

## Document Citation

Title	<b>After the thin man</b>
Author(s)	David Stewart Hull
Source	<i>Dartmouth Film Society</i>
Date	
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	2
Subjects	Van Dyke, W. S.
Film Subjects	After The Thin Man, Van Dyke, W. S., 1936

# Dartmouth Film Society

## AFTER THE THIN MAN (1936)

Nick Charles	William Powell	Casper	Teddy Hart
Nora Charles	Myrna Loy	Abrams	Sam Levene
David	James Stewart	Polly	Dorothy McNulty
Selma	Elissa Landi	Lum Kee	William Law
"Dancer"	Joseph Calleia	Dr. Kammer	George Zucco
Aunt Katherine	Jessie Ralph	Phil	Paul Fix
Robert	Alan Marshall	Asta	Asta

Screenplay by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett from the original story by Dashiell Hammett. Music by Herbert Stothart and Edward Ward. Songs: "Smoke Dreams" by Nacio Herb Brown and Arthur Freed; "Blow That Horn" by Walter Donaldson, Chet Forrest and Bob Wright. Photographed by Oliver T. Marsh. Edited by Robert L. Kerr. Sound by Douglas Shearer. Art direction by Cedric Gibbons, assisted by Harry McAfee and Edwin B. Willis. Costumes by Dolly Tree. Produced by Hunt Stromberg for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, released December 24, 1936.

Directed by W. S. VAN DYKE

The golden days of the "series movies" were certainly the 1930's, and no studio took such advantage of its many-volumed properties as M-G-M. Year in and year out one could expect a new reincarnation of Tarzan, Andy Hardy, Doctor Kildaire or the movies' most loved couple, Nick and Nora Charles, alias Mr. and Mrs. Thin Man. While Tarzans changed from picture to picture, and Andy Hardy grew up, William Powell and Myrna Loy remained exactly the same for six films made over the rather astonishing period of thirteen years. It would be as unthinkable to cast others in their roles as it would be to replace Sean Connery in the next James Bond film.

The whole cycle had started in a rather innocent way with THE THIN MAN (1934), a well-made suspense comedy directed by W. S. Van Dyke from Dashiell Hammett's 1932 novel. Hammett was probably America's favorite detective writer and created Sam Spade in The Maltese Falcon (1930), which was filmed three times, in addition to Nick and Nora Charles. His detectives are usually as tough as their quarry and often just as immoral. While it took Raymond Chandler to bring the final touch of nastiness and cynicism with his creation of Philip Marlowe (so well played by Bogie in Hawks' THE BIG SLEEP), Hammett's characters had a certain suave streak which is missing in his imitators' private-eyes.

While THE THIN MAN was made on an ample budget with a good director and well-known stars, apparently no one had any idea that it would be such an enormous box-office hit. Due to commitments of the stars on other films, the second of the series had to wait two years. This time, AFTER THE THIN MAN was given the full M-G-M treatment, with all the best talents on the lot working for it, and an unusually long running time for such a picture. While some feel THE THIN MAN was better, the second film is probably the peak of the cycle largely due to its lavish production factors. From this point on, the Thin Man series went slowly downhill in the editions of 1939, 1941, 1944 and 1947. As long as Van Dyke was in charge these films were imbued with great style, but the last two, under Richard Thorpe and Edward Buzzell, leave much to be desired.

Director Woodbridge Strong Van Dyke II (1890-1943) was one of Hollywood's most prolific filmmakers. Born in a theatrical family, he made his stage debut at the age of seven months. This career continued uninterrupted until his 'teens, when he left the stage for various jobs as miner, lumberjack and reporter. A meeting with actor Walter Long propelled him to Hollywood, where he worked as a handy man for D. W. Griffith on INTOLERANCE. In later years he remarked that "Griffith taught me all I know."



Working at various studios, including Essenay, he earned the nickname of "Quickie" because of the speed at which he could turn out a movie: a Western in three days, a whole serial in nine. But Van Dyke hit the big time when he was sent to Papeete as an assistant to Robert Flaherty on WHITE SHADOWS IN THE SOUTH SEAS (1928). Flaherty quit the film after a few weeks and Van Dyke brought it to a triumphant conclusion. The intellectual verdict of the time was that genius (Flaherty) had been conquered by commercialism (Van Dyke), but this is hardly the case. Unfortunately for his critical reputation, Van Dyke was usually regarded as a slick, fast worker, without style, who willingly lent his quiet temperament to any project at M-G-M. The four major biographical film dictionaries in print today do not even mention his name.

However, his record should speak for itself. His films include such notable works as the first TARZAN, TRADER HORN, ROSE MARIE, SAN FRANCISCO, MARIE ANTOINETTE, BITTER SWEET, ESKIMO, NAUGHTY MARIETTA, and RAGE IN HEAVEN. Van Dyke's sudden death at the age of fifty-three was a severe blow to his studio and to the type of quality film which he was able to do so well.

AFTER THE THIN MAN is interesting as an example of a sort of mild screw-ball comedy, less frenzied than most of this genre, put together at a leisurely pace quite at odds with the fast tempo of modern mystery films. The story is rather complicated, with plenty of red herrings, and a most surprising killer revealed at the end. Powell and Loy are charming in their respective alcoholic and scatterbrained ways, and Asta appears now and then to liven things up. There is also a rather funny nightclub number which is glimpsed from time to time. All in all, a gentle reminder that crime films have not always been full of violence and sadism.

--David Hull

The Thin Man Films THE THIN MAN (1934-dir. Van Dyke); AFTER THE THIN MAN (1936-dir. Van Dyke); ANOTHER THIN MAN (1939-dir. Van Dyke); SHADOW OF THE THIN MAN (1941-dir. Van Dyke); THE THIN MAN GOES HOME (1944-dir. Richard Thorpe); SONG OF THE THIN MAN (1947-dir. Edward Buzzell).

Our next program is CITIZEN KANE (1941), screened Thursday, June 3, at 4:00 and 8:30 pm. This film is presented in a 35mm print which greatly enhances the visual and sound values of this greatest of all American films.