

The Museum of Modern Art

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HALF-CENTURY OF METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER MARKED BY MUSEUM OVER 200 FILMS WILL BE SHOWN IN FOUR-MONTH RETROSPECTIVE

Films of Lon Chaney, Lillian Gish, Jean Harlow, Buster Keaton, Marie Dressler, Clark Gable, Judy Garland, the Barrymores, and Greta Garbo are among the illustrious historic pictures, dating from 1924 to 1974, that will comprise the fiftieth anniversary celebration of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer by The Museum of Modern Art. The retrospective, containing such silent films as "Lights of Old Broadway" (1925), "The Scarlet Letter," (1926) and "Ben Hur" (1925), starts August 1st and will continue through December 5th. It includes no less than 200 pictures, some of which are "Trader Horn" (1931), "The Thin Man" (1931), "Tug Boat Annie" (1933), "A Night at the Opera" (1935), "Fury" (1936), "Boys Town" (1938), "Goodbye Mr. Chips" (1939), "Wizard of Oz" (1939), "Meet Me in St. Louis" (1944), "National Velvet" (1945), "Intruder in the Dust" (1949), "Red Badge of Courage" (1951), and "Blackboard Jungle" (1955). In addition a host of musicals, directed by Vincente Minnelli, from "Cabin in the Sky" (1943) to "Gigi" (1958), are on the program. There will also be 13 short film programs, compiled by Leonard Maltin, with Academy Award-winning Tom and Jerry cartoons and Robert Benchley favorites.

The Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer retrospective, organized by Adrienne Mancina, Associate Curator, and Larry Kardish, Assistant Curator in the Department of Film, gives an index to the broad spectrum of productions turned out by this studio in its reigning years as the leading major American film company. Drawing upon unlimited talent, the studio, under the direction of Louis B. Mayer, assisted by the legendary Irving Thalberg, excelled in spectacles, musicals, comedies, adventures, dramas, and homespun American family stories, all of which were patronized by 8 million weekly movie-goers in the U.S.A. MGM alone produced a minimum of forty pictures a year for this film-hungry audience. The wealth of

(more)

180

pictures from this studio provided America and the rest of the world with a ceaseless source of dynamic, catholic entertainment, star-studded with highly individual personalities whose combined talents represent an often resurrected magical era and a never-to-be repeated past.

Worthy of note is the fact that at this time many women writers were engaged by the studio. Anita Loos spent 18 years with MGM; June Mathis, it is said, was the most instrumental in the making of "Ben Hur"; others were Frances Marion, Bess Meredyth, and Kathleen Norris. There seemed to be no prejudice against tapping female creativity.

As for directors, the studio engaged the most gifted in Hollywood, and as a consequence, this program contains four films by the Swedish Victor Seastrom, three by Tod Browning, six by W. S. Van Dyke, five by Victor Fleming, four by George Seitz, and ten by Clarence Brown, who will be honored by a festival of his own this fall at the University of Tennessee. Rex Ingram, Ernst Lubitsch, Norman Taurog, John Ford, Edmund Goulding, Frank Borzage, Sidney Franklin, William Wellman, Howard Hawks and others, too numerous to mention, are well represented.

The history of MGM began on April 17, 1924, when the Metro-Goldwyn studios joined together with a group formed by Louis B. Mayer to become Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Previously, Marcus Loew had gained control of the independent producing outfit Metro, then absorbed Goldwyn, acquiring two of that producer's studios in Culver City, in addition to his theaters and exchanges. Now Mayer, Irving Thalberg and Robert Rubin acted as the directing team, while Sam Goldwyn bowed out. He was not a stock holder, despite the use of his name, as he was bought out by his own choice. The deal was an amicable one, but, as noted by Bosley Crowther in his definitive work on MGM, "The Lion's Share," "A glowing future was envisioned.... How important was to be that future to the development

(more)

187

of the American film industry was a matter that even the most sanguine prophet could not at that time foresee."

One of the pictures inherited from Sam Goldwyn was the monumental epic "Ben Hur," then in production in Italy, based on the book written by General Lew Wallace in 1880, which had sold millions of copies and for several decades was presented theatrically. The film version with Fred Niblo as director replacing Charles Brabin, and Ramon Novarro, a new romantic lead, was moved from Rome to Culver City, where, at a cost of \$300,000, a Coliseum was built; 3,000 extras were recruited; a crack cavalry troop was borrowed; and stunt men rode in twelve chariots, each drawn by four powerful horses. Forty-two cameras were used.

"Ben Hur" opened at the George M. Cohan Theater on December 30, 1925, and it was a "colossal" success. It ran one year, after which it was road-showed around the country before it went into general release. The original "Ben Hur" and the remake (1959) will both be shown on the Museum program.

A large measure of MGM's success has always been attributed to the youthful Irving Thalberg, who started at age 21, a wonder boy from Brooklyn who rose from \$30 a week to \$4,000, with a guarantee of profits of a half million dollars yearly. Starting out as secretary to Carl Laemmle, a neighbor of his family at a summer resort at Edgemere, Long Island, Thalberg, sickly as a youth, bookish and conscientious, went to Hollywood with Laemmle, and his first major undertaking was an attempt to control the "enfant terrible" Erich von Stroheim, whose "Merry Widow" is in the retrospective, along with two other versions of the film.

