

Document Citation

Title	'Don Juan'
Author(s)	William K. Everson
Source	<i>New School for Social Research (New York, N.Y.)</i>
Date	1970 Nov 06
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Don Juan, Crosland, Alan, 1926

"DON JUAN" (Warner Brothers, 1926) Directed by Alan Crosland
Written for the screen by Bess Meredyth; photographed by Byron
Haskins and Gordon Hollingshead; Art Director, Ben Carre;
Bachanalian Art Dancing - Marion Morgan; 13 reels

With: JOHN BARRYMORE (Don Juan and Don Jose); Mary Astor (Adriana);
Willard Louis (Pedrillo); Estelle Taylor (Lucrezia Borgia); Warner
Oland (Cesare Borgia); Montague Love (Donati); Myrna Loy (Maia);
Helene Costello (Adriana's maid); Jane Winton (Beatrice); John Roche
(Leandro); Phyllis Haver (Imperia); Hedda Hopper (Marquise Rinaldo);
Gustav von Seyffertitz (Nehri the Sorcerer); June Marlowe (Trucia);
Yvonne Day (Don Juan at 5); Phillipe de Lacy (Don Juan at 10); John
George (Hunchback); Helene D'Algy (Murderess of Jose); Josef Swickard
(Duke Della Varnese); Lionel Braham (Duke Margoni); Nigel de Brulier
(Marquis Rinaldo)

"Don Juan" is usually thought of just as the film that was used to
introduce Vitaphone -- just as "The Jazz Singer" is too often
dismissed as a sentimental piece of corn that gained fame only
because it ushered in talkies. Thus have two of Alan Crosland's best
works been almost eradicated as films; small wonder that this
vigorous and stylish director is almost unknown today, while the
hacks - the Niblos and the DeMilles - are revered for the laurels
usually won for them by their made-to-measure vehicles, their stars,
or their second-unit directors. (Note: those of you who missed the
beautiful "Beloved Rogue", another Barrymore-Crosland collaboration,
when we showed it earlier, should try to catch it in the current
Museum of Modern Art cycle). "Don Juan" is, in its own way, quite
wonderful stuff - expertly staged and directed, lush, elegantly
mounted, and done with just the right tongue in cheek approach.
Barrymore's performance is superbly sardonic, quite one of the best
of his career though less seriously conceived and executed than with
many of his other roles. In contrast to the dull and plodding "Beau
Brummel", "Don Juan", despite a dearth of physical action until the
closing reels, vibrates with life from beginning to end. The original
"Don Juan" was written by a Spanish monk, one Gabriel Tallez, and was
intended to sway one's sympathies towards a spiritual life. Lord
Byron later took a somewhat different tack. Bess Meredyth's scenario
is supposed to combine elements of both, but what comes out is sheer
Barrymore "vehicle" from first scene to last; here you'll see
familiar and bizarre bits repeated from earlier Barrymores, as well
as bits that were themselves to be re-used. For example, the prison
scene between Juan and Lucrezia Borgia turns up again in "Tempest".
Barrymore personally has a field-day, and many scenes were clearly
written in at his suggestion - as for example, one of his favorite
ploys, that of impersonating (convincingly) Satanic-faced Gustav
von Seyffertitz. (As Sherlock Holmes he had also done this to
Seyffertitz's Moriarty).

"Don Juan" is a masterpiece of style and hoke. Perhaps it is not a
film that stands up too well to repeated viewings (mainly because of
its length) but that after all, is hardly criticism. Wonderfully
satisfying as many films are on repeated viewings (especially
classic comedy, or emotional subjects such as "Sunrise") films are,
after all, designed primarily for those who see them once. It is the
initial impression that counts, and in this respect "Don Juan" really
succeeds. It is an eye-popper of a production, and the original score
by the New York Philharmonic lovely, full and sweeping.
Its duel scene is still the best of its kind, and - despite the
later forays by Fairbanks and Flynn - Barrymore is still the
"definitive" Don. If there is a complaint at all, it is only that
the mechanically expert camerawork is still rather uninspired. With
those sets and Crosland's direction, one hardly notices the drawback;
but what (visually) Charles Rosher or Wong Howe could have done!

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