

The Museum of Modern Art

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DIRECTOR GEORGE CUKOR HONORED FIVE-WEEK-21-FILM RETROSPECTIVE

A Five-Week Tribute to George Cukor, including 22 films by the American director, will commence on August 27, 1970 at The Museum of Modern Art. Starting with THE ROYAL FAMILY OF BROADWAY, the 1930 movie based on the famous Barrymore clan, with Ina Claire and Fredric March, the Cukor show covers more than three decades in the director's career. In the thirties, stars such as Cary Grant were familiar fixtures in his pictures; the late forties and fifties were marked by the film-maker's frequent collaboration with screenwriters Garson Kanin and his actress wife Ruth Gordon, as well as his pictures co-starring Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy. The final film of the series, THE CHAPMAN REPORT, was made in 1963.

The retrospective was assembled by Gary Carey, former Assistant Curator of the Museum's Department of Film and author of a forthcoming book entitled Cukor & Co., to be published this fall by the Museum. According to Carey, Cukor was most sympathetic to comic material which had "a strong undercurrent of humanity." Cukor emphasized the roles of his writing collaborators, as well as his actors, because he was primarily influenced by the theater, which he entered in Chicago in 1918. He was a stage manager when stars such as Sarah Bernhardt, Isadora Duncan, Yvette Guilbert, Alla Nazimova, and Elsie Ferguson reigned. He never lost his admiration for actors, which he later carried over to his screen work, at the same time that he displayed a healthy regard for the playwright, who in the 20s became the dominant element in the theater. At the same time the director gained importance as an interpreter of the author's script.

Cukor, a resident director of a theatrical company in Rochester in 1920, went on to direct several plays in New York during the late twenties, among them "The Great Gatsby" and Maxwell Anderson's "Gypsy," play material with which he was to be most comfortable-- "too light to be considered drama but a little too serious to be considered comedy," according to Carey.

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With the advent of sound in motion pictures, stage directors were suddenly in demand. The move to Hollywood was natural for Cukor, who had established a good reputation in his field. At this time, former stage directors were often employed as co-directors in charge of actors and dialogue, sharing the job with an experienced silent film director who handled technical matters. Cukor was dialogue director of ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT, and co-directed three other films, among them THE ROYAL FAMILY OF BROADWAY.

TARNISHED LADY (1931) was the first film directed solely by Cukor and marked the debut of Tallulah Bankhead in talking pictures. At the time, critics praised Miss Bankhead's performance lavishly but felt the film was an inadequate vehicle for her talent. As it developed, according to Carey, she was not to have a better film in which to display her ability until Hitchcock's 1944 film LIFEBOAT.

In all, Cukor directed or co-directed 20 films in the thirties. LITTLE WOMEN, made in 1933 with Katharine Hepburn, was a visually sophisticated adaptation of Louisa May Alcott's novel, with effective lighting and imaginative camera placements to capture what Carey calls "sentimentality as a style of life."

CAMILLE (1937), featuring Greta Garbo in what the New York Herald Tribune called "a magnificent and unforgettable performance," was also directed by Cukor. Garbo so dominated the film that a New York Times critic wrote: "She is as incomparable as legend tells us Bernhardt was." It is to Cukor's credit that, with characteristic respect for an actress with a talent as great as Garbo's, he let her play the part as she wished.

Carey considers HOLIDAY (1938) one of Cukor's best films. With Katharine Hepburn and Cary Grant starring in Philip Barry's romantic comedy, it criticized the materialism of American life and the snobbishness of a money-oriented society. The picture was considered "expertly directed" but Miss Hepburn was labeled "box-office poison," and it was not until THE PHILADELPHIA STORY (1940), one of Cukor's greatest successes, that she made a comeback. Bosley Crowther, erstwhile New York Times critic, noted that the film had "just about everything a blue-chip comedy should have" and added: "Someone was rudely charging a few years ago that Miss Hepburn was 'box-office poison.' If she is, a lot of people don't read labels--including us."

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Meanwhile Cukor, who had been signed in 1936 to direct the most famous film of the thirties, GONE WITH THE WIND, was removed from the production in 1938 after shooting had started, in spite of the objections of Vivien Leigh and Olivia de Havilland, both of whom continued to seek his advice throughout the filming. To this day, the reasons for his dismissal are unclear. It is felt that he spent too much time on intimate detail and not enough on spectacle; it is also rumored that Clark Gable believed Cukor was devoting too much attention to the female leads. While several directors worked on the film, only Victor Fleming received the credit.

The late forties saw the union between Cukor and the husband-wife screenwriting team of Garson Kanin and Ruth Gordon, a collaboration which resulted in such movies as ADAM'S RIB, a 1949 comedy with Katharine Hepburn, Spencer Tracy and Judy Holliday; BORN YESTERDAY (1950), with Miss Holliday, Broderick Crawford and William Holden; and PAT AND MIKE (1952), in which Hepburn and Tracy, together for the seventh time, transmit to the audience the warmth and enjoyment resulting from their own polished, relaxed interplay.

Cukor directed A STAR IS BORN in 1954, probably the most famous musical of the fifties, and one of the first films to use the wide screen ratio with imagination. In the 50s and 60s, Cukor also made great strides in the use of color, dramatically evident in HELLER IN PINK TIGHTS, LES GIRLS, and THE CHAPMAN REPORT. In 1964, Cukor won an Academy Award for his direction of MY FAIR LADY.

