

The Museum of Modern Art

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HOLLYWOOD IN 1939

August 4 - September 12, 1989

Widely regarded as the height of the Hollywood studio system, the year 1939 produced an unparalleled variety of enduring films. Thirty-five of the most memorable movies released that year by major studios and independent producers are presented in HOLLYWOOD IN 1939, opening at The Museum of Modern Art on August 4, 1989. In addition to the acknowledged classics of the time, the exhibition also includes modest genre films and B movies which sustained the industry and entertained an avid public worldwide.

In 1939, a decade after the entrenchment of talkies and with the Depression on the wane, the film industry reached a new level of technological, artistic, and economic confidence. In terms of theme, style, and budget, Hollywood's output was remarkably diverse. This series reflects the range of films produced at the time, from opulent adaptations of literary classics, such as William Wyler's Wuthering Heights, to massive biographical portraits, such as William Dieterle's Juarez. Also included are B pictures of the time featuring continuing characters--the thirties' equivalent of network television series--such as Harold S. Bucquet's Calling Dr. Kildare, Alfred Werkers's The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes, Edwin L. Marin's Maisie, and Richard Thorpe's Tarzan Finds a Son.

Although all the major studios produced a wide variety of films, many concentrated on specific genres for which they demonstrated a particular flair. Raoul Walsh's The Roaring Twenties, starring James Cagney and Humphrey Bogart, is an example of Warner Bros' underworld melodramas; Rowland V. Lee's Son of

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Frankenstein, starring Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi, is representative of Universal's horror films; and Busby Berkeley's Babes in Arms, starring Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney, is typical of MGM's musicals. 20th Century Fox exhibited a special affinity for films that celebrated Americana; these included John Ford's Drums Along the Mohawk and Young Mr. Lincoln, and Henry King's Jesse James, all of which star Henry Fonda. Yet, with the impending war in Europe posing a threat to democracy, the impulse to examine the American past was widespread throughout Hollywood in 1939. This resulted in such films as Michael Curtiz's Dodge City, John Ford's Stagecoach, and Victor Fleming's Gone With The Wind.

Another visible current in the films of that year was social progressivism, a fading legacy of the Depression. Socially conscious films included Rouben Mamoulian's Golden Boy and Dudley Murphy's One Third of a Nation. More characteristically, in response to the troubled mood of the times, Hollywood exercised its penchant for escapism. One dominant strain in 1939 was the headlong romanticism of such love stories as Gregory Ratoff's Intermezzo, with Ingrid Bergman and Leslie Howard; John Cromwell's Made for Each Other, with Carole Lombard and James Stewart; and Edmund Goulding's Dark Victory, with Bette Davis and Humphrey Bogart.

HOLLYWOOD IN 1939 has been organized by Stephen Harvey, associate curator, Department of Film. The exhibition continues through September 12, 1989.

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For further information or film stills, contact Sarah Eaton, film press representative, Department of Public Information, 212/708-9750.