

## THE BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GREAT FILMS WITH BRUCE JACKSON & DIANE CHRISTIAN

PRESENTED BY THE UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO AND THE MARKET ARCADE FILM AND ARTS CENTER

### 23 JANUARY 2001 (III:2) GOLD DIGGERS OF 1933 (1933)

**MERVYN LE ROY** (15 October 1900, San Francisco—13 September 1987, Beverly Hills, Alzheimer's disease) quit school at 13 to become a newsboy. "I saw life in the raw on the streets of San Francisco," he said. "I met the cops and the whores and the reporters and the bartenders and the Chinese and the fishermen and the shopkeepers. . . . When it came time for me to make motion pictures, I made movies that were real, because I knew first hand how real people behaved." What does that imply about his opinion of the other filmmakers he knew? His first film was *No Place to Go* in 1927; his last was as uncredited director of John Wayne's hyperbolic *The Green Berets* 1968. Le Roy's career in show business began in vaudeville, then his movie-mogul cousin Jesse Lasky hired him at Famous Player-Lasky, where he worked in wardrobe, then as a film tinter, and then as an actor in minor roles. He wrangled a directing job at another studio and made profitable simple entertainments until *Little Caesar* 1930, which invented the '30s gangster genre and made him a major director. Some of the other 65 films he directed were *Mary*, *Mary* 1963, *Gypsy* 1962, *The FBI Story* 1959, *No Time for Sergeants* 1958, *The Bad Seed* 1956, *Mister Roberts* 1955, *Rose Marie* 1954, *Million Dollar Mermaid* 1952, *Quo Vadis?* 1951, *Any Number Can Play* 1949, *Little Women* 1949, *The House I Live In* 1945, *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo* 1944, *Madame Curie* 1943, *They Won't Forget* 1937 (a great social issue film, also notable for the first sweatered film appearance by his disco wife Judy Turner, whose name he changed to Lana), *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* 1932, and *Two Seconds* 1931. He produced 28 films, one of which was *The Wizard of Oz* 1939 hence the inscription on his tombstone in the Garden of Honor in Glendale's Forest Lawn Cemetery: "Over the Rainbow." In addition to Judy/Lana Turner, he is credited with discovering Clark Gable, Loretta Young, and Robert Mitchum.

**BUSBY BERKELEY** (William Berkeley Enos, 29 November 1895, Los Angeles—14 March 1976, Palm Springs, California) was arguably the greatest choreographer in film. He invented the camera as a character in the dance. Scott M. Keir wrote in the 1997-1998 Edinburgh University Film Society program, "Berkeley was a choreographer who did not just choreograph the dancing, but also the cameras and the audiences, in a host of grand, outlandish musicals. His sweeping, novel style was his hallmark, with the fine set pieces in *Gold Diggers of 1933* a fine example. . . . Busby always experimented with unusual camera angles and editing to liven up the proceedings. The films tried to go one better than the stage musicals by going one bigger, with huge set pieces and opulent surroundings. This was where many who arrived in Hollywood seeking stardom found their dream. The set pieces of many a Berkeley musical would call for a cast of hundreds of dancing girls in a kaleidoscopic, co-ordinated extravaganza. *Gold Diggers of 1933* has some of the most outlandish of these, as does one of the later remakes, *Gold Diggers of 1935* (not to mention *Gold Diggers of 1937*)." Before Berkeley, the choreographer or dance director would design the dances and train the dancers, then the film's director would control the actual filming. Berkeley talked producer Sam Goldwyn into letting him direct the entire dance sequences. Not only did he bring his own genius to the dances but he changed the way they were filmed—using only one camera (which meant the shots became part of the choreography rather than merely a documentation of it) and doing closeups of the dancers. "Well, we've got all the beautiful girls in the picture, why not let the public see them?" he said. Darryl Zanuck at Warner Brothers hired him to direct the musical segments of *42<sup>nd</sup> Street* 1932, after which his style and position were solidly established and he and his team (composer Harry Warren and lyricist Al Dubin) got a 7-year contract. Some of Berkeley's other films were *Billy Rose's Jumbo* 1962, *Rose Marie* 1954, *Million Dollar Mermaid* 1952, *Call Me Mister* 1951, *Girl Crazy* 1943, *The Gang's All Here* 1943, *Lady Be Good* 1941, *Gold Diggers in Paris* 1938, *Stars Over Broadway* 1935, *Roman Scandals* 1933, *Footlight Parade* 1933, *Girl Crazy* 1932, and *Whoopee!* 1930. He was also director of 22 films, among them *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* 1949, *For Me and My Gal* (Gene Kelly's first film) 1942, *Babes in Arms* 1939, and *They Made Me a Criminal* 1939. The famous neon violin "Shadow Waltz" sequence in *Gold Diggers of 1933* had an afterlife: the song was included in the 1970s stage version of *42<sup>nd</sup> Street* on Broadway and the violins themselves are on display in the Warner's Studio museum. Nicole Armour's interesting *Images* article, "The Machine Art of Dziga Vertov and Busby Berkeley," is on-line at <http://www.imagesjournal.com/issue05/features/berkeley-vertov.htm>.

