

UNIVERSAL PICTURES:
CELEBRATING
100 YEARS



CARL LAEMMLE

UNIVERSAL PICTURES: CELEBRATING **100** YEARS

Curated by UCLA Film & Television Archive

Presented by American Express





UNIVERSAL PICTURES: CELEBRATING 100 YEARS



“We hope you enjoy the films and thank you for honoring our past by celebrating 100 years of Universal films with us.”

WELCOME

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or 100 years Universal Pictures has been in the business of making movies. Universal films have touched the hearts of millions and fostered one of the world's greatest shared love affairs of going to the movies.

Along with our extensive film restoration commitment, as part of our year-long Centennial Celebration, it was important to find ways to share our films with others. We are proud to be working with the UCLA Film & Television Archive to bring you the “Universal Pictures: Celebrating 100 Years” film tour. We hope this event will introduce a new generation of filmgoers to Universal classics.

Movies continue to touch our hearts, make us laugh, cry and unite us in the most amazing ways. We are proud to play a role in preserving and continuing the iconic legacy of our Studio.

We hope you enjoy the films and thank you, and our corporate partner American Express, for honoring our past by celebrating 100 years of Universal films with us.

Ron Meyer

President and Chief Operating Officer, Universal Studios

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

It's not often that we have the opportunity to celebrate the centenary of a major motion picture company—and given its mission to *collect, preserve and showcase* moving image culture, this opportunity has been a particularly rich and rewarding one for UCLA Film & Television Archive. Delving into the storied history of Universal Pictures has been fascinating from an archival perspective and has allowed us to rethink and reconsider what Universal has meant to film history.

On a more personal note, this project has been a fond reminder of my own tenure at the Universal Pictures. Back in 1998, I was hired by Universal Pictures to establish the Archives & Collections Department, which became responsible for collecting the studio's history, its material culture, whether sets, props, costumes, posters, photos, publicity materials, etc. I can honestly say that my time at Universal was among the happiest in my professional career. Under the protective hand of Ron Meyer, Archives & Collections became the central repository for the studio's historic artifacts and continues to be an important department within the company today.

Our "Universal Pictures: Celebrating 100 Years" tour will take this program throughout the United States and beyond. There is no better way for the Archive to fulfill its mission.

Jan-Christopher Horak
Director, UCLA Film & Television Archive



"...this opportunity
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UNIVERSAL PICTURES: CELEBRATING 100 YEARS THE HISTORY

Looking at the Universal logo over the past century, one is struck by the consistency of the design and iconography. Right from the beginning in 1912, when Carl Laemmle forged the company from a diverse group of renegade producers who were defying big capital in the guise of the Motion Picture Patents Trust, the globe was there. Company mythology tells us that Laemmle came up with the name Universal while looking out the window at a passing truck, "Universal Pipe Fittings." But it was the image of the whole planet that signified the company's world-wide reach and appeal, because the new medium of motion pictures was indeed conquering the world. Movies belonged to the new age of airplanes, the telephone and other technologies of modernity which had collapsed geographic space even for ordinary citizens. That wide shot from outer space spoke volumes. Over the next 100 years, the logo was periodically modernized, color was added, the topography of the globe's surface sharpened (or abstracted, as in the late 1930s), but the brand, like the company, endured, outlasting every one of its competitors. Universal Pictures is the oldest continuously operating film producer and distributor in the United States.

Just as the company's iconography has remained constant, so too has its physical presence in the landscape of Los Angeles: No other major Hollywood studio has produced films in the same location as long as Universal. The first Universal films were shot on the Oak Crest Ranch in late 1912. In July 1913, Oak Crest and an adjacent property were formally christened Universal City, and by September, Universal was offering bus tours from downtown L.A. to its lot. When the Universal "tour" officially opened in 1915, visitors were allowed to watch a Western, a melodrama, a comedy, and a crime drama on four side-by-side, open-air sets, signaling that Universal had something for everyone.

The breadth of the studio's offerings in its early days—and throughout its history—raises the question, what does Universal represent? Unlike other Hollywood companies that had "more stars than there are in heaven" or a cartoon character, Universal's image in the popular imagination is strangely amorphous,

a bundle of seeming contradictions. That was partially by design. Without its own chain of cinemas or any first run-theatres, the company supplied films to tens of thousands of independent movie houses in the heartland, and needed a heterogeneous slate of films to attract diverse, but popular, tastes. Like its rural and small-town clients, Universal survived by living modestly, keeping budgets in check and making genre films, rather than expensive prestige pictures, strictly the domain of the big spending major studios. In the company's first decade, Laemmle released films through such labels as Bison, Bluebird, Majestic, Joker and Jewel, with one label specializing in Westerns, another in comedies, and a third in quality dramas. Such a broad output demanded a rational and regimented workflow and Universal's operation would become a model for the emerging studio system, its mode of film production based on an exact division of labor, standardization, and an insistence on a regularized release schedule.

Limitations in some areas, created opportunities in others. Hoping to expand its audience base, Universal hired women in key creative positions and gave them license to explore themes from a female perspective. Between 1916 and 1919, Universal employed no less than eleven women as directors, including Grace Cunard, Lois Weber, Cleo Madison, Ida May Park, Ruth Stonehouse, Elsie Jane Wilson, and Ruth Ann Baldwin. Universal City's first chief of police was actress Laura Oakley, although no relation to her famous namesake. At the other end of the company's history, Stacey Snider was chairman of Universal Pictures from 1996 to 2006.

Ironically, it was low-budget genre production that brought Universal the critical prestige it sought. Whether comedies, Westerns, or horror, it was within these genres that Universal not only shined, but made film history: the monster cycle from the 1930s to 1940s, from *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* to *The Wolf Man*; the Deanna Durbin musical comedies in the 1930s and 40s; the Anthony Mann directed adult Westerns in the 1950s; the Technicolor melodramas of Douglas



Sirk and Ross Hunter in the 1950s; the Doris Day/Rock Hudson comedies in the 1950s and 60s; and the adventure/sci-fi dramas of Steven Spielberg.

Operating at the lower end of the budget spectrum also allowed filmmakers a degree of experimentation, leading to the comedy-horror mash-ups of Abbott and Costello, as well as the Technicolor adventures of Maria Montez. Such genre mixing, in fact, paved the way for the Spielberg and others at Universal, albeit with the much larger budgets available to them. In a similar vein, Universal in the late 1960s and into the 1970s enjoyed a huge success in establishing the mixed-genre form of television movies, which changed the whole entertainment industry.

When Universal did venture into expensive productions, as happened in the early 1930s when Carl Laemmle Jr. took over the company's reins, the company floundered, leading to a change in ownership in 1936. For much of the next two decades, it seemed as if Universal was run by committee, after successive take overs by Standard Capital, International, Rank, and Decca. Nevertheless, three outstanding personalities have guided the company: Carl Laemmle for more than twenty years after its founding, Lew Wasserman for over thirty years after 1962, and now Ron Meyer for more than fifteen years.

"Uncle Carl" Laemmle belonged to a pioneering generation of film producers, outlasting almost all his competitors. He fought and beat the Patents Trust (officially, the General Film Co.) by creating an outrageous cartoon character, "General Filmco," who looked like a South American dictator in full dress regalia. Ironically, Laemmle was as short as his cartoon nemesis, but also a very frugal family man. On annual trips to Europe, Laemmle recruited new talent, including Joe Pasternak, Henry Koster, E.A. Dupont, Paul Kohner, Paul Leni, Conrad Veidt, and William Wyler, all of whom went on to long, successful careers in Hollywood. (Although German-speaking, like Laemmle, they were not relatives, except for Wyler, but charges of nepotism persisted, since he did put his son in charge of the studio.)

With the breakdown of the classical Hollywood system after the Paramount consent decree in 1948 outlawing monopoly ownership in production, distribution, and exhibition, Universal finally came into its own. Its organizational structure as a studio of parts rather than as a rigidly structured whole perfectly matched the new system of independent producers and freelance talent. Wasserman's ground-breaking percentage deal for Jimmy Stewart on *Winchester '73* in 1950 hastened the demise of the old studio hierarchies and ushered in a new era. Wasserman worked for MCA, a talent agency, which would eventually purchase the Universal lot for television production in 1958 and buy Universal outright in 1962. Wasserman became one of the most powerful men in the entertainment world and made Universal the most successful studio in Hollywood.

Another former agent, Ron Meyer inherited Wasserman's mantle and kept Universal Pictures on a steady course after 1995, despite three more changes in parent company ownership. Quiet, unassuming, and even-keeled, Meyer kept film production budgets in check, while navigating the treacherous and bewildering transition to digital media by strengthening the company's ties to television (NBC) and cable (Comcast).

In retrospect, then, it seems as if Universal Pictures' very multiplicity of identities has been its greatest asset. Like the little engine that could, Universal was not always taken seriously by the "majors," yet in the long run it has kept ahead of an industry in flux by constantly adjusting to structural changes in management, technologies, economies, and public tastes. At the same time, it has produced truly great films that, like its monsters, have become American cultural icons.

Jan-Christopher Horak

UNIVERSAL PICTURES: CELEBRATING 100 YEARS THE PROGRAM

It is a quirk of American cinephilia that we tend to think of Hollywood movie studios as possessing the essential qualities of a family home, in which dramas unfold and delightful surprises are revealed, in a comfortable, familiar setting. This is perhaps to be expected when we recall that in Hollywood's golden age, studios were run like oversized families, with diverse, industrious talents overseen by a fatherly figure—none of them more famously benign than Carl Laemmle, founder of Universal Film Manufacturing Company. Though now at its century mark, Universal Pictures still inspires such specific and familiar associations despite a history of tectonic changes in fortune. That this is the case is a testament to the company's well-laid foundations.

Today, Universal is a monumental presence in global moving image culture, as evidenced by its exciting work with such a broad range of contemporary auteurs as Steven Soderbergh, Quentin Tarantino and Judd Apatow. The studio didn't always seek this status. In its early years, Universal displayed occasional splurges on talent and set dressing, as with Lewis Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), but some of its biggest hits of the time transformed economic necessity into brisk storytelling, as with the studio's horror classics, including *Dracula* (1930) and *Frankenstein* (1931), which continue to thrill today.

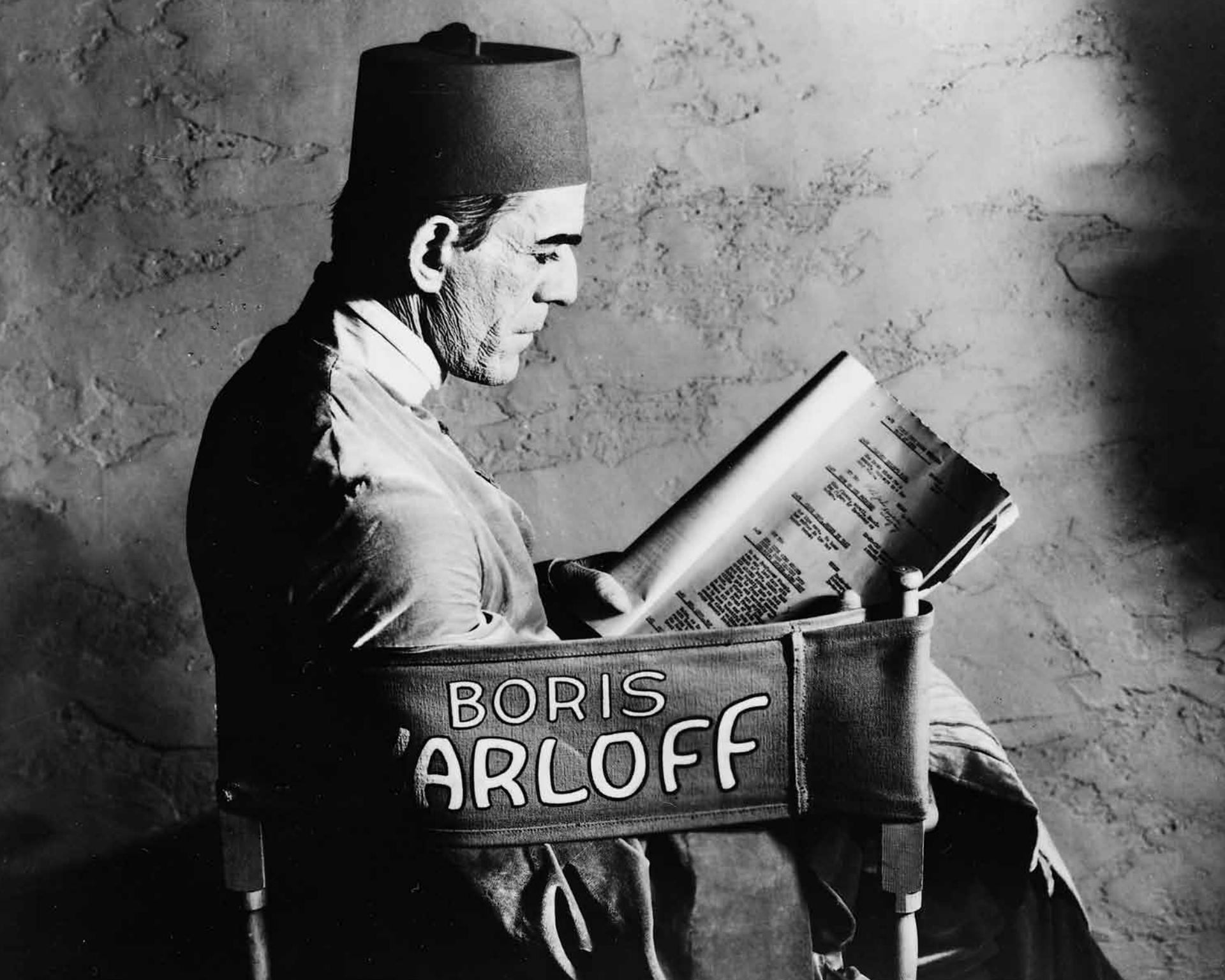
Producing films inexpensively for wide distribution to a broad, geographically diverse audience—in contrast to the premium-priced literary and continental specialties of other studios—Universal appealed to the shared sensibilities of a widespread American public. In modestly budgeted program pictures—including Deanna Durbin musicals, such as *Three Smart Girls Grow Up* (1939), and “swing” dance films, such as *Chip Off the Old Block* (1944)—one encountered virtuosity wedded to homespun values that

