

News from the Library of Congress

December 30, 2008

Cinematic Classics, Legendary Stars, Comedic Legends and Novice Filmmakers Showcase the 2008 Film Registry

The holiday season is usually a busy time for moviegoers, but December is also the time of year when attention is focused on the preservation of the nation's movie heritage. Librarian of Congress James H. Billington today named 25 important motion pictures--classics and genres from every era of American filmmaking--to the National Film Registry of the Library of Congress, including "The Asphalt Jungle," "Deliverance," "A Face in the Crowd," "The Invisible Man," "Sergeant York" and "The Terminator." Spanning the period 1910-1989, this year's selections bring the number of motion pictures in the registry to 500.

Under the terms of the National Film Preservation Act, each year the Librarian of Congress names 25 films to the National Film Registry that are "culturally, historically or aesthetically" significant, to be preserved for all time. These films are not selected as the "best" American films of all time, but rather as works of enduring significance to American culture.

"With this year's list, the registry now includes 500 films and stands as a matchless record of the amazing creativity America has brought to the movies since the early 1890s," said Billington. "Both as a public-awareness tool and as an educational learning aid for students, the registry helps this nation understand the diversity of America's film heritage and, just as importantly, the need for its preservation. The nation has lost about half of the films produced before 1950 and as much as 90 percent of those made before 1920. In addition, more and more nitrate-based and acetate-based films are deteriorating with the passage of time."

The Librarian makes the final selection, after reviewing hundreds of titles nominated by the public and having extensive discussions with the distinguished members of the National Film Preservation Board, as well as the Library's motion picture staff. Dr. Billington again solicited public nominations at the Film Board's Web site: www.loc.gov/film/, and issued a call for lesser-known, but culturally vital, films such as amateur and home-movie footage. This year's list includes "Disneyland Dream," a significant home movie record of Hollywood and Los Angeles in 1956, and the student film, "No Lies."

Congress established the National Film Registry in 1989 and reauthorized the program most recently in September 2008 when it passed the "Library of Congress Sound Recording and Film Preservation Programs Reauthorization Act of 2008." For each title named to the registry, the Library of Congress's Packard Campus of the National Audio-Visual Conservation Center works to ensure that the film is preserved for future generations, either through the Library's massive motion-picture preservation program or through collaborative ventures with other archives, motion-picture studios and independent filmmakers.

The Packard Campus is the Library's state-of-the-art preservation facility in Culpeper, Va., which was made possible through the generosity of David Woodley Packard and the Packard Humanities Institute. The Library's Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division's collections include nearly six million items.

Founded in 1800, the Library of Congress is the nation's oldest federal cultural institution. It seeks to spark imagination and creativity and to further human understanding and wisdom by providing access to knowledge through its magnificent collections, programs and exhibitions. Many of the Library's rich resources can be accessed through its Web site at www.loc.gov and via interactive exhibitions on a new, personalized Web site at myLOC.gov. For more information about the National Film Preservation Board and the National Film Registry, visit www.loc.gov/film/.

2008 National Film Registry

The Asphalt Jungle (1950)

John Huston's brilliant crime drama contains the recipe for a meticulously planned robbery, but the cast of criminal characters features one too many bad apples. Sam Jaffe, as the twisted mastermind, uses cash from corrupt attorney Emmerich (Louis Calhern) to assemble a group of skilled thugs to pull off a jewel heist. All goes as planned — until an alert night watchman and a corrupt cop enter the picture. Marilyn Monroe has a memorable bit part as Emmerich's "niece."

Deliverance (1972)

Four Atlanta professionals (Burt Reynolds, Ned Beatty, Ronnie Cox and Jon Voight) head for a weekend canoe trip — and instead meet up with two of the more memorable villains in film history (Billy McKinney and Herbert Coward) in this gripping Appalachian "Heart of Darkness." With dazzling visual flair, director John Boorman and cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond infuse James Dickey's novel with scenes of genuine terror and frantic struggles for survival battling river rapids — and in the process create a work rich with fascinating ambiguities about "civilized" values, urban-versus-backwoods culture, nature, and man's supposed taming of the environment.

Disneyland Dream (1956)

The Barstow family films a memorable home movie of their trip to Disneyland. Robbins and Meg Barstow, along with their children Mary, David and Daniel were among 25 families who won a free trip to the newly opened Disneyland in Anaheim, Calif., as part of a "Scotch Brand Cellophane Tape" contest sponsored by 3M. Through vivid color and droll narration ("The landscape was very different from back home in Connecticut"), we see a fantastic historical snapshot of Hollywood, Beverly Hills, Catalina Island, Knott's Berry Farm, Universal Studios and Disneyland in mid-1956. Home movies have assumed a rapidly increasing importance in American cultural studies as they provide a priceless and authentic record of time and place.

