



Eddie Bracken...Norval Jones
 Betty Hutton...Trudy Kockenlocker
 Diana Lynn...Emmy Kockenlocker
 William Demarest...Const. Kockenlocker
 Porter Hall...Justice of the Peace
 Emory Parnell...Mr. Tuerck
 Al Bridge...Mr. Johnson
 Julius Tannen...Mr. Rafferty
 Victor Potel...Newspaper editor
 Brian Donlevy...Gov. McGinty
 Akim Tamiroff...The Boss

Directed and written by Preston Sturges
 Written by Preston Sturges
 Produced by Buddy G. DeSylva and Preston Sturges
 Cinematography by John F. Seitz
 Costume Design by Edith Head
 Makeup Department Wally Westmore

Selected for the National Film Registry by the National Film Preservation Board, 2001

Preston Sturges (29 August 1898, Chicago—6 August 1959, New York, heart attack) is the first Hollywood director to get the double credit, "written and directed by." His only Oscar, in fact, was for the screenplay of *The Great McGinty* 1941. (He received best screenplay nominations for *Hail the Conquering Hero* and *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek*, both in 1944. He split the vote with himself and the award went to Lamar Trotti for *Wilson*, a film no one has heard of since). He wrote 45 screenplays and directed 15, among which were *The French they Are a Funny Race* (1955), *The Beautiful Blonde from Bashful Bend* (1949), *Unfaithfully Yours* (1948), *The Sin of Harold Diddlebock* (1947), *The Great Moment* (1944), *Hail the Conquering Hero* (1944), *The Palm Beach Story* (1942), *Sullivan's Travel's* (1941), *The Lady Eve* (1941), *Christmas in July* (1940), and *The Great McGinty* (1940). He won a best screenplay Oscar for *The Great McGinty* and was nominated for *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* and *Hail the Conquering Hero*. For more information visit The Official Preston Sturges Website: <http://www.prestonsturges.com>.

John F. Seitz (23 June 1892, Chicago—27 February 1979, Los Angeles) shot 159 films, among which were *Guns of the Timberland* (1960), *Hell on Frisco Bay* (1955), *Invaders from Mars* (1953), *When Worlds Collide* (1951), *Sunset Blvd.* (1950), *The Great Gatsby* (1949), *Saigon* (1948), *Calcutta* (1947), *The Lost Weekend* (1945), *Double Indemnity* (1944), *Hail the Conquering Hero* (1944), *This Gun for Hire* (1942), *Sullivan's Travels* (1941), *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1939), *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1922), *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1921), and *The Ranger of Lonesome Gulch* (1916). He was nominated for 6 best cinematography Oscars.

Eddie Bracken (7 February 1915, Astoria, New York—14 November 2002, Montclair, New Jersey, complications from surgery) performed in 69 films and tv series, among them "Murder, She Wrote," "Ellery Queen," "Burke's Law," "Rawhide," "Studio One," "Kraft Television Theatre," *The Girl from Jones Beach* (1949), *Hold That Blonde* (1945), *Bring on the Girls* (1945), *Hail the Conquering Hero* (1944), *Sweater Girl* (1942), *Caught in the Draft* (1941) and *Too Many Girls* (1940).

Betty Hutton (26 February 1921, Battle Creek, Michigan—11 March 2007, Palm Springs, California, colon cancer) performed in 20 films and 5 tv series, including "Baretta," "Gunsmoke," "Burke's Law," "The Greatest Show on Earth," "The Betty Hutton Show," *Somebody*

September 18, 2007 (XV:4)
 Preston Sturges **THE MIRACLE OF MORGAN'S CREEK**
 (1944) 99 minutes



Loves Me (1952), *The Greatest Show on Earth* (1952), *Annie Get Your Gun* (1950), *Dream Girl* (1948), *The Perils of Pauline* (1947), *The Stork Club* (1945), *Incendiary Blonde* (1945), *And the Angels Sing* (1944), *Star Spangled Rhythm* (1942), *The Fleet's In* (1942) and *One for the Book* (1939).

