

Hail Preston Sturges:



Sturges has a rare cameo in *Christmas in July*/photo courtesy of Jim Curtis



Eddie Bracken and William Demarest in *Hail the Conquering Hero*/photo courtesy Universal Studios Home Video



Barbara Stanwyck in *The Lady Eve*/photo courtesy Universal Studios Home Video

This month's Sturges film festival at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art will afford writers and other film fans a rare opportunity to see Sturges's work on the big screen, complete with roaring masses. It includes a special writers panel on August 29th, Sturges's 100th birthday. The event is being sponsored by the Writers Guild of America, the Writers Guild Foundation, Universal Studios Home Video, and LACMA's film department. For tickets and information call (213) 857-6010 or Ticketmaster. Tickets: \$6 general public; \$4 WGA members. All screenings begin at 7:30 p.m. with a ten-minute intermission between films unless otherwise noted. The complete schedule with film notes written by Devra Maza follows.

Wednesday, August 19

"WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY PRESTON STURGES" PREMIERE

A program of film clips, and appearances by Eddie Bracken, Sandy Sturges, Ken Bowser, and others opens the festival at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Theater. For tickets to this night only, call (310) 247-3600. The rest of the program continues at The Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Thursday, August 20

THE GREAT MCGINTY - Written and directed by Preston Sturges (1940, 81 min.)

Sturges explores what happens when a man goes against his nature. Under the tutelage of a political boss (Akim Tamiroff), a corrupt bum (Brian Donlevy) works his way up to governor, then tries to go straight. Big mistake. The first film Sturges directed won him the first Oscar for Best Original Screenplay.

STRICTLY DISHONORABLE - Screenplay by Gladys Lehman, based on a play by Preston Sturges, directed by John Stahl (1931, 91 min.)

Sturges's first big hit on Broadway put him on the writer's map. A betrothed Southern belle (Sidney Fox) wanders into a speakeasy and under the spell of an Italian tenor (Paul Lukas) whose intentions are in the title. Surprisingly, the ingenue is willing, but the lothario falls in love. What's a seducer to do?

Friday, August 21

REMEMBER THE NIGHT - Written by Preston Sturges, directed by Mitchell Leisen (1940, 94 min.)

Long before *Double Indemnity*, Sturges gave prosecutor Fred MacMurray a choice: Send career thief Barbara Stanwyck up the river, or take her home to mother. Guess which he chooses? The comedy's laced with melodrama, but the defense attorney's pure screwball.

CHRISTMAS IN JULY - Written and directed by Preston Sturges (1940, 70 min.)

Based on his play, *A Cup of Coffee*. Advertising wannabe Dick Powell thinks he's won a pre-decaf coffee slogan contest. ("If you can't sleep at night, it's not the coffee, it's the bunk.") After a promotion, engagement (to Ellen Drew), and shopping spree, the truth comes out—that the best ideas are winners without winning. A timeless lesson for writers. Look for Sturges as a radio listener, getting a shoe-shine.

Saturday, August 22

THE LADY EVE - Written and directed by Preston Sturges (1941, 97 min.)

Barbara Stanwyck tempts beer millionaire Henry Fonda, first as the cardsharp Jean, then as the look-alike Lady Eve. Fonda falls for both—literally. Charles Coburn is the doting dad who taught Jean everything she knows. ("A mug is a mug in everything.") Fonda has the double standards, Stanwyck delivers the double-entendres, and William Demarest does the double-takes, adding up to an absolute gem. Topped the N.Y. Times 10 Best List for 1941...*Citizen Kane* was second.

THE GOOD FAIRY - Screenplay by Preston Sturges, from a play by Ferenc Molnar, directed by William Wyler (1935, 98 min.)

Margaret Sullivan is an innocent in search of a good deed. Herbert Marshall is a cynic in need. Frank Morgan is, well, a wizard (or so he says), with a lascivious bent, who can help her help him, if only waiter Reginald Owen would stop watching over her. Want to see a witty and charming sex farce? "Go."

Thursday, August 27

THE POWER AND THE GLORY - Written by Preston Sturges, directed by William K. Howard (1933, 76 min.)

Sturges got serious for the landmark spec script—and got a percentage of the gross. Years before *Citizen Kane*, Spencer Tracy goes from railway walker to magnate and leaves his roots behind on the road to power. The innovative use of voice-overs (dubbed "narratage") and story-puzzle structure made Sturges a critics' star. An extremely rare opportunity to see one of the few surviving prints, seldom shown.

DIAMOND JIM - Screenplay by Preston Sturges, adaptation by Doris Malloy and Harry Clark, based on the novel by Parker Morrell, directed by Edward Sutherland (1935, 90 min.)

Edward Arnold plays 19th-century tycoon Diamond Jim Brady, whose devotion to food and fortune is only surpassed by his love for two women. (Jean Arthur plays both.) With Binnie Barnes as Brady's star attraction: music-hall queen Lillian Russell. A biopic of a larger-than-life man, ruined by his own appetites.

A Centennial Celebration

Friday, August 28

SULLIVAN'S TRAVELS - Written and directed by Preston Sturges (1942, 90 min.)