A Face in the Crowd (1957)

Before Andy Griffith became a television legend playing a likable small-town sheriff, he portrayed a completely different type of celebrity in this dark look at the way sudden fame and power can corrupt. In his film debut, Griffith plays a rural drunk, drifter and country singer who becomes an overnight success when a radio station employee (Patricia Neal) puts him on the air. Behind the scenes, he turns into a power-hungry monster who must be exposed. This film is based on the short story "The Arkansas Traveler" by Budd Schulberg, who also wrote the script for director Elia Kazan.

Flower Drum Song (1961)

This film version of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical marked the first Hollywood studio film featuring performances by a mostly Asian cast, a break from past practice of casting white actors made up to appear Asian. Starring prominent Asian-American actors Nancy Kwan and James Shigeta, this milestone film presented an enduring three-dimensional portrait of Asian America as well as a welcomed, non-clichéd portrait of Chinatown beyond the usual exotic tourist façades.

Foolish Wives (1922)

Director Erich von Stroheim's third feature, staged with costly and elaborate sets of Monte Carlo, tells the story of a criminal who passes himself off as a Russian count in order to seduce women of society and steal their money. This brilliant and, at the time, controversial film fully established von Stroheim's reputation within the industry as a challenging and difficult-to-manage creative genius.

Free Radicals (1979)

Born in New Zealand, avant-garde filmmaker Len Lye moved to the United States and became a naturalized citizen in 1950. For his four-minute work "Free Radicals" (begun in 1958 and completed in 1979), Lye made scratches directly into the film stock. These scratches became "figures of motion" that appear in the finished film as horizontal and vertical lines and shapes dancing to the music of the Bagirmi tribe in Africa.

Hallelujah (1929)

The all-black-cast film "Hallelujah" was a surprising gamble by normally conservative MGM, allowed chiefly because director King Vidor deferred his salary and MGM had proved slow to convert from silent to sound films. Vidor had to shoot silent film of the mass-river-baptism and swamp-murder Tennessee location scenes. He then painstakingly synchronized the dialogue and music. Around themes of religion, sensuality and family stability, Vidor molded a tale of a cotton sharecropper that begins with him losing his year's earnings, his brother and his freedom and follows him through the temptations of a dancehall girl (Nina Mae McKinney). The passionate conviction of the melodrama and the resourceful technical experiments make "Hallelujah" among the very first indisputable masterpieces of the sound era.

In Cold Blood (1967)

In 1959 two men brutally murdered four members of a Holcomb, Kan., family. Truman Capote reported on the infamous incident, first in a series of New Yorker articles and later in his non-fiction novel, "In Cold Blood." With an unsparing neo-realism, director Richard Brooks adapted Capote's novel, focusing on the motivations, backgrounds, and relationship of the killers, society's failure to spot potential murderers, and their eventual execution on death row. Filmed in striking black-and-white documentary style by cinematographer Conrad Hall, the film starred then-unknown actors Robert Blake and Scott Wilson, both of whom bore a close physical resemblance to the real-life murderers. Blake, in particular, provides a sensational, multi-layered portrayal. The chilling ending depicts Blake climbing to the gallows to be hanged as we hear his heartbeat slowly come to a stop as the screen fades to black.

The Invisible Man (1933)

Universal released many classic horror films during the 1930s and director James Whale crafted some of the greatest from that famous cycle: "Frankenstein," "Bride of Frankenstein," "The Old Dark House" and "The Invisible Man." Whale brought a dazzling stylishness to what were essentially low-budget horror films and, in the case of "The Invisible Man," produced sophisticated special effects, aided by John P. Fulton. As in his discovery of Boris Karloff to play "Frankenstein," Whale made another inspirational choice in picking British-born Claude Rains, in his American film debut, to portray H.G. Wells' tormented scientist Jack Griffin. In the film, after discovering a drug which provides the secret to invisibility, Rains becomes an insane maniac and goes on a power-hungry murder spree, but later makes a deathbed confession to his fiancée: "I meddled in things that man must leave alone."

Johnny Guitar (1954)

Often described as the one of the stranger, kinkier Westerns of all time, Nicholas Ray's film-noiresque "Johnny Guitar" possesses enough symbolism to keep a psychiatrist occupied for years and was a favorite film of French New Wave directors. "Johnny Guitar," filmed in the Trucolor process, also rates significance as one of a few Westerns featuring women as the main stars (Joan Crawford and Mercedes McCambridge). Crawford is the owner of a gambling saloon in an isolated town waiting for the train lines to arrive so she can get rich; McCambridge plays her nemesis. Upon its release, Variety and The Hollywood Reporter panned "Johnny Guitar," but the film's reputation has soared over time.