registered powerfully with the films' intended audience. Several decades later in *Jaws* (1975), Steven Spielberg pitted a family man against a great white shark with spectacular results. In 1995, Ron Howard's *Apollo 13* similarly emphasized to great effect the everyman qualities of the heroic astronauts it depicted.

The pulpy, the absurd; the fantastic could all be accommodated within Universal's implicit embrace of populist sensibility. Even such sophisticated entries as Douglas Sirk's psychologically charged melodrama *Magnificent Obsession*, and an array of pictures dealing with race politics (1934's *Imitation of Life*, the 1936 *Show Boat* and the celebrated *To Kill A Mockingbird* from 1962) couch their inner complexity in terms that readily and comprehensibly accommodate introspection, paving the way to Spike Lee's explosive *Do The Right Thing* (1989).

This program represents an opportunity to range around in Universal's vast house of treasures; where curiosities from the attic can also be found—and perhaps a few mirrors. Seeing such founding documents as Lois Weber's phenomenally popular 1916 potboiler about abortion, *Where Are My Children?*, alongside the sexually charged comedy *Pillow Talk* (1959), or comparing the baroque Westerns of Anthony Mann (*Winchester '73*, 1950) and Clint Eastwood (*High Plains Drifter*, 1973), is a pleasure too rarely enjoyed in the theatrical setting. In the spirit of Carl Laemmle, who noted that “men and women attend places of entertainment in a holiday mood,” we invite audiences to this reunion of images, on the occasion of Universal Pictures' centennial.

Shannon Kelley
Head of Public Programs, UCLA Film & Television Archive



BORIS
KARLOFF

UNIVERSAL PICTURES: CELEBRATING 100 YEARS UCLA SCREENING SCHEDULE

UCLA Film & Television Archive
Friday, May 4—Sunday, June 24

5.04.12 FRI | 7:00 PM | page 16

APOLLO 13

5.05.12 SAT | 7:30 PM | pages 24/19

DRACULA
THE BLACK CAT

5.06.12 SUN | 7:00 PM | pages 20/41

BLIND HUSBANDS
THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA

5.13.12 SUN | 7:00 PM | pages 48/39

THREE SMART GIRLS GROW UP
NEVER GIVE A SUCKER AN
EVEN BREAK

5.18.12 FRI | 7:30 PM | page 23

DO THE RIGHT THING

5.19.12 SAT | 4:00 PM | page 44

SHOW BOAT

6.02.12 SAT | 4:00 PM | page 21

CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK

6.02.12 SAT | 7:30 PM | page 40

OUT OF SIGHT

6.04.12 MON | 7:30 PM | page 45

SOMEWHERE IN TIME

6.10.12 SUN | 7:00 PM | pages 31/36

IMITATION OF LIFE
LITTLE MAN, WHAT NOW?

6.15.12 FRI | 7:30 PM | page 14

AIRPORT

6.17.12 SUN | 11:00 AM | page 17

BACK TO THE FUTURE

6.23.12 SAT | 7:30 PM | page 33

INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS

6.24.12 SUN | 7:00 PM | page 34

JAWS

5.10.12 THU | 7:30 PM | page 50/51

**TRAFFIC IN SOULS
WHERE ARE MY CHILDREN?**

5.11.12 FRI | 7:30 PM | page 15

ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT

5.12.12 SAT | 4:00 PM | page 22

COBRA WOMAN

5.19.12 SAT | 7:30 PM | pages 43/37

**PILLOW TALK
MAGNIFICENT OBSESSION**

5.21.12 MON | 7:30 PM | page 26

THE 40-YEAR-OLD VIRGIN

5.23.12 WED | 7:30 PM | pages 27/13

**FRANCIS
ABBOTT AND COSTELLO
MEET FRANKENSTEIN**

6.08.12 FRI | 7:30 PM | pages 28/38

**FRANKENSTEIN
THE MUMMY**

6.09.12 SAT | 4:00 PM | page 32

THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN

6.09.12 SAT | 7:30 PM | page 49

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

6.17.12 SUN | 7:00 PM | pages 29/52

**HIGH PLAINS DRIFTER
WINCHESTER '73**

6.18.12 MON | 7:30 PM | page 46

THE STING

6.22.12 FRI | 7:30 PM | page 18

THE BIRDS



"ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT"
WORLD'S MOST POPULAR STORY-ALL TALKING

UNIVERSAL PICTURES: CELEBRATING 100 YEARS THE TOUR

Film Forum, New York: July-August 2012

Gene Siskel Film Center, Chicago: July-December 2012

Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley: August 2012

Pacific Cinematheque, Vancouver: August-September 2012

Northwest Film Forum, Seattle: October 2012

Brattle Theatre, Cambridge: November, 2012

Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus: December 2012

Northwest Film Center, Portland: January 2013

Museum of Fine Arts, Houston: February 2013

Cornell Cinema, Ithaca: February-March 2013

Emory Cinematheque, Atlanta: March-April, 2013

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC: April 2013



ABBOTT AND COSTELLO MEET FRANKENSTEIN 1948

Director: Charles T. Barton.

Universal-International Pictures Co., Inc. **Producer:** Robert Arthur. **Screen-writers:** Robert Lees, Frederic I. Rinaldo, John Grant. **Cinematographer:** Charles Van Enger. **Editor:** Frank Gross. **With:** Bud Abbott, Lou Costello, Lon Chaney Jr., Bela Lugosi, Glenn Strange.
35mm, b/w, 83 min.

By the mid-1940s, Universal's star comedy team of Bud Abbott and Lou Costello experienced a considerable drop in popularity from the heights of their first top-billed film for the studio, the blockbuster hit, *Buck Privates* (1941). As the Universal and International Pictures merger in 1946 found the studio transitioning away from B pictures, attempts to insert Abbott and Costello into higher-budget productions, such as the costume comedy *The Time of Their Lives* (1946), were mostly poorly received. In Hollywood, rumors indicated that the studio was considering releasing the once-bankable team from their contract.

The venerable duo's fortunes improved with the return-to-basics sequel *Buck Privates Come Home* (1947), which pointed back to the vitality of their early days and paved the way for a full comeback. Originally titled *The Brain of Frankenstein*, the scenario that would become the smash hit *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* was initially rejected by Costello, who reportedly protested that his "[five-year-old] daughter could write a better script." However, producer Robert Arthur (*Sweet Charity*), credited with the inspired high-con-

cept pairing of Abbott and Costello with Universal's forgotten stable of horror movie monsters, persuaded Costello to get on board with financial incentives and by bringing on the comedian's favorite director, Charles Barton.

Boasting a significant budget for what was considered a B-picture, *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* features an animated title-sequence by Walter Lantz (of Woody Woodpecker fame) and highly detailed sets, costumes, and make-up all worthy of Universal's classic horror canon. That authenticity was extended to the casting of cinema's revered horror veterans Bela Lugosi, Lon Chaney Jr. and Glenn Strange (with a cameo from Vincent Price). True to their roots, the gothic legends play it straight, leaving the comedy to derive from Abbott and Costello's perfectly timed reactions and double-takes. Perhaps the best-reviewed and most financially successful title in Abbott and Costello's long career, the beloved evergreen remains a landmark genre mash-up. The cult classic was named to the National Film Registry in 2001.

Mark Quigley

AIRPORT 1970

Director: George Seaton.

Ross Hunter Productions, Inc. **Producer:** Ross Hunter. Based on the novel by Arthur Hailey. **Screenwriter:** George Seaton. **Cinematographer:** Ernest Laszlo. **Editor:** Stuart Gilmore. **With:** Burt Lancaster, Dean Martin, Jean Seberg, Jacqueline Bisset, George Kennedy. 35mm, color, 137 min.



Writer-director George Seaton's explosive hit was one of film history's great game changers, launching a new screen genre, the disaster epic, and bringing a renewed focus on the spectacular. Specifically, *Airport* confronted viewers with the spectacle of a disaster that they themselves might experience in their own lives, offering a new frisson to moviegoers while narrowing the gap between the Hollywood movie and the thrill ride.

The story, adapted from Arthur Hailey's best-selling novel, concerns a bombing aboard a transatlantic flight, and the passengers, crew, and airport officials on the ground who strive to bring the crippled craft safely home. Drama emerges from reference to the countless people who daily pass through an airport, mindless of its systems and occasional breakdowns, and by personifying the responsible professionals there as deeply human—with flaws, conflicts, and desires that intersect with their life-or-death functions.

Not the first film about a potential plane crash, *Airport* benefits from the combination of Hailey's well-researched portrayal of a modern bureaucracy and the talents of both Ross Hunter—fabulously successful producer of women's pictures, melodramas and sex comedies at Universal—and the versatile

hyphenate, Seaton, recently arrived at the studio and equally adept at thrillers and family dramas. Assembling an impressive all-star cast—a move out of step with the iconoclastic smaller films of the times—Seaton and Hunter keep the hefty project aloft and humming for more than two hours. As the airport manager Burt Lancaster and airline public relations officer Jean Seberg work to avert disaster while negotiating personal attraction, stewardess Jacqueline Bisset and married pilot Dean Martin enact a similar drama aboard the endangered airplane. George Kennedy, Van Heflin, Maureen Stapleton and Helen Hayes (who won an Oscar for her performance) offer impressive character turns.

The film's technical details, special effects and wide-screen compositions give it a distinctly modern sheen, trending toward the bigger-budget, event-driven Hollywood still to come. Dismissed by many critics—even Hunter jokingly called it "a soap opera on wings," adding, "it's not art, it's fun"—*Airport* became Universal's biggest-ever box-office hit until *Jaws* shattered that record in 1975.

Shannon Kelley

ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT 1930

Director: Lewis Milestone.

Universal Pictures Corp. **Producer:** Carl Laemmle Jr. Based on the novel by Erich Maria Remarque. **Screenwriter:** George Abbott. **Cinematographer:** Arthur Edeson. **Editor:** Edgar Adams. **With:** Louis Wolheim, Lew Ayres, John Wray, Ben Alexander, Scott Kolk. 35mm, black and white, 143 min.



Erich Maria Remarque's novel *Im Westen nichts neues* (English translation, *All Quiet on the Western Front*) was published in Berlin in 1929. Told from the viewpoint of a schoolboy named Paul Baumer who, along with his classmates, is persuaded to enlist in the German army during World War I by their teacher, a fanatical patriot, the book was an unflinching portrayal of the brutality and sheer human waste of modern trench warfare. By giving voice to a general disgust with the smug platitudes of the pre-war generation, the novel became a worldwide bestseller, even in countries, such as the United States, that had opposed Germany and the Central Powers.

