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# Theater Programs / Film Notes

# Pacific Film Archi

Tuesday July 1

From Silent to Sound: W.C. Fields

## It's The Old Army Game and The Bank Dick 7:00

### It's The Old Army Game

In *It's The Old Army Game*, W.C. Fields is Elmer Prettywillie, proprietor of the local drug store, and Louise Brooks is his shop assistant.

"The silent W.C. Fields was slightly less endearing than the sound, partly due to the fact that Fields, shrewd vaudevillian that he was, was still engaged in building up his screen character. Over the years he whittled away at elements that didn't work, expanded on those that did. But in terms of sheer comedy, despite the lack of his voice and those glorious thrown-away asides, *It's The Old Army Game* still works well as a comedy, and there's an added bonus in seeing for the first time some of the key routines - such as the sleeping porch episode in this film - that he was to revise, polish, and re-present in his sound films. The silent Fields films were all made on the East Coast, and lacked the polish of the Hollywood comedies, but of course we now know that it was the rough edges that gave all Fields films, silent and sound, much of their bite." --William K. Everson

• Directed by Edward Sutherland. Produced by Famous Players-Lasky (Paramount). Written by Tom J. Geraghty, J. Clarkson Miller from a play by Joseph P. McEvoy. Photographed by Alvin Wyckoff. With W.C. Fields, Louise Brooks, Blanche Ring, William Gaxton, Mary Foy. (1926, 65 mins, silent, Print Courtesy of W.K.E.)

### The Bank Dick

"*The Bank Dick* is the culmination of Fields' studies of small-town American morality, in which he puts the ax in axioms of wealth through hard work, happiness through wealth, and propriety through Protestantism. The story itself is an anarchic twisting of film conventions, a series of Fieldisms passing for plot and leading to the inevitable (and one of the greatest) chase scene. It centers on husband and father Egbert Souse (the name reflects his preferred state of sobriety), to whom there is, thankfully, no place like home; he chooses for his castle 'The Black Pussy Cat' saloon. Through incredible luck and almost no effort at all, Souse acquires riches and catapults his family from normalcy to bogus graciousness, but his own officiousness and slippery indifference were never dependent on wealth - only on the Black Pussy Cat Saloon." --J.B.

• Directed by Edward Cline. Produced by Universal Studios. Written by Mahatma Kane Jeeves (W.C. Fields). With W.C. Fields, Cora Witherspoon, Una Merkel, Franklin Pangborn, Grady Sutton, Harlan Briggs. (1940, 73 mins, Print from Universal 16)

Mae West:

## She Done Him Wrong 9:30

"The name is Lady Lou, 'the finest woman that ever walked the streets,' and the film was the first to make Mae West - and the young Cary Grant - famous. Lou, based on West's own Broadway creation, 'Diamond Lil,' is the big woman with the big heart, gaudy, bawdy, with a magnetic strut that miles of opulent yardage and pounds of jewels never could hide. Despite the title, she never done no one wrong. A working girl ('my career is diamonds') who knows her trade ('you can be had') and plies it with the delicate aggressiveness of a professional ('Why'n'cha come up and see me sometime?'), it's Lou's generous heart and not the fixtures around it that brings on her demise.

"West works wonders with 'I Wonder Where My Easy Rider's Gone,' which she fills with staggering double entendres, 'Frankie and Johnnie,' and 'I Like A Man Who Takes His Time' (you'd better believe it)." --J.B.

• Directed by Lowell Sherman. Written by Harvey Thew and John Bright, based on the play 'Diamond Lil' by Mae West. Photographed by Charles Lang. Art Direction by Bob Usher. Music by Ralph Rainger. With Mae West, Cary Grant, Gilbert Roland, Noah Boone, Rafaela Ottiano, David Landau, Rochelle Hud-

gentle) *Kino-Pravda...* --Jay Leyda, "Kino: A History of the Russian & Soviet Film"

• Directed by Sergei Eisenstein. Photographed by Frantzius. With Grigori Alexandrov, Maxim Strauch, Alexander Antonov. (1923, ca. 2 mins, 35mm, silent, Print from PFA Collection)

## By The Law 9:00

An adaptation of Jack London's story "The Unexpected," *By The Law* was filmed on an extremely low budget, using only one interior set and five actors. The setting is Alaska, where three characters have been cut off from civilization by winter storms and spring floods. Kuleshov succeeds in building up an almost unbearable degree of physiological tension in following London's drama of three people who undergo inner turmoil as the result of their complicity in a murder. Most critics consider *By The Law* to be Kuleshov's best film.

