

## 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

SEPTEMBER 25, 2001 (IV:4) TROUBLE IN PARADISE

ERNST LUBITSCH (28 January 1892, Berlin—30 November 1947, Hollywood; heart attack, the morning after a big dinner and vigorous night with a new friend) directed 76 films, beginning with *Fr ulein Seifenschaum* (aka Miss Soapsuds, 1914) and ending with *That Lady in Ermine* 1948. (Lubitsch received credit as director on the film, but he died after the first week of filming and the job was taken over by Otto Preminger, whose name does not appear in the credits. Most Lubitsch fans would prefer that Preminger got sole credit because *That Lady* is a bore.). Lubitsch's first American film was *Rosita* 1923, with Mary Pickford. Some of the others are *Heaven Can Wait* 1943, *To Be or Not to Be* 1942, *That*

TROUBLE IN PARADISE (1932, 83 minutes)  
Miriam Hopkins... Lily, alias Mlle. Vautier  
Kay Francis... Madame Mariette Colet  
Herbert Marshall... Gaston Monescu, alias La Valle  
Charlie Ruggles... The Major  
Edward Everett Horton... Fran is Filiba  
C. Aubrey Smith... Adolph J. Giron  
Robert Greig... Jacques, Mariette's Butler

Produced and Directed by Ernst Lubitsch  
Script by Grover Jones and Samson Raphaelson  
based on Aladar Laszlo's play *The Honest Finder*  
Original music by W. Franke Harling  
Cinematography by Victor Milner  
Paramount Publix Corporation

Selected for the National Film Registry

*Uncertain Feeling* 1941, *The Shop Around the Corner* 1940, *Ninotchka* 1939, and *The Merry Widow* 1934. 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 was given an honorary Academy Award in 1947.

MIRIAM HOPKINS (18 October 1902, Bainbridge, Georgia—9 October 1972; heart attack) appeared in 35 films, the first of which was *Fast and Loose* 1930. Her last film was *Savage Intruder* 1968. Some of the others were *Fanny Hill* 1964, *The Children's Hour* 1961, *Virginia City* 1940, *Becky Sharp* 1935, *The Story of Temple Drake* 1933 (an adaptation of Faulkner's *Sanctuary*, which caused such a stir it led, according to many film historians, to the infamous Code), and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* 1931. She started doing dramatic television work early, with an episode of "Studio One" in 1948. She

also appeared in "Lux Video Theatre," "General Electric Theater," "Pulitzer Prize Playhouse," and "The Outer Limits." Her last role was in "Beretrille and the Silent Flicks," an episode of "The Flying Nun" filmed in 1967 but not aired until November 26, 1969.

KAY FRANCIS (KATHERINE Edwina Gibbs, 13 January 1899, Oklahoma City—26 August 1968, New York, New York; cancer) appeared in nearly 70 films, among them *Wife Wanted* 1946, *Four Jills in a Jeep* 1944, *Between Us Girls* 1942, *Charley's Aunt* 1941, *When the Daltons Rode* 1940, *Women Are Like That* 1938, *My Bill* 1938, *Secrets of an Actress* 1938, *Confession* 1937, *The White Angel* 1936 (she played Florence Nightingale), *Mandalay* 1934, *Mary Stevens, M.D.* 1933 (she played Mary Stevens, M.D.), *Street of Women* 1932, *Man Wanted* 1932, *Guilty Hands* 1931, *Transgression* 1931, *Vice Squad* 1931, *For the Defense* 1930, *Passion Flower* 1930, *Raffles* 1930, *The Cocoanuts* 1929, and *Dangerous Curves* 1929. Don't those titles just knock you out?

