

Document Citation

Title	The last of the Mohicans
Author(s)	William K. Everson
Source	<i>Publisher name not available</i>
Date	
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	The last of the Mohicans, Seitz, George B., 1936

THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS (Edward Small-Reliance/United Artists, 1936) Directed by George B. Seitz
Screenplay by Philip Dunne, John Balderston, Paul Perez and Daniel Moore from the novel by
James Fenimore Cooper; Camera, Robert Planck; 91 mins.
With Randolph Scott, Henry Wilcoxon, Heather Angel, Binnie Barnes, Bruce Cabot, Hugh Buckler,
Robert Barrat, Philip Reed, Willard Robertson, Frank McGlynn sr., Will Stanton, William V. Mong.

Rather surprisingly, since it is such a famous piece of Americana in literary form, "The Last of the Mohicans" hasn't been too well (or frequently) handled by Hollywood. By far the best (and the definitive) version was the silent film made by Maurice Tourneur and Clarence Brown in 1920, though one can have high hopes for the quality of an apparently lost German version of the same period in which Bela Lugosi played not the villainous Magua but the heroic title role. In the sound period, tonight's version is quite certainly the best, though the only competition was a preceding Mascot serial, rather cheap and talkative, and a dreadful mid-40's remake by Sam Katzman, and a tv series. This 1936 film takes many liberties with the original Cooper story, writing in such typical Hollywoodian elements as a love story for Hawkeye, and it even contrives to have the wrong girl killed off. The "impossibility" of an inter-racial love story is however handled with rather more tact and compassion than usual, even if the outcome is predictably inevitable. As a piece of bleed-and-thunder action melodrama however, it holds up well. At the time it was reviewed as being exceptionally (and almost unacceptably) bleed-thirsty, and while it seems relatively tame in terms of today's bleed-letting, the massacre sequence is still very powerful (though surprisingly, not as savage as in the Tourneur silent). The canoe pursuits and outdoor action scenes are well-staged by silent action specialist George B. Seitz, an old serial maestro who later directed "Kit Carson" for Small. True, the location-filmed action sequences are marred by frequent intercuts to studio sets, but it's exciting stuff, and is certainly helped along by large-scale liftings of chunks of Max Steiner's "King Kong" score. The cast is quite strong, and Bruce Cabot has a field day as Magua -- matched by his villainy as the No. 1 hoodlum in "Let 'Em Have It". The white actors in makeup as Indians (especially William V. Mong) are far more convincing than those used by deMille (Victor Varconi, Paul Harvey and others) in the same year's "The Plainsman". "The Last of the Mohicans" was, rather surprisingly, one of a kind: despite its success, it inspired neither a sequel by Small, nor imitations by other studios. Small himself seemed to change directions immediately thereafter, making a curious little group of pictures for RKO ("Sea Devils", "The Toast of New York", "Super Sleuth") before returning to United Artists with a rather gentler brand of film: "The Duke of West Point", "King of the Turf". Tonight's two films thus represent a kind of high point of mid-30's Small melodrama; certainly (together with 1933's "I Cover the Waterfront") his toughest films. Both, incidentally, premiered at the Rivoli Theatre in NY.

--- William K. Everson ---

Program ends: 10.57 (No discussion period)

(Among later Small films of real interest and merit that I neglected to mention in the notes were the two Anthony Mann films "T Men" and "Raw Deal". These two films are certainly "tougher" than tonight's two, but somehow one tends to credit their style to Mann rather than Small).