#### Warner Brothers, 1933, 96 minutes

**Director** Mervyn LeRoy

**Dance Director** Busby Berkeley

**Writers** David Boehm (dialogue), Erwin S. Gelsey, Avery Hopwood (play), Ben Markson (dialogue), James Seymour

**Producer** Jack L. Warner

**Original music** Harry Warren

**Cinematographer** Sol Polito

**Film Editor** George Amy

**Art Director** Anton Grot

**Costumes** Orry-Kelly

**Makeup** Perc Westmore

**Lyricist** Al Dubin

**Warren William** .... J. Lawrence Bradford

**Joan Blondell** .... Carol King

**Aline MacMahon** .... Trixie Lorraine

**Ruby Keeler** .... Polly Parker

**Dick Powell** .... Brad Roberts (Robert Treat Bradford)

**Guy Kibbee** .... Faneul H. Peabody

**Ned Sparks** .... Barney Hopkins

**Ginger Rogers** ... Fay Fortune

**SOL POLITO** (1892, Palermo, Sicily, Italy—23 May 1960, Hollywood) was cinematographer on more than 160 films, beginning with *Rip Van Winkle* 1914 and ending with *The Plunderers* 1960. Some of his other films were *Anna Lucasta* 1949, *Sorry, Wrong Number* 1948, *Cloak and Dagger* 1946, *A Stolen Life* 1946, *Rhapsody in Blue* 1945, *Arsenic and Old Lace* 1944, *This Is the Army* 1943, *Now, Voyager* 1942, *Sergeant York* 1941, *The Sea Wolf* 1941, *Santa Fe Trail* 1940, *Virginia City* 1940, *Angels with Dirty Faces* 1938, *The Charge of the Light Brigade* 1936, *The Petrified Forest* 1936, *The Woman in Red* 1935, *'G' Men* 1935, *42nd Street* 1933, *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* 1932, *No, No, Nanette* 1930, *The Girl of the Golden West* 1923 and *Fruits of Desire* 1916.

**WARREN WILLIAM** (Warren William Krech, 2 December 1895, Aitkin, Minnesota—24 September 1948, Hollywood, multiple myeloma) was, according to Leonard Maltin, “Often called ‘the poor man's John Barrymore,’ ...this slender, striking, sharp-featured leading man was most successful playing unmitigated cads, but also made his mark as Perry Mason and The Lone Wolf. Born to a newspaper publisher, he served in World War 1 and took up acting upon his return from service, studying at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. He played in stock and made a few films on the East Coast, appearing opposite serial queen Pearl White in *Plunder* 1923, billed under his real name. As Warren William, he was signed by Warner Bros. in 1931. He initially played supporting roles in the likes of *Expensive Women* and *Under Eighteen* (both 1931), but quickly graduated to leading-man status in a series of sharp-witted, often rowdy pre-Production Code vehicles. He brought style and authority to *Beauty and the Boss*, *The Mouthpiece*, *The Dark Horse*, *The Match King*, *Three on a Match* (all 1932), *Gold Diggers of 1933* (1933), *Employees Entrance*, *The Mind Reader*, *Goodbye Again*, *Bedside*, *Upperworld* and *Dr. Monica* (all 1934). On loan to other studios, he made a perfect Dave the Dude for Frank Capra in the Damon Runyon story *Lady for a Day* (1933), a sympathetic leading man for Claudette Colbert in *Imitation of Life* and an effective Julius Caesar in *Cleopatra* (both 1934).” His last film appearance was a supporting role in *The Private Affairs of Bel Ami* 1947.

**GINGER ROGERS** (Virginia Katherine McMath, 16 July 1911, Independence, Missouri—25 April 1995, Rancho Mirage, California, congestive heart failure) worked in vaudeville from 14 to 17, then appeared as a dancer on Broadway in *Top Speed*. She had the first of several bit parts in *A Night in Dormitory* 1929, then had two important roles in 1933: the monocled Anytime Annie in *42<sup>nd</sup> Street* and the singer of “We’re in the Money” in *Gold Diggers of 1933*. She is perhaps best known for her three great performances with Fred Astaire in *Flying Down to Rio* 1933, *Roberta* and *Top Hat* 1935, but she was also an excellent dramatic actress, which is why she won an Academy Award for *Kitty Foyle* 1940. Her autobiography, *Ginger, My Story* was published in 1991. She once said: “When two people love each other, they don't look at each other, they look in the same direction.”

