
Tuesday February 15th 1955 at 8.0. p.m., in the Marine Room, Capitol Hotel, 51st St., New York

A Special Memorial Program in Honor of

C L Y D E B R U C K M A N

1895 1955

Clyde Bruckman, one of the cinema's great comedy talents, died on January 4th last. Almost as tragic as his passing was the fact that Bruckman had been inactive for too long in the work that he loved best, and probably considered that his great contribution to the art and history of cinema had been forgotten. Perhaps he would have been heartened had he known how highly revered is his work - that it is still shown, all over the world, and acclaimed not only by students and lovers of cinema, but sometimes by the boxoffice as well, since films like "Movie Crazy" are still doing top business in England, in Sweden, and in other countries.

We would have liked tonight to have presented some of the director's less familiar films but, alas, prints no longer seem to be available. We are presenting instead two films that you have probably seen, but which, because they represent Clyde Bruckman's peak work in silent and sound eras, form a particularly appropriate combination for this memorial program.

These two comedies - THE GENERAL and MOVIE CRAZY - are ageless; indeed, with the dearth of good contemporary comedy material, they seem to improve and grow funnier as the years go by. Certainly they are films that one can see again and again, and we are proud to present them tonight as a tribute to a great comedy craftsman.

Tonight's program, in order of presentation:

An opening address by Mr. Herman G. Weinberg, distinguished writer, critic and foremost film historian, will sum up the work of Clyde Bruckman.

"THE GENERAL" (United Artists, 1926) Directed by Clyde Bruckman and Buster Keaton. Starring BUSTER KEATON and Marion Mack.

Undoubtedly one of the half-a-dozen finest screen comedies of any period, "THE GENERAL" can rank easily with the best of Chaplin and Harry Langdon, and represents Bruckman's greatest achievement. Although directed in collaboration with Keaton, it would seem fairly certain that it was Bruckman who was primarily responsible for the film's successful outcome. Keaton (like Langdon) was singularly inept in directing his own material, as later films like "Go West" (directed solely by Keaton) were to prove.

A delightful satire on civil war adventures, while managing to remain consistently exciting at the same time, "The General" creates a wonderfully exact and stylish sense of its period. The battle and action sequences are expertly handled and presented on a massive scale - many of these sequences were, in fact, used as stock footage in many later (including talkie) straight Civil War dramas. The hilarious comedy sequences are essentially visual, and should be seen rather than described.

"MOON OVER LAS VEGAS" (Universal, 1944) Extract only.
A two-reel extract from this slickly-made "B" musical comedy affords a good example of the lively and amusing work of Bruckman in his later years, when he was writing prolifically but no longer directing. We'll have more to say about this period later in our notes.

"MOVIE CRAZY" (Paramount, 1933) Directed by Clyde Bruckman. Starring HAROLD LLOYD and Constance Cummings.

Although made some four years after the change-over to sound films, "Movie Crazy" is still typical of the best of silent screen comedy. The dialogue is a useful means of carrying the plot along without recourse to subtitles, and to put over the various plot complications. But as far as the comedy itself is concerned, both Bruckman and Lloyd have remained faithful to the wonderful traditions of the silents. The comedy is still visual - and still a constant delight. Too, the film carefully retains the measured pacing of the silents, refusing - as did Chaplin - to acknowledge the sound era's alleged requirement of noise and speed. The Hollywood backgrounds are fascinating, and the film altogether remains the best sound comedy made by either Bruckman or Lloyd.

"The General" will be introduced, briefly, by Warner Brothers producer Robert G. Youngson; "Movie Crazy" by William K. Everson of Allied Artists.

A note about Clyde Bruckman's career:

Clyde Bruckman came into prominence in the mid-twenties, primarily as a result of his work on "The General". He followed this up by directing a Monty Banks comedy, "Horse Shoes", and then in 1927-28, turned out a whole series of fine, fast-moving westerns for Pathe. ("The General" had already proven his aptitude for the expert handling of action material). In 1928, the director joined the Harold Lloyd unit and directed such memorable classics as "Feet First", "Welcome Danger" and "Everything's Rosy". Bruckman remained with Lloyd until 1932-33, the year of "Movie Crazy".

After a period of comparative inactivity, Bruckman came back to work with a vengeance in 1935, directing two fine comedies which represented, as it happened, his last important directorial work. "Spring Tonic", for Fox, was a slick, sophisticated comedy from a Ben Hecht script, and starring Lew Ayres, Claire Trevor, Tala Birell, Zasu Pitts and Jack Haley. That same year at Paramount, Bruckman directed the great W.C. Fields in "The Man on the Flying Trapeze". Co-starring Mary Brian, and produced by William Le Baron, it had the benefit of a wonderfully zany script by Fields (under the name of Charles Bogle) and his actor-friend Sam Hardy. It is unfortunate that this quite brilliant little comedy does not seem to be available for showing today.