HERBERT MARSHALL (23 May 1890, London—22 January 1966, Beverly Hills; heart attack) was in 77 films, among them *The Third Day* 1965, *The List of Adrian Messenger* 1963, *The Fly* 1958, *The Black Shield of Falworth* 1954, *The Secret Garden* 1949, *Duel in the Sun* 1946, *The Razor's Edge* 1946, *Andy Hardy's Blonde Trouble* 1944, *The Moon and Sixpence* 1942, *The Little Foxes* 1941, *Foreign Correspondent* 1940, *A Bill of Divorcement* 1940, *Girls' Dormitory* 1936, *If You Could Only Cook* 1935, *The Good Fairy* 1935, *I Was a Spy*

1933, *Blonde Venus* 1932, and *Mumsie* 1927. Mumsie?

**CHARLES RUGGLES** (8 February 1886, Los Angeles—23 December 1970, Hollywood; cancer) was the voice of Aesop in "The Bullwinkle Show" and Charlie Ruggles on the 1949-52 tv series, "The Ruggles." Late in his career, he did a good deal of tv work, appearing in such series as "The Beverly Hillbillies" "Bonanza," "Laredo," "The Munsters," "Bewitched," "The Andy Griffith Show," "The Man from U.N.C.L.E." and "Wagon Train." He also acted in more than 100 films, some of which were *The Parent Trap* 1961, *Give My Regards to Broadway* 1948, *Ramrod* 1947, *My Brother Talks to Horses* 1946, *Incendiary Blonde* 1945, *Bedside Manner* 1945, *Our Hearts Were Young and Gay* 1944, *Dixie Dugan* 1943, *Go West, Young Lady* 1941, *The Farmer's Daughter* 1940, *His Exciting Night* 1938, *Bringing Up Baby* 1938, *Anything Goes* 1936, *Ruggles of Red Gap* 1935 (in which he played Egbert Floud), *Alice in Wonderland* 1933, *Madame Butterfly* 1932, *This Is the Night* 1932, *Husband's Holiday* 1931, *Beloved Bachelor* 1931, *The Girl Habit* 1931, *Charley's Aunt* 1930, *Peer Gynt* 1915, and *The Patchwork Girl of Oz* 1914.

**VICTOR MILNER** (15 December 1893, New York, New York—29 October 1972, Los Angeles) was cinematographer on more than 130 films, beginning with *Hiawatha* in 1913 and ending with *Jeopardy* 1953. He won a best cinematographer Academy Award for *Cleopatra* 1934, and he was nominated for 8 others: *The Furies* 1950, *Reap the Wild Wind* 1942, *North West Mounted Police* 1940, *The Great Victor Herbert* 1939, *The Buccaneer* 1938, *The General Died at Dawn* 1936, *The Crusades* 1935, and *The Love Parade* 1929.

"...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**

A star director in Germany, Lubitsch came to the United States in 1923; by 1929, he was Paramount's biggest name. In Germany, he had begun by directing historical dramas and turned to comedy.... His work for Paramount between 1932 and 1933 reflected a facile nihilism about personal relations. It was not the chaotic destructiveness of the Marxes, but for all the flip 'sophistication' Lubitsch applied to the exteriors of his films, their comic energy and intent had that same corrosiveness.

*Trouble In Paradise* (1932), which Dwight Macdonald thought "as close to perfection as anything I have ever seen in the movies," was a dazzling directorial performance. Lubitsch demonstrated a fluidity of movement which most talkies still failed to achieve; his camera never lingered unnecessarily and subtleties abounded. The story line involved a romance between two thieves...who fall for each other while plying their trade. She lifts his watch, he steals her garters and they embrace. Lubitsch's sophistication about sex, and his rebellion against Hollywood's monumentalization of illicit love, also is demonstrated by his treatment of the protagonists' cohabitation; he makes no comment. They are obviously living together (casually sipping their breakfast coffee) and they are just as obviously not married. It is taken as close to granted as it could be in 1932. (After the Production Code was strictly enforced in 1934, such blithe sexuality would vanish from the screen). Andrew Bergman, *We're in the Money: Depression America and Its Films*, 1971.

