**Billed Cast:**

[Marie Dressler](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0237597/?ref_=tt_cl_i1) Marie Dressler as Carlotta Vance

[John Barrymore](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000858/?ref_=tt_cl_i2) John Barrymore as Larry Renault

[Wallace Beery](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000891/?ref_=tt_cl_i3) Wallace Beery as Dan Packard[Jean Harlow](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0001318/?ref_=tt_cl_i4) Jean Harlow as Kitty Packard[Lionel Barrymore](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000859/?ref_=tt_cl_i5) Lionel Barrymore as Oliver Jordan[Lee Tracy](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0870543/?ref_=tt_cl_i6) Lee Tracy as Max Kane[Edmund Lowe](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0522926/?ref_=tt_cl_i7) Edmund Lowe as Dr. Wayne Talbot[Billie Burke](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000992/?ref_=tt_cl_i8) Billie Burke as Millicent Jordan [Madge Evans](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0263004/?ref_=tt_cl_i9) Madge Evans as Paula Jordan[Jean Hersholt](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0380965/?ref_=tt_cl_i10) Jean Hersholt as Jo Stengel[Karen Morley](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0605904/?ref_=tt_cl_i11) Karen Morley as Mrs. Lucy Talbot[Louise Closser Hale](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0167113/?ref_=tt_cl_i12) Louise Closser Hale as Hattie Loomis[Phillips Holmes](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0392004/?ref_=tt_cl_i13) Phillips Holmes as Ernest DeGraff[May Robson](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0733480/?ref_=tt_cl_i14) May Robson as Mrs. Wendel

**Other TV & Movie Versions:**

Supper at Six

*(1933) (Spoof short)*

Come to Dinner

*(1934) (Spoof short)*

Dinner at Eight

*(1989) (TV Movie)*

Front Row Center: Dinner at Eight

*(1955) (TV Episode)*

The Partridge Family: Aspirin at 7, Dinner at 8

*(1973) (TV Episode)*

One Day at a Time: Dinner at Seven: Part 1

*(1981) (TV Episode)*

Cheers: Dinner at Eight-ish

*(1987) (TV Episode)*

Frasier: Dinner at Eight

*(1993) (TV Episode)*

Northern Exposure: Dinner at Seven Thirty

*(1994) (TV Episode)*

Melrose Place: Breakfast at Tiffany's, Dinner at Eight

*(1995) (TV Episode)*

**Trivia:**

As originally filmed, Carlotta's dog was named Mussolini. However, due to the changing world political climate of the 1930's, the dog's name was post-dubbed as "Tarzan", even though Marie Dressler's lips are clearly saying "Mussolini".

Max Kane's line, "How's the great profile." is an inside joke. John Barrymore was known on stage as "The great profile." Hattie also remarks, "He has the most heavenly profile."

**Synopsis:**

The dinner party (of the film's title) is being hosted by scheming, social-climbing Millicent Jordan (Billie Burke), wife of ailing and soon-to-be-bankrupt shipping magnate Oliver Jordan (Lionel Barrymore). Millicent is pre-occupied with the plans she is making for a high-class dinner party. Her husband Oliver, in failing health, and he is worried because someone is trying to buy up the stock in his shipping business. Hoping to get help from businessman Dan Packard, he persuades Millicent, against her wishes, to invite Packard and his wife to the dinner. As Oliver's problems get worse, Millicent is increasingly quick-tempered because the plans for the party are not going smoothly. As the time for the dinner approaches, it appears that the hosts and the guests will all have plenty on their minds.The film looks at the tangled and changed lives of the high society guests, from the time the invitations are given out for "dinner at eight" to the time of the party itself.

**Movie History:**

*Dinner at Eight* began as a Broadway play written by George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber. The play opened at the Music Box Theater on October 22, 1932 and was a smash hit. Biting and poignant at the same time, Dinner at Eight is one of the great screen comedies of manners. Thought it's often hilarious, there is always more going on beneath the surface in the interactions of these brilliantly realized characters. It's an elegant mixture of both high and low comedy that delves into the problems of the wealthy when they are faced with the loss of money, power and status.

