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PRESENTS:

7/3/68

(ARSENIC AND OLD LACE,) directed by Frank Capra (1944) 118 min.
HOW TO TAKE A VACATION, Robert Benchley 10 min.

The Hollywood of the thirties and forties has been receiving a great deal of criticism lately and for some good reasons. This period was marked by a heavy reliance upon the star-system and most of the films produced were just vehicles for the personalities who were then under contract to the studios. Also, the producer was the man who was really in control of the film; the director was responsible to the producer. And of course, there was the infamous Hayes office, set up to censor and control film out-put so that no portion of the American public would be offended. This resulted in a very stifling climate for creative directors. Despite these impediments, some very good directors did come out of Hollywood at this time: Preston Sturges, John Huston, John Ford, Leo McCarey, Billy Wilder, Alfred Hitchcock, and Frank Capra.

Frank Capra was born in Sicily just before the turn of the century and migrated here as a child. As a young man he found himself working as a gag man for Mack Sennett. Working for Sennett, he began his development into one of Hollywood's top comic directors. Capra's first break as a director came when Harry Langdon appeared on the set. Capra recognized that the baby-faced Langdon would make a natural screen comedian. However, Langdon was in real-life the same gentle, innocent and inexperienced boy that he portrayed on the screen. Moreover, he was totally unable to really comprehend what he was doing in front of the cameras. He could not understand how the shots would all fit together in the editing process. Capra had to explain each scene to Langdon before the take, before Langdon could go into his "routine." Their first film together was THE STRONG MAN, tremendously successful in its time and considered a masterpiece of silent cinema today. To all appearances, Langdon was destined to the same heights as Keaton, Chaplin and Harold Lloyd. His next films were equally successful, but in the meantime, Hollywood was changing Langdon. Unable to cope with the money, the women, and the fame, he slid steadily downhill after he and Capra stopped working together. He died penniless and bitter in the forties.

Frank Capra went on directing films at the rate of two or more a year for the next five years. Then, in 1934, his film IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT won the Academy Award for best picture of 1934. It was also awarded Oscars for best director, best actor (Clark Gable), and best actress (Claudette Colbert). It set the pace for most of the sophisticated comedies produced by Hollywood during the 1930's. Capra, now recognized as a top director, went on to direct three more academy award winning films, and was one of the few men in Academy Award history to win three Oscars for directing.

When the war came, Capra went to work for the government producing and directing the WHY WE FIGHT series. Both he and John Huston won acclaim for their work on government-sponsored films, but they took credit for doing nothing more than editing the film shot by combat photographers. Before the war was over, Capra was able to return to Hollywood and direct tonight's film, ARSENIC AND OLD LACE. It had been a very successful play on Broadway for years, and like most good plays that are adapted to the screen, it posed technical difficulties. The action relies very heavily on the dialogue, and, because it takes place almost entirely within the confines of a single room, the camera never gets a chance to go anywhere or do anything. Because of the inherent limitations to "sets" in a theatrical medium, spatial problems have always occurred in attempted adaptations. Capra seems to have been as unsuccessful in liberating the camera as the makers of more recent adaptations, such as THOUSAND CLOWNS and BAREFOOT IN THE PARK. Capra was also restricted by the fact that the war was still going on while he shot the film. Travel restrictions

made location shooting impossible; the blackout made night shooting out-of-doors impossible; and budgets were sharply limited. Despite all of his obstacles, Capra was still able to make a delightfully funny film. In the meantime he managed to take a few pokes at Hollywood itself in the characters portrayed by Peter Lorre and Raymond Massey.

The character played by Cary Grant seems almost as Keatonian in this film as his role in Hitchcock's NORTH BY NORTHWEST: a man unable to control what is happening to him, who must be content to just ride out the storm and hope for a favorable conclusion.

The films that Capra made after the end of the war were never of the same caliber as his pre-war ones. He made his last film in 1961.

FILMOGRAPHY OF FRANK CAPRA

1926	THE STRONG MAN	1933	BITTER TEA FOR GENERAL YEN
1927	LONG PANTS		LADY FOR A DAY
	FOR LOVE OF MIKE	1934	IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT
1928	THAT CERTAIN FEELING		BROADWAY BILL
	SO THIS IS LOVE	1936	MR. DEEDS GOES TO TOWN
	THE MATINEE IDOL	1937	LOST HORIZON
	THE WAY OF THE STRONG	1938	YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU
	SAY IT WITH SABLES	1939	MR. SMITH GOES TO WASHINGTON
	SUBMARINE	1940	MEET JOHN DOE
	POWER OF THE PRESS		
1929	YOUNGER GENERATION	1942-45	CAPRA WORKED ON THE <u>WHY WE</u>
	DONOVAN AFFAIR		<u>FIGHT</u> SERIES
	FLIGHT		
1930	LADIES OF LEISURE	1944	ARSENIC AND OLD LACE
	RAIN OR SHINE	1946	IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE
1931	DIRIGIBLE	1948	STATE OF THE UNION
	MIRACLE WOMAN	1950	RIDING HIGH
	PLATINUM BLONDE	1951	HERE COMES THE GROOM
1932	FORBIDDEN	1959	A HOLE IN THE HEAD
	AMERICAN MADNESS	1961	A POCKETFUL OF MIRACLES

Next week we will be showing MR. HULOT'S HOLIDAY, by French comedian Jacques Tati. It is a great film to bring the kids to see. It concerns the bumbling antics of a businessman (Tati) as he disrupts a French coastal resort during his summer vacation. In this film Tati tries to recapture some of the romance and vitality of the silent comedy era. His style is his own kind of extremely subtle pantomime.

With it we are running HAPPY ANNIVERSARY by Pierre Etaix. A protege of Tati, Etaix strives to achieve the same dominance of image over dialogue that Tati produces in MR. HULOT'S HOLIDAY. Neither film really requires subtitles, though what dialogue there is is French.

On July 11 at 12 noon, two short films by Dutch director Joris Ivens will be shown admission free in 296-98 College Center.

BRIDGE - Shot in Rotterdam in the 1920's, this was Ivens first film. He is most widely known in this country SPANISH EARTH, which he shot in Spain during the Spanish Civil War, and for POWER AND THE LAND, made in this country about the Tennessee Valley Authority. BRIDGE is a poetic visual analysis of the functional movements of a drawbridge used for railway traffic. 15 min.

A VALPARAISO - Released in 1963, this is one of Ivens' most recent films. It was written by Chris Marker who has since become a well-known European director in his own right (LA JETEE, LE JOLI MAI, THE KOUMIKO MYSTERY). The film was shot in the Chilean seaport of Valparaiso, which Ivens shows as both a thing of beauty and of tragedy.