

FORTIES (1941-1950) A-G
All reviews by Michael J. Weldon

THE ABCs OF LOVE (SW, 50) D Lillian Hunt

Shirley Jean Rickert aka "Gilda The Golden Girl Of Burlesque" is the star attraction as she smiles and twirls her long blonde hair. As a child she was in *OUR GANG* and *MICKEY McGUIRE* shorts, and was a movie choreographer and dancer before her stripper career. This has more female comics than usual and a woman sings the intros. You also get drunk comedy, can can and tap dancers, Wilma singing a Cockney song, Blaza Glory, and Taffy, "The Candy Kid From Texas" twirling her tassels. William C. Thompson was cinematographer and Robert Derteno was editor. Both later worked for Ed Wood.

AFRICA SCREAMS (Englewood, 49) D Charles Barton, S Earl Baldwin, P Edward Nassour

Stanley Livingston (Lou Costello) and his boss Bud (Abbott) work in the jungle book department (!?) of a department store. Because Stanley claims to remember a map, they go on safari to the Congo with Hillary Brooke, her sissy butler (Joe Besser with hair), two big thugs (Max and brother Buddy Baer), and a nearly blind hunter (Shemp Howard). Abbott seems even meaner and Costello seems even more cowardly than in the Universal A+C comedies, and old style racial (racist) humor is featured. Scared chanting natives who work like plantation slaves carry Costello. Abbott calls them "boys" and they say ungowo and boom gowa-ha! An unbilled Bill Walker translates for Bobo (Burton Wenland), a bone through the nose cannibal. When a giant man-in-a-suit gorilla shows up (U.A. released this just before *MIGHTY JOE YOUNG*), the natives are scared white. It's fun to see the stars sharing scenes with the two Stooges. Both are funny but Shemp's part is too brief. With famous celebrity hunters Clyde Beatty and Frank Buck as themselves, Charles Gemora in his gorilla suit, a studio set jungle and river, and stock footage. Brooke became a regular on the *ABBOTT AND COSTELLO* show. Barton had directed shorts at Educational, including *KID N'AFRICA* (32) which had cannibals cooking Shirley Temple! He went on to direct the *AMOS AND ANDY* TV series.

AMONG THE LIVING (Fang, 41) D Stuart Heisler, S Lester Cole, Garrett Fort, P Sol C. Siegel

John (Albert Dekker) returns to his hometown, named after his family, for the funeral of his much hated father, who had "built" the depressed Southern mill town. The family doctor (Harry Carey) reveals that John's long dead twin brother Paul (also Dekker) is a "hopeless maniac," secretly kept in a room (sometimes in a straightjacket) in the old family mansion. The childlike Paul escapes, checks into a cheap rooming house and gives money to the flirtatious daughter (Susan Hayward) of the landlady (Maude Eburne). He also kills several people and eventually brother John is blamed and nearly lynched. While parts resemble a horror movie, this (only 69 mins. long) atmospheric Paramount production is more of a downbeat social problem movie, with parts that reminded me of Lang's *M* (or *FURY*), and even the later *DAUGHTER OF HORROR* or *THE PHOENIX STORY*. The several black actors don't play scared fools (unusual at the time) and despite the location, nobody has Southern accents. With Frances Farmer as John's wife, Ernest Whitman as Paul's guardian, Jean Phillips as a bar girl and Gordon Jones (later Mike The Cop on the *ABBOTT AND COSTELLO* show). Dekker and Farmer both had tragic real life endings. Heisler also directed the anti-KKK movie *STORM WARNING* (50). His *THE BISCUIT EATER* (40), is seen advertised here on a marquee. Screenwriter Cole later became one of the blacklisted Hollywood Ten. Unfortunately the print is worn and has some jumps.