**JOAN BLONDELL** (Rose Joan Blondell, 30 August 1906, New York, New York—25 December 1979, Santa Monica, leukemia) appeared in more than 100 films, beginning with *Office Wife* 1930 and ending with *The Woman Inside* 1981, released two years after her death. Some of her other films were *The Champ* 1979, *The Cincinnati Kid* 1965, *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?* 1957, *Desk Set* 1957, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* 1945, *Cry Havoc* 1943, *I Want a Divorce* 1940, *Bullets or Ballots* 1936, *Three on a Match* 1932, *Blonde Crazy* 1931, *The Public Enemy* 1931, and *Sinner's Holiday* 1930. Frequently a second lead or an important supporting player, she never became a star, which is perhaps why it was so easy for her to move into a wide variety of television roles from the early 1950s on. She was a regular player on two series, “Here Comes the Brides” and “Banyon,” and she appeared in episodes of “The Love Boat,” “Medical Center,” “The Rookies,” “Love, American Style,” “Family Affair,” “My Three Sons,” “Dr. Kildare,” “Bonanza,” “The Twilight Zone,” “Wagon Train,” “The Virginian,” and “The Untouchables.” She appeared in 10 musicals with Dick Powell, her husband for 10 years. She wrote a novel about her vaudeville years, *Center Door Fancy* 1972.

**RUBY KEELER** (Ethel Hilda Keeler, 25 August 1910, Halifax, Nova Scotia—28 February 1993, Rancho Mirage, California, cancer) didn't sing, dance or act very well, but she was so likeable that she did very well the romantic comedies and musicals of the 1930s in which an ordinary person was interesting enough to be central to the action. She acted in only 15 films, the first of which was an uncredited appearance in *Show Girl in Hollywood* 1930, the second a justly-famous starring role in *42<sup>nd</sup> Street* (1932), and the last *Sweethearts of the Campus* 1941. One of her most famous dancing roles was done on giant typewriter keys in *Ready, Willing and Able* 1937; her favorite of her films was *Colleen* 1936. She was a Broadway dancer before marrying singer Al Jolson and moving to Hollywood. She divorced Jolson in 1940, married a real estate executive, and was out of show business for almost 30 years. In 1971 she began a run of 861 performances in Busby Berkeley's *No No Nanette* on Broadway.

**DICK POWELL** (14 November 1904, Mountain View, Arkansas—2 January 1963, West Los Angeles, cancer) began in 1932 as the juvenile lead in many Warner's productions, was a star in musical comedies for more than a decade, then moved into tough guy roles with a terrific performance as detective Philip Marlowe in the film version of Raymond Chandler's *Murder, My Sweet* 1944. He hosted and occasionally acted in his own series, “The Dick Powell Show” (1961-1963), appeared in many episodes of “The Zane Grey Theater,” and starred in two radio series, “Richard Diamond, Private Detective” (written and directed by Blake Edwards, who would later become a famous film director) and “Rogue's Way.” He was married to actresses June Allyson and Joan Blondell. Some of his film roles were *Cry Danger* 1951, *Right Cross* 1950, *The Reformer and the Redhead* 1950, *To the Ends of the Earth* 1948, *Johnny O'Clock* 1947, *In the Navy* 1941, *I Want a Divorce* 1940, *Hollywood Hotel* 1938, *Stage Struck* 1936, *Gold Diggers of 1937* 1936, *Colleen* 1936, *Gold Diggers of 1935* 1935, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 1935, *Dames* 1934, and *Footlight Parade* 1933.

---

#### NEXT WEEK

Join us next Tuesday January 30, for the Buffalo Film Seminars' presentation of Boris Karloff, Colin Clive and Elsa Lanchester in James Whale's classic horror film, *BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN*.

#### READINGS

A course book with readings for The Buffalo Film Seminars is available at Queen City Imaging (3175 Main Street, Buffalo, directly across the street from Talking Leaves Bookstore).

#### THE 5<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S FILM FESTIVAL

UB's 5<sup>th</sup> International Women's Film Festival will take place at the Market Arcade on Thursday evenings January 25 through March 15<sup>th</sup>. It's a terrific group of important and interesting films you won't see anywhere else. For links with information on each film, go to [//www.womenandgender.buffalo.edu/events/film2001/](http://www.womenandgender.buffalo.edu/events/film2001/)

#### LINKS

For a timeline of the Great Depression visit [//www.korpios.org/resurgent/Timeline.htm](http://www.korpios.org/resurgent/Timeline.htm) ...for selections from some of the great documentary works about the Depression years [//xroads.virginia.edu/~1930s/PRINT/document/doc.html](http://xroads.virginia.edu/~1930s/PRINT/document/doc.html) and...

...to email Bruce Jackson: [bjackson@buffalo.edu](mailto:bjackson@buffalo.edu)

...to email Diane Christian: [engdc@acsu.buffalo.edu](mailto:engdc@acsu.buffalo.edu)...

...for the series schedule, links and updates: [www.buffalofilmseminars.com](http://www.buffalofilmseminars.com)

...for the weekly email informational notes, send an email to either of us.

...for cast and crew info on almost any film: <http://us.imdb.com/search.html>

**THE BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS ARE PRESENTED BY THE UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO  
& THE MARKET ARCADE FILM & ARTS CENTER**