And from Scott Eyman, *Ernst Lubitsch: Laughter in Paradise*. (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000):

*In that Golden Age of Hollywood that everybody's always talking about there were only two directors whose names meant anything to the public and critics: Cecil B. De Mille and Ernst Lubitsch.*

Claudette Colbert

*None of us thought we were making anything but entertainment for the moment. Only Ernst Lubitsch knew we were making art.* John Ford

*"I'd like to repay you. . . "*

*"All right, give me a letter of introduction to Lubitsch."*

*"I might be able to . . . Who's Lubitsch?"*

From Preston Sturges's "Sullivan's Travels"

In the car on the way back to the office, Wurzel asked the invariably affable director why he was wasting his time on an insert shot. "Young man, let me explain something to you," said Lubitsch. "Every shot in a picture is the most important shot in a picture."

Likewise Peter Bogdanovich, who notes in his invaluable *Who the Devil Made It* that "Lubitsch . . . is the one director whom nearly every other director I ever interviewed mentioned with respect and awe as among the very best."

When Paramount Pictures was foundering while trying to escape from bankruptcy, he took over as production head, the only major director in Hollywood history to run a large movie studio. In a Hollywood career lasting a quarter century, he was the only studio director whose work was contractually sacrosanct, immune from tampering by studio heads like Jack Warner and Darryl Zanuck.

He was a pet hate of Hitler's, who reputedly demanded that a large blowup of his face be mounted in the Berlin train station over the words "The Archetypal Jew."

As the critic Michael Wilmington observed, Lubitsch movies "were at once elegant and ribald, sophisticated and earthy, urbane and bemused, frivolous yet profound. They were directed by a man who was amused by sex rather than frightened by it—and who taught a whole culture to be amused by it as well."

For this was the secret of Lubitsch's films: they were fantasies of blithe sexuality and emotional noninvolvement, not just for the audience, but for him as well. In this superior world of the imagination, the men are tall and elegant and humorously adept at getting a beautiful lady into bed, and the women are capable of giving as well as receiving love.

[when filming *Madame DuBarry* with Pola Negri and Emil Jannings] Standing in for Versailles was Frederick the Great's Sans Souci, in Potsdam. When the company arrived to do their location work, the weather was cold and Negri was wearing flannel underwear under the thin silks of her costumes. Noticing the slight bulkiness, Lubitsch lifted her dress and snapped, "Get into some silk panties. Can you imagine DuBarry wearing those?" Negri obeyed, and froze for the rest of the location shoot.

Leni Sonnet was an attractive, very sensual woman, just the sort to bring a hidebound, lonely man suddenly roaring out of his workaholic's closet. She was also another in a long line of non-Jewish blondes that Lubitsch would be attracted to. A typical man of his time, Lubitsch would tell Leni that

he would never be able to marry a Jewish woman. "It would be like marrying my sister," he claimed. [they married shortly thereafter]

Lubitsch was probably thinking of Negri when he wrote in 1932 that "'The relation between a director and an actress is like the relation between a man and his mistress. They are bound together by contract, but there is no sentimental attachment."

As the first German to emigrate to Hollywood after World War I, Ernst was the point man in a brain drain that, over the next ten years, would decimate German film.

Nathan Burkan, the attorney for Charlie Chaplin, Pickford's partner [she'd chosen Lubitsch to direct her in her first adult film role] in United Artists, quietly met Ernst in New York in an effort to defuse any bad press. Lubitsch's appearance did not jibe with the image of a director who had "humanized history." He wore egg-top trousers and banana yellow boots, and had several gold teeth in the front of his mouth. He looked like a middle-class Jewish burgher.

After considerable struggle, Burkan outfitted him with a new wardrobe and had his own dentist replace the gold teeth with porcelain ones.

[When he arrived in LA there were WWI American veterans protesting his working in America.]