The Killers (1946)

Director Robert Siodmak took the original Ernest Hemingway short story as the film's opening point and developed it with an elaborate series of flashbacks, creating a classic example of film noir. Two killers shatter a small town's quiet before an insurance investigator (Edmond O'Brien) digs up crime, betrayal, and a glamorous woman (Ava Gardner) behind an ex-fighter's death (Burt Lancaster's electrifying film debut).

The March (1964)

George Stevens Jr., who headed the United States Information Agency (USIA) Motion Picture Service unit from 1962-67, brought in several young talented documentary filmmakers such as Charles Guggenheim, Carroll Ballard, Kent McKenzie, Leo Seltzer, Terry Sanders, Bruce Herschensohn, and James Blue, who directed "The March." This period ushered in the "Golden Era" of USIA films. Examining the 1963 Civil Rights March on Washington from the ground-level and focusing on the idealistic passion, joy and synergy of the crowds, Blue's documentary lets us see the event take shape from the planning stage — with sound checks and worries about whether people will attend — to the arrival of enormous crowds on parades of trains and buses. It culminates in Martin Luther King's electrifying "I Have a Dream" speech. These USIA films were rarely seen in America because, fearing propaganda, the 1948 Smith-Mundt Act mandated that no USIA film could be shown domestically without a special act of Congress. These films are being rediscovered because a 1990 act of Congress (P.L. 101-246) authorized domestic screening 12 years after release.

No Lies (1973)

Done in faux cinéma vérité style, Mitchell Block's 16-minute New York University student film begins on a note of insouciant amateurism and then convincingly moves into darker, deeper waters. Opening with a scene of a girl getting ready for a date, the camera-wielding protagonist adroitly orchestrates a mood shift from goofiness to raw pain as an interviewer tears down the girl's emotional defenses after being raped. One of the first films to deal with the way rape victims are treated when they seek professional help for sexual assault, "No Lies" still possesses a searing resonance and has been widely viewed by nurses, therapists and police officers.

On the Bowery (1957)

"On the Bowery" is Lionel Rogosin's acclaimed, unrelenting docudrama about the infamous New York City zone

known as the Bowery. The film focuses on three of its alcoholic skid row denizens and their marginal existence amid the gin mills, missions and flop houses. Bosley Crowther in *The New York Times* wrote that "this is a dismal exposition to be charging people money to see." Rogosin and his small crew spent months on the Bowery observing and talking with residents. They crafted the film as a "synthesis" of Bowery life, and it remains a wrenching portrait of hopelessness, despair and broken dreams. The film's writer, Mark Sufrin, wrote in an issue of *Sight and Sound* magazine: "Very few, once they hit the Bowery, ever leave, are reclaimed, or rehabilitated...I had escaped that frightening place. They still remain."

One Week (1920)

"One Week" is the first publicly released two-reel short film starring Buster Keaton. One of Keaton's finest films and one of the greatest short comedies produced during the 1920s, the film, as critic Walter Kerr noted, shows Keaton as "a garden at the moment of blooming." Considered astonishingly creative even by contemporary standards, "One Week" is rife with hilarious comic, often surrealist, sequences chronicling the ill-fated attempts of a newlywed couple to assemble their new home.

The Pawnbroker (1965)

"The Pawnbroker" was the first Hollywood film to depict in a realistic, psychologically probing manner the trauma of a Holocaust survivor, a subject previously taboo because of the fear of poor box office or offending delicate sensitivities. Rod Steiger's astounding performance — as he tries to repress his memories of the anguish, physical and emotional shame of being an internment-camp inmate — also serves a perfect allegory for American film's own struggles to represent this major tragedy of 20th century history.

The Perils of Pauline (1914)

"The Perils of Pauline" was among the very first American movie serials. Produced in 20 episodes, in a groundbreaking long-form motion-picture narrative structure, the series starred Pearl White as a young and wealthy heiress whose ingenuity, self-reliance and pluck enable her to regularly outwit a guardian intent on stealing her fortune. The film became an international hit and spawned a succession of elaborate American adventure serial productions that persisted until the advent of regularly scheduled television programs in the 1950s. Although now regarded as a satirical cliché of the movie industry, "Perils of Pauline" in its day inspired a generation of women on the verge of gaining the right to vote in America by showing actress Pearl White performing her own stunts and overcoming a persistent male enemy.

Sergeant York (1941)

Gary Cooper, in one of his favorite roles, won his first Oscar for his dead-on portrayal of Tennessee pacifist Sgt. Alvin York, who in an Argonne Forest World War I battle single-handedly captured over 130 German soldiers. A stirring film, which appeared six months before America entered World War II as a nation and inspired Americans through the later conflict, "Sergeant York" contains three main segments all masterfully directed by Howard Hawks: Cooper's life in Tennessee, the war scenes, and post-war scenes in New York City where his newfound fame briefly tempts Cooper not to return to his Tennessee home. This film is Americana at its finest.

