

RARE, SELDOM-SEEN, AND CLASSIC MOVIES

JANUARY-JUNE 2020 POST

Campus Vamp (1928) Daphne Pollard, Johnny Burke, Sally Eilers, Carole Lombard

College rivalries among co-eds for the big man on campus. Blondes vs. brunettes in this film with examples of some women being more aggressive in getting their man than others. The big dance and the baseball game at the beach provide the highlights. This silent short provides interest with a glimpse into campus life in the 20s. Lots of slapstick in this short with some laughs and antics focused on female rivalries. Mildly interesting. IMDB: [Campus Vamp](#)

Circus Queen Murder (1933) Adolphe Menjou, Donald Cook, Greta Nissen

New York police commissioner takes a vacation with his secretary. While visiting a suburban New York town, they visit a circus where intrigue reigns. The beautiful trapeze artist is having an affair with the circus star while her husband vows revenge. He threatens to kill her and her lover and destroy the circus. Commissioner Colt takes charge of the investigation. The circus cannibals are suspicious, the murders are gruesome, and this mystery is entertaining enough to deserve a watch. IMDB: [Circus Queen Murder](#)

St. Louis Woman (1933) Jeanette Loff, Johnny Mack Brown, Earle Foxe

College football star, Jim Warren, rebuffs the offer from the owner of a professional football team to play for his team. Jim says he wants to become a doctor instead. He does, however, accept the owner's offer to visit the club that night, where he meets and falls in love with St. Louis Lou, the club's singer. He drinks, starts a fight, and gets caught by the college dean. He's expelled, can't find a job, and plays for the professional football team while pursuing St. Louis Lou, who pulls strings behind the scenes to benefit Jim's career. Poor, stiff acting and an unimaginative story, make this film just average. It's also unrealistic for 30-year-old Johnny Mack Brown to be playing the part of a college kid. Not a good movie but entertaining enough to watch. IMDB: [St Louis Woman](#)

Stolen Sweets (1934) Sally Blane, Charles Starrett, Jameson Thomas

On her return cruise from Europe with her overprotective companion, wealthy Patricia finds herself bored and depressed. When she runs into a group frolicking on deck, she joins in and experiences the type of fun she doesn't have in her locked-down life. One of the group falls in love with her, but when he follows her off the ship he sees her kiss her fiancé. At home she yearns for the fun she experienced aboard the cruise ship and for her new-found boyfriend. She's to marry the rich man her parents chose for her and feels obliged to do so. Her shipboard boyfriend, however, pursues her relentlessly. Looking for a cute, clever romantic comedy? This is it. Well-acted with an engaging plot, corny humor at times but generally funny, sexual innuendos, serious romance, conflicts galore make this film **must see viewing**. IMDB: [Stolen Sweets](#)

Tanned Legs (1934) Arthur Lake, June Clyde, Dorothy Revier, Ann Pennington, Sally Blane

At a resort, father cavorts shamelessly with a married woman, mother plays with a much younger man, older sister tries to close a marriage proposal with her cad of a boyfriend, and little sister works to save this dysfunctional family. Grifters are also on the prowl. An abundance of bathing beauties, legs galore, risqué dancing, and plenty of singing, amateurish acting and a thin plot highlight backstabbing and intrigue among flirtatious couples and philandering spouses. Lots of bickering, love making, and some violence. Sappy romantic comedy/musical. Worth a look. IMDB: [Tanned Legs](#)

Her Private Affair (1929) Ann Harding, Harry Bannister, John Loder

A wealthy married woman wants to end her affair with a cad. She desperately wants to retrieve her love letters, but her lover insists she visit him in his apartment to get them. When she goes to his apartment, he locks the door and moves in to rape her. In the struggle that ensues, she conveniently grabs a gun on a table, the gun goes off, and her lover dies. She later agonizes over the trial of an innocent man accused of this murder. The film features cringe-worthy acting—even hard-to-watch hysterics. The well-worn plot executes well, but the urge to stop watching kept nagging at me. Only watch this movie if you're desperate for entertainment—really desperate. IMDB: [Her Private Affair](#)

