

## From The Beginning Of Film To 1930 - S-Z

### All reviews by Michael J. Weldon

**THE SEA BAT (30)** D Wesley Ruggles, S Beth Meredyth, John Howard Lawson  
 On the (fictional) Carribean island of Portuga, men risk their lives working as sponge divers and fear a huge manta ray "devil bat." Nina (Raquel Torres), a hot blooded young Spanish woman, seems unusually devoted to her handsome brother Carl (the Swedish Nils Asther). When he dies, she freaks out while dancing wildly with black voodoo natives in the woods. Then, after cursing the sea during a driving rain storm in her see thru dress, she has to fight off three of the hard drinking international workers. They are Juan (John Miljan), Limey (GREED star Gibson Gowland), and "The Corsican" (Boris Karloff). Meanwhile, Nina taunts the newly arrived Reverend Sims (top billed co-star Charles Bickford), actually an escapee from Devil's Island. They eventually fall in love. Besides the slave like black workers (called boneheads and monkeys by the captain), hordes of Polynesian divers bow and chant whenever someone dies at sea. Also with George F. Marion as Nina's comic relief father, Edmund Breese as a cop, and Mack Swain as the bartender. It was filmed in Mexico and released the same year as **THE UTAH KID (PV #36)**, also with Karloff, whose death here is unfortunately offscreen. The two attack scenes are pretty impressive, even though manta rays are fairly harmless in real life. TNT has shown this wild sweaty 67 min. pre code MGM feature. The Mexican Torres was also in **DUCK SOUP (33)**. Bickford was also in **EAST OF BORNEO (PV #34)** and **WHITE WOMAN (33)**. Miljan, a classic villain, was in **PHANTOM OF THE OPERA (25)**, **THE SLAVER (27)**, **THE TERROR (28)**, and **STARK MAD (29)**, to name a few. Screenwriter Meredyth also wrote **THE SEA BEAST (26)**.

**SEVEN FOOTPRINTS TO SATAN (29)** D/act Benjamin Christensen, S Richard Bee, P Wid Gunning

One of the most famous "lost" American silent horror movies has been found in Europe. When first released (by First National Vitaphone/Warners) it had synchronized music and sound effects. This version (**LA SCALA DI SATANA**) has a recent piano/flute score and Italian titles. The wealthy, jaded James Kirhart (Creighton Hale from **THE CAT AND THE CANARY**) meets Eve Martin (blonde beauty Thelma Todd) at their engagement party. A fight breaks out, shots are fired and people panic. The pair is driven away in a sealed limo then taken (at gunpoint) to a mansion filled with strange characters, ominous shadows and screaming women. Eve disappears (she's found later in a coffin) and James is given a series of keys to various secret rooms. After going up spiral stairs to a meeting room, he passes through a masked ball then descends in an elevator to what looks like the beginning of an orgy. A servant in full Asian costume (Sojin) bangs a gong and announces "Silencio! Satana Viene!" The hooded Satan (on his throne) begins choosing women from the crowd, but shots are fired and everyone panics (again). Then James has to carefully climb the stairs (each is numbered and lights up) to the throne just the right way to avoid death. This all turns out to be an elaborate prank, but who cares? It's much more than just another haunted house comedy (as described in some books). Hale's character seems perplexed, intrigued or even angry more than scared most of the time.

**SEVEN FOOTPRINTS** is overloaded with impressive horror makeup faces, interesting characters and visual surprises. One brief (pre-code) scene shows a naked oriental woman (we only see part of her). Her hands are then bound above her head with leather straps while the gorilla holds her feet! A hairy faced man (William V. Mong) who I think is a werewolf and a bearded dwarf (young Angelo Rossitto) both help the hero. A witch woman in a sexy dress (Nora Cecil) and a club footed cripple with long hair (Sheldon Lewis, who was **DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE** in 1920) both threaten. Also with the director as Eve's uncle and Loretta Young (an extra). The director, best known for his incredible **WITCHCRAFT**

THROUGH THE AGES (22), also made THE HAUNTED HOUSE (28) and HOUSE OF HORROR (29) in Hollywood, both also with Todd and Mong, before returning home to Denmark. Todd, famous for 30s comedy shorts, died of carbon monoxide poisoning in her car in 35. The Japanese Kamiyama Sojin (also in THE BAT - 26) died in 44 in a U.S. internment camp. Hale, from Ireland, retired after the 40s and lived into his 80s.

