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THE DARTMOUTH



DAILY FILM PROGRAM

1963

ACROSS THE PACIFIC (1942)

Rick Leland
Alberta Marlow
Dr. Lorenz
A. V. Smith
Joe Totsuiko
Sugi
Sam Wing On
Captain Morrison

Humphrey Bogart
Mary Astor
Sidney Greenstreet
Charles Halton
Sen Yung
Roland Got
Lee Tung Foo
Frank Wilcox

Colonel Hart
Canadian Major
Court-Martial Pres.
Dan Morton
Captain Harkness
Captain Higoto
Office Clerk
T. Oki

Paul Stanton
Lester Matthews
John Hamilton
Monte Blue
Roland Drew
Chester Gan
Kaye Luke
Kam Tong

Screenplay by Richard Macayley, after the Serial of the same name by Robert Carson. Art direction by Robert Haas and Hugh Reticker. Music by Adolph Deutsch. Musical direction by Leo F. Forbstein. Photographed by Arthur Edison. Special effects by Byron Haskin and Willard van Enger. Edited by Frank Magee. Produced by Jerry Wald and Jack Spear for Warner Brothers.

Directed by JOHN HUSTON

Note: A copy of the first version of the script, which differs very greatly from the finished film, is in the Thalberg Collection of the Dartmouth Library.

One of John Huston's most unjustly neglected films, ACROSS THE PACIFIC is an almost complete delight. It was his last film in Hollywood before entering the Army and making his first, remarkable color documentary REPORT FROM THE ALEUTIANS in 1943. Because it was based on a patriotic wartime theme (at least ostensibly) it seems a bit dated in subject matter, but certainly not in treatment.

In many ways, ACROSS THE PACIFIC is a film in the same series as THE MALTESE FALCON, BEAT THE DEVIL, and THE LIST OF ADRIAN MESSENGER. All four are, to a certain extent, "in-group" films which derive a good deal of their fun from the knowledge of certain jokes and parodies which are being exploited by the director and script-writer. The three dubious heros of the earlier film are in evidence again, Humphrey Bogart, Mary Astor and Sidney Greenstreet, along with the same photographer, art director, composer and of course, director. Like THE MALTESE FALCON, one can watch a well oiled machine move smoothly on its unpredictable way with much pleasure.

It seems almost incredible that this film has not been revived since its original release, except for a one-day screening in New York last year at the New Yorker Theatre. Most of the complaints stem from the utterly preposterous ending, which marred the film for most viewers. Huston told this writer that there was a good reason for this. Having supplied several endings (the one in the Thalberg Collection script, which ends in Hawaii on December 7 rather than the Panama Canal, and paints a very dim picture for the ultimate survival of Mr. Bogart and Miss Astor, being far better), Huston hit on a really diabolical plan. As the film neared its completion, the date for Huston's entry into the Army approached, and it became obvious that he would not be able to finish the film, another director, Vincent Sherman (most recently responsible for THE YOUNG PHILADELPHIANS) was called in to take over. He watched on the side while Mr. Huston maneuvered his characters into a house from which escape was impossible. Complementing Mr. Huston on the scene, he inquired what the ending he would have to shoot involved. Huston smiled

and calmly told him there wasn't one, and he would have to get them out of that house under his own power, put down the uncompleted script and walked out the door. Faced with the choice of scrapping a good deal of the film to provide for a new ending, or putting the only solution possible on to it, Sherman and Warner Brothers chose the latter course. So when viewing across the PACIFIC, just forget the ending, because it doesn't make any sense.

ACROSS THE PACIFIC has a sort of joke in its title, because it doesn't involve the Pacific at all, most of it taking place on a Japanese freighter chugging its way from a Canadian port to Cristobal via New York. The first version of the script, however, and apparently also Mr. Carson's Saturday Evening Post serial, does indeed get as far as Hawaii, and the boat trip goes down the Pacific side of the country. In the earlier script we are spared the court-martial completely; it is only mentioned in passing in the dialogue. Bogie, tough as nails, gives a hard time to mystery woman Mary Astor, who may or may not be playing along with a group of very suspicious Japanese. (The fact that Miss Astor turns out to be something quite different than we are led to believe by the clues given to us drove some critics wild.) Enter Mr. Greenstreet, a mysterious professor of sociology who is obviously up to no good at all. In version one Miss Astor is making the trip to Hawaii to inherit a plantation from an uncle, which leads to the logical ending of Pearl Harbor which for some mysterious reasons was scrapped.

However, the dialogue is unfailingly funny, somewhat in the spirit of the 1930's screwball comedy. Consider the following conversation between Bogie and Miss Astor:

RICK: Are you an only child?

ALBERTA: Yes.

RICK: I thought so. No one could have done you twice. What did you do in Medicine Hat?

ALBERTA: I sold peanut brittle in the dime store.

or this later exchange:

ALBERTA: Your real name is Richard, so why don't they call you Dick?

RICK: They called my father Dick. When my mother used to say "Dick, bring me my opium, "I'd show up with it, so they started calling me Rick. They didn't let me touch the stuff until I was almost ten.

Unfortunately the two above conversations did not escape the blue pencil of the final version, but the wacky spirit remains.

ACROSS THE PACIFIC is a classic spoof of the detective thriller, played so carefully that one can almost take the whole thing seriously. Materials that might have been ridiculous in other hands take on a gloss of sophistication; when humor is intended we get the point but never lose the story in the gags. We hope that this revival will bring about a new interest in one of Huston's cleverest films.

David Stewart Hull