[working on *Forbidden Paradise* with Negri she protested a negligee was unwieldy and dangerous to run in]

"Nonsense," Lubitsch soothed her. "You'll manage perfectly."

"If it catches on the railing I'll break my neck."

"What's wrong with you? We did much more dangerous stunts in Berlin."

"I was younger then."

"Three years younger." Furious, Lubitsch marched her into a dressing room, snatched the negligee off her, and stepped into it. Dressed in the negligee, puffing on his cigar, Lubitsch dashed down the stairs and back again, conclusively proving that the costume was not dangerous and that it looked better on Negri.

For Negri, this was just like old times, "fighting on a set again and both enjoying it enormously." But Lubitsch's tolerance for temperament had decreased as his own importance had increased; he would never work with Negri again.

[Patsy Ruth Miller] "What particularly endeared him to me was the fact that he loved America. Some of the foreign directors, like Victor Seastrom, were so scornful. Not a warm personality. But Ernst loved America, loved the American people."

Lubitsch felt comfortable with Miller and let down his guard of impersonal geniality when he told her that "You must take care of your money. You must save your money. You must always have enough money."

Confused, the actress asked why.

"Because then you don't have to be nice to anybody you don't like."

Lubitsch would freely admit that the picture was worked out in his mind to such an extent that, once the script was done, "I've finished the picture, All I have to do is photograph it. . .As you write the script, you cut the film, you build the sets, you light your players, you design their wardrobe, you set the tempo, you delineate the characters. . .For me, it is virtually all done in the script." By the time a script was finished, Ernst almost never referred to it, having long since committed it to memory. Shooting a film rarely took more than eight weeks.

With his passion for all things Hungarian, Lubitsch probably knew of [the swindler and thief Georges] Georges Manolescu, whose name, in the film, was slightly altered to Gaston Monescu. [Manolescu's 1907 *Memoirs* had previously resulted in at least two silent films]. *Trouble in Paradise* continued Lubitsch's habit of latching onto an obscure, inferior play, usually Hungarian, and playing Pygmalion to its dog-eared Galatea. Although these works were nearly always structurally flawed ("You could have a play that fell apart and still have a success in Budapest," remembered Raphaelson), they invariably had an intriguing central situation and romantic characters. That was all Lubitsch needed. Psychologically, it made more sense to him to fix what was broken than to build from the ground up. (In the fifteen years remaining to him, Lubitsch would produce only one entirely original script. Proving that he was a gifted creator as well as an interpreter, *To Be or Not to Be* was one of his greatest films.)

Some parts were written for specific actors such as Edward Everett Horton and Charlie Ruggles. The hushed, murmuring Herbert Marshall seems to have come in later in the casting process. Lubitsch must have been amused by Marshall's way with women; while very much married, Marshall managed affairs with both Kay Francis and Miriam Hopkins, as well as a serious relationship with Gloria Swanson, all within the space of a few years.

As always, Lubitsch and "Sem" slaved over the script. "We spent—oh, maybe three days getting that opening shot," remembered Raphaelson. "He wouldn't be content unless we got a brilliant opening shot. We wanted to introduce Venice. . . Now, pictorially, the conventional way of saying that is to open on a long shot of Venice, medium shot of wherever you want to be, and close shot on the canal and the house, and then you go inside the house or hotel or whatever it is. That's [the] conventional way.

"Now," Lubitsch would sit and say, 'How do we do that without doing that?'"

What Lubitsch and Raphaelson finally came up with was the famous opening where the singer of a glorious operatic air turns out to be a trash collector. Even in glorious, romantic Venice, someone has to pick up the garbage, but this being Venice—and Lubitsch—they must do it with panache. This sardonic undercutting of the ordinary is quintessential "Lubitsch touch," but the director was careful not to overdo a good thing.