William Demarest (27 February 1892, St. Paul, Minnesota—28 December 1983, Palm Springs, California, prostate cancer/pneumonia) performed in 162 theatrical and made-for-tv films, and episodes of tv series. Some of them were “The Millionaire” (1978), *Won Ton Ton, the Dog Who Saved Hollywood* (1976), “My Three Sons” (1965-1972), “Bonanza” (1963-1964), “Studio 57” (1957), *Here Come the Girls* (1953), *When Willie Comes Marching Home* (1950), *Night Has a Thousand Eyes* (1948), *The Jolson Story* (1946), *Hail the Conquering Hero* (1944), *The Palm Beach Story* (1942), *Sullivan's Travels* (1941), *The Lady Eve* (1941), *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1938), *Love on the Run* (1936), *The Crash* (1928), *A Night at Coffee Dan's* (1927), *When the Wife's Away* (1926).



from World Film Directors Volume One. Ed. John Wakeman. The H.W. Wilson Company NY 1987

Sturges, (Edmund) Preston (August 29, 1898-August 6, 1959), American film director, scenarist, and dramatist, was born in Chicago, the son of Edmund Biden, a traveling salesman, and his wife, Mary Desti. After a year of marriage Desti left her husband and went off with her infant son to study music in Paris. There she met and began her long friendship with the dancer Isadora Duncan. Short of money, she returned to Chicago, divorced Biden, and married Solomon Sturges, a wealthy broker who adopted her son in 1902.

Preston Sturges idolized his stepfather, a champion cyclist, amateur baseball player, and self-made man who gave the boy what little stability and security his extraordinary childhood provided. Mary Desti, on the other hand, found her husband almost intolerably vulgar. For six months of every year, like some cosmopolitan Persephone, she escaped from him and Chicago to Isadora and *vie bohème* in Paris. She took her son with her, dressing him in Greek tunics, enrolling him in experimental schools, and immersing him Shakespeare, Molière, Greek drama, music, and museums. “They did everything they could to make me an artist. I wanted to be a good businessman like my father.”

When Preston Sturges was eleven this hopeless marriage came to an end. The boy was now installed all year round in French schools while his mother and Isadora toured Europe. In due course Mary Desti married Vely Bey, son of a Turkish court physician whose preparations for the beautification of the harem they began to market through a cosmetics company, Maison Desti, with branches in France and New York. With the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Preston Sturges was shipped back to the United States (by this time speaking English with a French accent). His mother, traveling again with Isadora, had turned Maison Desti over to Vely, in whose hands it was foundering. Seeing a chance to prove himself

a businessman, Sturges, still in his teens, took charge. Living in great poverty in New York, he worked day and night to solicit famous customers and to market the new products he himself developed (including a “kiss-proof” lipstick), soon putting the business on its feet again. But the stock market was the arena in which he really wanted to succeed, and while continuing to direct Maison Desti he took a job as a runner with a New York brokerage house at seven dollars a week.

His plans were thwarted in 1917 by America’s entry into the war. Sturges, then nineteen, tried to enlist in the air service but was turned down because of a minor sight defect. His mother, aggrieved by this rejection, returned from Europe and pulled strings until he was accepted. Having served out stateside what remained of the war, Sturges returned to Maison Desti. The business was once more in trouble, however, and this time even Sturges’ energy and ingenuity couldn’t save it. At this point he made the first of his four marriages, to an heiress named Estelle de Wolfe Mudge. For a time he settled down in the country and devoted himself to developing a variety of inventions, including a ticker tape machine and a small automobile with the engine in the rear. Sturges remained an amateur inventor all his life, but none of the devices he designed in the postwar years found a market and he seems for a while to have lost all his energy and ambition. His marriage broke up and in December 1927 he became desperately ill with acute appendicitis.