Alter-ego, fluff filmmaker Sullivan (Joel McCrea) wants to make *Ob, Brother Where Art Thou?* and researches the homeless by joining their ranks. The road to philosophy is paved with pitfalls, but on the way he gets Veronica Lake and learns the value of laughter. A classic genre-blending, twist-ending, cinematic and social statement, all rolled into one... "with a little sex."

MAD WEDNESDAY - Written, produced, and directed by Preston Sturges (1950, 72 min.)

Sturges picks up with the last reel of *The Freshman* then gives underachiever Harold Lloyd his first drink. Lloyd wakes up two days later to find he owns a loud suit, a circus, and one very hungry lion—the odd ingredients to overachieve. Originally *The Sin of Harold Diddlebock*, Howard Hughes cut 19 minutes, Rudy Vallee, and added a talking horse and the new title, but the "sin" survives.

Saturday, August 29

(Special birthday program, documentary and panel, begins at 3:00 p.m.)

PRESTON STURGES: RISE AND FALL OF AN AMERICAN DREAMER - Written by Todd McCarthy, directed by Ken Bowser (1989, 75 min.)

Acclaimed documentary on the icon includes film clips, footage of Sturges, and interviews with Eddie Bracken, Joel McCrea, Betty Hutton, and more. Bowser's aim was "to reveal something of the man whose art continually reveals itself with every viewing." McCarthy won an Emmy.

SCREENWRITERS PANEL DISCUSSION

Following the documentary, The Writers Guild Foundation presents a panel of writers/admirers for analysis and insights into the Sturges canon. Participants include Ron Shelton (*Bull Durham*), Phil Alden Robinson (*Field of Dreams*), Hal Kanter (*Casanova's Big Night*), Leslie Dixon (*Outrageous Fortune*), and Todd McCarthy (*Visions of Light*). Screenings continue at 7:30 p.m.

HAIL THE CONQUERING HERO - Written and directed by Preston Sturges (1944, 101 min.)

Sturges's favorite film about a lie that snowballs out of control gave Eddie Bracken and William Demarest the roles of their careers—or anyone else's. A group of marines spirit 4-F Woodrow Truesmith (Bracken) "Home to the Arms of Mother" in the guise of a war hero, and the hometown goes to the extreme to honor him. The comedy is tight, the sentimentality is seamless, and the dictation scene's a classic. Quite simply one of the wittiest and best-constructed films ever made. Oscar nominated screenplay.

IF I WERE KING - Screenplay by Preston Sturges, based on the play by Justin Huntly McCarthy, directed by Frank Lloyd (1938, 100 min.)

Political satire goes medieval. Mellifluous Ronald Coleman plays poet-rebel Francois Villon who robs from the crown in besieged France. Basil Rathbone is almost unrecognizable in a deliciously comic turn as ruthless King Louis IX who gives Villon one week to see if he can rule better. Francis Dee and Ellen Drew play Villon's love interests on opposite sides of the moat. Packed with lots of verbal fencing between the swash and buckle.

Friday, September 4

THE MIRACLE OF MORGAN'S CREEK - Written and directed by Preston Sturges (1944, 99 min.)

Sturges seduces the censors and films to tell. Trudy (Betty Hutton) is in the family way, only she can't remember the soldier who got her that way. (She thinks his name was Ratskiwatski.) Nervous suitor Norval (Eddie Bracken) to the rescue, under the watchful eye of her pratfalling pa (William Demarest). The twist ending is so big, even McGinty and the Boss are in on it. Sturges's biggest financial success and an Oscar-nominated screenplay.

UNFAITHFULLY YOURS - Written and directed by Preston Sturges (1948, 105 min.)

Impresario Rex Harrison imagines his wife's been unfaithful and conducts scenarios of revenge to the tune of three classics. He then finds murder doesn't play as smoothly when scored in reality. What emerges is a sort of screwball film noir. With Linda Darnell as the devoted object of desire and vengeance, the instruments of which include a razor, a purple dress "with plumes at the hips," and a "Simplicity Home Recording Machine." Quick readers should scan the recorder's instructions which Sturges scripted. They're a riot.

Saturday, September 5

THE PALM BEACH STORY - Written and directed by Preston Sturges (1942, 88 min.)

Don't miss the credits, after which Claudette Colbert sets out to prove that looks are everything with hubby Joel McCrea in pursuit. Rudy Vallee makes it worth her while and sings *Goodnight Sweetheart* while Mary Astor, as his much-married sister, obsesses about "topic A." "Is there anything else?" "Nitz!" Social-sexual satire and Toto too.

EASY LIVING - Screenplay by Preston Sturges, story by Vera Caspary, directed by Mitchell Leisen (1937, 88 min.)

Financier Edward Arnold ("the Bull of Broadstreet") throws his extravagant wife's sable coat off the roof and it lands on impoverished Jean Arthur, sending her into the rich-man's spotlight, the automat, and the arms of Ray Milland. Cinderella on \$0 a day. How? "Kismet."



Joel McCrea in *Sullivan's Travels*/photo courtesy Universal Studios Home Video



Linda Darnell and Rex Harrison in *20th Century Fox's Unfaithfully Yours*/photo courtesy of Sandy Sturges



Joel McCrea and Claudette Colbert in *The Palm Beach Story*/photo courtesy Universal Studios Home Video