Cukor's most recent directorial effort was JUSTINE, a film version of Lawrence Durrell's esteemed Alexandria Quartet.

The films scheduled for A Tribute to George Cukor follow. All are directed by Cukor.

Thursday, August 27 (2:00, 5:30, 8:00)

THE ROYAL FAMILY OF BROADWAY, 1930. Co-directed by Cyril Gardner. With Fredric March, Ina Claire, Mary Brian.

Friday, August 28 (2:00, 5:30)

THE ROYAL FAMILY OF BROADWAY (see August 27).

Saturday, August 29 (3:00, 5:30)

TARNISHED LADY, 1931. With Tallulah Bankhead, Clive Brook, Phoebe Foster.

Sunday, August 30 (2:00, 5:30)

GIRLS ABOUT TOWN, 1931. With Kay Francis, Joel McCrea, Lilyan Tashman, Eugene Pallette.

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Monday, August 31 (1:30)

TARNISHED LADY (see August 29).

Tuesday, September 1 (5:30)

GIRLS ABOUT TOWN (see August 30).

Wednesday, September 2 (2:00, 5:30)

CAMILLE, 1937. With Greta Garbo, Robert Taylor, Lionel Barrymore.

Thursday, September 3 (2:00, 5:30, 8:00)

DINNER AT EIGHT, 1933. With Marie Dressler, John Barrymore, Wallace Beery, Jean Harlow, Lionel Barrymore.

Friday, September 4 (2:00, 5:30)

BILL OF DIVORCEMENT, 1932. With John Barrymore, Katharine Hepburn, Billie Burke.

Saturday, September 5 (3:00, 5:30)

BILL OF DIVORCEMENT (see September 4).

Sunday, September 6 (2:00, 5:30)

LITTLE WOMEN, 1933. With Katharine Hepburn, Joan Bennett, Frances Dee, Jean Parker, Spring Byington, Edna May Oliver.

Monday, September 7 (1:30)

LITTLE WOMEN (see September 6).

Tuesday, September 8 (5:30)

WHAT PRICE HOLLYWOOD, 1932. With Constance Bennett, Lowell Sherman, Neil Hamilton.

Wednesday, September 9 (2:00, 5:30)

CAMILLE (see September 2).

Thursday, September 10

2:00, 5:30: ROMEO AND JULIET, 1936. With Norma Shearer, Leslie Howard, John Barrymore, Edna May Oliver.

8:00: SYLVIA SCARLETT, 1936. With Katharine Hepburn, Cary Grant, Brian Aherne.

Friday, September 11 (2:00, 5:30)

HELLER IN PINK TIGHTS, 1959. With Sophia Loren, Anthony Quinn, Margaret O'Brien.

Saturday, September 12 (3:00, 5:30)

HOLIDAY, 1938. With Katharine Hepburn, Cary Grant, Doris Nolan, Lew Ayres.

Sunday, September 13 (2:00, 5:30)

THE WOMEN, 1939. With Norma Shearer, Joan Crawford, Rosalind Russell, Mary Boland, Paulette Goddard, Joan Fontaine.

Monday, September 14 (1:30)

HOLIDAY (see September 12).

Tuesday, September 15 (5:30)

THE WOMEN (see September 13).

Wednesday, September 16 (2:00, 5:30)

THE PHILADELPHIA STORY, 1940. With Katharine Hepburn, Cary Grant, James Stewart.

Thursday, September 17 (2:00, 5:30, 8:00)

THE PHILADELPHIA STORY (see September 16).

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Friday, September 18 (2:00, 5:30)

GASLIGHT, 1944. With Charles Boyer, Ingrid Bergman, Joseph Cotton, Angela Lansbury.

Saturday, September 19 (3:00, 5:30)

GASLIGHT (see September 18).

Sunday, September 20 (2:00, 5:30)

ADAM'S RIB, 1949. With Katharine Hepburn, Spencer Tracy, Judy Holliday, Tom Ewell.

Monday, September 21 (1:30)

ADAM'S RIB (see September 20).

Tuesday, September 22 (5:30)

BORN YESTERDAY, 1950. With Judy Holliday, Broderick Crawford, William Holden.

Wednesday, September 23 (2:00, 5:30)

BORN YESTERDAY (see September 22).

Thursday, September 24 (2:00, 5:30, 8:00)

PAT AND MIKE, 1952. With Katharine Hepburn, Spencer Tracy, Aldo Ray.

Friday, September 25 (2:00, 5:30)

PAT AND MIKE (see September 24).

Saturday, September 26 (3:00, 5:30)

THE ACTRESS, 1953. Spencer Tracy, Jean Simmons, Teresa Wright.

Sunday, September 27 (2:00, 5:30)

IT SHOULD HAPPEN TO YOU, 1953. With Judy Holliday, Jack Lemmon, Peter Lawford.

Monday, September 28 (1:30)

IT SHOULD HAPPEN TO YOU (see September 27).

Tuesday, September 29 (5:30)

THE ACTRESS (see September 26).

Wednesday, September 30 (2:00, 5:30)

A STAR IS BORN, 1954. With Judy Garland, James Mason, Jack Carson, Charles Bickford.

Thursday, October 1 (2:00, 5:30, 8:00)

THE CHAPMAN REPORT, 1963. With Efram Zimbalist, Jr., Shelley Winters, Jane Fonda, Claire Bloom, Glynis Johns.

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Additional information available from Lillian Gerard, Film Coordinator, and Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10019. Telephone: (212) 956-7296 (7501).