"Other times, he started [writing the script] right away," Raphaelson told Barry Sabath. "He didn't want to get a brilliant opening shot. Here, he felt he wanted it. He wanted to open with laughter and with style—and style, of course, is the essence of Lubitsch."

Lubitsch orchestrates his film with matchless grace and style to the nth degree, using all manner of optical devices—dissolves, wipes—even near-recitatives to move the film along on its toes. And, his professional luck was holding; *Trouble in Paradise* was released just a year and a half ahead of the imposition of the Production Code, which would have made a story centering on sexual swapping and resolutely unpunished crime impossible.

More heavily scored than most 1932 films, Lubitsch directs *Trouble in Paradise* as if it were an art deco musical, with the dialogue in place of lyrics and the characters as the elegant score. Miriam Hopkins runs at her usual frantic pace, but Herbert Marshall and the languid, knowing Kay Francis become the film's shimmering, tranquil erotic center.

*Trouble in Paradise* is perhaps Lubitsch's dearest statement yet on the tenuous nature of romantic relationships, and on the necessity of variation and some gentle mutual deceit to stave off lethargy and boredom. It's a dazzling Möbius strip of erotic allusion, genial irony and dégage visual lyricism and elegance. There's self-consciousness in the characters—their arch sophistication is always poised on the precipice of parody, yet never quite tumbles in—but there is no self-righteousness. Gaston may be cheerfully amoral, but he never mocks the pretensions and vanities of the rich while he's stealing from

them, because what he really wants is to live like them. It's nice work if you can get it.

At the same time Lubitsch creates a world that, underneath the glowing surfaces of Hans Dreier's furniture and sets, is recognizably real. People steal while pretending to be honest, they fret more over a lost handbag than over the starving people they pass on their way to work. These ironies are never stated directly, but they're there nonetheless.

The rate of consumption of Madame Colet and her friends is so spectacular—and so casual—that Lubitsch's clear implication is that they deserve to be robbed. What sets Madame Colet apart is that she seems to realize that. That a man like Gaston Monescu is doing the robbing is merely poetic justice. Although without work or training, his industriousness marks him as their (im)moral superior. Equally ruthless, but swifter, more elegant, he is one of them.

"There is Paramount's Paris and Metro Paris, and of course the real Paris. Paramount's is the most Parisian of all." Ernst Lubitsch

"As for pure style, I have done nothing better or as good as *Trouble in Paradise*," he wrote in 1947.

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Join us next week, Tuesday, October 2, for Preston Sturges's classic **SULLIVAN'S TRAVELS** (1942). A Hollywood director, blocked on his new movie "Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?", goes out into the world to find meaning. He finds more than he bargained for. "*Sullivan's Travels*," writes Tim Dirks, "satirizes Hollywood pretension and excesses with Sturges' particular brand of sophisticated verbal wit and dialogue, satire and slapstick.... This journey film mixes every conceivable genre type and tone of film possible—tragic melodrama, farce, slapstick, romance, comedy, action, and even musical, in about a dozen sequences." Selected for the National Film Registry. [Did you like **Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?** Now you know where they got the title. Join us next week and see why they loved its source enough to engage in that bit of theft.]

If you can't wait until Tuesday for another great film, come down to MAFAC Sunday at 3:00 for this week's presentation in the MAFAC Sunday Classics series, Jacques Rivette's hallucinatory fable, based on a Henry James story, **CELINE AND JULIE GO BOATING** (1974). For a complete schedule with descriptions of each film visit <http://www.sundayclassics.com>. The Jewish Community Center of Greater Buffalo's 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Film Festival runs October 13-18. For film list, screening times and ticket prices go to <http://www.jccbuffalo.org/page21.html>.

Email Diane [engdc@acsu.buffalo.edu](mailto:engdc@acsu.buffalo.edu) email Bruce [bjackson@buffalo.edu](mailto:bjackson@buffalo.edu) visit our website [www.buffalofilmseminars.com](http://www.buffalofilmseminars.com)