Wedding , and was twice nominated in that category for the 1935 films All the King 's Horses and The Big Broadcast of 1936 . He was awarded the Golden Globe for best film choreography in 1958 .

Though known mainly for his work as a dance director on big @-@ budget musicals , he directed a number of mainly short films , one of which , A Boy and His Dog (1946) , won the Academy Award for Best Live Action Short Film .

= = Choreographic style and legacy = =

A New York Times profile said that " his life story reads more like the script of an Errol Flynn adventure " , though the stories he told about himself were often dubious . He was once described as " a feisty little man who always had a cigarette dangling from his lips and looked more like a bartender than a choreographer . "

Prinz was an " idea man " rather than as a choreographer , creating lavish production numbers and using simple steps and dance routines . Jazz dance choreographer Jack Cole has said that Prinz " didn 't know a bloody thing about dancing . " In a 1952 profile , Associated Press Hollywood columnist James Bacon said that Prinz differed from what he described as " sissified " choreographers , that he was " a rough , tough guy , as some little giants of 5 foot 5 are . His language is colorful . " He claimed to have never taken a lesson in his life and , in a reference to his family 's dancing school , that he was a " victim of heredity . "

As a choreographer at Warner Brothers , Prinz had a different approach than Busby Berkeley , whose choreography for early 1930s movies included elaborate production numbers that were photographed using imaginative camera angles , often from above . Berkeley 's numbers " broke the boundaries of the stage , " while Prinz took a completely opposite approach , with the audience never able to forget that it was watching a stage performance . Prinz 's style is evident in the Little Johnny Jones number in Yankee Doodle Dandy , which featured a stationary camera and included features of the stage , such as the orchestra pit , in the dance number . The camera , in effect , became a member of the audience .

In his 1983 study of wartime Hollywood musicals , Allen L. Woll says that with the camera angles not being employed effectively , as they were by Berkeley , " the pedestrian quality of Prinz 's dance numbers is painfully revealed . No matter the picture , no matter the director , Prinz 's dances are invariably the same , static and stage @-@ bound . "

His treatment of dancers was sometimes caustic . Choreographer Hermes Pan recalled in 1972 interview that Prinz " would make some girls hysterical . He loved to have them in tears . And that seemed to be the thing , to swear at the girls and be nasty . "

= = Personal life = =

Prinz was married three times and had a son , LeRoy Prinz , Jr .

= = Selected credits = =

Bolero (1934)
Cleopatra (1934)
The Big Broadcast of 1936 (1935)
Anything Goes (1936)
Show Boat (1936)
The Big Broadcast of 1937 (1936)
Artists & Models (1937)
St. Louis Blues (1939)
Road to Singapore (1940)
Buck Benny Rides Again (1940)
Too Many Girls (1940)
Fiesta (1941 film)
Yankee Doodle Dandy (1942)
Mission to Moscow (1943)
This is the Army (1943)
Thank Your Lucky Stars (1943)
Hollywood Canteen (1944)
Rhapsody in Blue (1945)
Night and Day (1946)
Escape Me Never (1947)

The West Point Story (1950)
The Ten Commandments (1956)
Sayonara (1957)
South Pacific (1958)