

The Museum of Modern Art

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WILL ROGERS RECEIVES MUSEUM TRIBUTE; PERMANENT COLLECTION ACQUIRES HIS FILMS

American folk hero, humorist and political satirist Will Rogers, whose barbed wit and talent for repartee and rope twirling were immortalized on film, will be posthumously feted from May 18 through June 7 at The Museum of Modern Art. The occasion of this tribute is a gift from The Will Rogers Memorial in Claremore, Oklahoma of the collection of Will Rogers films to the Museum's Department of Film, to be added to the permanent archive so they can be preserved for future generations.

Covering the years from 1919 to 1935, the program of Will Rogers films include "The Connecticut Yankee" (1931), directed by David Butler, "State Fair" (1933), directed by Henry King, "David Harum" (1934), directed by James Cruze, and "Steamboat 'Round the Bend" (1935), directed by John Ford. It has, in addition, "The Ropin' Fool" (1922), which was produced by Rogers himself.

The phenomenal success of Will Rogers and his acerbic wit dates back to the Depression Era when "a homely man in his fifties outreached the most glamorous and beautiful movie stars in popularity," according to Eileen Bowser, Associate Curator in charge of the Museum's Film Archives. In a program note accompanying the series, Mrs. Bowser recalls that Rogers was a vaudeville star, a newspaper columnist, a lecturer, and a radio personality. "He had become an American institution."

Characterized as a homespun philosopher, Rogers, whose "put downs" of pomposity and sham are still quoted today, developed his own style of free-wheeling verbiage to accompany his lasso slinging act in the Broadway "Follies." The ex-cowboy/adventurer, who was born in Oklahoma and was part Indian, had been a soldier in the Boer War, and later toured the country in Wild West shows before becoming a professional entertainer. He was a master in what is now "nearly a lost art" -- expert roping. His talent as a roper may be seen on the screen not only in his own film, but also in "Ambassador Bill," in which roping plays an important part.

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From the stage Rogers moved into the films, but he disliked learning lines, according to David Butler, who directed five of his pictures, so he usually improvised before the cameras. Frank Borzage, director of two Rogers films, believed that Rogers could handle simple human emotions because of his own sincerity and conviction. Mrs. Bowser feels that it was his special rhythm and natural charm that singled out his comedy performances, though his range was not wide. As Alistair Cooke once said, his visible character was obvious in his body and carriage.

Notable is the fact that John Ford, Henry King and James Cruze, who directed Rogers, are among the best interpreters of Americana on film. It was inevitable that the Mark Twain tradition continue in the person of Will Rogers, who became "The Connecticut Yankee." The link to Twain was evident, too, in four other films: "They Had to See Paris," "So This Is London," "Ambassador Bill," and "Business and Pleasure," in all of which Rogers portrayed the shrewd, albeit naive, American innocent abroad. Finally, Rogers assumed the Mississippi River life beloved of Mark Twain in "Steamboat 'Round the Bend," one of his most important films.

The small-town, independent do-gooder and unpretentious citizen that Rogers personified in his earlier films often came from American fiction. "The Headless Horseman" was, in fact, based on Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," and was filmed on location in Westchester County. "Business and Pleasure" came from Booth Tarkington's "The Plutocrat"; "Down to Earth" was a Homer Croy story; and "Judge Priest" originated as Irvin Cobb tales. However "Ambassador Bill" was suggested by Vincent Sheean's "Ambassador from the United States" and when he made this film, Rogers performed very much as he appeared in his lectures and newspaper columns, for his public character and film personality had so fused.

It is to be hoped that this series will be the beginning of a rediscovery of Will Rogers, writes Eileen Bowser, reporting that Roberto Rossellini was once heard to say we have neglected Will Rogers who was one of his favorite American comedians. Will another American comedian be appreciated far away from home before his contribution is recognized by those who inherit it?

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The schedule follows of Will Rogers films, some of which were donated to the Museum's collection by Twentieth Century-Fox. Short films have been lent for the occasion by Paul Killiam. Asterisk denotes silent films.