ATROCITIES OF THE ORIENT (SW, 49) D ?, P (U.S.) Lloyd Friedgen

(*ATROCITIES OF MANILA*, *OUTRAGES OF THE ORIENT*, *BEAST OF THE EAST*). After a narrated intro and a musical number by happy Filipino villagers (similar to Indian movie segments) the main story is about the Japanese occupation (some actual news footage is used), two rival brothers and some captured freedom

fighters. The Japanese Col. ("There is only one God, the Emperor Of Japan!") orders (mostly offscreen) bayonet deaths and decapitations. Eve, a tough lady guerrilla leader shoots one of her own men for punishment. There's even a comedy relief Sgt. character. In (second language) English but whole conversations are in Japanese. The topless women running and some other sequences were awkwardly edited in for the U.S. exploitation release. The David Friedman Roadshow Rarity release is from a 59 re-issue. It still played theatres in the 70s!

BECAUSE OF EVE (SW, 48) D Howard Bretherton, S Walter A. Lawrence, P William A. Bacon

(THE STORY OF LIFE) This still shocking hit was built around three educational shorts. After lightning strikes and Biblical quotes are heard, Bob (John Parker), a Battle Of The Bulge vet, and Sally (JUNGLE GODDESS star Wanda McKay) visit kindly Dr. West (Joseph Crehan). We see a series of flashbacks and flashbacks inside of flashbacks, revealing the incredible interwoven tale of how he had gotten VD and she had gotten pregnant before they married. (It's all Mr. X's fault). A big headline in a flashback is CO-ED TRIES SUICIDE! The doc also projects three short films in his office, saying "You are going to sit quietly and look at them." Before schools offered any sex education, countless Americans did just that, usually in gender segregated audiences. The VD short informs us that 1/10 (!) of the U. S. population suffers from syphilis or gonorrhea, and is loaded with horrifying stark close-ups of infected privates and other body parts, blind and crippled people and infected babies. The tame reproduction short uses diagrams, drawings and a nude model (an audience draw at the time). Then a voice announces a live lecture by "Mr. Alexander Leeds," which would take place on the movie theater stage. The final short has birth of baby scenes. Bob and Sally, who had broken up, leave informed and ready to happily raise a family. The facts that the famous best selling Kinsey Report was released in 1948 and the sex movie MOM AND DAD (44) was still making big bucks led to three similar roadshow movies that year. The sillier STREET CORNER (PV #26) also had Crehan as the doctor, and the tamer THE STORY OF BOB AND SALLY was produced by Universal. EVE scenes were later used in IT CAME FROM HOLLYWOOD (82). This tape also includes a long (50s) lecture on teen marriage and pregnancy.

BEWARE! (SW, 46) P/D/edit Bud Pollard, S John C. Gordon

Louis Jordan accidentally returns to Ware college (in Ware, Ohio) and saves his alma mater from being closed down by doing a free show and punching out the rich grandson of the school's founder. He also gets the girl (Valerie Black). Jordan sings 8 songs (and plays sax solos) with his 6 member Tympany Band. They play on a train, in a classroom and at a dance. The title song (a comical warning about marriage) was a #20 hit on the pop charts but my favorite is "Today You Got To Have A Beat." Jordan also does two solo numbers and his band does several instrumentals. Jordan had been in Soundies, other shorts and musical review features, but this very cool all black cast movie was his first feature as star. If you want to see where rock and roll or rhythm and blues started check this out.

BLONDE SAVAGE (Sinister, 47) D S. K. Seeley, S Gordon Bache, P Lionel J. Toll

Steve (Leif Erickson) flies to Kenya, where his ex Connie (Veda Ann Borg from RETURN OF THE ZOMBIES) is miserable living with her jealous corrupt diamond mine owner husband Harper (Douglass Dumbrille). Meanwhile natives in war paint chant and pound drums and Meelbah (blonde Gale Sherwood) steps out and sings "Farga! Farga!" (you may have marveled at this scene in IT CAME FROM HOLLYWOOD). She teaches English to Chief Tonga (Ernest Whitman) and falls for Steve. With Matt Willis (the RETURN OF THE VAMPIRE werewolf) as Harper's killer assistant, Frank Jenks (ZOMBIES ON BROADWAY) as the comic relief Hoppy and John Dehner. With a flashback inside a flashback and some old stock footage

including bone through the nose natives and a standout mondo movie battle between a water buffalo and a huge snake. Sherwood later was Nelson Eddy's singing partner. The print of this Eagle Lion release jumps.