Sturges survived, but this encounter with death changed him—seems, indeed, to have been a “rebirth” like those experienced by characters in several of his films. For the moment he put aside his hopes of a business career and turned to the world that his mother had tried so hard to prepare him for, the theatre. His first play, *The Guinea Pig* (1929), made no great stir. He followed it with another comedy, written in two weeks, called *Strictly Dishonorable* (1929). It was immediately accepted and produced on Broadway by Antoinette Perry with immense success. It concerns a naive American girl choosing between her stuffy fiancé and a sophisticated European (and preferring the latter). This hit, which brought Sturges instant celebrity, was followed by two failures: the marital drama *Recapture* (1920) and the operetta *The Well of Romance* (1930), for which he wrote the lyrics as well as the dialogue. Sturges, who often invested in his own productions, lost a good deal of money on these, and to recoup, wrote his first screenplays.

The Big Pond and *Fast and Loose*, both filmed by Paramount in 1930, were play adaptations, and both credited Sturges only as author of the dialogue. In fact, the contributions of the so-called scenarists seem to have been slight, and both films follow Sturges’ original scripts very closely. *The Big Pond*, for example, seems in retrospect a highly characteristic work in its love-triangle theme, its shameless reliance on the intervention of fate, its introduction of a tycoon character, and its delight in puns

and verbal misunderstandings. Sturges' own play, *Strictly Dishonorable*, was filmed at Universal in 1931 (the adaptation being written by Gladys Lehmann) and Sturges then sold his 1932 play, *Child of Manhattan*, to Columbia for \$40,000. After that, to quote his biographer James Ursini, he "moved to where the money and the creative opportunity lay—Hollywood."

Sturges' first big success as a scenarist was *The Power and the Glory* (Fox, 1933), an original story about a railroad tycoon, Tom Garner, who wins power and wealth at the cost of emotional tragedy. The film employs an original and interesting technique that the studio dubbed "narratage," the story being told in a complex, nonchronological series of flashbacks purporting to be the recollections of a narrator whose voice, on occasion, is synchronized to the characters we see speaking on the screen. Directed by William K. Howard and moodily photographed by James Wong Howe, it provided a meaty part for Spencer Tracy and has been seen as a precursor, in some respects, of *Citizen Kane*.

After working on several scripts that were subsequently much revised by others, or abandoned, Sturges wrote *The Good Fairy* (Universal, 1935), adapted from Molnar's cynical comedy (and considerably sentimentalized in the process). Sturges was already recognized as one of Hollywood's more civilized and cosmopolitan writers, and on that account was often assigned to adapt foreign classics. His next script, however, was an original one and very much in the American grain, *Diamond Jim* (Universal, 1935). Another study of the rise and fall of a tycoon, it gave Edward Arnold one of his richest and most sympathetic roles. There is a good deal of Solomon Sturges in his stepson's portrait of Diamond Jim Brady, as there is in all the self-made captains of industry he drew.

Sturges contributed to several other movies during the mid-thirties, though how much is not clear. He also wrote the Mitchell Leisen comedy *Easy Living* (Paramount, 1937), adapted Marcel Pagnol's "Marseilles Trilogy" as *Port of Seven Seas* (MGM, 1938), and followed it with another adaptation called *If I Were King* (Paramount, 1938) derived from a play about François Villon. After *Never Say Die* (Paramount, 1939), a Bob Hope vehicle somewhat mauled by Hope's regular gag writers, came another Leisen comedy, *Remember the Night* (Paramount, 1940), a celebration of small-town America.

Ambitious as he was, Sturges had long been eager to direct the films he wrote, and had learned all he could by watching others. In 1940 he offered Paramount a promising script for ten dollars on condition that he direct it himself. The studio agreed and the same year Sturges went to work on *The Great McGinty*. He had a three-week shooting schedule and a budget of about \$350,000. The movie opens in a seedy Latin American bar, where the bartender (Brian Donlevy) begins the story of how he got there. In 1920 he had been a bum in Chicago. Offered two dollars for his vote, he had ingeniously sold it thirty-seven times, thus earning the admiration of the local political boss (Akim Tamaroff). Muscle and a talent for graft had taken McGinty rapidly up through the political ranks. He had become mayor and then governor, meanwhile acquiring a wife and a fortune. Unfortunately his wife had been chronically honest and eventually she had infected McGinty with the same disease. Bucking the system, he had wound up alongside his boss in jail, whence they had escaped into exile.

