

# The Museum of Modern Art

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel. 956-6100 Cable: Modernart

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## MUSEUM'S DEPARTMENT OF FILM HONORS FRANK CAPRA

The Department of Film of The Museum of Modern Art is dedicating Thursday, June 24, to Frank Capra, the motion picture director, and starting at noon until ten in the evening, special Capra films, landmarks in the career of the eminent Academy Award winner, will be shown. The films include one important war film from Capra's "Why We Fight" series, titled "The Battle of Russia," designed for servicemen in World War II with the object of understanding America's commitment to the Allied struggle. "The Battle of Russia" will be shown at noon.

The occasion for the Museum's Frank Capra Day is the publication by The Macmillan Company of the director's autobiography, "The Name Above the Title." Mr. Capra will also present to the Museum's Archive Collection two of his early films, which will be shown the same day in the Museum auditorium. They are "Flight," with Jack Holt and Lila Lee, released at the George M. Cohan Theatre in New York on September 14, 1929, dealing with the solo flight of a marine pilot; and "Dirigible," a 1931 film containing, according to The New York Herald Tribune, "one of the most excitingly realistic airship disasters ever pictured on the screen. Frank Capra, the director, has found a way of projecting the fury of a thunderstorm, tossing a huge dirigible around the skies so that it looks like the real thing," reported the newspaper's critic William Boehnel. "Flight" will be shown at 2:00 p. m. and "Dirigible" at 5:30 p. m.

Mr. Capra, who became best known for his comedies, will be present at the 8:00 p. m. showing of "American Madness," a 1932 predecessor of his later comedies on the American scene. The director, who will receive the Museum's accolade from the Director of the Department of Film, Willard Van Dyke, will be introduced to the public and address the audience. An extra screening of "American Madness" has been scheduled for 3:45 p. m.

"American Madness," chosen by the director as were the other films on the program, was described as "timely, topical, human, and dramatic," and extolled by

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Variety as "swell propaganda against hoarding, frozen assets and other economic evils which 1932 Hooverism has created." The picture "was about as close to timely social comment as the screen had yet dared to approach," Colliers magazine reported. Most of the action takes place in a bank and deals with the banking officials and personnel and depositors. With Walter Huston and Pat O'Brien in the cast, the picture, seen four decades later in the light of today's era of inflation and banking concerns, may offer other satiric values.

Mr. Capra was born in Palermo, Sicily in 1897, the youngest of seven children. His family emigrated to America, and, working his way through school, he matriculated in the California Institute of Technology, later undertaking chemical research. After serving as an artillery officer in World War I, he held numerous odd jobs, pruning trees, working in steel mines, selling and teaching, and then he entered motion pictures as a property man, a film cutter, assistant director, and writer of film titles. Working for Mack Sennett, he wrote many Hal Roach comedies, especially for comedian Harry Langdon.

Capra is most famous for such films as "Forbidden," with Barbara Stanwyck, and his Jean Harlow film "Platinum Blonde" (1931), and "It Happened One Night," starring Claudette Colbert and Clark Gable. The latter earned the Academy Award for him. His later films, "Mr. Deeds Goes to Town," "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington" and "You Can't Take It With You," received the enthusiastic support of a depression-ridden audience.

According to Allen Rivkin, "Capra's message -- the necessity of man to respect his soul, to know that all men no matter how small, if they believe in themselves, are the greatest force in the world -- comes through in his pictures... To the audiences who are the people in his pictures, Capra each time restores a faith in human nature."

Capra was in charge of a Special Service branch of the War Department and served as chief of production of the Army Pictorial Services during World War II, in the rank of Colonel, and he was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal and the Legion of Honor for his film works, "Why We Fight," "Know Your Enemies" and "Know Your Allies." He was president of the Directors' Guild and of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

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Additional information available from Lillian Gerard, Film Coordinator, and Mark Segal, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53, New York, New York 10019. Tel: 212-956-7296.