

American Museum of the

Moving Image

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SIN AND SALVATION: THE FILMS OF CECIL B. DEMILLE

April 10–25, 2004

This series was made possible with support from The Cecil B. DeMille Trust.

Saturday, April 24

1:30 p.m.

REAP THE WILD WIND

1942, 124 mins. 35 mm print source: UCLA Film & TV Archive.

Directed by Cecil B. DeMille. Written by Charles Bennett, Jesse Lasky Jr., Alan Le May, Jeanie Macpherson and Thelma Strabel. Produced by Cecil B. DeMille. Photographed by Victor Milner, William V. Skall. Edited by Anne Bauchens. Original Music by Victor Young. Art Direction by Roland Anderson, Hans Dreier and George Sawley. Costume Design by Natalie Visart. Principal Cast: Ray Milland (Stephen Tolliver), John Wayne (Capt. Jack Stewart), Paulette Goddard (Loxi Claiborne), Raymond Massey (King Cutler), Robert Preston (Dan Cutler), Lynne Overman (Capt Phillip Philpott), Susan Hayward (Drusilla Alston), Charles Bickford (mate of the "Tyfib"), Walter Hampden (Commodore Devereaux), Louise Beavers (Maum Maria), Martha O'Driscoll (Ivy Devereaux), Hedda Hopper (Aunt Henrietta), Victor Varconi (Lubbock), Raymond Hatton (Master Shipwright).

Production opened: June 2, 1941. Production closed: August 19, 1941. Production reopened: September 9-12, 1941. Second unit opened: April 28, 1941. Second unit closed: August 31, 1941. Length: 11,094 feet (13 reels). Released: March 18, 1942 (Hollywood premiere).

Preceded by

HOLLYWOOD EXTRA GIRL

1935, 10 mins. 35 mm print source: Paramount Pictures.

Directed by Herbert Moulton. Written by John Flory and Herman Hoffman. Produced by William H. Pine. Photographed by Harry Fischbeck. Principal Cast: Cecil B. DeMille (himself), Ann Sheridan (Genevieve), Suzanne Emery (herself), Clara Kimball Young (Grace).

4:00 p.m.

UNCONQUERED

1947, 135 mins. 35 mm print source: UCLA Film & TV Archive.

Directed by Cecil B. DeMille. Written by Charles Bennett, Fredric M. Frank, Jesse Lasky Jr. and Neil H. Swanson. Produced by Cecil B. DeMille. Photographed by Ray Rennahan. Edited by Anne Bauchens. Original Music by Victor Young. Art Direction by Hans Dreier and Walter H. Tyler. Costume Design by Gwen Wakeling. Principal Cast: Gary Cooper (Christopher Holden),

Paulette Goddard (Abby), Howard Da Silva (Garth), Boris Karloff (Guyasuta, Chief of the Senecas), Cecil Kellaway (Jeremy Love), Ward Bond (John Fraser), Virginia Campbell (Mrs. Fraser), Katherine DeMille (Hannah), Henry Wilcoxon (Capt. Steele), Sir C. Aubrey Smith (Lord Chief Justice), Victor Varconi (Capt. Simeon Ecuver), Raymond Hatton (Venango Scout). Production started: July 29, 1946. Production finished: November 8, 1946. Production reopened for pick-up shots: November 25-26, 1946. Additional pick-up shots: December 10 and December 30, 1946. Added scene shot: May 5, 1947. Second unit location work: June 5-23, 1946 at Cook Forest, Pennsylvania; and July 15 to August 4, 1946 at Ashton & McCall, Idaho. Length: 13,194 feet. Released: October 3, 1947.

Program notes written by Robert S. Birchard for a Cecil B. DeMille retrospective at the American Museum of the Moving Image in 1989. (Birchard's book *Cecil B. DeMille's Hollywood* will be published in June 2004 by the University Press of Kentucky):

Reap the Wild Wind

Similar in plot to both *Union Pacific* and *North West Mounted Police*, with a pair of rivals vying for the leading lady, *Reap the Wild Wind* is DeMille's most successful variation on this theme—primarily because of casting. In the earlier films, Robert Preston and Preston Forster were no match for Joel McCrea and Gary Cooper. True, Robert Preston seems a more imposing rival now than he must have seemed in 1939, but even though Preston Forster won Madeleine Carroll, audience sympathies were still with Gary Cooper. However, in *Reap the Wild Wind*, with a choice between Ray Milland and John Wayne, there is at least a reasonable possibility that Paulette Goddard could go either way.

As he had throughout his career, DeMille continued to seek out and support young talent, and although Susan Hayward had been in films since 1937, her presence in a DeMille picture was the impetus needed to launch her starring career. But DeMille also appreciated the past achievements of those whose careers were now in decline. One of the reasons DeMille was so cherished by picture people was that he always had a part, small though it may be, for a fellow trouper who had seen better days. In *Reap the Wild Wind* one can find George Melford—a former director at Lasky who brought Rudolph Valentino to fame in *The Sheik*, Mildred Harris—once the wife of Chaplin and one of the stars of DeMille's *Fool's Paradise*, Claire McDowell—erstwhile leading lady with D.W. Griffith at Biograph, Monte Blue—who began with DeMille as a bit player in the teens and went off to stardom at Warner Brothers in the 1920's before the talkies put the skids to his career, and Billy Elmer—who played Cash Hawkins in the first version of *The Squaw Man* in 1913.

Hollywood Extra Girl

From the beginning of his career Cecil B. DeMille showed a flair for self-promotion, and, having been an actor, he delighted in playing himself on-screen. What is remarkable about many of these appearances is that the director makes no effort to smooth the edges of his personality for the public. In *Hollywood Extra Girl*, for example, he is seen not only as charming, dedicated and fatherly, but also demanding, arrogant, somewhat insensitive, and forgetful of the young extra's name. It would be overstating the case to say that DeMille bares his soul in these films, but as in his autobiography, these brief portraits demonstrate that he was willing to acknowledge his own shortcomings, even if he didn't often appreciate it when others pointed them out to him.

Unconquered

Perhaps it is reading too much into this rousing adventure to state that *Unconquered* is a film of serious intent, but DeMille's film might be compared to John Ford's more somber treatment of the pre-revolutionary era, *Drums Along the Mohawk* (20th Century-Fox, 1939). Despite its action and spectacle, Ford's film is a human scale drama whereas the DeMille picture is an epic mythological narrative.

Ford's characters are tragic figures. They may question why they should fight for their way of life, but they are already committed to the American dream and their actions are inevitable. In the DeMille film the dream is yet to be formulated. In fact, the characters with the most freedom are the villains who also show the least social responsibility, and the hero acts with some ambivalence as he buys the freedom of one woman and seeks to bind another in a marriage that she does not want.

In *Unconquered* DeMille resorts to the hoariest of devices to push his story along. He was criticized by *The New York Times'* Bosley Crowther for lifting the "dead soldiers" rescues from *Beau Geste* (written in 1924 and filmed in 1926 and 1939). In his autobiography DeMille claimed to have borrowed the scene from an old stage melodrama "...about the Sepoy rebellion, called, I think it was, *Jessie Brown*." In admitting his debt to this forgotten play DeMille said much about his own work, for he never abandoned the conventions of the 19th century melodrama in constructing his screenplays.

DeMille was also a student of film, of course, and it does seem more than a coincidence that the daring rescue as the canoe goes over the falls bears a striking similarity to a scene in Buster Keaton's *Our Hospitality* (1923). Borrow from two, and it's research!

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