SEVEN KEYS TO BALDPATE (29) D Reginald Barker, S Jane Murfin, P Louis J. Sarecky

Famous writer William "Mack" Magee (Richard Dix) accepts a \$5000 bet in Manhattan to write a novel in 24 hours while spending the night in the upstate Baldpate Inn during a winter snow storm. The caretaker couple warn about a "ghost" (soon revealed to be a hermit), then leave then one character after another show up, all with keys. Myra (Margaret Livingston, also in BROADMINDED) is involved with a criminal plot planned by the local mayor (DeWitt Jennings, from SEVEN FOOTPRINTS TO SATAN) and the head of the railroad (Lucien Littlefield, from THE CAT AND THE CANARY). Mack falls for newspaper writer Mary (Miriam Seegar), talks to himself, jokes about how what everybody says sounds like lines from his books, and holds the cast at gunpoint for hours. Police chief Kennedy (Carleton Macy ) also shows up. It all turns out to be an elaborate set up - or is it? Charlie Chan creator Earl Derr Biggers (from Ohio) wrote the story in 1913, the same year that the popular Broadway version, written by and starring George M. Cohan, debuted. There were three silent versions. The 1917 one (with Cohan) is also available. Biggers died in '33. Other sound versions were in '35, '47, and '82, as HOUSE OF THE LONG SHADOWS (PV #4). Horror movie books ignore SEVEN KEYS..., even though it led to the similar plays and movies of THE CAT AND THE CANARY, THE BAT, and THE GORILLA, and every damn old dark house comedy and mystery ever made. This RKO version (a hit in its day) has been on AMC. The director was from Ottawa. Screenwriter Murfin also wrote THE SAVAGE (26) and ALICE ADAMS (33).

THE SHOW OF SHOWS (29) D John Adolphi

This Warner Brothers review opens with a serious French revolution scene. A military aristocrat is guillotined while the peasants cheer, then the executioner looks at the camera and announces the movie title (just like on SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE). My favorite part is when an enthusiastic and intense John Barrymore does Shakespeare's Richard III (in a scene from Henry VI). He wears black armor (looking like a character in ROLLERBALL) and holds a decapitated head on a battlefield hill! The best pre-code part is when lines of acrobatic female dancers do bare leg splits with crotch close ups. The "Motion Picture Pirates" segment stars singing orchestra leader Ted Lewis, with Noah Beery, Bull Montana, Wheeler Oakman, Anders Randolph and other bad guys as singing pirates, and Sam Baker as one of the ring through the nose natives. The big and brash Winnie Lightner loudly sings "Pingo Pongo" (about Congo cannibals), and comic Sid Silvers insists on doing a singing Al Jolson imitation. The Technicolor part starts with Nick Lucas (of "Tiptoe Through The Tulips" fame) singing to a dancing Myrna Loy (both are supposed to be Chinese). A choreographed number with dozens of chorus girls climbing up and down slanted ladders (in long shots) follows. Beatrice Lillie, with very stylish short hair, helps recite some risqué verse and Sojin appears in a comedy routine with Jack Mulhall and Chester Morris. Eight sets of sisters, including Loretta Young and Sally Blane, Dolores and Helene Costello, and Lola and Lupita Tovar, are all in one number. Soft spoken MC Frank Fay (Barbara Stanwyck's husband) is interrupted every time he starts to sing. Several sequences make fun of the quaint fashions and customs of the turn of the century, which is like mocking the 70's today. They were already making fun of musical production numbers with women posed on chandeliers and in crazy costumes. A second execution scene (Mexican firing squad) includes a blatant plug for Old Gold cigarettes! It all ends with a tall black lady dancer and dozens of black male dancers (one is Fred "Snowflake" Toones). Also with Douglas Fairbanks Jr.,

Richard Barthelmess, Patsy Ruth Miller, Lila Lee, Louise Fazenda, Alice White, Ann Sothorn, Betty Compson, Marian Nixon, and Grant Withers, silent movie comics Ben Turpin, Chester and Heinie Conklin, Lloyd Hamilton, Lupino Lane, Monte Blue, and Johnny Arthur, plus Irish tenor Morton Downey, Robert Wadlowe, the 8'11" "world's tallest man," and Rin Tin Tin.

