

GINGER ROGERS COLLECTION: COSTUME



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Eight costumes worn by Ginger Rogers and a variety of other garments and related archival resources have been gifted to the Missouri Historic Costume and Textile Collection (MHCTC) within the Department of Textile and Apparel Management (TAM) in the College of Arts and Science. Several of these costumes and archives were previously maintained by Roberta Olden, Rogers' personal assistant from 1977 to 1995. As the steward of much of Rogers' costume and clothing, Olden selected the MHCTC as the permanent home for garments curated over the last two years from Rogers' nightclub revue and stage career. Olden was referred to the MHCTC by Marge Padgitt, founder of the Owens-Rogers House Museum, Rogers' childhood home in Independence, Missouri. Padgitt also gifted three Rogers garments, a nightgown set designed by Rogers, two pairs of gloves, and a variety of magazines and other media from her own curated collection beginning in 2021. The majority of garments and archives in the Ginger Rogers Collection were worn by Rogers during her later career of the 1960s through the 1970s.

“I can never emphasize enough how important clothing was to me.”

- Ginger Rogers, *Ginger Rogers: My Story*, 1991

The importance of fashion to Ginger Rogers's success as a performer cannot be denied. Her Hollywood film costumes by legendary studio designers such as Bernard Newman, Edith Head and Jean Louis became legendary themselves. Many of them, and the dance numbers in which they appeared, later influenced many of Rogers' costume and performance choices in her solo career, particularly those of her late 1970s nightclub revue *The Ginger Rogers Show*. In fact, Rogers herself quoted in her autobiography, “I can never emphasize enough how important clothing was to me.”



HELLO, DOLLY! 1965-67

***Hello, Dolly!* Red and Pink Silk Satin Gown with Beaded and Embroidery Trim and Fringe, Leather Gloves, Bustle, Feather Headdress, Heeled Shoes**

1965-1967

Designer: Freddy Wittop

Gift of Roberta Olden

Ginger Rogers appeared as the lead role in Broadway's long-time smash hit *Hello, Dolly!* from 1965 to 1967. The national tour of the Broadway show stopped in over sixteen cities, with the final curtain call in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1968. At the age of 54, Rogers performed for 1,116 performances as Dolly Levi, all while wearing a corseted satin bodice and skirt heavily weighted by thousands of hand-sewn beads, sequins and fringe.

Designed by Freddy Wittop, the silk satin costume was worn by Rogers in the musical's most notable scene – an evening at Harmonia Gardens - and includes full-length leather gloves, beaded high-heeled shoes, a bustle, and a feather headdress complete with faux hairpiece.



Hello, Dolly! Feather Headdress with Faux Hairpiece
1965-1967
Gift of Roberta Olden



Hello, Dolly! Beaded Silk Shoes
1965-1967
Gift of Roberta Olden



“I sent my measurements to New York so that the turn-of-the-century dresses of velvet brocade and taffeta could be manufactured by the costume designer, Freddy Wittop. The minute I got there, I was to go in for my first fitting. [Opening night] I was wigged, rigged and ready to go on. I hadn’t been on the New York musical stage since *Crazy Girl* [1930]. But the moment the horse-drawn buggy halted in the middle of the stage, and I put down the newspaper that was covering my face, the audience went wild with applause (says she, modestly.) During my run on Broadway in *Dolly*, there had never been an empty seat in the house.”

– Ginger Rogers, *Ginger Rogers: My Story*, 1991

TOP HAT, 1935

The 1935 film *Top Hat* with Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire was the duo's most successful picture and remains the couple's best-known work. In 1990, the film was selected by the Library of Congress for preservation in the United States National Film Registry as being "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant."

In her films of the 1930s, Rogers often collaborated with studio designers on the creation of her film costumes, including Bernard Newman who designed Rogers' infamous blue feather dress in *Top Hat*. As stated in Rogers' 1991 autobiography, when it became time to design the dress for the film, Rogers told designer Newman that she wanted something in the kind of blue found in a Monet painting. "It's funny to be discussing color when you're making a black-and-white film, Rogers confessed, "but the tone had to be harmonious." The resulting gown was exactly as Rogers had envisioned it, complete with \$1,500 worth of ostrich feathers.





TOP HAT, 1935

Astaire recalled how he had seen a sketch of the original feather dress (left) prior to rehearsal and thought it looked nice. However, upon filming, he recalled how “feathers started to fly as if a chicken had been attacked by a coyote. I had never seen so many feathers in my life. It was like a snowstorm. I had feathers in my eyes, my ears, my mouth, all over the front of my suit...” The dress was a problem, according to Astaire. Rogers, however, fought to keep the now-iconic costume. “I was determined to wear this dress, come hell or high water,” she wrote in her autobiography. This blue gown was the influence for two of Rogers’ feathered nightclub costumes included in this exhibition.