Invitation to Happiness (1939) Irene Dunne, Fred MacMurray, Charles Ruggles

As a favor to a friend, wealthy Mr. Wayne buys half interest in a prize fighter. Wayne's college-educated daughter falls in love with the 'mug' who dropped

out of grammar school to help support his family. They marry, have a child, and face with the conflict of a woman who wants a family and a man who wants the world championship. This film gets a sluggish start and looks like it could be a dud. But a strong second half, top-notch acting, and a major dose of sentimentality make this film **must see viewing**. Irene Dunn's stellar performance and the realistic, powerful fight scene at the end serve as highlights in this film. IMDB: [Invitation to Happiness](#)

Playthings of Desire (1933) Linda Watkins, James Kirkwood, Reed Howes)

A wealthy playboy dumps his kept lover to marry a young, naive beauty. He can't give up another long-time lover, however, even after marriage. Tensions grow as he continues his love affair and his young wife falls in love with the neighbor. And then there's a murder. Beautiful women but atrocious acting and a simplistic, sloppy story make this "less-than-B-movie" barely worth watching. IMDB: [Playthings of Desire](#)

Topaze (1933) John Barrymore, Myrna Loy, Reginald Mason

Timid, absent-minded Professor Topaze stresses kindness and honesty in his classroom and in life, but he struggles to handle a misbehaving student. The student's wealthy, influential mother pressures the principal to fire Topaze. A wealthy grifter then enlists Topaze to sponsor his drink that, supposedly, provides medicinal benefits. Based on an original play by Marcel Pagnol, this film was remade a number of times, including *Mr. Topaze* in 1961 starring and directed by Peter

Sellers. This flimsy comedy with moral overtones boasts an impressive cast and worthy production values, but fails to offer more than modest entertainment value. IMDB: [Topaze](#)

Rainbow Over Broadway (1933) Joan Marsh, Frank Albertson, Lucien Littlefield

A once-wealthy, blended family finds themselves on hard times. Two young family members write songs to raise money, but a series of improbable events finally provide their ex-vaudeville step-mother Trixie with a job singing in a high-class club. Her troublesome behavior, though, threatens to ruin the whole affair. This hokey farce padded with musical numbers provides minimal entertainment. Watchable but why? IMDB: [Rainbow Over Broadway](#)

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JULY-DECEMBER 2020 POST

Unholy Garden (1931) Ronald Colman, Fay Wray, Estelle Taylor, Tully Marshall, Mischa Auer

International bank robber, Barrington Hunt, flees Paris for the Sahara Desert. He kidnaps a woman who tried to trap him for the reward, and hides out in a notorious den of thieves in the desert. A blind old man, tended to by his beautiful, young daughter, protects the hidden treasure in his apartment. Hunt attempts to foil the other thieves, his kidnapped hostage, and the old man's daughter to secure the treasure. Some suspense, a bit of humor, and Colman/Wray hold this film together, but mediocrity reigns throughout. Mildly entertaining. **IMDB:** [Unholy Garden](#)

The Witching Hour (1934) Guy Standing, John Halliday, Judith Allen, William Frawley

Clay Thorne loves heiress, Nancy Brookfield, and visits her Kentucky mansion frequently. Her father, Jack, runs an illegal casino out of his house. In front of Clay, he has a run-in with a local authority and threatens to kill him. Clay harbors an extreme fear of cat's eyes, and when he freaks out at the sight of Jack's cat's eye ring, Jack hypnotizes him to relieve his fear. Unfortunately, the hypnosis results in unexpected and deadly consequences. This well-acted film offers an unusual story-line and surprising plot twists. Not an award-winner, but, also, not a waste of time. **IMDB:** [The Witching Hour](#)