SHOW PEOPLE (MGM, 28) D/act King Vidor, S Wanda Tuchock, Agnes Christine Johnston, Lawrence Stallings

Naive star struck Southern belle Peggy (Marion Davies) arrives in Hollywood with her broke father Col. Pepper (Dell Henderson). Billy (William Haines), a nice young comic, calls them "punks" but gets her an acting job. She hates doing pie in the face, seltzer bottle slapstick but is an instant hit and soon is a stuck up star of dramas, about to marry pompous co-star Andre (Paul Ralli) who claims to be a count. This fun behind the scenes comedy has some wild slapstick sequences from the Mack Sennett troupe, flashbacks, in jokes and top guest stars. Charlie Chaplin asks for her autograph, Hearst columnist Louella Parsons interviews her and she's the center of attention at a studio lunch seated between Douglas Fairbanks Jr. and William S. Hart. Vidor (THE BIG PARADE) appears as himself directing a WWI movie and Davies as Polly encounters Davies as herself. Her comic facial expressions are the same ones later used by Lucille Ball. When she can't cry on cue, a director says "Imagine 40,000 starving Armenians!" Also with John Gilbert, Polly Moran (maid) and Albert Conti (producer). The silent 80 min. MGM release has a theme song and a music score. The print is excellent except for some badly worn spots. Vidor's next, his first talkie, was the all black HALLELUJAH (29). Davies was the long time mistress of millionaire publisher William Randolph Hearst (the Rupert Murdoch of his day), who created a whole company (Cosmopolitan) to produce her movies. A recent Davies cable TV doc. used SHOW PEOPLE scenes and criticized CITIZEN KANE (partially based on Hearst) to try and restore her reputation. The Pepper character, by the way, was loosely based on the early career of Gloria Swanson (the mistress of Joseph P. Kennedy at the time). Kirsten Dunst plays Davies in Peter Bogdanovich's new movie THE CAT'S MEOW, about a legendary (suspected) murder on Heart's yacht.

SUCH MEN ARE DANGEROUS (30) DKenneth Hawks, S Ernest Vajda  
British Eleanor (Catherine Dale Owen) flees from her unemotional, unpleasant multi-millionaire industrialist husband Ludwig Kranz (Warner Baxter in heavy make-up and a big nose) on their wedding night. He then fakes his own death while in his private plane and makes a financial offer that plastic surgeon Dr. Erdmann (Bela Lugosi) can't refuse. The miraculous surgery seems to change Kranz's appearance, voice and personality. As the charming Pierre, he wins the heart of Eleanor, but actually has revenge in mind. Many accents are heard and Bela (who flubs a few lines of English) also speaks German. His role is like a balanced version of his character in THE RAVEN. A Cinderella play drives home the fact that this unlikely Fox drama is basically a "women's picture." With Albert Conti as Kranz's faithful secretary, Hedda Hopper as her conniving sister and Claud Allister (also in DRACULA'S DAUGHTER) as her silly comic relief brother-in-law. While filming the parachute scene (near Redondo Beach), a two plane accident killed 10 (!) men, including the director (Howard Hawks' brother and the

husband of Mary Astor), several cameramen and Baxter's double. Incredibly, it was completed and released on schedule. I guess the show must go on.

TARZAN AND THE GOLDEN LION (27) D J. P. McGowan, S William Wing, P Joseph P. Kennedy

Tarzan (James Pierce), his wife Lady Jane (Dorothy Dunbar) and his lion companion Jad-bal-ja live in a nice jungle house complete with a lazy black native to fan them. Blonde Flora (Edna Murphy), engaged to his plantation overseer Jack (Harold Goodwin), is kidnapped and taken to the lost city of Diamonds. A tall (white) priest has her chained in a pyramid temple and prepared to be sacrificed to the lion god Numa while natives play "the drums of death." Tarzan wears modern dress clothes at home but switches to his leopard skin loincloth (complete with tail) when running through the jungle followed by loyal good natives who battle the bad Waziris led by Kwaka, played by a blackened Boris Karloff (!) with a horned skull face headpiece. With Frederick Peters (WHITE ZOMBIE) as the villain Esteban, D'Arcy Corrigan (MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE) as a bearded hermit, chimps who hold a funeral service for a fallen companion, and flashbacks. Pierce, a 6'4" Glendale High football coach (when John Wayne was on the team) was discovered by ERB himself. He married Burroughs' daughter Joan and the couple were Tarzan and Jane on the radio. The first pre recorded radio serial, the program aired all over the world. This feature (thought lost for years) was the last silent Tarzan and the last pre-Weissmuller Tarzan feature. The print has a score and French title cards. It was made by FBO, briefly (26-28) owned by the father of John, Robert and Ted Kennedy! The company became RKO and Kennedy was later appointed ambassador to England by President Roosevelt.