As James Ursini writes, the film shows Sturges' "budding visual sense" in scenes like one in which a suicide attempt is reflected in a dirty mirror that is shattered when the attempt is foiled, and in visual gags reminiscent of the silents. Sturges'

screenplay won an Oscar and the picture was a hit. In spite of its savage cynicism about American politics and the American Dream, it established him at once as a comedy director of the first rank. In *McGinty* Sturges used a number character actors for whom he had written parts in earlier movies—men like William Demarest, Harry Rosenthal, Frank C. Moran, Jimmy Conlin, and Robert Warwick. Together with Eric Blore, Franklin Pangborn, Edgar Kennedy, and one or two others, they became permanent members of Sturges' "stock company," appearing in film after film in the cameo parts he loved to write for them. Far more than employees, some of them were among Sturges' closest friends and favorite companions.



Half a dozen of these old pros feature in *Christmas in July* (Paramount, 1940) which stars Dick Powell as an obsessive contest competitor who is tricked into believing that he has won a fortune with a terrible coffee slogan. The unpredictable working of destiny is a recurrent theme in Sturges' movies, and this film makes use of relevant images (a turning wheel, a black cat). The huge office where the hero works before his "ludely break," with row upon row of identical desks, is almost as overwhelming a symbol of the automation of human beings as the similar set in Billy Wilder's *The Apartment* (1960). ...

Sturges was given his first chance at a big-budget production with *The Lady Eve* (Paramount, 1941), in which Charles, a naive millionaire snakecollector (Henry Fonda), returns from an Amazonian Garden of Eden to the perils of civilization. He is hooked by Barbara Stanwyck who, exposed as a hustler, disguises herself as an English aristocrat to try again and eventually gets her sadder but wiser Adam: it is another example of the notion of character rebirth which Sturges had used for the first time in *The Great McGinty*. ...

Sullivan's Travels (1941) is Sturges' most personal film. A comedy with dark undertones about movie-making, about American and about Preston Sturges, John L. Sullivan (Joel McCrea) is a successful Hollywood comedy director who, inspired by conscience (and the example of filmmakers like Frank Capra) sells his reluctant bosses on the idea of a socially "meaningful" movie—"a commentary on modern conditions...something that would realize the potentialities of Film as the sociological and artistic medium that it is...with a little sex in it."...

The film presents a remarkably honest and sometimes harrowing picture of poverty and injustice in America, lightened though it is by witty lines, eccentric characterizations, and slapstick visual humor. Music (the so-called Hobo Symphony) is effectively

used in the otherwise silent sequence where the principals experience the routine degradations of poverty. Andrew Sarris called the picture “a Swiftian glimpse of Hollywood and its occasional flirtations with social conscience.”

There are none of these uneasy undertones in the “almost perfect comic masterpiece” that followed in 1942, *The Palm Beach Story*. An unremitting but lighthearted satire on ambition and greed, it has Claudette Colbert reluctantly leaving her husband, an innocent and penniless inventor (Joel McCrea), and heading for Florida in search of a man with money....

Sturges was an inventor and he put several examples of the breed into his movies—impractical ones like the husband in *The Palm Beach Story*, or tragic like W.T. G. Morton, the real-life inventor of anesthesia, whose life is the subject of *The Great Moment*. The director was fascinated by the story of this Boston dentist who, to spare a young servant girl pain, gave away the secret of his discovery and died in poverty and ignominy...The picture was completed in 1942 but not released until 1944, after Paramount had edited it into hopeless confusion.

Sturges followed this depressing excursion with two comedies about small-town America during World War II. *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* centers on Trudy Kockenlocker (Betty Hutton), daughter of a local constable (William Demarest). One night she meets and is impregnated by a soldier who then disappears. The solution seems to be marriage to the town dummy, Norval Jones (Eddie Bracken), but a misunderstanding lands him in jail. However, Trudy's union is blessed by not one but six babies, and Morgan's Creek becomes worldwide front-page news. Precisely where the town is located is not made clear, but it is in the state governed by Dan McGinty (Brian Donlevy again). He finds it expedient to bend the law a little and “legalize” Trudy's nonexistent marriage to Norval, who is transformed from schnook to hero in the process. The film's astonishingly iconoclastic satire on marriage, motherhood, the Nativity, the nuclear family, patriotism, and American politics led it into a series of censorship battles from which it emerged, apparently, almost unscathed. When it was released in 1944, almost a year after its completion, James Agee concluded that the Hays Office must have been “raped in its sleep.” Not surprisingly, perhaps, it was Sturges' greatest financial success, grossing over ten millions dollars.