- Thurs, May 18 (2:00, 5:30) JUBILO. * 1919. Directed by Clarence Badger. Story by Ben Ames Williams. With Will Rogers. 80 min. JUBILO, JR. * 1920. Produced by Hal Roach. With Will Rogers. 20 min.
 (8:00) JES CALL ME JIM. * 1920. Directed by Clarence Badger. Adapted from "Seven Oaks" by James G. Holland. With Will Rogers, Irene Rich. 75 min. HUSTLING HANK. * 1923. Produced by Hal Roach. With Will Rogers. 10 min. DON'T PARK THERE. * 1924. Produced by Hal Roach. With Will Rogers. 20 min.
- Fri, May 19 (2:00) JES CALL ME JIM (see May 18, 8:00)
 (5:30) DOUBLING FOR ROMEO. * 1921. Directed by Clarence Badger. From a story by Elmer Rice. With Will Rogers. 70 min. BIG MOMENTS FROM LITTLE PICTURES. * 1924. Produced by Hal Roach. With Will Rogers. 20 min. UNCENSORED MOVIES. * 1923. Produced by Hal Roach. With Will Rogers. 20 min.
- Sat, May 20 (3:00) DOUBLING FOR ROMEO (see May 19, 5:30)
 (5:30) THE HEADLESS HORSEMAN. * 1922. Directed by Edward Venturini. From Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." With Will Rogers, Lois Meredith, Ben Hendricks, Jr., Mary Foy, Charles Graham. 80 min. A TRUTHFUL LIAR. * 1924. Produced by Hal Roach. With Will Rogers. 20 min.
- Sun, May 21 (3:00, 5:30) THE ROPIN' FOOL. * 1922. Produced by, and with Will Rogers. 20 min. AMBASSADOR BILL. 1931. Directed by Sam Taylor. Screenplay by Guy Bolton, suggested by Vincent Sheean's "Ambassador from the United States." With Will Rogers, Greta Nissen, Marguerite Churchill, Ray Milland. 70 min.
- Mon, May 22 (2:00) THEY HAD TO SEE PARIS. 1929. Directed by Frank Borzage. Screenplay by Sonya Levien, from the novel by Homer Croy. With Will Rogers, Irene Rich, Marguerite Churchill, Fifi Dorsay, Ivan Lebedeff, Edgar Kennedy. 96 min.
 (5:30) SO THIS IS LONDON. 1930. Directed by John Blystone. Screenplay by Sonya Levien, adapted by Owen Davis from the play by Arthur Goodrich. With Will Rogers, Irene Rich, Maureen O'Sullivan, Bramwell Fletcher. 90 min.
- Tues, May 23 (2:00) BUSINESS AND PLEASURE. 1932. Directed by David Butler. Screenplay by William Conselman, based on Arthur Goodrich's stage version of the Booth Tarkington novel "The Plutocrat." With Will Rogers, Jetta Goudal, Joel McCrea, Dorothy Peterson, Peggy Ross, Cyril Ring, Jed Prouty, Mitchell Lewis, Boris Karloff. 77 min.
 (5:30) YOUNG AS YOU FEEL. 1932. Directed by Frank Borzage. Screenplay by Edwin Burke, from the George Ade play "Father and the Boys." With Will Rogers, Fifi Dorsay. 75 min.
- Fri, May 26 (2:00) DOWN TO EARTH. 1932. Directed by David Butler. Screenplay by Edwin Burke, based on a story by Homer Croy. With Will Rogers, Irene Rich, Matty Kemp. 79 min.
 (5:30) TOO BUSY TO WORK. 1932. Directed by John Blystone. Screenplay by Barry Connors, Philip Klein, from the story "Jubilo" by Ben Ames Williams. With Will Rogers, Dick Powell, Louise Beavers. 76 min.
- Sat, May 27 (3:00, 5:30) THE CONNECTICUT YANKEE. 1931. Directed by David Butler. Screenplay by William Conselman from the novel by Mark Twain. With Will Rogers, William Farnum, Maureen O'Sullivan, Myrna Loy. 85 min.
- Sun, May 28 (3:00, 5:30) STATE FAIR. 1933. Directed by Henry King. Screenplay by Paul Green, Sonya Levien, based on the novel by Phil Strong. With Will Rogers, Janet Gaynor, Lew Ayres, Sally Eilers, Norman Foster, Louise Dresser, Frank Craven, Victor Jory. 100 min.
- Mon, May 29 (2:00) DOUBTING THOMAS. 1935. Directed by David Butler. Screenplay by William Conselman, adapted by Bartlett Cormack from the play "The Torch Bearers" by George Kelly. With Will Rogers, Billie Burke, Alison Skipworth, Sterling Holloway, Gail Patrick. 72 min.
 (5:30) LIFE BEGINS AT FORTY. 1935. Directed by George Marshall, screenplay by Lamar Trotti, based on the novel by Walter B. Pitkin. With Will Rogers, Rochelle Hudson, Slim