Thunderbolt (1929) George Bancroft, Fay Wray, Richard Arlen, Tully Marshall

Ritzie, the long-time girlfriend of gangster, Thunderbolt, falls in love with another man and attempts to leave Thunderbolt. He refuses to let her go and threatens to kill her new lover. Against all odds and at great peril, Ritzie and her lover pursue their relationship. Although the wooden acting in this early talkie detracts from the film, the story and the plot twist at the end make this film worth watching. **IMDB:** [Thunderbolt](#)

The Man Who Came Back (1931) Janet Gaynor, Charles Farrell, Kenneth MacKenna

A wealthy industrialist comes down hard on his worthless, shallow son by cutting off his funds and sending him to San Francisco to start at the bottom in one of his businesses. He washes out there, as well, but falls in love with a young lady before being kidnapped and taken to Shanghai. Devoted to her man, his new love follows him to Shanghai but descends into a hellish existence. This pre-code film features underwear, alcoholism, opium addiction, prostitution, and mental illness. Populated with unlikeable characters, this film fails in a big way. As a viewer who believes in watching a full movie once started, I was tempted many times to pull the plug on this dud. I even found Janet Gaynor's performance unwatchable at times. An unimaginative, confused plot with unrealistic coincidences make this film one to avoid. Hard to say, considering the first-rate leads in this film, but *The Man Who Came Back* ranks as one of the worst films I've ever seen. **IMDB:** [The Man Who Came Back](#)

The Royal Family of Broadway (1930) Ina Claire, Fredric March, Mary Brian

Mother, daughter, and brother are theater royalty. Granddaughter balks at a career in the theater because she's in love and wants to marry. Brother dodges commitments and tries to hide from a breach of promise threat. Daughter's old flame shows up with a proposal of marriage. The conflict of life in the theater and a life of love and marriage stands at the center of this film. Despite the hokey antics of Fredric March in this film, the acting is superb, the screenplay written by Edna Ferber and George Kaufman first rate, and the entertainment value high. The emotional conclusion to the film makes the viewing experience worthwhile. **IMDB:** [The Royal Family of Broadway](#)

The Studio Murder Mystery (1929) Neil Hamilton, Doris Hill, Warner Oland, Fredric March, Eugene Palette

Philandering actor, Richard Hardell, makes love to Helen, the naive, young daughter of the studio's night watchman. When Richard's wife visits the studio, she finds Helen in her husband's dressing room. She takes Helen home with her, and tells her the story of Richard's many lovers and that he's just

stringing her along. Helen's brother and father find out about her relationship with Richard, and Richard's current director threatens to fire him, so numerous suspects have a motive when Richard turns up murdered at the studio. Substandard acting and a mediocre screenplay make this primitive Precode film difficult to watch at times. Although watchable, better Precode mysteries would fulfill a viewer's entertainment needs. **IMDB:** [The Studio Murder Mystery](#)

State Fair (1933) Janet Gaynor, Will Rogers, Lew Ayres, Sally Eilers, Louise Dresser, Victor Jory

Ma prepares her foods and Pa readies his prize hog, Blue Boy, for competition at the state fair. Although the competitions play a part in the plot, the film focuses on the romance of daughter, Margy, and the dalliance of son, Wayne. Actual Iowa state fair footage adds authenticity to this film, and the plot provides humor, sentimentality, and romance. And, yes, Janet Gaynor is adorable. As a light romantic comedy, this film delivers. Highly recommended. **IMDB:** [State Fair](#)

The False Madonna (1931) Kay Francis, William 'Stage' Boyd, Conway Tearle

Four grifters flee the town they just fleeced, and on the train the porter asks the doctor in the group to help a seriously ill lady. Although he'd lost his license, he agrees to help the lady, who's on her way to meet her estranged, teenage son, who she hasn't seen in many years. She's wealthy. The doctor stays with her, gets off the train to accompany her to the hospital, but she dies. He schemes with his partner to impersonate the mother and scam the son for money. She yearns to leave the racket, but agrees to one last job. When she arrives at the mansion to see her "son," she finds out he's blind and ill. She falls in love with the boy, he falls in love with his "mother," but she's pressured by her partner to "get the money." Interesting film if one can wade through the syrupy sentiment. Kay Francis delivers a low-energy, understated performance, while others make journeyman efforts. Worth a watch. **IMDB:** [The False Madonna](#)