Having built Morgan's Creek in the studio and populated it with his gallery of character actors, Sturges used the same resources again in *Hail the Conquering Hero* (1944), a much less extreme satire on small-town values. Eddie Bracken stars again as the bumbling hero, now named Woodrow Truesmith. Like Norval he is rejected for military service on medical grounds (he has hay fever) but this time the rejection is critical, since he is the son of a Marine hero, weaned on the glories of the Corps. Woodrow takes a job in a shipyard and pretends to be overseas, then enters into a conspiracy with some sympathetic leathernecks to masquerade as a hero like his father. Returning home in spurious triumph, he is feted by the whole town, rediscovered by his old girlfriend, and nominated to replace the venal mayor. Discovered, Woodrow confesses all to the assembled populace with such touching frankness that he is renominated.

The frantic pace that builds throughout the last half of *Morgan's Creek* is redoubled in this movie. As James Ursini writes, “each medium shot is filled to the brim with characters naturally overlapping their lines and generally under the excitement of the moment. One cannot help but be amazed at the perfect timing Sturges' stock company demonstrates in these bits of ensemble acting.” Ursini, who elsewhere points out how frugal Sturges is with close-ups throughout his work, goes on to explain that “the cinematic device which ties *Miracle* irrevocably to *Hail* is the long tracking shot. In this film as in its predecessor, there is an abundance of camera movements which follow the characters through entire blocks of the town, thereby giving us a feel for the people and their daily surroundings.” However, what James Agee wrote of *Morgan's Creek* is even more applicable to this picture: “In the stylization of actions as well as language it seems to me clear that Sturges holds his characters, and the people they comically represent, and their predicament, and his audience, and the best potentialities of his own work, essentially in contempt.”

Hail the Conquering Hero, completed in 1943, was Sturges' last film for Paramount. He wanted independence, and Paramount, for its part, was increasingly bothered by his soaring budgets, his arrogance, and his habit of writing most of the night so that shooting couldn't begin until the afternoon. When *Morgan's Creek* and *Conquering Hero* were released in 1944, their enormous profits gave Paramount second thoughts, but by that time Sturges had gone into partnership with Howard Hughes to form California Pictures Corporation, releasing through United Artists. CPC was launched with a film that was intended as a comeback of the silent movie comedian Harold Lloyd, *The Sin of Harold Diddlebock* (1947).

The picture opens with the last reel of *The Freshman* (1925), in which Lloyd saves the day in a college football game. Sturges added sound to dovetail this silent footage into the next sequence, in which Lloyd is offered a job by an admiring local businessman....Before this picture was released, Hughes and Sturges went to work on *Vendetta*, an adaptation of a Corsican revenge story by Prosper Mérimée. Max Ophüls was hired to direct, but Hughes soon fired him and Sturges took over. He also displeased Hughes and CPC was dissolved, *Vendetta* eventually being completed by a string of other directors....

With the dissolution of CPC, Sturges went looking for a new backer with a script written fifteen years earlier, and landed Darryl F. Zanuck. He gave Sturges a suite of offices at 20th Century-Fox, a spectacularly generous contract, a two million dollar budget, and complete autonomy. *Unfaithfully Yours* concerns a famous conductor (Rex Harrison) who suspects that his wife (Linda

Darnell) is having an affair with a younger man. In the course of a single concert he imagines himself killing her, forgiving her, and challenging her lover to Russian roulette, the nature of his fantasy reflecting the nature of the music he is conducting...