BOY!, WHAT A GIRL! (Video Beat!, 46) P/D Arthur Leonard, S Vincent Valentini, P Jack Goldberg

Two guys try to scam money for a show from the visiting Mr. Cummings (Al Jackson) in a Harlem apartment building. Several romances blossom in this zany all star musical comedy. Three men actually fall in love with the bald cigar smoking Tim Moore (Kingfish on AMOS AND ANDY!) who spends most of the movie in drag. Meanwhile, a house rent party is going on with some wild dancing (from the Harlemaniacs) and some acts play on the roof top. Slam Stewart (of Slim And Slam fame) does "Slamboree" on his bass fiddle. Drummer Big Sid Catlett and His Band are joined by surprise (white) guest drummer Gene Krupa. (Catlett and Krupa had both been with Benny Goodman). The funny Deek Watson (from The Ink Spots) And His Brown Dots do two songs. Several women sing (the credits are incomplete) and another plays classical piano. Milton Woods (from Louis Jordan movies) plays a French suitor with two assistants that repeat "Oui Oui." Warren Jackson (as the landlord - who talks to the camera) and Al Jackson, both huge guys, were a comedy team. Sheila Guyse (also in the same director's SEPIA CINDERELLA) co-stars with Sybil Lewis, Betti Mays, and Ann Cornell. Leonard also made DEVIL'S DAUGHTER (PV # 6). Call (415) 397-2425.

COSMO JONES CRIME SMASHER (Sinister, 43) D James Tinling, S Michael L. Simmons, Walter Gering, P Lindsley Parsons,

This cartoonish, just over an hour long Monogram comedy was based on a radio program. Cosmo (Frank Graham) is an eccentric young amateur detective professor who uses big complicated words and imitates voices. He and a janitor's helper turned chauffeur named Useless (Mantan Moreland) help out when a rich oil heiress is kidnapped in New York. Mantan mangles English, trembles, faints (many times) and says "Well, dog my cat!" Edgar Kennedy is the befuddled angry Irish police captain. The other actors are pretty much lost in all the comedy but Gale Storm, the daughter of the Commissioner (Herbert Rawlinson), loves a cheerful sergeant (Richard Cromwell) who is framed, and Tristran Coffin is a gangster.

CRACKED NUTS (Fang, 41) D Edward Cline, S Erna Lazarus, W. Scott Darling

Boris (Mischa Auer) creates a fake robot (with a face like his own). He teams with a NYC patent attorney (William Frawley) with serious alimony problems to con the dim witted small town Lawrence (star Stuart Erwin) out of some prize money. Meanwhile, the eyes of the robot (Shemp Howard !) who has "blondeophobia" light up as he keeps getting arrested for chasing women. The servants have some of the funniest scenes in this silly forgotten comedy. Big Hattie Noel uses "Mr. Frankentin" to do her housework and to scare her crap shooting husband (Mantan Moreland). At the end, the Shemp robot steals a mannequin and flees from the cops (they think it's a monster with a woman) in a car and Mantan is scared white (a typical laugh getter in those days). With blondes Una Merkel and Astrid Allwyn as Frawley's secretary and ex wife and Philip Coolidge as a man with a rain machine. Cline, who started out with Max Sennett, also directed a different CRACKED NUTS (31) with Wheeler And Woolsey and 40s W. C. Fields comedies.