The Heart of New York (1932) Joe Smith, Charles Dale, George Sidney

Mendel struggles to pay the rent and provide for his family in the Jewish ghetto of New York City. He secretly takes money from his daughter to develop his invention, and when its sale makes him rich, the family takes a turn for the worse. This Precode film seems to be a Jewish Amos N' Andy in that it features Jewish stereotypes that may offend viewers' sensitivities. This comedy with PreCode attributes doesn't age well, and contemporary viewers would be best to skip this one. **IMDB:** [The Heart of New York](#)

Secrets of a Secretary (1931) Claudette Colbert, Herbert Marshall, Georges Metaxa

During a late-night double date, the couples decide on a whim to get married. When Helen gets home in the early morning, the nurse announces her father is near death. She runs to his room, only to have him die in her arms. When the estate is settled, she finds out that her father was bankrupt. Her new, but ne'er-do-well, husband, explodes when she explains she has no money. He'd lied about his wealth and has nothing as well. He leaves and takes a job as a gigilo in a night club run by the mob. She takes a job as a social secretary for a wealthy family and falls in love with the young daughter's fiancee. Intrigue, romance, illicit love, and murder ensue. Colbert doesn't disappoint, and this first-rate film entertains. Highly recommended. **IMDB:** [Secrets of a Secretary](#)

Stage Mother (1933) Alice Brady, Maureen O'Sullivan, Franchot Tone, Ted Healy

Vaudevillian Kitty, while pregnant with her child, loses her husband in a trapeze accident. When her daughter, Shirley, comes of age, Kitty drives her, against her will, into show business. Kitty deviously works to promote Shirley's career, thwarting her romances and promoting illicit relationships that will boost her career, as well as Kitty's lifestyle. Maureen O'Sullivan shines as the rising star in this film, and the supporting cast excels. The musical numbers add to the film's entertainment value but fall short of quality performances. Overall, this film delivers a high level of entertainment, and is well worth watching. Highly recommended. **IMDB:** [Stage Mother](#)

Stamboul Quest (1934) Myrna Loy, George Brent, Lionel Atwill, Mischa Auer

Fräulein Doktor uses her beauty and sex appeal as a spy for the Germans during the Great War to achieve her objectives. She outs Mata Hari for letting love interfere with her role as a German spy, which leads to Mata Hari's execution. Unfortunately, during her mission to Istanbul, Fräulein Doktor, herself falls in love with a man who's been pursuing her relentlessly, and her role as a spy who trades sex for secrets creates the major conflict in the film. Myrna Loy excels in this film which features suspense, intrigue, romance, and sexual tension (a lot). See Myrna Loy at her best in this exceptional **Must See** film. **IMDB:** [Stamboul Quest](#)

My Sin (1931) Tallulah Bankhead, Fredric March, Harry Davenport

Representatives of the dregs of society can be found in a Panamanian night club. Carlotta entertains for drinks and favors while the ex-lawyer, Dick Grady, exists as an irredeemable drunkard. A stalker breaks into Carlotta's apartment and ends up dead. Dick defends her in court, and they develop a symbiotic relationship. Plot twists, romance, drama, murder, suspense, superior acting and professional production values make this film a winner. To see Tallulah Bankhead at her best, don't miss this **Must See** view. **IMDB:** [My Sin](#)

Professional Sweetheart (1933) Ginger Rogers, Norman Foster, Zasu Pitts, Frank McHugh, Allen Jenkins, Franklin Pangborn, Edgar Kennedy, Sterling Holloway

A radio program features songs from "The Purity Girl." The sponsor wants to sign her to a long-term contract with morality clauses, and a competing company also wants to sign her without morality clauses. On the radio the Purity Girl comes off as sweet and innocent. Off the radio she wants to smoke, drink, and go out with men. To promote her innocence, the company's publicist sets up a romance and on-the-air wedding. The groom doesn't realize it's a publicity stunt. Although this film offers only light, comedic fare, Ginger Rogers makes the most of her role and turns a modest film into a movie well worth watching. **IMDB:** [Professional Sweetheart](#)