TOLL OF THE SEA (22) D Chester M. Franklin, S Frances Marion

TCM has aired this rare 41 min. experimental two tone color silent (with piano score). The Technicolor company produced it and First National was the distributor. It's a simple nice looking low key drama shot mostly outdoors and was made at a time when (usually fake) Asians sold white women and drugs in western movies. In China in 1919, Lotus Flower (the teenage Anna May Wong) sees a man wash up on the shore and soon falls for the nice seeming Allen (Kenneth Harlan). His western friends criticize him for being involved with her, local women warn and shun her, and he leaves for America promising to return. Meanwhile she becomes a single mother who watches the crashing waves waiting for him and pretends to receive letters from him. She seems to be wealthy though and has servants. When he does return, it's with his American wife (Barbara Bentley). The tragic Lotus gives her son away to them, then jumps into the sea. Wong had smaller roles in the major hits THE THIEF OF BAGDAD and PETER PAN (both 24) and was still acting many years later but she had to commit on screen suicide many more times. Harlan was later starred in serials. Marion wrote at least 162 filmed screenplays including CAMILLE and LOVE FROM A STRANGER (both 37).

THE UNHOLY NIGHT (29) DLionel Barrymore, S Dorothy Farnum, Edwin Justus Mayer

Former soldiers who had served in Galipoli during WWI are being strangled in London. After an attempt on his life, the frivolous idel rich Lord Montague (Roland Young) invites the remaining survivors, in their uniforms, to his mansion. His blonde sister (Natalie Moorhead) has an ex-con mystic (Sojin, whose head floats) hold a seance, and a "green ghost" wails. A Turkish lawyer (Boris Karloff) shows up with a will and the daughter (Dorothy Sebastian) of a traitor. They both relate flashbacks. Soldiers drink, sing drinking songs and are killed, a Scotland Yard inspector arrives and it all ends in the most unexpected way. With Polly Moran, also in LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT (maid) Sydney Jarvis (butler), Ernest Torrence, who had played Dr. Hook and Dr. Moriarty (doctor), John Miljan, Lionel Belmore, George Cooper, and John Loder. The MGM mystery, based on a Ben

Hecht short story, was released in silent and “all talking” versions. Director Barrymore’s film roles went back to 1912, working for D. W. Griffith. This was his 100<sup>th</sup> (!) credit and it’s been on cable TV.

L’UOMO MECCANICO (21) D/S/star Andre Deed

The first two reels of this amazing sci fi movie are lost and the title cards are in Italian, but that doesn’t explain why it isn’t listed in reference books or mentioned in film histories. It has action, comedy, two giant robots, and nudity and looks like a pretty expensive production for the time. A female master criminal scientist (Margheritt Donadieff) shoots up some drug, starts a fire in the mental hospital she’s being held in and escapes in disguise. She then monitors her very cool ten foot tall (!) safe cracking remote control killer robot on her big screen TV. The robot is a hit at a society costume party where it sits down, shows off and orders champagne. The party ends though when it grabs a woman, pulls her top off (!) then throws her to her death. When it runs (!) after a car, the FX are excellent. A friend of Inspector Ramberti creates a similar rival robot and they destroy each other in a rock ‘em sock ‘em fight. The director, an early French comedy movie star, takes the hyper comedy relief role. Segments are tinted various colors. A soundtrack of Sun Ra jazz records (!) was added in Italy in the 70s. Ambrosia films also made IL MONSTRODI (20), a forgotten early Frankenstein movie.