Film rights to the novel were immediately bought by Carl Laemmle, the German-born founder of Universal Pictures, who hoped a well-wrought screen version would convince even Germany's former enemies that the despised "Hun" were human beings, too. The film was budgeted at \$1,200,000, an enormous sum in 1929, and shooting began on 20 acres of Southern California ranchland under the direction of Lewis Milestone, born Lev Milstein in Bessarabia in 1895. Milestone immigrated to the U.S. in 1914, and entered pic-

tures in 1921, directing his first film in 1925. By shooting the battle sequences in *All Quiet on the Western Front* with a silent camera, dubbing in the sound of gunfire and the screams of the wounded and dying later, he avoided the static look of most early talkies and achieved a picture of warfare that Variety accurately described as "harrowing, gruesome, morbid ... Here exhibited is war as it is, butchery."

The film won Milestone his second Oscar for Best Director, and went on to win for Outstanding Production of 1929-30. The film did not please everyone, however. Hitler and Goebbels predictably hated it, and it was banned in Germany, along with Remarque's novel, as soon as the Nazis came to power. It has since often been banned in countries that are planning to go to war. One American who was profoundly affected was the actor who played Paul, Lew Ayres, who said that *All Quiet on the Western Front* influenced his decision to become a conscientious objector during World War II.

Charles Hopkins

APOLLO 13 1995

Director: Ron Howard.

Imagine Entertainment. **Producer:** Brian Grazer. Based on a book by Jim Lovell and Jeffrey Kluger. **Screenwriters:** William Broyles Jr., Al Reinert. **Cinematographer:** Dean Cundey. **Editors:** Mike Hill, Dan Hanley. **With:** Tom Hanks, Kevin Bacon, Bill Paxton, Gary Sinise, Ed Harris. 35mm, color, 139 min.



Just nine months after Neil Armstrong's famous footsteps crystallized American dreams of a man on the moon, the harrowing journey of Apollo 13 riveted the nation and underscored the extraordinary risks of space exploration, and the bravery and heroism of those who face these perils.

After an explosion crippled their spacecraft, the astronauts aboard Apollo 13 were left in near-freezing temperatures with a dwindling oxygen supply and failing electrical systems, as mission control worked around the clock to find a way to bring them home safely. *Apollo 13* captures the intimate human drama of this nail-biting true story, as well as its reaffirming importance to an America jaded by the Vietnam War and losing faith in the power of American ingenuity and perseverance.

Nominated for nine Academy Awards, director Ron Howard's deep collaboration with NASA and veterans of the mission produced a film with vivid detail and authenticity. The terse and suspenseful screenplay, based on the memoir of flight commander Jim Lovell, handles arcane technical matters with clarity and simplicity. Houston's mission control was meticulously recreated at

Universal Studios, and the spacecraft scenes were shot in zero gravity aboard the same KC-135 airplane used to train astronauts.

Beyond these technical achievements, the acting shines in illuminating the many dramas of the story. Tom Hanks adeptly embodies Lovell's quiet enthusiasm and determination, and Ed Harris gives a steely performance as Gene Kranz, the resolute mission commander. Kranz epitomizes the tenacity of the mission control team, whose intricate group effort brings Lovell and crew home. As Lovell's wife, Kathleen Quinlan movingly portrays the domestic trials faced by those on the ground.

A necessary film for an era in which the space shuttle program has so recently been retired, *Apollo 13* resonates strongly as a nostalgic look to a time when American vision looked expansively outward, extraordinary courage and resilience could seemingly overcome all odds, and the simple wonder of journeying to a strange place captured the national imagination.

Nina Rao

BACK TO THE FUTURE 1985

Director: Robert Zemeckis.

Amblin Entertainment. **Producers:** Bob Gale, Neil Canton. **Screenwriters:** Robert Zemeckis, Bob Gale. **Cinematographer:** Dean Cundey. **Editor:** Arthur Schmidt, Harry Keramidas. **With:** Michael J. Fox, Christopher Lloyd, Lea Thompson, Crispin Glover, Thomas F. Wilson. 35mm, color, 116 min.



When eccentric scientist Emmett "Doc" Brown (Christopher Lloyd) steals plutonium from Libyan terrorists to power his newest invention, a time-traveling DeLorean sports car, his ill-advised decision accidentally sends teenage pal Marty McFly (Michael J. Fox) back in time to 1955. A twist of fate shortly thereafter leads to Marty's future mom developing a crush on Marty instead of his future father. In order to repair the course of history and ensure his existence, Marty, with the help of the younger Doc Brown, must make his parents fall in love and figure out how to get back to 1985.

Back to the Future overcame several production challenges before becoming the year's biggest blockbuster. Fox, initially unavailable due to his role as Alex P. Keaton on the television show *Family Ties*, joined the production as Marty only after filming had begun, necessitating re-shoots and an even tighter production schedule. With a release date scheduled less than ten weeks after filming wrapped, crews worked in double shifts to complete the sound editing and

visual effects needed for the film. Industrial Light & Magic produced the effects, creating such indelible images as the fire trails left behind by the DeLorean's tire treads as it disappears, at 88 miles per hour, into the future.

A deftly executed comic adventure, *Back to the Future* was a hit with both young audiences and their Baby Boomer parents. The fusion of Marty's guitar-playing, skateboarding antics with poodle skirts and sock hops, gratified youthful tastes for the latest music, fashion and pop culture as well as an older generation's nostalgia for the culture of its own adolescence. So ubiquitous was *Back to the Future* that Ronald Reagan even quoted the film in his 1986 State of the Union speech, evidence of both the mutual influence of art and life upon each other and the extent to which this sci-fi gem permeated its own cultural milieu.

Nina Rao

THE BIRDS 1963

Director: Alfred Hitchcock.

Alfred J. Hitchcock Productions, Inc. **Producer:** Alfred Hitchcock. Based on the short story by Daphne du Maurier. **Screenwriter:** Evan Hunter. **Cinematographer:** Robert Burks. **Editor:** George Tomasini. **With:** Rod Taylor, Tippi Hedren, Jessica Tandy, Suzanne Pleshette, Veronica Cartwright. 35mm, color, 120 min.



Following on the heels of the massively successful *Psycho* (1960), Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* does for our fine feathered friends what that earlier film did for showers, as a seaside community is terrorized when seemingly normal birds turn suddenly and inexplicably malevolent.

Hitchcock's first film for Universal since 1943's *Shadow of a Doubt*, *The Birds* stars Rod Taylor as brash young lawyer Mitch, and Tippi Hedren, in her first screen appearance, as wealthy San Francisco socialite Melanie, whose visit to Mitch's family home turns into a harrowing ordeal. Shot partially on location in Bodega Bay, California, Hitchcock alternates masterfully between long, elevated shots of the surroundings and intimate close-ups, building dramatic tension before unleashing the full horror of the birds' assault on the community and the psyches of its residents.

In achieving this vision, loosely adapted from the 1952 Daphne du Maurier short story, Hitchcock pursued a variety of innovations to overcome numer-

ous technical challenges. The sound track of *The Birds*, supervised by longtime collaborator Bernard Herrmann, contains no music, relying instead on bird sounds, manipulated electronically to menacing and ominous effect. Thanks, in large part, to the rapid montage style of the attack sequences, *The Birds* contains almost 1,400 shots, or more than twice the average Hitchcock film.

Finally, the avian menace itself was brought to life through a combination of animation, mechanical birds, and live birds, trained by handler Ray Berwick to swoop, dive, gather, and nip on command. While no birds were harmed in the making of the film, the same cannot be said of Tippi Hedren who, for the final attic sequence, endured a brutal week of shooting described by Donald Spoto in *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock*: "two men, with heavy gauntlets protecting them from fingertips to shoulders, opened huge boxes of gulls which they threw directly at her, hour after hour."

Nina Rao

THE BLACK CAT 1934

Director: Edgar G. Ulmer.

Universal Pictures Corp. **Producer:** Carl Laemmle. Based on the short story by Edgar Allan Poe. **Screenwriter:** Peter Ruric. **Cinematographer:** John J. Mescall. **Editor:** Ray Curtiss. **With:** Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi, David Manners, Jacqueline Wells, Egon Brecher.
35mm, b/w, 70 min.



Like a monster from the id, director Edgar G. Ulmer's morbid jewel—Universal's top-grossing release of 1934—is a catalog of public fascinations in the 1930s: Edgar Allan Poe (whose story "suggested" the film); megastars Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi (in their first of six Universal collaborations); modernist architecture; postwar trauma; psychiatry, pathology and the occult (personified in the tabloids by Aleister Crowley).

The story is simple: American honeymooners find themselves trapped in the Hungarian mansion of a sinister war profiteer (Karloff) who stole the wife and child of a vengeful psychiatrist (Lugosi) who's terrorized by cats, the movie's recurring symbol of evil. But the film's plot is secondary to its astonishing visual design and increasingly shocking vortex of necrophilia, sadism, and torture.

Born in Austria and a veteran designer of Max Reinhardt's theater and German cinema, Ulmer came to Hollywood to assist F.W. Murnau on *Sunrise* (1928). His expressionist heritage (and facility with low budgets) fit Universal's horror cycle like a glove: *The Black Cat* revels in Bauhaus-inspired decor with a hard-edged geometry that reflects the jagged psychology of its characters. Karl-

off, as Hjalmar Poelzig (an homage to German architect Hans Poelzig, whom Ulmer assisted on 1920's *The Golem*), appropriates his mansion's angularity with his rigid movements, a hatchet hairstyle and v-necked robes. "If I wanted to build a nice, cozy, unpretentious insane asylum," the film's hapless protagonist quips, "he'd be the man for it."

David Manners and Julie Bishop, ostensibly starring in the film's main roles, play naïve romantics who, rather than resolve narrative conflict, merely try to survive it; the real drama revolves around the studio's dueling stars. Lugosi's own performance as the spiritually wounded Werdegast benefitted from last-minute reshoots that emphasized his protective relationship with the American couple. Less a villain than a tragic hero, Werdegast delivers a portentous speech that continually connects the story's horrors to World War I—another personal note from the film's auteur, whose own father fought and perished in the trenches.

Doug Cummings

BLIND HUSBANDS 1919

Director: Erich von Stroheim.

Universal Film Mfg. Co. **Producer:** Carl Laemmle. Based on a novel by Erich von Stroheim. **Screenwriter:** Erich von Stroheim. **Cinematographer:** Ben F. Reynolds. **Editors:** Frank Lawrence, Eleanor Fried. **With:** Sam DeGrasse, Francelia Billington, Erich von Stroheim, T. H. Gibson-Gowland, Fay Holderness. 35mm, silent, b/w, 92 min.



Long before "the man you loved to hate" became "the director studios hated to love," unemployed character actor Erich von Stroheim pitched Universal studio chief Carl Laemmle his original screenplay titled *The Pinnacle*, which featured a love triangle set among the peaks of the Tyrolean Alps. Captivated, Laemmle wanted to buy the story, but von Stroheim wouldn't give it to Universal unless he was allowed to direct and star. Laemmle, well known for making important studio decisions based solely on his intuition, green-lit the project (eventually re-titled *Blind Husbands*) and shooting commenced April 3rd, 1919, on an alpine village set on the Universal back lot.

Much like his friend Rex Ingram (who also made his directorial debut at Universal), von Stroheim had a highly developed pictorial sense and obsession for detail which he used to shape *Blind Husbands'* numerous visual possibilities into a story rife with sexual symbolism, while cameraman Ben Reynolds' exceptional photography perfectly complemented his director's vision. The small but accomplished cast articulated their roles with poetic clarity, but it is von Stroheim, the actor, who steals the picture. He clearly relished playing the unscrupulous "other man," although he wisely deflates his womanizing

character with jabs of occasional humor—before discrediting him entirely by story's end.

By the time shooting finished on June 12th, 1919, the budget had ballooned to well over \$100,000, and von Stroheim would spend the entire summer editing the vast amount of footage he had accumulated. After viewing the completed picture, Laemmle was certain the studio had something special on its hands, and ordered the advertising department to spend an additional \$140,000 to promote the film's release and its director. Both von Stroheim and Universal had much riding on the success of *Blind Husbands*, and the risk paid off handsomely. Audiences swarmed to the theatres in droves, and the picture quickly racked up impressive box office numbers worldwide. Critics praised it not as the promising first effort of a novice, but as a fully realized masterpiece by a mature artist—ultimately marking *Blind Husbands* as one of the greatest film debuts by any director during the silent era.

