

In the summer of 1968, I was hired as a dancer to perform two numbers in the film version of *Hello, Dolly!* starring Barbra Streisand and Walter Matthau. Most of the film had already been shot in Hollywood. The two numbers I was hired to do, “Put on Your Sunday Clothes” and the finale, were shot on location in Garrison, New York and West Point. Forty New York dancers, and at least 2,000 extras, were added to the cast for these shoots. Time did not allow for new costumes to be made. Thus we were fitted from stock wardrobe leftover from previous 20th Century Fox films. The following excerpt, taken from the chapter, “Hello, Barbra!” of *The Wrong Side of the Room: A Life in Music Theater*, recounts the filming of the movie’s finale, which was shot on location at West Point. [*The Wrong Side of the Room: A Life in Music Theater* is available here.](#)

Once “Sunday Clothes” was completed, we moved on to the finale, which meant piling thousands of people into buses and driving us across the Hudson River to West Point every day. I could scarcely believe what I saw when we arrived. They had flown in by helicopter the frame of a full-sized New England-style white wooden church and placed it strategically at the tip of the point. The scene involved a wedding procession, beginning at the top of the hill and ending as Barbra and Walter Matthau entered the church.

I was assigned a partner, and we began learning our little dance steps, which once again required no remarkable technique. I was excited when I learned that we would be positioned in the front row just before the entrance to the church, and therefore very visible to the camera as Barbara and Walter passed us on their procession. The three thousand extras literally cloaked the hill overlooking the point.

The music began to play, Gene Kelly called “take one, action,” the cameras started to roll, and Barbra and Walter made their way slowly down the hill to the church. Just as they passed in front of my partner and me, I heard a screaming voice from up on the hill. “Stop the cameras. Stop the movie this instant.” All action ceased. Everyone was frozen in place as the woman whose voice we heard came storming down from the top of the hill. Who is she? What does she want? Why is she so angry? Everyone looked puzzled.

This particular “she” was famed Broadway and Hollywood costume designer, Irene Sharaff. As we watched her approach the church, she seemed to be heading straight for me and my partner? Is that possible? Yes, she was definitely glaring at us. What could we possibly have done wrong? When she reached us, she gave immediate and irrevocable orders to Gene Kelly, who came to see what the problem was. Pointing accusingly at my partner, she screamed, “Get that ugly dress out of my movie and get it out now. It’s hideous.”

My partner had been fitted in a dress worn by Judy Garland in *The Harvey Girls*, at least according to the label inside the dress. Admittedly, it was one of the most unsightly dresses I had ever seen—a nauseatingly colored brown crepe, covered with turquoise chenille balls. My partner and I were swiftly exiled to what was the equivalent of Siberia—the far reaches of the hill, behind even the extras, where no camera would catch the slightest glimpse of us.