Sturges had once offered the script to Ernst Lubitsch, who had turned it down on the grounds that the public wanted “corned beef and hash,” not caviar. *Unfaithfully Yours* is nevertheless a film very much in the Lubitsch tradition, albeit laced with Sturgesian slapstick. Lubitsch seems to have been right, however—it had mixed reviews and, perhaps because of the blackness of its humor, was not successful at the box office. Seeking to redeem himself at Fox, Sturges then embarked on a spoof Western called *The Beautiful Blonde From Bashful Bend* (1949), a rickety vehicle for Betty Grable. She plays a pistol-packing singer who falls in love with a card sharp, is jailed for shooting a judge, escapes, impersonates a schoolmarm, and takes on the local baddies in a final shoot-out. Sturges’ only film in color, it is one of the weakest and least imaginative of all his works.

This second failure ended the director’s brief career at Fox and branded him throughout the industry as a bad risk. He stoically returned to his beginnings as a writer for other directors. Over the next few years he wrote half-a-dozen screenplays, of which some were optioned but none filmed. He also turned his attention to other interests. These included a factory, Sturges Engineering Company, which had helped to make him a millionaire during the war years, turning out diesel engines among other items, and a Hollywood restaurant, *The Players*. In 1955 he added a theatre and a dance hall to the restaurant, offering diners one-act plays and other entertainments which he produced, directed, designed, and sometimes wrote himself, turning his troupe of old actors into a repertory company. In 1951 he added a theatre and a dance hall to the restaurant, offering diners one-act plays and other entertainments which he produced, directed, designed, and sometimes wrote himself, turning his troupe of old actors into a repertory company. This venture was ahead of its time and failed, leaving Sturges near bankruptcy, hounded for debts, taxes, and alimony. After a brief interlude in New York he went even further back into his past, settling in Paris, where he had spent his childhood.

Sturges’ last years, full of aborted plans and projects, produced one more completed film, *Les Carnets du Major Thompson* (*The French They Are a Funny Race*, 1956). Adapted from Pierre Danino’s best-seller, it became in Sturges’ hands a “conjugal comedy” about a stuffy Englishman (Jack Buchanan) in France, clumsily satirizing French and British stereotypes. It had some success in Europe, none in America. For three more years Sturges shuttled between Europe and the United States in search of backers for his manifold schemes, but without success. In 1959 he died of a heart attack.

“No one made better dialogue comedies than Sturges,” wrote Gerald Mast, “primarily because no one wrote better dialogue....The Sturges emphasis on dialogue determines his film technique, which relies on the conventional American two-shot to capture the faces and features while the characters talk, talk, talk. But it is such good talk—incredibly rapid, brittle—that the film has plenty of life. Like Hawks, Sturges was a master of the lightning pace. When Sturges uses special cinematic devices, he inevitably turns them into self-conscious bits of trickery and gimmickry that harmonize well with the parodic spirit of the film.” James Ursini has discussed Sturges’ debt to Molière, Shakespeare, Congreve, and

Feydeau, saying that he united “the sophistication of the stage with the visual slapstick that was so much a part of the silent film.”

James Agee, who analyzed Sturges almost obsessively in his *Nation* articles, said of his films: “They seem to me wonderfully, uncontrollably, almost proudly corrupt, vengeful, fearful of intactness and self-commitment....Their mastering object, aside from success, seems to be to sail as steep into the wind as possible without for an instant incurring the disaster of becoming seriously, wholly acceptable as art. They seem...the elaborately counterpointed image of a neurosis.” Penelope Houston, rather similarly, wrote: “His defenses were built up in depth, and his favorite approach was the oblique and glancing one, with all the retreats into burlesque left open. The world of his comedy is self-contained and self-protected, and he becomes ill at ease when confronted with an idea to be followed straight through, or a situation that can’t be resolved in an explosion of nervous energy.” The energy, which carries his plots over “chasms of improbability,” and his crowded canvases persuaded Andrew Sarris that he was “the Brueghel of American comedy directors.”