Steven K. Hill

CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK 1944

Director: Charles Lamont.

Universal Pictures Company, Inc. **Producer:** Milton Schwarzwald. **Screen-writers:** Eugene Conrad, Leo Townsend. **Cinematographer:** Charles Van Enger. **Editor:** Charles Maynard. **With:** Donald O'Connor, Peggy Ryan, Ann Blyth, Helen Vinson, Helen Broderick.
35mm, b/w, 77 min.



Donald O'Connor and Peggy Ryan were Universal's answer to MGM's Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney, although the pair's chemistry wasn't immediately evident to studio executives. O'Connor and Ryan were first teamed up in 1942's *What's Cookin'*? as part of the "Jivin' Jacks and Jills," a troupe of fresh-faced, dancing teens put together for a series of B musicals choreographed by Louis Da Pron. Though largely relegated to the back of the film's dance numbers, O'Connor and Ryan clicked with young audiences at a preview screening, who demanded more. Quickly bumped up to starring roles, O'Connor and Ryan went on to make 13 films together at Universal.

Directed by Charles Lamont (*Ma and Pa Kettle*), *Chip Off the Old Block* was one of a number of O'Connor and Ryan vehicles raced into production in the months before O'Connor had to report for Army duty in early 1944. He plays Donald, a young naval cadet following in the footsteps of his legendary father and grandfather, even to the point of getting suspended for pranking the faculty—this, despite his outstanding contributions to the school's musical revues. At liberty, Donald heads to New York where he tries to woo one girl

(Ann Blyth, in her big screen debut) and fend off another (Ryan) while trying to save his dad from a spy ring. (As if that isn't subplot enough, watch for extended bits featuring pint-sized genius Joel Kupperman, from the radio show "The Quiz Kids.")

All along, the story bubbles with adolescent *amore*, the winking brand of innocent cooing and crooning perhaps only ever found on a classical studio sound stage. "Mother, mother, mother, there's a boy who wants to smother me with kisses tonight," sings Ryan alongside O'Connor; "Is it good, or is it bad?" the slow arch of her eyebrows hinting at the preferred answer. In keeping with formula, O'Connor and Ryan's pairing as comically combatant pals extends into their dance numbers, notable for their knockabout choreography, an O'Connor specialty that he later carried to classic heights in *Singin' in the Rain* (1952).

Paul Malcolm

COBRA WOMAN 1944

Director: Robert Siodmak.

Universal Pictures Company, Inc. **Producer:** George Wagner. **Screenwriters:** Gene Lewis, Richard Brooks. **Cinematographers:** George Robinson, W. Howard Greene. **Editor:** Charles Maynard. **With:** Maria Montez, Jon Hall, Sabu, Mary Nash, Lon Chaney Jr.
35mm, color, 70 min.



The fourth of Universal's costume adventures pairing Jon Hall and Maria Montez, *Cobra Woman* provided a welcome bit of tropical escapism to war-weary audiences. Filmed in lush Technicolor with ornate sets and lavish, bejeweled costumes, this fanciful romp is truly a feast for the eyes, if not for more rational faculties.

In a definitive performance, Montez, her cult status as the "Queen of Technicolor" already taking shape, plays dual roles as virtuous princess Tollea and her evil twin Naja, the iron-fisted, fabulously attired ruler of Cobra Island. As its name suggests, Cobra Island is a cheery place where strangers are instantly put to death, and inhabitants are periodically thrown into the local volcano at Naja's whim. Such a state of affairs is bad for community morale so Tollea is compelled by her inexplicably British-accented grandmother to put an end to Naja's wicked ways.

Wickedness aside, Naja's ways are a spectacle not to be missed. Her cobra dance, the elaborate ritual by which she chooses her victims, is a visual marvel, as she writhes and contorts—in a sparkling silver evening dress—around a

giant cobra. The kitschy splendor of this scene would later prove highly influential to underground filmmaking, particularly on the emergence of a camp aesthetic as articulated by Jack Smith in his famous essay, "The Perfect Filmic Appositeness of Maria Montez," and his more infamous film, *Flaming Creatures* (1963). Divine's over-the-top performance in John Waters' *Female Trouble* (1974) also bears the unmistakable influence of the cobra dance.

Cobra Woman featured a lively mix of talent all around, including Lon Chaney Jr., here downgraded from terrifying monster to mute henchman; director Robert Siodmak, who would take a very different approach to good and evil twins two years later in *The Dark Mirror*; and then screenwriter Richard Brooks, who had penned the previous Hall-Montez escapade *White Savage* (1943), and would go on to write and direct such landmark films as *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958) and *In Cold Blood* (1967). One wonders at, but is grateful for, such a fortuitous combination.

Nina Rao

DO THE RIGHT THING 1989

Director: Spike Lee.

40 Acres and a Mule Filmworks. **Producer:** Spike Lee. **Screenwriter:** Spike Lee. **Cinematographer:** Ernest Dickerson. **Editor:** Barry Alexander Brown. **With:** Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee, Spike Lee, Danny Aiello, Richard Edson. 35mm, color, 120 min.



Writer-director-actor Spike Lee's third feature, a lively, frequently hilarious but hard-hitting drama, charts mounting racial tensions on the hottest day of the year in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of central Brooklyn. Released in the wake of a series of violent incidents—including the high-profile police killings of graffiti artist Michael Stewart in 1983 and Eleanor Bumpurs in 1984—the film is a passionate and engrossing state of the union.

Sometimes mischaracterized as a call to arms, the film's equal-opportunity validations and critiques, its polyphonic approach to Black identity and its ambiguous "message" (focusing on the only known photograph of pacifist Martin Luther King and militant Malcolm X together) testify to its complexity. The movie offers descriptions rather than solutions; its very title denies easy explication.

The action takes place in and around an Italian pizzeria owned by Sal (Danny Aiello), whose equivocal attitude toward his Black customers is reflected by his two sons, the racist Pino (John Turturro) and affable Vito (Richard Edson). Mookie (Lee) is Sal's deliveryman, who navigates the neighborhood with casual aplomb, connecting a host of colorful characters, including the irascible Buggin'

Out (Giancarlo Esposito), the towering Radio Raheem (Bill Nunn), and various youth, elders, commentators, and passersby.

Resolutely contemporary in feeling, the film makes fascinating connections to history. Established actors Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee appear alongside newcomers Martin Lawrence, Robin Harris, and Rosie Perez. A nostalgic blend of jazz and R&B mixes with aggressive hip-hop, notably Public Enemy's rap anthem, "Fight the Power." A reconfiguration of Robert Mitchum's "love/hate" monologue from *The Night of the Hunter* and cinematographer Ernest Dickerson's many canted angles and blinds-striped, sunlit rooms evokes an aesthetic of MTV-noir.

Coming at a time when white filmmakers such as Steven Spielberg (*The Color Purple*) and Alan Parker (*Mississippi Burning*) were making highly touted Black "message pictures" (and before studio subsidiaries became prevalent), Lee's rousing and provocative movie announced the presence of a new voice willing, able and demanding to speak for itself.

Doug Cummings

DRACULA 1931

Director: Tod Browning.

Universal Pictures Corp. **Producer:** Carl Laemmle Jr. Based on the novel by Bram Stoker. **Screenwriter:** Garrett Fort. **Cinematographer:** Karl Freund. **Editor:** Milton Carruth. **With:** Bela Lugosi, Helen Chandler, David Manners, Dwight Frye, Edward Van Sloan. 35mm, b/w, 75 min.

Billed as a Gothic romance, the overnight success that met “the story of the strangest passion the world has ever known” helped launch a series of iconic horror films at Universal, giving the studio not only a steady financial boost at the dawn of the sound era but also a new identity, one it would be associated with for decades to come.

Based on Bram Stoker’s novel and a wildly successful stage adaptation by Hamilton Deane and John L. Balderston, Tod Browning’s realization bears the influence of both. While the film’s compositions have been characterized as betraying the source material’s theatrical origins (perhaps attributable to the new encumbrances of sound equipment), Karl Freund’s moody and atmospheric photography, particularly in the gloomy interiors of Dracula’s decaying castle, adeptly displays the cinematic influence of German Expressionism and Murnau’s *Nosferatu* (1922). One of the earliest sound horror films, *Dracula* eschewed a musical score for the most part, the better to accentuate every creak, footprint, and wolf howl against an ominous silence.

The piercing gaze and deliberate delivery of Bela Lugosi, the Hungarian actor who had played the Count in the American stage version, lent an eerie pres-

ence to the role and became the standard by which the many future incarnations of *Dracula* would be judged. Ironically, though Lugosi would come to be associated with the hypnotic bloodsucker for the rest of his life—he was even buried wearing Dracula’s cape—he was Browning’s last choice for the role. The director preferred Lon Chaney Sr. who died of throat cancer before production could begin. When other prospects proved unavailable or unsuitable, Lugosi was offered the role for a pittance, later reprising it in such films as *Mark of the Vampire* (1935), *Return of the Vampire* (1944), and *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948).

Asked in a 1952 interview if Dracula ever ends for him, Lugosi replied, “No, no; Dracula never ends. I don’t know whether I should call it a fortune or a curse, but it never ends.” A milestone for the genre and for Universal, *Dracula* and Bela Lugosi’s portrayal of the sinister, otherworldly Count resonate to this day.

Nina Rao



THE 40-YEAR-OLD VIRGIN 2005

Director: Judd Apatow.

Apatow Productions. **Producers:** Judd Apatow, Clayton Townsend, Shauna Robertson. **Screenwriters:** Judd Apatow, Steve Carell. **Cinematographer:** Jack Green. **Editor:** Brent White. **With:** Steve Carell, Catherine Keener, Paul Rudd, Romany Malco, Seth Rogen. 35mm, color, 116 min.



Dating back to the critically acclaimed television show *Freaks and Geeks*, Judd Apatow's productions have always shown a particular affinity for outcasts and misfits. Apatow brings this sensibility to *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*, his directorial debut and the first collaboration between Apatow Productions and Universal Pictures.

Steve Carell, who first developed the idea of a closeted virgin in a skit for the Second City comedy troupe, stars as Andy, a shy, mild-mannered loner. Having given up any hope of intimacy with women after a series of awkward, fruitless encounters in his youth, Andy occupies himself with boyish pursuits: comic books, action figures, and video games. Like many of Apatow's films, *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* mines the territory of men struggling to reconcile the demands of maturity with adolescent desires, but unlike later films such as *Knocked Up* (2007), the man in question here is not so much forced, as enabled, to grow up. Andy's co-workers' efforts to help him overcome his social clumsiness and solve his "problem" are as uproariously funny as they

are revealing of each character's fears and foibles. Co-written by Apatow and Carell, the film approaches Andy's situation with insight and empathy as well as humor. Andy's fumbling, tentative relationship with single mom Trish (Catherine Keener) tempers mortifyingly embarrassing moments with a feeling of genuine sympathy between the characters. Trish, too, has reservations about establishing intimacy, and a sense of understanding underlies the comic mishaps that surface as Andy and Trish struggle to overcome their anxieties and trepidations.

In a 2002 *New York Times* interview, Apatow described his work as "the opposite of event TV; it's about the small moments of people's lives." At once a raucous buddy flick and an earnest romantic comedy, *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* plies the large and small moments of its characters' lives with wit, clarity, and humanity.

Nina Rao

FRANCIS 1950

Director: Arthur Lubin.

Universal-International Pictures Co., Inc. **Producer:** Robert Arthur. Based on the novel by David Stern. **Screenwriter:** David Stern. **Cinematographer:** Irving Glassberg. **Editor:** Milton Carruth. **With:** Donald O'Connor, Patricia Medina, ZaSu Pitts, Ray Collins, John McIntire. 35mm, b/w, 91 min.



Former actor Arthur Lubin had directed over 40 features—most of them B pictures, with an occasional A picture like the 1943 Technicolor version of *Phantom of the Opera*—when he approached Universal in 1949 with a proposal for a World War II comedy about a talking Army mule named Francis. Contract actor Donald O'Connor starred as Peter Stirling, an inept second lieutenant who is rescued on the battlefield by the mule at the film's outset, only to be serially committed and released from the mental ward by unbelieving superiors whenever he explains Francis' role in his subsequent adventures. (In the time-honored tradition of supernatural fantasies, Francis only talks to Peter and only when no one else can hear them.) The mule's voice was supplied by veteran character actor Chill Wills, a fact Universal tried to keep a secret, perhaps to little avail given the familiarity of Wills's voice to audiences at the time. Lubin always refused to divulge how he got the mule's mouth movements to match his dialogue—although there were rumors that liberal applications of peanut butter were required.