When his reputation spread, Louis B. Mayer, who valued talent, made Thalberg a lucrative offer. He accepted and stayed with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer until his untimely death at age 37. He had by then married Norma Shearer, developed a coterie of outstanding talented friends, among them Howard Hawks, King Vidor, John Gilbert, Jack Conway, and his intimates Paul Bern, Albert Lewin, and Bernard Hyman, all colorful and intelligent members of the Hollywood colony. Thalberg

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was responsible for the herculean job of filming "Mutiny on the Bounty," partly in Tahiti, in addition to many other major films like "The Good Earth," "Camille," "A Night at the Opera," "The Barretts of Wimpole Street," and "Romeo and Juliet." "He always insisted on seeing every important scene rehearsed before it was shot," wrote Bosley Crowther who says in his introduction to the Museum's program that the studio claimed "more stars than there are in heaven." He believes this audacious slogan was justified by the galaxy of star performers who "appeared in the multitude of films released by this leonine organization in the past half century.

"The studio produced films not only of admirable variety but of generally superior quality, scores of which rank today as screen classics." Pointing out in his introduction to the series the mass nature of entertainment during this time, Mr. Crowther says it is a marvel MGM was able to produce so much quality for so long. He attributes the character of its films to the sentiments and attitudes of its long-reigning paternalistic head, Louis B. Mayer, and to Mayer's youthful associate Irving Thalberg who brought to MGM a concern for literacy and taste. In sum, "the films MGM made in its fabulous half century stand as impressive testimony to both the artists and businessmen participating in the endlessly fascinating sweep of the popular American cinema." Is it possible that those films may be more appreciated now than they were then?

The MGM retrospective has been made possible through the courtesy of MGM and the present distributors of the MGM library, United Artists and Films Inc.

THE SCHEDULE FOR THE FIRST WEEK IS ON THE REVERSE SIDE OF THIS PAGE.

COMPLETE SCHEDULE WILL BE FORTHCOMING.

July, 1974

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 Additional information available from Lillian Gerard, Special Projects Coordinator, and Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53 St., New York, NY 10019.
 Phone: (212) 956-7296; 956-7501.

Schedule for MGM films from August 1 through August 7

* Silent film; original piano accompaniment by William Perry. (Courtesy Films Inc.)

** Silent film; no piano accompaniment.

Short film program consists of cartoons, newsreels, and novelties. ca 60 minutes.

Thursday, August 1 (5:30) - HE WHO GETS SLAPPED.* 1924. Victor Seastrom. With Lon Chaney, Norma Shearer, John Gilbert. ca 80 minutes.

Thursday, August 1 (8:00) - THE UNKNOWN.* 1927. Tod Browning. With Lon Chaney, Joan Crawford. French intertitles. ca 60 minutes.

Friday, August 2 (2:00) - THE UNKNOWN.** See Thursday, August 1 at 8:00. Also THE MYSTIC.** 1925. Tod Browning. With Aileen Pringle, Conway Tearle. ca 65 minutes.

Friday, August 2 (5:30) - THE MONSTER.* 1925. Roland West. With Lon Chaney. ca 60 minutes. WHILE THE CITY SLEEPS.* 1928. Jack Conway. With Lon Chaney. (Final reel missing.) ca 60 minutes.

Saturday, August 3 (5:30) - FREAKS. 1932. Tod Browning. With Wallace Ford, Olga Baclanova, Harry and Daily Earles, Nip & Pip. 61 minutes..

Sunday, August 4 (12:30) - TARZAN ESCAPES. 1936. Richard Thorpe. With Johnny Weissmuller, Maureen O'Sullivan. 88 minutes.

Sunday, August 4 (3:00) - TARZAN THE APE MAN. 1932. W. S. Van Dyke. With Johnny Weissmuller, Maureen O'Sullivan. 100 minutes.

Sunday, August 4 (5:30) - TARZAN AND HIS MATE. 1934. Cedric Gibbons. With Johnny Weissmuller, Maureen O'Sullivan. 105 minutes.

Monday, August 5 (2:00) - THE MONSTER and WHILE THE CITY SLEEPS.** See Friday, August 2 at 5:30.

Monday, August 5 (5:30) - SUN-UP.* 1925. Edmund Goulding. With Pauline Starke, Conrad Nagel. ca 65 minutes. PARIS.* 1926. Edmund Goulding. With Charles Ray, Joan Crawford. ca 65 minutes.

Tuesday, August 6 (2:00) - SUN-UP and PARIS.** See Monday, August 5 at 5:30.

Tuesday, August 6 (5:30) - THE MYSTIC.* See Friday, August 2 at 2:00.

Wednesday, August 7 (Noon) - Short film program I.

Wednesday, August 7 (2:00) - THE SCARLET LETTER.** 1926. Victor Seastrom. With Lillian Gish, Lars Hanson. (Intertitles and few scenes missing.) ca 100 minutes.

Wednesday, August 7 (5:30) - CONFESSIONS OF A QUEEN.** 1925. Victor Seastrom. With Alice Terry, Lewis Stone. (First four of original seven reels only.) ca 45 minutes.