Years of spasmodic activity as a writer followed, culminating in an unusually prolific period as a writer at Universal. From 1943 through 1945, Bruckman turned out a dozen slickly constructed original stories and screenplays for Universal's then prodigious "B" schedule. Universal's minor musicals and comedies of that time were usually ghastly 6-reel bores expanded from material that should have been relegated to two-reelers. It was an unappetizing series to cater to, but Bruckman met the challenge and produced scripts that were vastly superior to others in the series -- and, more importantly, scripts with a marked comedy content. "She Gets Her Man", a Joan Davis vehicle, was a really excellent minor comedy with a good deal of smartly conceived slapstick and visual humor. As a contrast, "Moon Over Las Vegas", of which we are screening an extract this evening, was a sparkling comedy of manners very much in the Lubitsch mould. This film, admittedly a second feature, was unfortunately rather lost in the shuffle, due to Universal's methods of mass "B" productions at that time. Had it been released as an individual item, rather than as just one of a group, it might well have turned out to be a surprisingly successful sleeper. Bruckman's other screenplays at this time included "Her Lucky Night", "Under Western Skies", "South of Dixie", "Swingtime Johnny", "Twilight on the Prairie", "Weekend Pass", "Honeymoon Lodge" and "So's Your Uncle".

Bruckman's final work, as a writer of two-reel comedies at Columbia, gave him little opportunity. The films had to be made on very meagre budgets, on two-day shooting schedules, and with as much use made of old sets, old footage and other money-saving deceptions as possible. Creative comedy was neither wanted nor could be afforded. Bruckman did his best, and undoubtedly was responsible for helping to raise the standards of a group of cheapies, but under such conditions there was little that he could do beyond that. We could have screened one of these shorts tonight, but there seemed little point. Certainly we would rather remember Bruckman for his classics than for his quickies.

Bruckman's passing was given but scant mention in the trade papers, although responsible film journals did pay appropriate tributes. Inasmuch as our membership is evenly divided between film writers and historians, and active members of the trade, perhaps this little screening this evening can be considered as a belated tribute from the industry to which Bruckman contributed so much.

When we first announced this memorial screening a few weeks ago, we received a number of spontaneous tributes from a widely assorted group of people, many from Europe, and all with two things in common -- a love of film, and a great respect for the work of Clyde Bruckman. It is only fitting that we reproduce some of these comments here:

CARL DREYER, Denmark, director of many screen classics:

"Truly great screen comedy is all too rare, as are the great comedy craftsmen among whom Clyde Bruckman was a leader. I have often wished that I had made "The General".

PENELOPE HOUSTON, London, The British Film Institute: "We still show THE GENERAL and MOVIE CRAZY over here as examples of outstanding screen comedy. It is a wonderful thing to see today's audiences laughing and applauding at images that were put on celluloid so many years ago. Turn to any book on the history of the film and you will find Bruckman's name in an honoured position; go to any film archive, and you will find his films in readiness for yet another screening".

PAUL ROTH, producer, writer (quoting from his book "The Film Till Now"):
"The General" was Keaton's best Bruckman's work was notable for a minimum of detail, and a maximum of effect".

CHARLES TURNER, motion picture director, New York:
"Bruckman didn't arrive on the scene early enough to be considered a pioneer; but his work so rivals that of pioneers Charles Chaplin and Mack Sennett, that he must certainly be considered their equal".

RICHARD KRAFT, feature-writer for "Film Culture":
"What Lubitch did with his script, Bruckman did with his camera. These are the two great comedy talents of Hollywood - one the master of wit, the other the master of visual comedy. I deliberately say that they "are" the great comedy talents of Hollywood; they may be gone, but their work lives on. It will never be replaced - nor surpassed".

EDWARD CONNOR, columnist for "Films in Review":
"I hardly need to pay any kind of tribute to Clyde Bruckman. His films are a more lasting memorial than most men are fortunate enough to achieve".

E. LAURITZEN, curator, the Swedish Film Museum, Stockholm:
"Our students have come to love and respect the comedies of Clyde Bruckman. Perhaps more important, they enjoy them, finding that in a direct comparison with other, and current, screen comedies, they rise far superior to them".

RICHARD GORDON, producer and president of Renown Pictures of America Inc:
"There isn't a comedy film-maker alive today who hasn't learned something from Clyde Bruckman - and who couldn't learn a little more by a careful study of his work".

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