Francis returned a healthy profit of \$2 million on an expenditure of \$125,000, and was credited with rescuing Universal from bankruptcy at a time when all the Hollywood studios were reeling from the impact of television. Universal released six more modestly budgeted *Francis* comedies between 1951 and 1956. Lubin directed and O'Connor and Wills starred in all but the last feature, *Francis in the Haunted House*. O'Connor, whose career on loan from Universal during the same period included acclaimed performances in *Singin' in the Rain* (1951), *Call Me Madam* (1953) and *Irving Berlin's There's No Business Like Show Business* (1954), always chafed at being trapped in a series where, as he put it, the mule got more fan mail than he did. After 1957, Lubin worked almost exclusively in television, where he recycled the talking animal formula in the popular series *Mr. Ed*, producing and directing over 140 episodes between 1961 and 1966.

Charles Hopkins

FRANKENSTEIN 1931

Director: James Whale.

Universal Pictures Corp. **Producer:** Carl Laemmle Jr. Based on the novel by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley. **Screenwriters:** Garrett Fort, Francis Edwards Faragoh. **Cinematographer:** Arthur Edeson. **Editor:** Clarence Kolster. **With:** Colin Clive, Mae Clarke, John Boles, Boris Karloff, Edward Van Sloan. 35mm, b/w, 70 min.



Carl Laemmle Jr., appointed head of production at Universal by his father in 1928, had ambitious plans to upgrade feature output and compete for the prestige market. By 1931, consigned to smaller budgets, but having scored a surprise hit with the sensationally popular (and economically-produced) *Dracula*, "Junior" began preparing *Frankenstein* as a follow-up.

Screenwriters Garrett Fort and Francis Edward Faragoh adapted Peggy Webling's British stage version of Mary Shelley's story but managed to crystallize the novel's essential themes and emotions. From their economical narrative, director James Whale, new to horror, summoned an exquisitely pitched story to quicken the blood. From its chilling opening images of grave-robbing to its hyper-electrified creation scene (still a jarring spectacle of design and theatrics) to the climactic confrontation between the monster and his maker, *Frankenstein* peddled passion: that of a scientific genius longing to play god, and of his unfortunate, synthetic creation, reaching out for beauty, tender-

ness and ultimately, revenge. As portrayed by fiery Colin Clive and icy Karloff, these passions prove so much more interesting than the moral hand-wringing of *Frankenstein*'s fiancée (Mae Clarke), best friend (John Boles) and teacher (Edward Van Sloan), it is hard not to sympathize with both genius and monster.

Nay-sayers at Universal worried that audiences might recoil from the macabre story of a man created from cadavers; the film actually opens with a spoken prologue by character actor Van Sloan, inviting audiences to think twice before subjecting their nerves to "such a strain." Audiences, however, responded with the same enthusiasm that met *Dracula* the season before, vindicating "Junior" Laemmle, creating a permanent icon in the misshapen monster and a star of Boris Karloff, as well as solidifying Universal's predominance in, and commitment to, the horror genre.

Shannon Kelley

HIGH PLAINS DRIFTER 1973

Director: Clint Eastwood.

Universal Pictures. **Producer:** Robert Daley. **Screenwriters:** Ernest Tidyman, Dean Riesner. **Cinematographer:** Bruce Surtees. **Editor:** Ferris Webster. **With:** Clint Eastwood, Verna Bloom, Mariana Hill, Mitchell Ryan, Jack Ging. 35mm, color, 105 min.



A mysterious stranger wreaks havoc on a small Western town that allowed its sheriff to be whipped to death by a gang of thugs. Similar to the townspeople in *High Noon*, the inhabitants of the small community at the edge of a large lake on the plains, aptly named Lago (lake in Italian), could populate several rings of Dante's *Inferno*. The Stranger actually has the town painted red and renames it Hell.

Clint Eastwood went through an extensive apprenticeship at Universal in the 1950s, before becoming a star in *Rawhide* (1959-1965), filmed on Universal's back lot and one of many popular Western series on television in the early 1960s. When the series ended, Eastwood unexpectedly became a world superstar in Sergio Leone's "Man with No Name" trilogy of Spaghetti Westerns, beginning with *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964). After starring in several more American westerns, Eastwood chose *High Plains Drifter* for his second directorial outing and it is now considered one of his masterpieces. A stylized, revisionist Western in the manner of Leone, it allows Eastwood the opportunity

to pay homage to his Italian mentor, by marking one of the gravestones in the cemetery "Sergio Leone" (an honor also bestowed on Eastwood's American mentor, Don Siegel). The film's opening five minute sequence without any dialogue is also a nod to Leone, whose characters are men of few words (unfortunately, the film's misogyny, exemplified in a rape scene, also seems to be a hold-over from the Spaghetti Westerns).

As with Eastwood's later quasi-religious Western, *Pale Rider* (1985), *High Plains Drifter* leaves it unclear whether The Stranger is a flesh-and-blood human being or a ghost. His arrival and departure is filmed with a telephoto lens through hazy waves of heat, a physical materialization out of nothingness and disappearance back into the ether, like an angel of death. Underscoring this ambiguity, Buddy Van Horn, Eastwood's long time stunt-double, plays the murdered sheriff.

Jan-Christopher Horak



IMITATION OF LIFE 1934

Director: John M. Stahl.

Universal Pictures Corp. **Producer:** Carl Laemmle Jr. Based on the novel by Fannie Hurst. **Screenwriter:** William Hurlbut. **Cinematographer:** Merritt Gerstad. **Editors:** Philip Cahn, Maurice Wright. **With:** Claudette Colbert, Warren William, Rochelle Hudson, Ned Sparks, Louise Beavers. 35mm, b/w, 116 min.

Renowned for its early Westerns and horror films, Universal also laid substantial groundwork for the melodrama in a series of films directed by John M. Stahl, three of which made such a strong impression that they were remade by Douglas Sirk in the 1950s (*Imitation of Life*, *Magnificent Obsession* and *When Tomorrow Comes*, which became *Interlude*).

While Sirk's movies are known for Technicolor expressiveness, Stahl's power lay in his restraint; his camera's cool, lingering gaze mapped the byways of emotional turbulence with open sincerity. *Imitation of Life*, based on Fannie Hurst's 1933 novel, focuses on single mother Bea (Claudette Colbert), who successfully markets her Black maid Delilah's (Louise Beavers) pancake recipe but fails to improve the plight of Delilah's daughter, Peola (Fredi Washington), who "passes" for white. Though it's suffused with stereotypes—most obviously in its appropriation of the servile and superstitious "mammy" figure—it's an earnest attempt to address racial tensions in its day. The assertion that Peola was born into a world prejudiced against her is skillfully and compassionately wrought.

The film brims with memorable supporting players (look for Ned Sparks as the crusty and clownish businessman Elmer Smith), but Black actress Fredi

Washington makes a particularly strong impression as Peola. With her magnetic screen presence and a carefully modulated anxiety, Washington conveys her character's dilemma with clear, tragic force. "You don't know what it's like to look white and be Black," she tells Bea. Unlike the character she plays, however, Washington, later a journalist and social activist, proudly bore her ethnicity throughout her career and co-founded the Negro Actors Guild of America in 1937.

In addition to its racial drama, the film touches admirably on women's independence. As the rags-to-riches entrepreneur, the always charismatic Colbert shifts easily from working class exasperation to society glamor, but her confidence and self-sufficiency remain central. Exploring issues of career, motherhood and romance through its female protagonists, the film helped establish the "weepie" as a substantial genre.

Doug Cummings

THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN 1957

Director: Jack Arnold.

Universal-International Pictures Co., Inc. **Producer:** Albert Zugsmith.
Based on a novel by Richard Matheson. **Screenwriter:** Richard Matheson.
Cinematographer: Ellis W. Carter. **Editor:** Al Joseph. **With:** Grant Williams, Randy Stuart, April Kent, Paul Langton, Raymond Bailey.
35mm, b/w, 81 min.



At the outset of this sci-fi classic, ordinary businessman Scott Carey (Grant Williams) and his wife, Louise (Randy Stuart), are enjoying a sunny holiday on a yacht when a mysterious mist suddenly envelops their boat, leaving Scott covered in a strange substance. Months later, he notices that his clothes don't quite fit anymore. An expert at a nearby research institute delivers Scott the truth behind this inexplicable phenomenon: Exposure to radioactive pesticides have caused his body to shrink. Dwindling at an alarming rate, Scott feels increasingly inadequate and menaced by his own home. When just several inches tall, he retreats into a dollhouse, away from his caring wife. After a mishap strands him in the basement, Scott begins a primitive struggle to survive in a domestic space turned strange and sinister landscape. As he continues to shrink, Scott turns to contemplation of his own, and man's, place in the universe. He finds consolation in the stirring, quasi-religious epiphany that, though he is dissolving into infinity, his existence still has meaning.

Directed by sci-fi and horror master Jack Arnold (*Creature from the Black Lagoon*, *It Came From Outer Space*), *The Incredible Shrinking Man* bears all the

traits of the best B monster movies of its era. Making the most of its modest budget with clever use of oversized props and special effects photography, it features a number of startling scenes, as when a once-benign housecat and a spider are rendered grotesquely large and alien. What sets the film apart from other sensationalist horror flicks, however, is Richard Matheson's intelligent script (adapted from his novel *The Shrinking Man*), and its thought-provoking themes. The tale can be read as an unsettling allegory of the anxieties that lurked beneath the glossy 1950s suburban ideal, alluding to the paranoia of nuclear threats and the reshaping of gender politics in post-World War II America. Director Arnold succeeds in conveying these weighty matters with a light and entertaining touch. Grant Williams and Randy Stuart are also convincing as the average suburban couple who are torn apart by Scott's nightmarish affliction and the challenges that arise from it.

Jennifer Rhee

INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS 2009

Director: Quentin Tarantino.

The Weinstein Company. **Producer:** Lawrence Bender. **Screenwriter:** Quentin Tarantino. **Cinematographer:** Robert Richardson. **Editor:** Sally Menke. **With:** Brad Pitt, Christoph Waltz, Michael Fassbender, Eli Roth, Diane Kruger.
35mm, color, 153 min.



Sweet revenge suffuses Quentin Tarantino's astounding revisionist World War II epic. A passion project in preparation for over a decade, the finished film premiered at Cannes in 2009 as a co-production between the Weinstein Company and Universal Pictures. It displays the full flowering of the techniques and tropes Tarantino had burnished over many years as an international auteur: the iconoclastic use of established actors, the insistence on the surface beauty of cinema violence, and an uncanny grasp of entertainment value lurking in unlikely (or more properly, sacrosanct) places, which critics of the film have alternately found exhilarating and exasperating.

Expectedly reverential of cinema, Tarantino here offers his take on the sub-genre of films that includes *The Wild Bunch* and *Guns of Navarone* about a group of male vigilantes on a dangerous mission. In an audacious genre twist, the badass avengers are a Jewish special forces unit. Assembled by Lieutenant Aldo Raine (Brad Pitt), they have a single mission: to infiltrate enemy territory and kill Nazis. The savagery and glee with which the so-called "Basterds" meet this challenge in the European badlands seems without precedent in stories of

World War II. Likewise, the story of Shosanna Dreyfus (Melanie Laurent), a young French cinema owner whose Jewish family is wiped out by sadistic German Colonel Hans Landa (Christoph Waltz). When Nazi leaders plan a self-congratulatory event in Shosanna's theater, she plots a vengeful finale worthy of, well, Tarantino. Her plot converges with another by the Basterds, and the hellishly violent denouement offers one of the most fascinating, complicated episodes of catharsis in modern cinema.

Shot through with painful cultural memories, infused with perverse humor and exuberantly observed bedlam, it became Tarantino's most popular and profitable film to date, with worldwide grosses of more than \$320 million. Featuring a magnificent international cast and a free-wheeling mash-up of genres and pop-cultural influences, *Inglourious Basterds* revels in the wealth of history, and film history, as reservoirs of narrative fantasy.

Shannon Kelley

JAWS 1975

Director: Steven Spielberg.

Zanuck/Brown Company **Producers:** Richard D. Zanuck, David Brown.
Based on the novel by Peter Benchley. **Screenwriters:** Peter Benchley, Carl Gottlieb. **Cinematographer:** Bill Butler. **Editor:** Verna Fields. **With:** Roy Scheider, Robert Shaw, Richard Dreyfuss, Lorraine Gary, Murray Hamilton.
35mm, color, 124 min.