The 7th Voyage of Sinbad (1958)

Special-effects master Ray Harryhausen provides the hero with fantastic antagonists, including a giant cyclops, fire-breathing dragons, and a sword-wielding animated skeleton, all in glorious Technicolor. His stunning Dynamation process, which blended stop-motion animation and live-actions sequences, and a fantastic score by Bernard Herrmann ("Psycho," "North by Northwest," "The Day the Earth Stood Still," "Citizen Kane," "Vertigo") makes this one of the finest fantasy films of all time.

So's Your Old Man (1926)

While W.C. Fields' talents are better suited for sound films — where his verbal jabs and asides still delight and astound — Fields also starred in some memorable silent films. Fields began his career as a vaudevillian juggler and that humor and dexterity shines through in "So's Your Old Man." The craziness is aided immeasurably through the deft comic touches of director Gregory LaCava. In the film, Fields plays inventor Samuel Bisbee, who is considered a vulgarian by the town's elite. His road to financial success takes many hilarious detours including a disastrous demo for potential investors, a bungled suicide attempt, a foray into his classic "golf game" routine and an inspired pantomime to a Spanish princess.

George Stevens World War II Footage (1943-46)

Having already directed classics such as "Swing Time," "Gunga Din" and "Woman of the Year," director George Stevens joined the U.S. Army Signal Corps and headed a motion picture unit under Gen. Eisenhower from

1943-46. He shot many hours of footage chronicling D-Day, including rare extant color film of the European war front; the liberation of Paris; American and Soviet forces meeting at the Elbe River; and horrific scenes from the Duben labor camp, thought to be a sub-camp of Buchenwald; and the Dachau concentration camp. The footage has become an essential visual record of World War II and a staple of documentary films.

The Terminator (1984)

In 1984, few expected much from the upcoming film "The Terminator." Director James Cameron, a protégé of legendary independent filmmaker Roger Corman, had made only two films previously: the modest sci-fi short "Xenogenesis" in 1978 and "Piranha Part Two: The Spawning" in 1981. However, "The Terminator" became one of the sleeper hits of 1984, blending an ingenious, thoughtful script — clearly influenced by the works of sci-fi legend Harlan Ellison — and relentless, non-stop action moved along by an outstanding synthesizer and early techno soundtrack. Most notable was Arnold Schwarzenegger's star-making performance as the mass-killing cyborg with a laconic sense of humor ("I'll be back"). Low-budget, but made with heart, verve, imagination, and superb Stan Winston special effects, "The Terminator" remains among the finest science-fiction films in many decades.

Water and Power (1989)

Winner of a Sundance Grand Jury prize, Pat O'Neill's influential experimental work is in his own words "a landscape film that became animated by the beginnings of human stories." In this "city symphony," O'Neill juxtaposes images of downtown Los Angeles with scenes from the Owens Valley, Los Angeles' source of water. This was a brilliant examination of water in all its forms and the one-sided sharing of energy between the two places, representing nature and civilization.

White Fawn's Devotion (1910)

James Young Deer is now recognized as the first documented movie director of Native American ancestry. Born in Dakota City, Neb., as a member of the Winnebago Indian tribe, James Young Deer (aka: J. Younger Johnston) began his show-business career in circus and Wild West shows in the 1890s. When Pathé Frères of France established its American studio in 1910, in part to produce more authentically American-style Western films, Young Deer was hired as a director and scenario writer. Frequently in collaboration with his wife, actress Princess Red Wing (aka: Lillian St. Cyr), also of Winnebago ancestry, Young Deer is believed to have written and directed more than 100 movies for Pathé from 1910-1913. Many details of Young Deer's life and movie career remain undocumented and fewer than 10 of his films have been discovered and preserved by U.S. film archives.

Films Selected to the 2008 National Film Registry

1. The Asphalt Jungle (1950)
2. Deliverance (1972)
3. Disneyland Dream (1956)
4. A Face in the Crowd (1957)
5. Flower Drum Song (1961)
6. Foolish Wives (1922)
7. Free Radicals (1979)
8. Hallelujah (1929)
9. In Cold Blood (1967)
10. The Invisible Man (1933)
11. Johnny Guitar (1954)
12. The Killers (1946)
13. The March (1964)
14. No Lies (1973)
15. On the Bowery (1957)
16. One Week (1920)

17. The Pawnbroker (1965)
18. The Perils of Pauline (1914)
19. Sergeant York (1941)
20. The 7th Voyage of Sinbad (1958)
21. So's Your Old Man (1926)
22. George Stevens WW2 Footage (1943-46)
23. The Terminator (1984)
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