**“Feathers - I hate feathers -
And I hate them so that I can hardly speak,
And I never find the happiness I seek
With those chicken feathers dancing
Cheek to Cheek.”**

- Fred Astaire and Hermes Pan, “Cheek to Cheek” Parody, *Fred Astaire: An Autobiography* 1995



THE GINGER ROGERS SHOW

**Pink Silk Dress with Ostrich Feathers; Rhinestone Bracelet
1975-1979**

Designer: Jean Louis

Gift of Roberta Olden

Ginger Rogers wore this pink feather gown in her nightclub revue, *The Ginger Rogers Show*, from 1975 to 1980. Rogers asked award-winning Hollywood designer Jean Louis to design a costume for the revue that was inspired by her infamous blue feather dress from the 1935 film *Top Hat*.

French-born Jean Louis first worked for fashion entrepreneur Hattie Carnegie, designing her iconic Carnegie Suit, before becoming head designer for Columbia Pictures from 1944 to 1960. Beyond styling Ginger Rogers, other famous stars who wore his designs included Rita Hayworth, Marlene Dietrich, Vivien Leigh, Joan Crawford, Katharine Hepburn, and Marilyn Monroe whose sheer, sparkling gown designed by Louis in 1962 for President John F. Kennedy's birthday celebration was worn by Kim Kardashian to the 2022 MET Gala.

Rogers wore the light pink dress for her nightclub revival of “The Continental” dance number with Fred Astaire from the 1934 film “The Gay Divorcee.”

As shown in these two images, the top three rows of ostrich feather trim were a later addition to the garment, an alteration that raised the waistline from lower on the hips to the natural waist.





THE GINGER ROGERS SHOW

**Pink Silk Dresses with Ostrich Feathers;
Rhinestone Bracelet
1975-1979
Designer: Jean Louis
Gift of Roberta Olden**

Both pink feather dresses include a full leotard which helped ensure the garment remained in place. A small pocket trimmed in feathers was tucked into the folds of both skirts on the reverse side to possibly hold a battery pack for a microphone.



THE GINGER ROGERS SHOW

Black Silk Satin Dress and Coat with Rhinestone and Fox Fur Trim
1975-79

Designer: Jean Louis
Gift of Roberta Olden

As Jeanine Basinger wrote in *A Woman's View: How Hollywood Spoke to Women, 1930-1960*, "Fashion and glamour were direct connections to the audiences' need to see things they could never have and to experience feelings absent from their daily lives. Clothing for women in the movies became a subtle instrument, teaching the need for conformity, stressing the woman's role as sex object or love partner, and showing the viewers consumer goods that they would want to purchase for themselves. In 1930s and 40s film, women were defined by their clothes, and the clothes were fantastic, outrageous, and astonishing!"

Rogers' 1930s and 40s film costumes reflected this outrageous luxury, a look she and Hollywood designer Jean Louis transformed into this 1970s revue costume: glossy black silk and sparkling white rhinestones contrast sharply with luxurious ivory fox fur. The shape of the dress beneath consists of a skirt made of long, narrow strips, a look similar to that of the voluminous wedding gown worn by Rogers in the 1944 film *Lady in the Dark* whose underskirt was comprised of numerous strips of chiffon.





THE GINGER ROGERS SHOW

'Carioca' Costume of Jeweled Silk Taffeta Sleeves and Skirt, Silk Chiffon Scarf, Spandex Leotard, and Silk Heeled Shoes
1975-79