Steven Spielberg's thriller about deadly shark attacks in a sunny beach community sent shock waves through a moviegoing public largely unaccustomed to such cinematic events. But they would have to get used to it: *Jaws* ushered in the blockbuster era. Where previously, a Hollywood feature might open in a few markets and gradually "roll out" on the basis of reviews and word-of-mouth, Universal released *Jaws* nationwide in the same week, accompanied by a national advertising campaign. Post-*Jaws*, the industry oriented itself around sensational success achieved quickly in multiple markets, setting up the high-stakes Hollywood of today.

Groomed in television at Universal and boasting one feature film (*Sugarland Express*, 1974), Spielberg sought the opportunity from producers Richard Zanuck and David Brown to direct the adaptation of Peter Benchley's novel. *Jaws'* similarity to Spielberg's hit TV movie *Duel* (1971) made the choice seem logical, but also aroused the director's ambivalence, causing him at one point to try to get out of the assignment to avoid being typecast. The producers would not relent, and the rest is history.

For all its lasting influence, *Jaws'* narrative setup of a community imperiled by an unseen terror is more or less conventional, albeit with a timely, post-Watergate view of cynical community "leaders" refusing to close profitable, though deadly, beaches. But *Jaws* is uncommonly affecting, with its oddly-matched heroes (Robert Shaw's salty shark hunter; Richard Dreyfuss' preppy biologist, and Roy Scheider's embattled police chief) and its unmistakable score by John Williams. Not to mention the puckish subtext of symbolically eviscerating the same middle-class American public being invited to purchase movie tickets.

While acknowledging the film's spectacular violence and unforgettable set pieces, it's notable that *Jaws* is also Spielberg's first in a line of nuanced, sympathetic valentines to the American family—here, focusing on the home life of the beleaguered officer. In many ways, *Jaws* inaugurated the mutual admiration between the director and a public facing its own daily perils (if not exactly sharks), and to whom the name "Spielberg" would personify "the movies" for decades to come.

Shannon Kelley



LITTLE MAN, WHAT NOW? 1934

Director: Frank Borzage.

Universal Pictures Corp. **Producer:** Carl Laemmle Jr. Based on the novel by Hans Fallada. **Screenwriter:** William Anthony McGuire. **Cinematographer:** Norbert Brodine. **Editor:** Milton Carruth. **With:** Margaret Sullavan, Douglass Montgomery, Alan Hale, Catharine Doucet, DeWitt Jennings. 35mm, b/w, 98 min.



Universal's adaptation of the 1932 international bestseller by Hans Fallada is a rare example of Hollywood addressing Germany's interwar depression and political turmoil while it was happening. For the most part, the industry typically avoided offending its German distributors and shied away from potentially controversial topics.

Released when Hitler was already chancellor of Germany, *Little Man, What Now?* became the first film in director Frank Borzage's increasingly anti-Nazi "Weimar Trilogy," which includes *Three Comrades* (1938) and *The Mortal Storm* (1940), both also starring Margaret Sullavan. The film is virtually bookended with street demonstrations dispersed by police, and the title is a rhetorical question posed to the baby of the story's newlyweds, Hans (Douglass Montgomery) and Laamchen (Sullavan): What will be the fate of an individual in a country facing violent upheaval?

Hans and Laamchen are happily married in Ducherow, but struggling to make ends meet in hard economic times. The news of Laamchen's pregnancy causes them worry, particularly Hans, who works as a bookkeeper for a bullying grain merchant who threatens to fire his employees on a regular basis. Their efforts

to establish a new life apart from the chaos around them leads them to Berlin and a series of relationships with cutthroat employers, desperate opportunists, and ideologues. But their commitment to each other never falters.

Though it was merely her second feature, the strong-willed Sullavan reportedly insisted on the selection of Borzage as director, and the material couldn't have appealed more to the filmmaker as it connected with his major theme: the possibility of personal transcendence through romantic love. The diminutive but soulful Sullavan quickly became one of Borzage's key muses, much as Janet Gaynor did in the silent period.

Borzage's visual finesse especially shines in two set pieces: an Edenic countryside outing in which Hans and Laamchen are bathed in soft light and playfully chase each other in a magnificent tracking shot; and a conversation staged on a merry-go-round, an apt visual metaphor for the lovers' determined grasp in a whirlwind of social change.

Doug Cummings

MAGNIFICENT OBSESSION 1954

Director: Douglas Sirk.

Universal-International Pictures Co., Inc. **Producer:** Ross Hunter. Based on the novel by Lloyd C. Douglas. **Screenwriter:** Robert Blees. **Cinematographer:** Russell Metty. **Editor:** Milton Carruth. **With:** Jane Wyman, Rock Hudson, Agnes Moorehead, Otto Kruger, Barbara Rush. 35mm, color, 107 min.



Universal struck gold in the 1950s with a string of melodramas directed by Douglas Sirk, whose *Imitation of Life* (1959) was the studio's biggest hit until *Airport* (1970). Sirk was an émigré under contract who cut his teeth in German theater during the 1920s and '30s. Although he made eight films with Rock Hudson, their most successful were soap operas boasting a European formalism that framed American passions with searing clarity.

Magnificent Obsession made a star of Hudson, a studio hunk previously relegated to supporting roles, and reinforced Jane Wyman's "weepie" credentials after her Oscar-winning role in *Johnny Belinda* (1948). It also helped define the tone for Sirk's melodramas, mostly shot by ace cinematographer Russell Metty (*Spartacus*, *Touch of Evil*): heightened emotions conveyed through lush, expressionist visuals.

The film is a remake of director John M. Stahl's 1935 adaptation of the "pay it forward" novel by author-minister Lloyd C. Douglas (*The Robe*) that indicted the hedonism of the Roaring Twenties. Sirk transposes the story to the materialism of the 1950s: Bob Manning (Hudson) is a millionaire playboy whose

reckless behavior contributes to the death of a revered doctor. Captivated by the doctor's widow (Wyman), Manning takes a cue from an idealistic painter and devotes his life to charity.

Sirk utilizes the colorful peaks of Technicolor but grounds them, and his fanciful story, in a rigorous and carefully composed materialism of pristine decor: the latest fashions, houses, cars, vases; even a lamp provides a major metaphor. As the narrative progresses into greater realms of dramatic incredulity, the film's sunny, vacation exteriors—an amalgamation of Lake Arrowhead and Lake Tahoe—give way to sober interiors and shadowy evenings.

Like many melodramas, the film revolves around hospitals and medical professionals, and the spectre of death hangs around every perfectly lit corner. But its awareness of mortality strengthens its conviction that life in all its splendor must be lived while it can, a passionate exhortation of the ultimate magnificent obsession.

Doug Cummings

THE MUMMY 1932

Director: Karl Freund.

Universal Pictures Corp. **Producer:** Carl Laemmle Jr. **Screenwriter:** John L. Balderston. **Cinematographer:** Charles Stumar. **Editor:** Milton Carruth. **With:** Boris Karloff, Zita Johann, David Manners, Arthur Byron, Edward Van Sloan. 35mm, b/w, 78 min.



The discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb in 1922 created a sensation around the world. Extensive press coverage of its excavation, exhibitions of the pharaoh's artifacts, and rumors of an ancient and deadly curse kept public interest high throughout the decade. Such context made it a natural for Universal to continue its run of monster movie hits with *The Mummy*.

After the success of the previous year's *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*, horror was firmly established as a viable and lucrative genre, and the public's fascination with Egypt was matched by its interest in the recently discovered talents of Boris Karloff. Universal gratified demand for both with this chilling tale of a cursed mummy reanimated by an ancient spell. Karloff's portrayal of Imhotep, the ancient Egyptian priest driven to possess the modern-day incarnation of his long-lost love, is as unforgettable as his bandaged visage. Creating the iconic look of the moldering monster was no small feat; Karloff endured an arduous process in becoming Imhotep. Under the exacting eye of makeup wizard Jack Pierce, the full-body application of rags, clay, and spirit gum for the opening scene reportedly took eight hours. The mummy's subsequent masquerade as Egyptian scholar Ardath Bey is played with understated menace, demonstrating the range of Karloff's talent.

The Mummy broke new ground in several ways, featuring an original story written expressly for the screen, rather than looking to established literary works for supernatural subject matter. The action is handled with restraint by acclaimed cinematographer Karl Freund, in his first directorial effort for Universal. Tantalizing shots of trailing bandages and shadowy misdeeds stoke the imagination, building up to the vivid scenes of Imhotep's past demise and present fate. While Edward Van Sloan and David Manners reprise familiar roles as occult expert and callow suitor, Zita Johann's leading lady departs from tradition by managing to save herself, albeit with the help of a vengeful Isis. In its ambitious mix of archeological adventure and supernatural thriller, *The Mummy* built upon the success of previous horror films while establishing the legitimacy of the genre in its own right and making its own enduring contribution to the pantheon of Universal monsters.

Nina Rao

NEVER GIVE A SUCKER AN EVEN BREAK 1941

Director: Edward Cline.

Universal Pictures Company, Inc. **Screenwriters:** John T. Neville, Prescott Chaplin. **Cinematographer:** Charles Van Enger. **Editor:** Arthur Hilton. **With:** W. C. Fields, Gloria Jean, Leon Errol, Margaret Dumont, Susan Miller. 35mm, b/w, 70 min.



In 1938 W.C. Fields ended his 12-year association with Paramount by signing a four-picture contract with Universal, which was trying to recover from the double whammy of the Depression and a turnover in studio management after Carl Laemmle's departure. Fields' first three films for Universal—*You Can't Cheat an Honest Man* (1939), written by himself under the pseudonym Charles Bogle; *My Little Chickadee* (1940), co-starring and co-written by another Paramount veteran, Mae West; and *The Bank Dick* (1940), with a screenplay credited to "Mahatma Kane Jeeves"—are usually considered among Fields' best and most characteristic films.

For all their farcical elements, these three films had fairly conventional, well-structured storylines; his fourth and last film for the studio, *Never Give a Sucker an Even Break* (based on a story by "Otis Criblecoblis"), was something else again. Fields plays himself, an actor-screenwriter trying to interest Esoteric Studios producer Franklin Pangborn in a ridiculous script about selling nutmegs to a colony of Russian expatriates living in Mexico. Losing patience before

Fields has had a chance to finish his pitch, Pangborn kicks him out of his office. Disgusted, Fields decides to leave Hollywood in the company of his niece, Gloria Jean (Gloria Jean Schoonover, a pretty teenaged soprano Universal was grooming to replace Deanna Durbin, who had outgrown the ingénue roles that made her famous). The film ends with a furious automobile chase shot, like the Keystone shorts it closely resembles, on the actual streets of Los Angeles (in this case on sections of Hyperion Avenue, Glendale Boulevard, and Brand Boulevard in Glendale). Like many old L.A. neighborhoods, the locations look very much the same today. (Two years later Universal reused the chase in the climactic sequence of an Abbott and Costello comedy, *In Society*.) Unfortunately, Fields was unable to moderate his drinking, and after *Sucker* he completed only a few cameo and guest appearances in longer films before his death on Christmas Day, 1946.

Charles Hopkins

OUT OF SIGHT 1998

Director: Steven Soderbergh.

Jersey Films. **Producer:** Danny DeVito, Michael Shamberg, Stacey Sher. Based on the novel by Elmore Leonard. **Screenwriter:** Scott Frank. **Cinematographer:** Elliott Davis. **Editor:** Anne V. Coates. **With:** George Clooney, Jennifer Lopez, Ving Rhames, Don Cheadle, Albert Brooks. 35mm, color, 123 min.



The desire for cine-literate, comedic crime thrillers in the wake of *Pulp Fiction* (1994) launched a number of movies in the 1990s, notably *Get Shorty* (1995), a winning adaptation of an Elmore Leonard novel by producer Danny DeVito and screenwriter Scott Frank. Hoping to repeat their success, DeVito and Frank reteamed at Universal to adapt Leonard's *Out of Sight*, about a love affair between a wisecracking bank robber and a tough federal marshal. The film boasted a new creative team that included indie wunderkind director Steven Soderbergh (*sex, lies and videotape*) and up-and-coming stars George Clooney ("ER") and singer Jennifer Lopez (memorable in the biopic *Selena*). Rather than a retread, however, the film is an unusually smart and sexy thriller; a throwback to the polished and efficient Hollywood caper films of yesteryear.