THE UTAH KID (30) D Richard Thorpe, S Frank Howard Clark

Nice guy outlaw Cal (Rex Lease) rescues Jennie (Dorothy Sebastian) when Baxter (Boris Karloff) drags her to the saloon hangout of his big boss Butch (Tom Santschi). Her sheriff fiancé Jim (Walter Miller) uses the horse Cal had given her to lead his men to the secret Robber’s Roost. Hideout. Shootouts and chases occur, Cal also saves Jim’s life and gets the girl in the end. Karloff’s Mexican bad guy character is KO’d twice by Butch, who wears all black. Santschi, in films since 1907, died a year after this 57 min. Tiffany “poverty row” feature was released. Lafe McKee is the preacher and Bud Osborne (later in NIGHT OF THE GHOULS) plays the deputy. Thorpe also directed Karloff in the Mascot serial KING OF THE WILD (31), also with Santschi and Miller. The tape of a (8mm sound) British copy I saw gives Karloff second billing.

WHOOPEE! (Avco Embassy, 30) D Thornton Freeland, S William Conselman, P Sam Goldwyn, Florence Ziegfeld

Hypochondriac “Hebrew” Herm Williams (Eddie Cantor) is being treated at a western ranch by a blonde nurse (Ethel Shutta) who loves him. Meanwhile George (baritone Paul Gregory) is a half breed Indian who loves Sally (red haired Eleanor Hunt) but she’s about to marry the ranch owner’s son. Herm pretends to be the cook (in blackface) and sings “My Baby Just Cares For Me” and other songs. He also gets high smoking a peace pipe with grunting Indians, and makes references to Catholic Gov. Al Smith, Al Jolson, Amos And Andy and being gay. The Technicolor United Artists hit (#1 at the box office in ‘30!) was based on the hit Broadway version and has the same main cast. It features the very first Busby Berkeley chorus girl production numbers (including then unknowns Betty Grable and Paulette Goddard) and ends with a sexy Indian fashion show and women in bikinis riding horses, backed by a green studio sky with red clouds. Greg Toland was a cinematographer. Freeland also directed GEORGE WHITE’S SCANDALS (PV #33). The same basic script was used for NERVOUS WRECK (26) and UP IN ARMS (44), starring Danny Kaye.

WILD COMPANY (30) D Leo McCarey, S Bradley King

Larry (Frank Albertson) is the spoiled wise ass son of wealthy department store owner Mr. Grayson (H. B. Warner) who is supporting the local reform party. Larry’s girlfriend Natalie (Mildred Van Dorn) gives him “the air, “ so he gets smashed at the Skyrocket gambling nightclub and instantly falls for Sally Curtis (Sharon Lynn), the singer mistress of gangster Joe Hardy (Kenneth Thompson). When his \$15 a week allowance runs out he starts charging her gifts to his father’s

store. The club's manager Felix Brown (Bela Lugosi) sees Hardy robbing the safe. He says "I won't squawk!" but is shot and killed anyway. Larry, who was looking for Sally, and his concerned father were both there at the time too so there's a lot of explaining to do. Sally dances and sings "That's What I Like About You" and "Moanin' Low," a blues song. Also with Richard Keene (best friend), Joyce Compton (sister), Claire McDowell (mother), and Grady Sutton. McCarey later directed DUCK SOUP (33). Bela was also in SUCH MEN ARE DANGEROUS (PV #32) the same year.

THE WIZARD OF OZ (American Home, 25) D/star Larry Semon, S L. Frank Baum, Leon Lee

The once very popular (and very strange looking) comedy star Semon made this slapstick deconstruction of the children's classic. Three idiot farmhands (Semon, Oliver Hardy and a black guy) only briefly pretend to be a scarecrow, tin man and lion after a tornado carries them in a house to Oz. Dorothy (Dorothy Dwan, Semon's wife), who becomes queen, and her obese "Uncle" go too. Much time there is spent with real lions in a dungeon/cave. Snowball ("G. Howe Black" !) is lazy and eats watermelons and the dictator of Oz has black boy slaves. The "phantom of the basket" is a dancing man in Vegas type drag. WIZARD features cartoon FX (lots of lightning and attacking bees) and a bi-plane. I'd like to think that author Baum (who died in 1919) would have hated it. With Charlie Murray, later Kelly in the Cohens and The Kellys series) as the fake wizard, Mary Carr (who has a flashback) as the mother and Chester Conklin. Hardy, who often played villains in Semon comedies, teamed with Stan Laurel in 27. Semon died bankrupt (at 39) the next year.