The mathematical precision of every gesture and movement contributes to the total effect of each character and episode. Kuleshov taught his workshop that the hands, arms and legs are the most expressive parts of the film actor's body and we can observe that their movements create as much of the film's tension as does the facial expression.

"This calculated isolation and intensification of significant detail and gesture, accumulated for totality of effect, Kuleshov had learned from Griffith and from Chaplin's *A Woman Of Paris*." --Jay Leyda, "Film Notes, The Museum of Modern Art"

Notes by Tom Luddy, Yvette Biro.

• Directed by Lev Kuleshov. Screenplay by Victor Shklovsky and Lev Kuleshov, based on "The Unexpected" by Jack London. Photographed by Konstantin Kuznetsov, supervised by Alexander Levitsky. Designed by Isaac Makhlis. With Alexandra Kokhlova, Sergei Komarov, Vladimir Fogel, Porfiri Podobed. (1926, 90 mins, 35mm, silent, translation of Russian titles provided, Print from PFA Collection)

## Thursday July 3

Critics' Choice: Japan's Best Film

of the Year, 1931-1978

Presented in Cooperation with the Japan Society of New York and the Japan Film Library Council

## Sisters Of The Gion (Gion no shimai) 7:30

"1936 may be considered the year when, in a Japanese film world ruled by sentimentalism and heroism, realism came into its own. The evidence is Kenji Mizoguchi's film *Sisters Of The Gion*." --Akira Shimizu.

In telling the story of two sisters, both geisha in the Gion entertainment district of Kyoto, Mizoguchi strips away the romantic veneer of the geisha business, both in the story and in a stark visual style that capitalizes on the narrow alleyways and shuttered windows of the

Friday July 4

William K. Everson Presents

The French and The British on Holiday

## Holiday For Henriette 7:15

Directed by Julien Duvivier (*Poil De Carotte*), and "fortuitously coinciding with the rise of the New Wave, this delightful comedy in a sense both climaxes and satirises the French cinema to that point, and it's literally *made* for film buffs. A director and his writer try to concoct a boy-meets-girl script with a Bastille Day background, and their trial and error efforts make up the film. Duvivier pokes fun not only at his own earlier works, but also those of Carné, DeSica and others, as well as the stylistic excesses of film noir. Even Georges Auric's scoring is occasionally self-satirising. A thoroughly delightful romp that hasn't been seen in years, thanks to the American remake *Paris When It Sizzles*." --W.K.E.

• Directed by Julien Duvivier. With Dany Robin, Michel Auclair, Hildegard Knef. (1952, 110 mins, English titles, Print from W.K.E.)

## Holiday Camp 9:30

"Only the British could promote, sustain and actually enjoy the unique institution of Holiday Camps, so totally regimented that they have a near military status, and, for outsiders, an element of horror suggestive of Concentration Camps! A *Grand Hotel* type of omnibus, *Holiday Camp* mixes stories of pathos, romance, melodrama and comedy, and is interesting not only as an oblique social statement, but as a showcase for a variety of good British performers. With typical logic, British studios for some reason assumed that a background as a documentarian qualified one for making comedies, and a number of fine British realist film-makers (Harry Watt earlier on, Ken Annakin here) made their narrative-film debuts with comedies. Just as the American *The Egg And I* spawned a whole series of Ma and Pa Kettle films, so *Holiday Camp*, with its class-conscious attitudes, spawned the equally prolific Huggett Family series, here making their first (and probably last) appearance at the Pacific Film Archive. Incidentally, the sex killer played by Dennis Price was patterned on a notorious (and prolific) killer who operated in just such a milieu and fortuitously was caught and hanged just prior to the production of *Holiday Camp*." --W.K.E.

• Directed by Ken Annakin. Written by Muriel and Sydney Box, et al, from a story by Godfrey Winn. With Dennis Price, Flora Robson, Hazel Court, Jack Warner, Kathleen Harrison. (1947, 95 mins, Print courtesy of W.K.E.)

## Saturday July 5

The Films of Michael Powell

## 49th Parallel 7:15

"Prompted by the Ministry of Information (as part of the propaganda campaign to bring the United States into the war) and largely shot on location, *49th Parallel*