Designer: Jean Louis
Gift of Roberta Olden

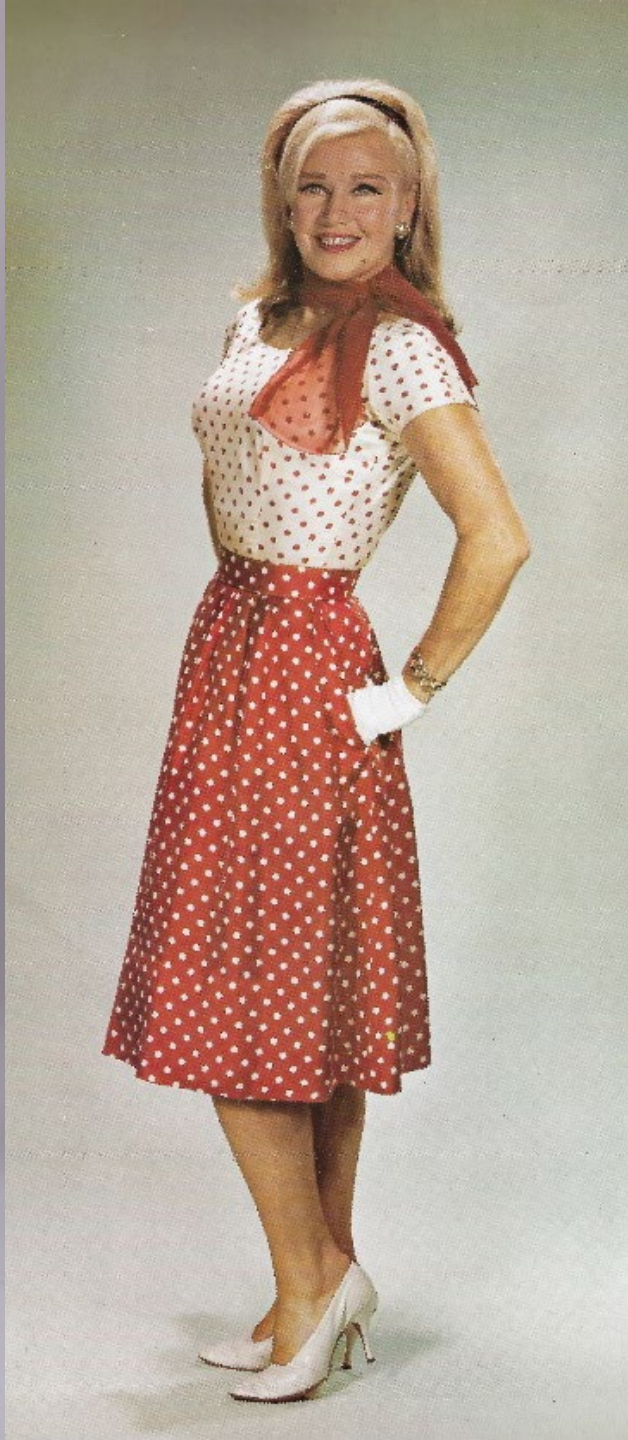
Inspired by her "Carioca" gown in *Flying Down to Rio* (1933) (lower right picture), her first film with Fred Astaire, Rogers and Louis designed this bejeweled ruffled ensemble for the last song of her nightclub revue, *The Ginger Rogers Show*. Not only are the ruffled sleeves designed with elastic to keep them in place on the upper arms, but the flamenco-style skirt is fully ruffled on both the exterior and interior layers, creating an ensemble of significant weight which required skill and agility to masterfully maneuver.



THE GINGER ROGERS SHOW

Rhinestone Bracelet, Rhinestone Earrings and Bejeweled Silk Satin Heeled Shoes
1975-79
Gift of Roberta Olden





TENDER SHOOT, 1959

Red and White Polka Dot Silk Satin Dress and Belt
1959
Gift of Marge Padgitt

Rogers wore this silk dress in the 1959 short film *Tender Shoot* on “The June Allyson Show.” The garment reflects the full-skirted, corseted silhouette of the 1950s.

The dress was utilized in fall 2022 and spring 2024 by TAM 2280 *Apparel Production* students at the University of Missouri as the first of several Rogers-related design and scholarship activities in Textile and Apparel Management. Graduate instructor Mackenzie Miller (below) measured the physical garment before creating a 3D digital pattern using the software program CLO3D available through TAM’s Technology Lab. Students manipulated the dress pattern into one-of-a-kind garment designs influenced by Rogers’ costume and career.



ACADEMY AWARDS, 1967

Blue Beaded Silk Chiffon Gown

1967

Gift of Marge Padgitt

As the *Washington Post* reported in 1992, “We tend to think of Ginger Rogers floating, or seeming to float; flying, or seeming to fly; twirling through the air in satin or silk or feathers.” This was the affect Rogers created with a beaded blue silk chiffon gown worn to the 1967 Academy Awards. Co-presenting an award with Fred Astaire, the couple danced their way on stage, performing an unexpected, effortless spin; the numerous godets at the hem of Rogers’ gown flared with movement, seemingly light as air. A small size 12 tag inside the gown indicates it was not a custom design; however, the gown still reflects Rogers’ consideration of color and form.





Pink Chiffon Outer Gown with Feather and Rhinestone Trim
1960s-70s
Gift of Marge Padgitt

Multiple layers of crisp chiffon create a voluminous skirt on this outer gown worn by Ginger Rogers in the 1960s to 1970s. In her trademark color of pink, the garment's full sleeves feature another trademark element of Rogers' style: feathers, similar to the pink feathered garment Rogers wore in the 1940s as shown in the image at right.

In a 1966 interview on the *Merv Griffin Show*, Rogers stated, "Feathers have always been a sort of good point of argument, they tell me."



Orange Nylon Robe and Nightgown
Label: Ginger Rogers for JCPenney
1972-1975
Gift of Marge Padgitt

From 1972 to 1975, Ginger Rogers served as Fashion Consultant for J.C. Penney, designing clothes and lingerie under the label "Ginger Rogers for JC Penney." Rogers hand-picked clothes for the mail-order catalog and traveled around the states to help women find affordable but fashionable clothing options. Of particular interest was lingerie. As she noted in her 1991 autobiography, J.C. Penney executives chose her as their representative due to her fashion knowledge and because they believed her famous legs would help the company sell pantyhose. Pictured at far left, is a 1973 catalog advertisement for the company's lingerie collection of Ultron nylon. It reads, "Ginger Rogers designs things to put you to sleep. And some to wake up to."