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Summerville, Sterling Holloway. 81 min.

Tues, May 30 (2:00) HANDY ANDY. 1934. Directed by David Butler. Screenplay by William Conselman, Henry Johnson, adapted by Kubec Glasmon from the play "Merry Andrew" by Lewis Beach. With Will Rogers, Peggy Wood, Conchita Montenegro. 84 min.

Thurs, June 1 (5:30) DOCTOR BULL. 1933. Directed by John Ford. Screenplay by Jane Storm, adapted by Paul Green from the novel "The Last Adam" by James Gould Cozzens. With Will Rogers, Andy Devine, Rochelle Hudson. 79 min.

(8:00) JUDGE PRIEST. 1934. Directed by John Ford. Screenplay by Dudley Nichols and Lamar Trotti, based on stories by Irvin Cobb. With Will Rogers, Anita Louise, Henry B. Walthall, Stepin Fetchit, Rochelle Hudson, Charley Grapewin, Hattie McDaniels. 79 min.

Fri, June 2 (2:00) JUDGE PRIEST (see June 1, 8:00)

(5:30) MR. SKITCH. 1933. Directed by James Cruze. Screenplay by Ralph Spence, Sonya Levien, based on "Green Dice" by Anne Cameron. With Will Rogers, ZaSu Pitts, Rochelle Hudson, Florence Desmond, Eugene Pallette. 70 min.

Sat, June 3 (3:00) DAVID HARUM. 1934. Directed by James Cruze. Screenplay by Walter Woods from the novel by Edward Noyes Wescott. With Will Rogers, Louise Dresser, Evelyn Venable, Kent Taylor, Stepin Fetchit, Noah Beery. 88 min.

(5:30) DOCTOR BULL (see June 1, 5:30)

Sun, June 4 (3:00, 5:30) STEAMBOAT 'ROUND THE BEND. 1935. Directed by John Ford. Screenplay by Dudley Nichols, Lamar Trotti, from a novel by Ben Lucien Burman. With Will Rogers, Anne Shirley, Irvin S. Cobb, Eugene Pallette, Stepin Fetchit. 82 min.

Mon, June 5 (2:00) COUNTY CHAIRMAN. 1935. Directed by John Blystone. Screenplay by Sam Hellman and Gladys Lehmann, based on the play by George Ade. With Will Rogers, Evelyn Venable, Louise Dresser, Mickey Rooney, Stepin Fetchit. 76 min.

(5:30) LIGHTNIN'. 1930. Directed by Henry King. Screenplay by S. N. Behrman and Sonya Levien, based on the play by Winchell Smith and Frank Bacon. With Will Rogers, Louise Dresser, Joel McCrea, Jason Robards. 96 min.

Tues, June 6 (2:00) LIGHTNIN' (see June 5, 5:30)

Wed, June 7 (2:00) LIGHTNIN' (see June 5, 5:30)

Additional information available from Lillian Gerard, Special Projects Coordinator, and Mark Segal, Assistant, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, New York 10019. Phone: (212) 956-7296.