CRY OF THE WEREWOLF (44) D Henry Levin, S Griffin Tay, Charles O'Neal, P Wallace MacDonald

The ancestral home of Gypsy Princess Celeste (Nina Foch) is now the New Orleans Psychic Research Museum. Displays include a vampire skeleton and a voodoo room. Celeste, whose mother was said to be a legendary werewolf, uses secret passageways and a hidden crypt as she kills off characters and hypnotizes Elsa (Osa Massen) to force her to kill her scientist fiance Bob (Stephen Crane). Only paws are seen when she's a wolf and she sobs after killing. The wolf in the final scene is a German Shepherd. Short tempered Lt. Lane (Barton MacLane) has a semi comic partner (John Tyrrell). The 63 min. Columbia release manages to copy parts of the Universal WOLFMAN and the RKO CAT PEOPLE and the support cast is great. There's Milton Parsons as a funeral parlor owner, Blanche Yurka as the Maleva character, Fritz Leiber as the director of the museum and John Abbott as the tour guide who loses his mind. Transylvanians are played by actors from America, Holland (Foch), Denmark (Massen, who has a heavy accent), and Estonia (Ivan Triesault). Unbilled blacks play servants in the flashback. It was taped from TV in Philadelphia.

THE DEVIL ON WHEELS (Fang, 47) D/S Crane Wilbur, P Ben Stoloff

In this especially entertaining and outrageous PRC release, post war upper middle class suburban kids drag race in jalopies (or "meat grinders"), which leads to chases, crashes, deaths and several courtroom scenes. Micky (Darryl Hickman, later in THE TINGLER) has a reckless father and a Korea vet older brother who falls for the judges daughter (Noreen Nash). In a segment that could have been in a horror movie, blonde Rusty (young Jan Ford, later aka Terry Moore) is trapped in a morgue at night ("Jeepers!"). These kids aren't bad, just reckless and spoiled and they say things like "gives my the whammies," and "whistle bait." One of the "loopy dames" says "I'm PN!" (Psycho neurotic)! Hickman's younger brother later starred as DOBIE GILLIS on TV. By the director of TOMORROWS CHILDREN (34). The print has some jumps.

ENEMY OF WOMEN (Dark Dreams, 44) D/S Alfred Zeisler, S Herbert O. Phillips, P W. R. Frank

(MAD LOVER, THE PRIVATE LIFE OF DR. PAUL JOSEPH GOEBBELS) In 1920's Germany, an unsuccessful playwright (Paul Andor) falls for a young actress (Claudia Drake from FACE OF MARBLE). She laughs at him when he falls (he has a bad leg) and her WWI soldier father (H. B. Warner) throws him out. Unfortunately, the humiliated guy is Dr. Goebbels, who rises to power after being inspired by the 1933 speech of an unsuccessful Austrian painter. The Reichminister arranges for her to take a UFA screentest, but after she refuses to let him make her a star, has her blacklisted from acting. He has her father shot and after she marries in Vienna, has her passport revoked so she can't be with her husband (Donald Woods). This non-exploitive semi-fictional indy (shot by John Alton) opens and ends with Berlin being bombed and includes some actual news footage. It was backed by a Minneapolis theater chain owner who sold it to Monogram. Scenes include Goebbels presenting a fake clairvoyant at a party and a comedy troop mocking Nazi leaders. The cast includes Sigrid Gurie, Ralph Morgan, Gloria Stuart, Douglas Fowley, Byron Foulger, and Gene Stutenroth. Andor (who was a little too good-looking for Goebbels at the time) was aka Rudolph Anders, later in SHE DEMONS (!) and FRANKENSTEIN 1970 and on many TV shows. Goebbels shot himself, his wife and six children about eight months after this was released.