Jack Foley (Clooney) is a suave and clever Miami thief who lands in the pen shortly after the film begins; attempting to escape, he ends up in the trunk of a car pressed against the efficient and alluring officer, Karen Sisco (Lopez). An unexpected romance simmers between them, setting the plot in motion as Jack arranges for one final heist, and Karen attempts to stop him; both willing to follow the promptings of their mutual attraction while attempting to maintain boundaries.

Soderbergh captures the breezy momentum of Leonard's prose with swift editing and unexpected freeze frames that lend a rhythmic self-awareness to the nimble plot. Its nonlinear path feels effortless, and Leonard's witty dialogue (supplemented by memorable ad-libs from the cast) provides colorful repartee. The supporting players are uniformly strong, from Albert Brooks' vulnerable businessman to Michael Keaton's wry FBI agent (a character he also portrayed in *Jackie Brown*) to Don Cheadle's glib killer.

Soderbergh's enticing camerawork and staccato tempo convey his strong grasp of the material, but it's the powerhouse charm of the two leads that renders the film's magic. It was Clooney's breakthrough role—emphasizing his deft command of verbal deliveries as well as physical presence—and Lopez's coiled sensuality has rarely been put to better use; their onscreen sparks remain a shining example of star chemistry.

Doug Cummings

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA

1925

Director: Rupert Julian.

Universal Pictures Corp. **Producer:** Carl Laemmle. Based on the novel by Gaston Leroux. **Screenwriters:** Raymond Schrock, Elliott J. Clawson. **Cinematographer:** Virgil Miller. **Editor:** Maurice Pivar. **With:** Lon Chaney, Mary Philbin, Norman Kerry, Snitz Edwards, Gibson Gowland. 35mm, silent, b/w with color, 93 min.



A former Universal stock player, Lon Chaney was a sensation in Universal's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923) and two years later *The Phantom of the Opera* confirmed him as the silent era's leading interpreter of horror roles. As Erik, the deformed "Phantom" who lurks in catacombs beneath the Paris Opera, Chaney conceived a legendary, grotesque character, famously employing wire hooks and other effects to give his face a pinched, skull-like quality that terrified 1925 audiences. A master of pantomime, Chaney played effectively to the story's over-ripe air of Grand Guignol, surreptitiously offering vocal instruction to a young opera understudy (Mary Philbin) from behind a wall, then spiriting her away to his underground lair in the vain hope of winning her love. But the artistry of *Phantom*, probably Chaney's best-known film today, belies the difficulty of its making and the volatility of Universal at the time.

Irving Thalberg had been chief of production at Universal since 1919. A precocious talent at 24, he streamlined studio operations through an impressive, centralized organization, but desired to position Universal as an equal with larger studios via costlier prestige pictures. His expensive (and successful)

Hunchback was such a gambit but failed to spur a similar ambition in studio founder Carl Laemmle, prompting Thalberg to accept an offer to head the tonier Louis B. Mayer Pictures Corporation.

Laemmle and Universal charted a mostly conservative course for the next five years. But the *Phantom* project was in the pipeline, and then ascendant Chaney represented the studio's best chance at a return on its investment in the property. Direction was entrusted to Rupert Julian (*Merry-Go-Round*) who clashed with Chaney, and whose original cut was coolly received by preview audiences. The picture opened later that year, significantly re-shot and re-edited (a process repeated in 1929 for a "talkie" release). This series presents a version of the film that substantially recreates the 1929 release, including a color sequence, the famous "Bal Masque," with Chaney, costumed as the "Red Death."

Shannon Kelley



PILLOW TALK 1959

Director: Michael Gordon.

Universal-International Pictures Co., Inc. **Producers:** Ross Hunter, Martin Melcher. **Screenwriters:** Stanley Shapiro, Maurice Richlin. **Cinematographer:** Arthur E. Arling. **Editor:** Milton Carruth. **With:** Rock Hudson, Doris Day, Tony Randall, Thelma Ritter, Nick Adams.
35mm, color, 110 min.

Despite Universal's declining box office returns throughout the 1950s, producer Ross Hunter achieved great success at the studio with handsome and glossy productions, many directed by Douglas Sirk and starring favorite leading man Rock Hudson. Sensing Hudson's potential as a comic actor, the savvy Hunter seized on the idea of teaming him with Doris Day, America's favorite girl-next-door, in a sophisticated bedroom farce. By the mid-1950s, Day was free from the "gingham" roles of her Warner Bros. contract, but was suffering from a series of career misfires and a lack of cinematic identity. As Hunter infamously declared in his pitch to Day for what would become *Pillow Talk*, "Under that dirndl lurked one of the wildest asses in Hollywood!" Day and her co-producing husband, Martin Melcher, were convinced.

Even with Hunter's confidence, Hudson was nervous about starring in his first comedy. Making matters seemingly worse for Hudson was the fact that director Michael Gordon (helming his first film since being blacklisted in 1951) was a very intense and serious man. Gordon told Hudson to treat the comedy "like the very most tragic story you've ever portrayed. If you think you're

funny, nobody else will." Thankfully the two leads took an instant liking to each other; Hudson credits Day's incredible comedic instinct and timing for why he became so successful in the genre. The breezy Oscar-winning screenplay also allowed pitch-perfect wisecracking co-stars Tony Randall and Thelma Ritter a chance to display their immense natural comedic talents.

Pillow Talk would garner Day her only Oscar nomination and would become her most identifiable role. Costume designer Jean Louis created a meticulously beautiful wardrobe for Day that instantly transformed the star into a fashion icon throughout the 1960s. *Pillow Talk* was a colossal critical and box-office success. The film grossed over \$18 million and paved the way for two more "Doris & Rock" projects, as well as the slew of Universal sex-comedies to come in the following decade, including *Come September* (1961), *That Touch Of Mink* (1962), *Man's Favorite Sport?* (1964) and *Strange Bedfellows* (1965).

Todd Wiener

SHOW BOAT 1936

Director: James Whale.

Universal Productions, Inc. **Producer:** Carl Laemmle Jr. Based on the novel by Edna Ferber and the musical by Edna Ferber, Jerome Kern, and Oscar Hammerstein II. **Screenwriter:** Oscar Hammerstein II. **Cinematographer:** John J. Mescall. **Editor:** Ted Kent. **With:** Irene Dunne, Allan Jones, Charles Winniger, Paul Robeson, Helen Morgan. 35mm, b/w, 115 min.



Carl Laemmle purchased rights to *Show Boat*, Edna Ferber's sprawling Southern novel about life on the Mississippi, in 1927, several months before the opening of Florenz Ziegfeld's Broadway smash. Hollywood's scramble to convert to sound, however, overtook Universal's production and it became apparent to the studio that it would now have to include the tremendously successful Kern and Hammerstein musical score at considerable additional expense (\$165,000 for rights alone). The subsequent part-talkie/musical was released in 1929 to mostly scathing reviews, a plodding 14-reeler that exemplified Hollywood's mostly awkward transition to the sound era.

By 1935, the Laemmles had mortgaged the studio's future productions as well as their controlling interest in the studio and were in desperate need of a box office smash. Everything appeared to be resting on a *Show Boat* remake that had been languishing for years. Ultimately, Universal's prominent horror director James Whale was the incongruous choice to direct a cast of principals drawn mostly from the stage version, including Charles Winniger as the affable Cap'n Andy, Helen Morgan as the tragic Julie LaVerne, and the incomparable Paul Robeson as Joe. Currently under a three-picture contract with the

studio, an eager Irene Dunne reprised the role of Magnolia for which she had received great acclaim during the stage tour. Whale, however, incensed the theater veterans even before shooting began, telling them to "forget whatever ideas you have, because I will interpret, through you, my conception of each role." Much later, Dunne reflected on the experience: "Whale wasn't the right director. He was more interested in atmosphere and lighting and he knew so little about that [Southern riverboat] life."

Despite the chilly relationships, production delays, and cost overruns, Universal's 1936 *Show Boat* is a lovingly crafted and deeply emotional musical that received unanimous critical praise. *The New York Times* gushed that it was "one of the finest musical films we have seen." Unfortunately, the film's success could not be leveraged to save Universal from insolvency. The studio's new owners, Standard Capital Company and Charles R. Rogers, immediately dismissed Laemmle and son, and a new era of cost-cutting and modest productions commenced.

Todd Wiener

SOMEWHERE IN TIME 1980

Director: Jeannot Szwarc.

Rastar Films. **Producer:** Stephen Deutsch. Based on a novel by Richard Matheson. **Screenwriter:** Richard Matheson. **Cinematographer:** Isidore Mankofsky. **Editor:** Jeff Gourson. **With:** Christopher Reeve, Jane Seymour, Christopher Plummer, Teresa Wright, Bill Erwin.
35mm, color, 103 min.



How do you follow up portraying Superman on the big screen? If you're Christopher Reeve you slip naturally into the role of playwright Richard Collier, "the sort of man each woman dreams of in the deepest and most secret reaches of her heart." That's how stage actress Elise McKenna (played by Jane Seymour with far-away eyes) describes Collier in a rhapsodic improvisation mid-performance at the truly grand Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island, Michigan. The year is 1912 and Collier and McKenna have just met and fallen in love—decades before he was born.

Based on a novel by Richard Matheson, who also wrote the screenplay, *Somewhere in Time* tells a tale of time travel and long lost love. One is tempted to call it science fiction, but Matheson's elegant conception of the means for journeying across the years is so evocative, itself, of the tenuous dream-like quality of a love affair that science can have nothing to do with it. Plagued by writer's block, a young Collier escapes Chicago for the Grand Hotel circa 1980 where he becomes enthralled by a photo of McKenna hanging in the venerable estab-

lishment's "Hall of History." Further research not only convinces Collier that he and McKenna were lovers over 60 years earlier but that self-hypnosis could reunite them in the past. Literally willing himself back in time, Collier finds McKenna on the eve of that fateful performance and the two fall headlong into a romance for the ages, even as it's doomed from the start.

Around his star-crossed couple, director Jeannot Szwarc conjures a soft-focus fantasy of post-Gilded Age America. Collier and McKenna's first romantic turn around the hotel grounds rapturously unfolds like a live staging of Seurat's "Sunday Afternoon on the Isle of La Grande Jatte." John Barry's swooning score and recurring passages of Rachmaninoff complete the film's heady, intoxicating atmosphere. Though *Somewhere in Time* was released to withering reviews and tepid box office, it has since become one of Hollywood's most beloved romances with a devoted international fan base.

Paul Malcolm

THE STING 1973

Director: George Roy Hill.

Bill/Phillips Productions. **Producers:** Tony Bill, Julia Phillips. **Screenwriter:** David S. Ward. **Cinematographer:** Robert Surtees. **Editor:** William Reynolds. **With:** Paul Newman, Robert Redford, Robert Shaw, Charles Durning, Ray Walston.
35mm, color, 129 min.

Right from the start, *The Sting* bears the mark of New Hollywood's self-conscious affection for Old Hollywood's style. It opens with the Universal logo from the decade between 1936 and 1946, its swirling, glittering stars beckoning the audience into the past. As the first notes of Scott Joplin's ragtime "The Entertainer" begin and the first of the film's *Saturday Evening Post*-style illustrated title cards appear, we're already caught in its nostalgic spell. Yet for all of the film's overdetermined signifiers, it carries the weight of film history as lightly as a feather.

Such a balancing act is not surprising, given the film's reteaming of director George Roy Hill with leading men Paul Newman and Robert Redford, whose previous outing together, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969), delivered more than its share of winks without undermining its Western revisionist cred. From lovable outlaws to lovable con men, Newman and Redford here play a pair of Depression-era Chicago swindlers out to scam a big-time hood (Robert Shaw) for profit and revenge—their mark whacked a beloved mentor to

them both. Their plan has more angles than a Picasso but following every turn of the screw is only half the fun in a film brimming with so much on-screen charisma. The character talent below the line runs deep, including performances by Charles Durning, Ray Walston, Eileen Brennan and Harold Gould. Behind the camera, cinematographer Robert Surtees (*Ben-Hur*, *The Graduate*) and matte painter Albert Whitlock bring old Chicago to vivid, romantic life.

The Sting was a smash hit that, combined with the box office from *American Graffiti* released earlier the same year, transformed Universal into the most profitable studio in Hollywood at the time. The film's soundtrack even put Scott Joplin on the charts. Financial success was matched by critical acclaim. Praised by reviewers, *The Sting* was nominated for 10 Oscars and won seven, including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Original Screenplay and Best Music. In 2005, the film was named to the Library of Congress' National Film Registry.