Sturges’ fondness for pratfalls, slapstick and his “seamy old character actors” no doubt reflects his lifelong struggle to cast off his mother’s influence—the stubborn pretense to philistinism—that his films conclusively refute. According to Alistair Cooke, he was “an accomplished linguist. A canny art critic... an epicure of extravagant tastes.” Hollywood he once described as “a comic opera in which fat businessmen, good fathers, are condemned to conjugal existence with a heap of drunkards, madmen, divorcees, sloths, epileptics, and morphinomaniacs who are—in the considered opinion of the management—artists. Another wit, Alexander King, said of Sturges himself that he was actuated by a genuine affection for people, which rose naturally from a well of deep sympathy for anyone who must go through life without being Preston Sturges.” He was married four times—to Estelle Mudge, Eleanor Post Hutton, Louise Sargent Tervis, and Anne Margaret Nagle—and has three sons. Courty in manner, he had friends at every level of society.



from *Magill's American Film Guide, Vol 3. Ed. Frank N. Magill. Salem Softbacks Book. Salem Press, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1983.*

The Miracle of Morgan's Creek, along with its successor *Hail to the Conquering Hero* (1944), represents director Preston Sturges’ contribution to the already voluminous lore on small-town America. *Morgan's Creek*, the site of the two characters (“McGinty” and “the Boss”) from Sturges’ earlier film *The Great*

Mc Ginty (1940). As was the case with most areas of America in the early 1940s, the town is greatly affected by the war. A once-sleepy collection of stores and frame houses finds itself “invaded” by soldiers and also commercially activated by a need for increased production of materials for the war effort.

This community so beset by change and activity is peopled by Sturges’ stock company of actors in the roles of shopkeepers, lawyers, soldiers, policemen, and the like. All of these characters fit stereotyped notions of small-town folk....

The premise of the film is a daring one even for Sturges and one which caused him endless problems with the Production Code Office. Following the antics of Trudy Kockenlocker, a girl who becomes pregnant by an unknown soldier, Sturges aims a series of comic blows against small-town heroines, war hysteria, the nuclear family, and one of his perennial targets—the political machine....

Besides debunking the family unit and male dominance, Sturges takes a very bitter look at politics and marriage....In *The Miracle of Morgan’s Creek*, Sturges presents the most extreme

version of his bumbling comic hero. Norval Jones is, to a degree, the precursor of the Jerry Lewis characterizations of the 1950s and 1960s. ...He is a classically comic figure in all respects.

The censorship squabbles to which the film was subject are almost legendary. When the film was finally released, James Agee wrote that the Production Code Office must have been “raped in its sleep.” During the production Sturges was required to submit to Executive Producer Buddy De Sylva various pages of the script for approval, especially those dealing with the birth of the sextuplets and the “accidental” impregnation of Trudy. Having learned from his former experiences with the Code Office, Sturges took a more uncompromising stance this time. The result was a film which corresponds with only minor changes to Sturges’ original conception. The rewards he reaped for his integrity were both financial and artistic. For all its supposed lewdness (or perhaps because of it), *The Miracle of Morgan’s Creek* was Sturges’ most successful film, grossing over \$10,000,000 in two years and garnering an Academy Award nomination for Best Screenplay of the Year.



Contacts:

...email Diane Christian: engdc@buffalo.edu...email Bruce Jackson bjackson@buffalo.edu

...for the series schedule, annotations, links and updates: <http://buffalofilmseminars.com>

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

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

FALL 2007 SCREENING SCHEDULE:

Sept 25 Misoguchi, **Sansho the Baliff/Sanshō Dayū** 1954

Oct 2 Jean-Pierre Melville, **Army of Shadows/L’Armée des ombres** 1969

Oct 9 Akira Kurosawa **Ikiru** 1952

Oct 16 Jiří Menzel **Closely Watched Trains** 1966

Oct 23 Buñuel **That Obscure Object of Desire** 1977

Oct 30 Werner Herzog, **Aguirre: the Wrath of God** 1972

Nov 6 Charles Burnett **Killer of Sheep** 1977

Nov 13 Stanley Kubrick **Full Metal Jacket** 1987

Nov 20 Woody Allen **Crimes and Misdemeanors** 1989

Nov 27 Elia Suleiman **Divine Intervention/Yadon Ilaheyya** 2002

Dec 4 Ang Lee **Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon** 1992

The Buffalo Film Seminars are presented by the Market Arcade Film & Arts Center
and State University of New York at Buffalo
with support from the Robert and Patricia Colby Foundation