

The Museum of Modern Art

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Charlie Chan, the famous fictional detective hero who has flourished since the 20's in books, magazines, on radio, on the stage, in films and comic strips, will make a film come back at The Museum of Modern Art from March 4 through March 17. Twenty-three films made between 1926 and 1942, including "The Black Camel," unseen for some 30 years, have been made available for the special cycle by Warner Bros.-Seven Arts.

Charlie Chan, impeccably dressed in his white suit and Panama hat, appears first as performed by Warner Oland and then by Sidney Toler. Supporting players in the films include Sidney Blackmer, George Brent, Leo G. Carroll ("The Man from U.N.C.L.E."), Lon Chaney, Jr., Rita Hayworth, Boris Karloff, Ray Milland, Katherine de Mille, Jason Robards, Sr., Cobina Wright and Robert Young.

Charlie Chan was invented by Earl Derr Biggers in 1925 and appeared in six books published before he died in 1932. Each was serialized in the Saturday Evening Post. Since then, for more than 40 years, Charlie Chan has been adapted, published, presented, produced in literary, entertainment and commercial media throughout the world; he has appeared as the central character in more films than any other detective.

The Museum's program will include Charlie Chan at Monte Carlo, at the Circus, at the Race Track, at the Wax Museum, in Honolulu and in London, Rio and Shanghai, on Broadway and at the Opera.

Aside from his brilliance as a detective, Charlie Chan became famous for his aphorisms: "Bad alibi like dead fish - cannot stand test of time." "Charlie Chan, the philosophical Chinese detective from Honolulu, is one of the most engaging characters of the cinema, just as he is one of the most likable heroes of recent detective fiction" said Richard Watts, Jr., reviewing "Charlie Chan's Greatest Case" in the New York Herald Tribune in October, 1933.

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When the first Chan film produced after Bigger's death, "Charlie Chan in London," was released in September, 1934, the New York Times said: "With the death of Earl Derr Biggers, readers of his Charlie Chan mysteries and film audiences who had enjoyed Warner Oland's characterizations of the Oriental sleuth mourned the loss of the author and of his creature. Now it appears that half the mourning can be discarded. Chan has been resurrected ... and revived by Philip MacDonald, who is a superior spinner of mystery yarns in his own right.

"Unlike most imitations, which possess the glitter but not the substance of the original, this one maintains the Chan tradition The plot is sufficiently baffling and Mr. Oland does as well by the MacDonald Chan as he did by the Bigger's Chan, and that is well indeed."

In the following year, Charlie Chan turned up in Shanghai, from a story and screenplay by Edward T. Lowe and Gerald Fairlie, who added Chan's son to the cast.

Next, Lowe produced "Charlie Chan in Egypt," the eighth of the series, which was "lively and entertaining," according to the New York Times. In 1936 Chan visited the Circus with his twelve children, the Racetrack and the Opera, in which Boris Karloff appears and for which Oscar Levant wrote the score. The next year Chan went to Broadway in a film which "holds more than usual for metropolitan audiences because having a New York locale and concerned with graft in the big time" according to Variety. The next year Variety found Charlie at the Olympics and said, "Newsreel shots of the Olympic Games are effectively blended into the action by director H. Bruce Humberstone, whose work is expert throughout. Photography and production are of a high grade."

In 1938 in "Charlie Chan in Honolulu," Sidney Toler took over the lead. "Although immortality is almost the last thing we would expect of a Chinese detective, Charlie Chan appears to have swallowed the elixir. He has survived the death of his author Earl Derr Biggers, and now, with Sidney Toler in the title role, seems capable of getting along without his screen creator, Warner Oland," said the New York Times.

The selection has been made by Gary Carey, Supervisor, The Museum of Modern Art Film Study Center.

 Stills and additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 St., NYC 10019.
 245-3200.