Sailor's Luck (1933) James Dunn, Sally Eilers, Victor Jory

The fleet pulls into port, and the sailors pour onto shore looking for booze and babes. One sailor lucks out by finding a sweet, pretty girl who just got evicted and needs help. He sets her up in an apartment and expects a return on his investment. She's too innocent, however, and he falls out of lust and into love. He stumbles along in his relationship, though, and risks losing her altogether. One can abandon this film early because of the sophomoric attempts at humor, but if one sticks with this film, it does provide a moderate level of entertainment. **IMDB:** [Sailor's Luck](#)

Misleading Lady (1932) Claudette Colbert, Edmund Lowe, Stuart Erwin, George Meeker, Will Geer

A wealthy, young lady, bored with her life, connives a meeting with a Broadway producer. After much wrangling and his suggestion that she pursue a gentleman also at the gathering, she makes a deal with the producer. If she can convince the gentleman to propose marriage within three days, the producer will consider her for the lead in his new play. At a party, she secretly records her rendezvous with the gentleman, who, indeed, does propose to her, even though she has a fiancée. She's abruptly called out of the room. The gentleman also wanders out while partygoers flood into the room to play the record player with the recorded proposal still in place. Everyone at the party hears the proposal, to the extreme embarrassment of the gentleman, who realizes the young lady manipulated him. And next...he kidnaps the young lady. This farce provides all the stock characters for a farce along with quick entrances and exits and exaggerated drama. A clever plot and effective acting drive the fun in this romp. Well worth watching. **IMDB:** [Misleading Lady](#)

Murder by the Clock (1931) William 'Stage' Boyd, Lilyan Tashman, Irving Pichel, Regis Toomey

A wealthy matron finalizes her will and has to decide whether to leave her vast fortune to her crazy son or her alcoholic nephew. After she makes her decision, mayhem ensues and bodies pile up. A rather trite plot and amateurish acting weaken this film, but the suspense and intrigue make this film worth watching. **IMDB:** [Murder by the Clock](#)

Murder at Dawn (1932) Josephine Dunn, Jack Mulhall, Eddie Boland, Mischa Auer

With two friends, a young girl introduces her fiancée to her scientist father, who happens to live in a mansion with secret rooms and passages. On a dark night with thunder and lightning, and murder—it appears to be the perfect atmosphere for a whodunit, except this film fails at every level. Actors perform so poorly that they flub lines and the scene remains in the film. Slapstick intrudes on the horror that should anchor this film. Fight scenes elicit more snickers than suspense. Bottom line—viewers should not waste their time with this one. **IMDB:** [Murder at Dawn](#)

Laughter (1930) Nancy Carroll, Fredric March, Frank Morgan

A young chorus girl marries a much older millionaire but can't resist the laughter and carefree existence of her previous life—and previous boyfriends. Her husband also tasks her with watching over his wild daughter back from college. Competent acting and an intriguing storyline make this film engaging from start to finish. No laughter in this one, but an examination of the conflict of wealth and comfort vs. true love. Well worth watching. **IMDB:** [Laughter](#)

Looking Forward (1933) Lionel Barrymore, Lewis Stone, Benita Hume, Billy Bevan

Due to the Depression, department store owner, Gabriel Service, needs to fire a number of staff. Because of his personal relationship with a low-level clerk, Tim Benton, who has worked with the store for forty years (as did his father and grandfather) he fires him personally. Tim Benton returns to his humble home, wife and two grown children, who realize they have to sacrifice. Gabriel Service returns to his mansion with servants and a wife and two grown children, who do not understand sacrifice. This well-done film focuses on the differences between the worker and the elite during the Depression while glossing over the bitter suffering of most during this time and providing a saccharine ending. This film is well worth watching. **IMDB:** [Looking Forward](#)