

SEPTEMBER 6, 2000

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

NINOTCHKA

MGM, 1939, 110 minutes

DIRECTOR **Ernst Lubitsch**

SCRIPT **Charles Brackett, Billy Wilder and Walter Reisch,**

from a story by Melchior Lengyl

PRODUCER **Ernst Lubitsch**

MUSIC **Werner R. Heymann**

CINEMATOGRAPHER **William H. Daniels**

EDITOR **Gene Ruggiero**

ART DIRECTOR **Randall Duell**

SET DECORATION **Edwin B. Willis**

COSTUME DESIGN **Adrian**

Greta Garbo....Ninotchka (Nina Ivanovna Yakushova)

Melvyn Douglas ...Count Leon d'Algout

Ina Claire....Grand Duchess Swana

Bela Lugosi....Commissar Razinin

Sig Ruman....Michael Simonavich Iranoff

Felix Bressart....Buljanoff

Alexander Granach....Kopalski

Gregory Gaye....Count Alexis Rakonin

ERNST LUBITSCH (28 January 1892, Berlin—30 November 1947, Hollywood) directed 76 films, beginning with *Fräulein Seifenschäum* (aka *Miss Soapsuds*, 1914) and ending with *That Lady in Ermine* 1948. Some of his other films are *Heaven Can Wait* 1943, *To Be or Not to Be* 1942, *That Uncertain Feeling* 1941, *The Shop Around the Corner* 1940, *The Merry Widow* 1934, and *Trouble in Paradise* 1932. His first American film was *Rosita* 1923, with Mary Pickford. Lubitsch was nominated four times for best picture and best director Oscars: *The Patriot* 1928, *The Love Parade* 1929, *The Smiling Lieutenant* 1931, and *Heaven Can Wait*. His only award was an honorary one in 1947.

GRETA GARBO (Greta Louisa Gustafsson 18 September 1905, Stockholm—15 April 1990, New York) had major roles in 3 European films before coming to America with director Mauritz Stiller (over the objection of Louis B. Mayer who, until he saw the rushes of her first American film, *The Torrent* 1926, thought her uninteresting). While at MGM, she acted in 10 silent and 14 sound films, some of the most famous of which were *Flesh and the Devil* 1926, *Anna Christie* 1930, *Mata Hari* 1931, *Grand Hotel* 1932, *Queen Christina* 1933, *Anna Karenina* 1935, and *Camille* 1937. She did only one film after *Ninotchka*—George Cukor's *Two-Faced Woman* 1941—after which she created and occupied the role of filmdom's most famous recluse.

MELVYN DOUGLAS (Melvyn Edouard Hesselberg, 5 April 1901, Macon, Georgia—4 August 1981, New York) won two best supporting actor Academy Awards (*Hud* 1963 and *Being There* 1979). He was one of only three actors to win an Oscar, an Emmy, and a Tony. Some of his other films were *Tonight or Never* 1931, *Captains Courageous* 1937, *Mr. Blandings Builds his Dream House* 1948, *Billy Budd* 1962, *I Never Sang for My Father* 1970, *The Candidate* 1972, and *Tell Me a Riddle* 1980. He was married to Helen Gahagan from 1931 until her death in 1981.

BELA LUGOSI (Béla Ferenc Dezső Blaskó, 20 October 1882, Lugos, Austria-Hungary. [now Lugoj, Romania]—16 August 1956, Los Angeles) appeared in more than 100 films, beginning with *A Régiséggyüttő* 1917 and ending with Ed Wood's perfectly dreadful *Plan 9 from Outer Space* 1958. He played Count Dracula in the 1927 Broadway version of Bram Stoker's novel, a role he held for three years. In 1931, he portrayed the Count in Tod Browning's still-scary *Dracula*. He is best

known nowadays because of Martin Landau's Oscar-winning impersonation of him in Tim Burton's *Ed Wood* 1994, but for years he was filmdom's premier vampire, probably spending more time in vampire drag than the real Count Dracula. He was buried in his full Dracula costume, cape and all. Vincent Price said that at Lugosi's funeral, Peter Lorre looked into the casket and "Do you think we should drive a stake through his heart just in case?"

BILLY WILDER, who once said, "Anyone who doesn't believe in miracles isn't a realist," was nominated for 22 Academy Awards and won 6 of them: best director, picture and screenplay for *The Apartment* 1960; best writing, story and screenplay for *Sunset Boulevard* 1950; best director and screenplay, *The Lost Weekend* 1945. He was the 1988 recipient of the Academy's Irving G. Thalberg Memorial Award. **CHARLES BRACKETT** and Wilder worked together on 13 films, including *Double Indemnity*, *The Lost Weekend* and *Some Like It Hot*. At the age of 87, Wilder wanted to direct *Schindler's List*, which he said would have become his most personal film. When Wilder saw Freud's therapy couch he said, "It was a very tiny little thing. All his theories were based on the analysis of very short people." And on the longevity of films: "A bad play folds and is forgotten, but in pictures we don't bury our dead. When you think it's out of your system, your daughter sees it on television and says, My father is an idiot."

WILLIAM DANIELS (Cleveland 1895—Los Angeles 1970) won an Oscar for his cinematography for *The Naked City* 1948. He received nominations for *Anna Christie* 1930, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* 1958, and *How the West Was Won* 1964. Some of the other 157 films he photographed were *Greed* 1925, *Queen Christina* 1933, *Anna Karenina* 1935, *Brute Force* 1947, *Can Can* 1960, and *Valley of the Dolls* 1967.

"If we have, thus far, conveyed that *The Kiss* is a mediocre picture exceptionally well-directed, that is what we intended. If we have failed to say much about Greta Garbo, that is because we ran out of adjectives two years ago. We have compared her to Duse, Cavallieri, Mrs. Siddons, Helen of Troy and then Venus, and then ground our teeth because we hadn't made it strong enough. When someone invents a foolproof asbestos pencil, we shall order a gross and write a real piece about Greta Garbo, the best actress in the world. And then, throw it in the stove, as weak, futile and anemic." **Robert Sherwood, review in *Life of Garbo in The Kiss*, 1929**

"Except for Greta Garbo, no one who had attained really great stardom before the mid-twenties carried over well—or increased his or her status—in the sound era. Many went on making films, among them Clara Bow, Colleen Moore, Marion Davies, Richard Dix, Richard Barthelmess—but their careers soon fizzled out and the decade of the thirties did not belong to them. Garbo, of course, not only endured, but thrived." **Jeanine Basinger, *Silent Stars*. Knopf, 1999**

"...the famous 'Lubitsch touch' is misleadingly named, for it is not so much something added to a story as a method of telling a story through ellipsis and emphasis. Omitting the obvious presentation, Lubitsch substitutes allusive detail, and then emphasizes that detail, not simply to be sure that even a hick audience gets the point, but in such a way that the sweet nothing becomes the ornamental equivalent of the dramatic sense. As one of the censors bitterly complained, after the Hays Code had clamped down in 1933, 'you know what he's saying but you just can't prove that he's saying it!'" **Raymond Durnat, *The Crazy Mirror Hollywood Comedy and the American Image*, 1969**

"Lubitsch's work, until his last film in 1948, was respected by intellectuals and adored by shop girls." **ditto**

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