EVER SINCE VENUS (44) D/S Arthur Dreifuss, S McElbert Moore

Three naive roommates plan to get rich with a new lipstick they call Rosebud. The romantic lead is Brad (Ross Hunter) who meets Janet (Ann Savage) by physically forcing her to use the lipstick and kiss him. Tiny (Billy Gilbert) is a diner burger

cook who writes songs and poses in funny costumes for artist Michel (Fritz Feld). Hugh Herbert is a helpful eccentric business tycoon and Alan Mowbray is a scheming rival. Babs (Glenda Farrell) works for top billed band leader Ina Ray Hutton (as herself, a radio star). Farrell and Gilbert singing a funny insult song is the best part of this forgotten Columbia musical. Hutton was amazing doing Cab Calloway type material with her all girl band in the 30s, but is much toned down here, singing with a male band. The main production number (Beauty Through The Ages) features Cleopatra, Josephine and Miss 1944. Also with Marjorie Gateson (Mowbray's dominant wife), Thurston Hall (another tycoon), Dudley Dickerson from Stooges shorts (chauffeur), Mary Gordon (landlady), and Brian Foulger (drug store owner). Herbert and Gilbert also starred in comedy shorts at Columbia. Savage (born Bernie Lyon) is best known for DETOUR (45). Hunter (born Martin Fuss in Cleveland) later became a major Hollywood producer. Dreifuss later directed RIOT ON SUNSET STRIP.

GHOST CATCHERS (Fang, 44) D Edward Cline, P/S Edmund L. Hartmann
 NYC nightclub owners and stars Olsen and Johnson try to help a Southern gent and his daughters who have leased an old haunted mansion next door. This musical comedy has some of the same anarchist visual gags and in jokes as their HELLZAPOPPIN. Martha O'Driscoll goes to the club for help and is put in an electric chair, an old man cries like a baby and at one point they try to drive out the turn of the century ghost with swing music. The cast includes Leo Carrillo, Tor Johnson dressed like a gangster, Andy Devine in a horse costume, Lon Chaney (seen briefly) in a bear costume, dwarf actors as elves and Jack Norton. With songs by romantic leads Gloria Jean and crooner Clay Edwards (who also plays violin), Morton Downey (the then famous father of the talk show host) and best of all, Ella Mae Morse. One of her songs is "Quote The Raven." Mel Torme can be spotted playing drums. Cline directed the last three Olsen and Johnson movies.

GIRLS IN CHAINS (43) D Edgar G. Ulmer, S Albert Beich, P Peter R. Van Duinen
 Helen (Arlene Judge, with a pretty extreme hair style) reluctantly accepts a job as a teacher and psychiatrist at a correctional school for "girls" (most look at least 30). She tries to reform things there but the prison (and whole town) is run by killer gangster Johnny Moon (Allen Byron), whose girlfriend Rita (Robin Raymond) is Helen's sister. With a mess hall riot, horrible matrons, solitary confinement and a comic relief drunk character. Frank (Roger Clark) is a juvenile officer and Sid Melton (later on the CAPTAIN MIDNIGHT show) is Moon's right hand man Pighead. This, one of 11 PRC movies Ulmer made in about four years, was sent in by a reader. Judge, also in THE MYSTERIOUS MR. WONG (35), ended her career in THE CRAWLING HAND - ! (63).

THE GREAT RUPERT (Englewood, 50) D Irving Pichel, S Lazlo Vadnay, P George Pal
 A seriously broke vaudeville family moves into a cheap apartment. After the mother (Queenie Smith) prays, the landlord's hidden cash seems to magically rain down on them. The tuba-playing composer son (Pete Drake) of the miser landlord (Frank Orth) falls for the harp-playing Terry Moore, but despite her family's new riches, she's led astray by a theatrical agent (Chick Chandler). Jimmy Durante (in his last starring film role) is the father and since it's December, he sings two comic Christmas songs. Except for moving the money around, the (sometimes crudely animated) dancing squirrel Rupert only appears in the framing sequences (with Jimmy Conlin). The story could have been the same without him. The Eagle Lion release was the first feature by the Hungarian Pal, known then for his animated shorts. Pal and Pichel made DESTINATION MOON (50) next.

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