*Dinner at Eight* was the first film that both producer David O. Selznick and director George Cukor made for MGM. Selznick especially had something to prove. On the heels of MGM's great success under Irving Thalberg, Grand Hotel (1932), Selznick wanted to show that he was capable of competing with Thalberg. The roaring success of the film established Selznick as a power to be reckoned with at his new studio.

Marie Dressler, a huge, if unlikely, star in her day, was cast strongly against type as an upper crust former great beauty and woman of considerable means. Despite the risky casting, Dressler's talent is so great that she pulls it off. The dowager character played by Marie Dressler is reportedly based on actress Mrs. Patrick Campbell, for whom George Bernard Shaw wrote the role of Eliza Doolittle in the play "Pygmalion". When Marie Dressler took on the role of Carlotta Vance, she was recuperating from serious cancer surgery. The cancer eventually took her life in 1934.

Though Marie Dressler hadn't fit George Cukor's idea of former beauty Carlotta Vance when she was first cast, she made the part her own with utter believability. "She acquired a peculiar distinction, a magnificence," said Cukor in a later interview. "She'd mug and carry on-which she did in this picture-but she knew how to make an entrance with great aplomb, great effect." Co-star Jean Harlow was in awe of Dressler's talents and praised the veteran actress for her generosity. "Being in the same cast with Marie was a break for me," said Harlow. "She's one trouper I'd never try to steal a scene from. It'd be like trying to carry Italy against Mussolini."

Marie Dressler was also impressed with Jean Harlow. "It was whispered behind more than one hand that Jean Harlow, Metro's much-advertised platinum menace, was picked for parts that called for more allure than art," said Dressler in her 1934 autobiography My Own Story. "And in Dinner at Eight, she had to throw a bomb in the works by proving that she is a first-rate actress! Her performance as the wife of the hard-boiled, self-made politician played by Wallace Beery belongs in that limited category of things which may with reason be called rare. The plain truth is, she all but ran off with the show!" It was high praise indeed for Jean Harlow coming from Dressler, and Dressler's warmth helped put the actress at ease. Harlow was understandably insecure about holding her own against such immense acting talent, and it was important to her to do a good job with her part.

Jean Harlow’s all-white bedroom, designed by Hobe Erwin and Fred Hope, helped popularize the Art Deco style of the '30s, while her white satin evening dress became a fashion rage, referred to as the "Jean Harlow dress." She had worked with Wallace Beery before in The Secret Six (1931) and the two had developed a dislike for each other that carried over into Dinner at Eight. Beery thought that Harlow wasn't experienced enough and treated her rudely. Harlow found Beery gruff and boorish. Since the two were playing a husband and wife that can't stand each other, the real-life feelings worked to their comic benefit.

John Barrymore, who bravely took on the role of a fading matinee idol, relished the challenge of a strong character part. "Although (Barrymore) was playing a second-rate actor," said George Cukor in a 1970 interview, "he had no vanity as such. He even put things in to make himself hammier, more ignorant." Barrymore got involved in his part, making suggestions along the way to play up his character. Cukor was pleased that an actor of such prominence was confident and committed enough that he would be willing to sacrifice vanity for the greater success of the film. According to George Cukor, John Barrymore based his performance in Dinner at Eight on a combination of his father-in-law Maurice Costello, his brother-in-law Lowell Sherman and himself. John Barrymore, who notably struggled with chronic alcoholism that would lead to his death at age 60 in 1942, plays Larry Renault who was also addicted to the bottle. And just like Renault, he was in the death throes of a third marriage, one that would end within a year.

Actress Billie Burke's famous onscreen persona as a flighty flibbertigibbet can be traced back to this film. Dinner at Eight represented Burke's first role as a mature woman, and she was so effective as the high-strung hostess Millicent Jordan that that type of role has become synonymous with her name ever since.

MGM's faith in Dinner at Eight paid off. Upon its release, it was a huge success with critics and audiences alike. Despite not receiving any Academy Award® nominations, the film endured and is now considered one of MGM's finest films from the '30s.

**Sources:**

<http://www.filmsite.org/dinn.html>

<http://www.tcm.com/tcmdb/title/12530/Dinner-at-Eight/articles.html>

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0023948/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1>