Paul Malcolm



THREE SMART GIRLS GROW UP

1939

Director: Henry Koster.

Universal Pictures Co. **Producer:** Joe Pasternak. **Screenwriters:** Bruce Manning, Felix Jackson. **Cinematographer:** Joseph Valentine. **Editors:** Bernard W. Burton, Ted Kent. **With:** Deanna Durbin, Nan Grey, Helen Parrish, Charles Winninger; Nella Walker. 35mm, b/w, 87 min.



In this coming-of-age comedy set in glittering New York high society, Deanna Durbin stars as the precocious Penny, the youngest of the three Craig sisters. Soon after eldest sister Joan (Nan Grey) announces her engagement to the flawless, refined Richard Watkins (William Lundigan), Penny discovers that her other sister, Kay (Helen Parrish), secretly loves Joan's fiancé and is heartbroken over the proposed marriage. Seeking to remedy the situation and assuage her sister's sorrows, Penny conspires to have Kay fall in love with another young man, and her hunt for Mr. "Tall, Dark and Handsome" begins.

Penny finds the musician Harry Loren and invites him to their palatial house. Penny's contrived efforts to draw Harry's attention towards Kay prove to be in vain. The magnetism between the dynamic Harry and the beautiful Joan, however, is immediately apparent. A series of difficulties and misunderstandings arise as Penny, "Little Miss Fix-It," plays the role of matchmaker. Penny looks to her father, the absentminded businessman Judson Craig, for guidance, but the Wall Street wizard is oblivious when it comes to his own family affairs. (Still, Dad ultimately learns his lesson and saves the day, reaffirming the notion that "father knows best.") Throughout it all, the bright Craig sisters find themselves

stumbling into the realm of adulthood, as they make sense of amorous feelings and undergo conflicts which test their sibling loyalty.

Family matters are at the heart of this charming, tender sequel to *Three Smart Girls* (1936), which made the youthful Durbin a major Universal star. In the bitter Depression years, Durbin helped the studio stay afloat, delighting audiences with her sunny disposition and pleasant, unaffected style of operatic singing. Her on-screen persona as the tenacious girl with wholesome values and beaming optimism easily made her America's sweetheart. Director Henry Koster's *Three Smart Girls Grow Up* breezes along effortlessly thanks to its smart dialogue, amiable personalities, and light musical numbers, including Durbin's rendition of the old standard "Because." The film unfolds seamlessly as we glide through the world of opulent soirees and upscale nightclubs, while still grounded by its central, family-friendly themes.

Jennifer Rhee

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD 1962

Director: Robert Mulligan.

Pakula-Mulligan Productions, Inc. **Producer:** Alan J. Pakula. Based on the novel by Harper Lee. **Screenwriter:** Horton Foote. **Cinematographer:** Russell Harlan. **Editors:** Aaron Stell, J.Terry Williams. **With:** Gregory Peck, Brock Peters, Estelle Evans, Mary Badham, Robert Duvall. 35mm, b/w, 130 min.



Based on Harper Lee's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *To Kill A Mockingbird* depicts everyday life in the small, dusty town of Maycomb, Alabama in the 1930s, as seen through the eyes of two children, Jem and Scout Finch. When their widowed father Atticus, a lawyer, agrees to represent a Black man accused of raping a white woman, they are confronted with the realities of prejudice and injustice as the trial unfolds, challenging their heretofore innocent childhood.

In what the *New York Times* declared "a bewitching indication of the excitement and thrill of being a child," Robert Mulligan's skillful direction illuminates the moody mysteries and wonders of childhood, the stifling heat and underlying tensions of Maycomb, and the gradual awakening of Jem and Scout to the hatred in the world around them. It's an enduring coming-of-age journey traced, from the opening title sequence's meditation on objects in a child's box of treasures to the shadowy drama of the film's end, in the richly composed black-and-white photography of Russell Harlan, who was nominated for an Academy Award.

To Kill a Mockingbird received eight Academy Award nominations in all, including Best Picture, and went on to win three. In addition to wins for Best Screenplay and Art Direction, Gregory Peck, nominated four times previously, took home his only acting Oscar for his portrayal of the soft-spoken but unflinchingly principled Atticus Finch.

Other notable performances include Brock Peters' dignified rendering of the unfortunate Tom Robinson, John Megna as Jem and Scout's playmate Dill (a character based on Harper Lee's childhood friend Truman Capote), Robert Duvall's screen debut as reclusive neighbor Boo Radley, and Mary Badham's standout performance as the scrappy and precocious Scout. At 10 years old, Badham was the youngest person ever nominated for Best Supporting Actress at the time.

Nina Rao

TRAFFIC IN SOULS 1913

Director: George Loane Tucker.

Independent Moving Picture Co. **Screenwriters:** Walter MacNamara, George Loane Tucker. **With:** Jane Gail, Ethel Grandin, William Turner, Matt Moore, William Welsh.
35mm, silent, b/w, 88 min.



The issue of underage prostitution exploded in American public consciousness in 1910 with the publication of Reginald Wright Kaufmann's sensationalist novel, *The House of Bondage*, which went through ten printings in as many months. Prostitution then became a national obsession with the release of the "Rockefeller Commission Report on White Slavery," a supposed source for *Traffic in Souls*, co-written and directed by George Loane Tucker. In this seminal melodrama, a young woman accepts a date with a "nice" young man, and ends up sold to a "white slavery" ring, secretly run by a well-known philanthropist. Desperate to find her, the victim's sister takes a job with the philanthropist and, with the help of her boyfriend, a police detective, exposes his nefarious scheme. Whatever actual truth Tucker's depiction of this criminal world may hold, the fact that it is a member of the ruling class that controls public vice—and the working class his victims—testifies to the class bias of early cinema audiences, a trend in this new popular entertainment, also evidenced in D.W. Griffith's early gangster film *Musketeers of Pig Alley* (1912), that was almost as alarming to some social reformers as prostitution itself.

Striking the right balance between civic education and salacious exploitation, however, *Traffic in Souls* earned a whopping \$450,000 on a \$5,700 investment.

At one point, the film was being shown at 20 New York theatres simultaneously. Both film critics and Progressives praised its fast pace and social message. Produced by the Independent Motion Picture Company (IMP), Carl Laemmle's production company, *Traffic in Souls* was the first feature length film distributed by Universal after its founding, and one of the first long form films produced in the United States. Ironically, the film's success did little to convince Laemmle that features were the way of the future, so for several more years Universal continued making shorts, while others made the transition. Given that policy, *Traffic* was cast and shot in secret without the knowledge of IMP officials, then cut down to six reels by Jack Cohn and Walter McNamara, Tucker having left the country for England before the film's post-production was completed. Finally, since the film was shot in real New York locations, it affords the modern viewer a unique window on to the past.

Jan-Christopher Horak

WHERE ARE MY CHILDREN? 1916

Director: Lois Weber.

Universal Film Mfg. Co. Phillips Smalley. **Screenwriter:** Lois Weber.

Cinematographers: Al Siegler, Stephen S. Norton. **With:** Tyrone Power, Helen Riaume, Marie Walcamp, Cora Drew, Rene Rogers.
35mm, silent, b/w, 62 min.



An overzealous prosecutor accuses a local doctor of performing illegal abortions, unaware of his own wife's complicity in helping wealthy socialites, including herself, avoid pregnancy. Previously, the prosecutor had supported a doctor convicted of sending birth control literature through the mails (a subplot based on the sensational 1915 trial of suffragette and feminist Margaret Sanger). Thus, writer-director Lois Weber's *Where Are My Children?* served up mixed messages: on the one hand, condemning abortions, while on the other, advocating birth control, especially for working class women. Not surprisingly, as did *Traffic in Souls*, Weber's content and themes caused a huge controversy and was actually banned in some states, though film critics generally praised the film for its sensitive handling of difficult moral and social issues. *Where Are My Children?* was also Universal's biggest moneymaker of 1916.

Though little known today, except in film academic circles, Lois Weber was one of the most powerful women in Hollywood in this time period. She was

an outspoken feminist and social reformer who consciously used her films for social advocacy, and like D.W. Griffith, controlled every aspect of production from script to post-production. In 1916 alone, Weber directed no less than 10 films for Universal. The success of *Children* and other films allowed Weber to become the first American woman to own her own film studio, while continuing to distribute through Universal. She was not, however, unique at the studio, where a whole cadre of women directors worked in the 1910s, including Grace Cunard, Cleo Madison, Ida May Park, Ruth Stonehouse, Elsie Jane Wilson, and Ruth Ann Baldwin. However, by 1920, as Marc Cooper has demonstrated, they had been driven out of director's chairs and into "feminine" film professions, like scriptwriting and editing. In 1993, *Where Are My Children?* was named to the Library of Congress' National Registry of this country's most significant film works.

Jan-Christopher Horak

WINCHESTER '73 1950

Director: Anthony Mann.

Universal-International Pictures Co., Inc. **Producer:** Aaron Rosenberg.

Screenwriters: Robert L. Richards, Borden Chase. **Cinematographer:** William Daniels. **Editor:** Edward Curtiss. **With:** James Stewart, Shelley Winters, Dan Duryea, Stephen McNally, Rock Hudson.

35mm, b/w, 92 min.

Cowboy Lin McAdam wins a prized Winchester rifle in a contest, only to have it stolen by a rival. Unbeknownst to McAdam (James Stewart), the rival is actually his long lost brother who had murdered their father, thus setting off an epic, Cain-and-Abel struggle between good and evil. As the gun changes hands several times, the cowboy doggedly, one might say obsessively to the point of neurosis, pursues the killer and the coveted rifle. Written by classic Western novelist and screenwriter Borden Chase, *Winchester '73* helped kick off a tidal wave of complex, adult Westerns in the 1950s that eschewed the genre's previously black and white morality. Meanwhile, Anthony Mann's incredibly economic and dark direction and William Daniel's breathtakingly beautiful cinematography give *Winchester '73* a sweeping scope that have earned the film a reputation as a true masterpiece.

With this film, Stewart became Universal's most popular Western star, changing his previous image as a city slicker and light comedian to that of a hard-boiled, but also morally ambiguous Westerner who can stand up to Dan Duryea's nearly psychotic gang leader. Ironically, Stewart almost didn't take the

role, because the producers could not match his \$250,000 fee, until MCA agent Lew Wasserman brokered a percentage deal, the first of its kind in the sound film era, which earned the actor more than \$600,000. Percentage deals would soon become an industry norm, upending the relationship between studios, agents and talent and contributing to the demise of long-term contracts and the studio system.

The film revitalized Stewart's career after a number of post war flops and a growing reputation as an acting lightweight. It was Stewart who suggested Mann to direct after Fritz Lang pulled out of the project. The pair would go on to produce several more masterpieces together, including *Bend of the River* (1957), *The Naked Spur* (1953), and *The Man From Laramie* (1955). Also, look for Rock Hudson and Tony Curtis in tiny roles, before both became stars at Universal.

Jan-Christopher Horak



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UNIVERSAL PICTURES: CELEBRATING 100 YEARS THE CATALOG

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Special thanks to: Daniel Bish, Tracy Cohen, Hollace Davids, Dennis Doros, Cindy Gardner, Paul Ginsburg, Robert Gitt, Jeff Greenspun, Tim Lanza, Jenny Manriquez, Sonia Marroquin, Michael Mashon, Jeff Pirtle, Ned Price, David Shepard, Suzette Snyder, Rob Stone, Stephanie Testa, Marilee Womack.

Designer: Elizabeth Burrill.

Selected Photographs Courtesy: Margaret Herrick Library, Universal Pictures.

Photos: **Front cover:** *Pillow Talk* (1959); inside front cover, Carl Laemmle, founder, Universal Pictures; **page 1:** Universal Pictures "glittering globe" logo, 1936 – 1946; **page 5:** Filming of *Love's Lariat* (1916) starring Harry Carey, with guests observing from bleachers of the Universal Studios tour; **page 6:** Boris Karloff; **page 10:** *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) playing at the Roxy Theater, New York; **inside back cover:** Universal Studios Tour Tram by Psycho House, 1965; **back cover:** On location with cast and crew: Fred Frank, George Taylor, Al Rogell (director), Norman Deming, Billy Engels, Jack Hoxie (with sheriff's badge), George Robertson, and Lew Collins, 1923-1927.



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