23 January 2001 (III:2) Gold Diggers of 1933 (1933)

Mervyn LeRoy (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 Chineses 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 discovery 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 42nd 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 42nd 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

Warren William (Warren William Krench, 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 I 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 Initation 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 Anything Annie in 42nd 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 an 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 42nd 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 5th International Women’s Film Festival**
UB’s 5th International Women’s Film Festival will take place at the Market Arcade on Thursday evenings January 25 through March 15th. 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/

**Links**
For a timeline of the Great Depression visit //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 and...

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