



MATTHEW HOFFMAN
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Legends of Laughter:
Keaton, Lloyd & Chaplin

BIO MATTHEW HOFFMAN - FILM HISTORIAN

Film Historian Matthew C. Hoffman was the program director and projectionist for Chicago's LaSalle Bank revival house (now called Bank of America Cinema) from 1999-2003. He studied film at Columbia College Chicago under Scott Marks and is currently a graduate student there, working on his Master's Degree in Creative Writing. He is also a regular contributor to the old-time radio magazine Nostalgia Digest and is administrator of the Fredric

March Film Society on facebook. Hoffman has worked in the

Circulation Department of the Park Ridge Public Library for over a decade.





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PRESS RELEASE

MEDIA CONTACT: Mary Dalton, (847) 720-3209, mdalton@prpl.org

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Film Historian Brings Forgotten Films to New Audiences

In the spring of 2010, when the Park Ridge Public Library introduced a nine-film series on Pre-Code Hollywood films with the tagline “Forbidden Cinema,” it generated a lot of buzz in the local press.

News articles and a radio interview with Film Historian and Program Host Matthew C. Hoffman all stressed the fact that audiences were flocking to watch films that, by all accounts, had been forgotten for decades. Many viewers were curious to see works that were notably different from the kind of classics Hollywood produced during its golden age. And most couldn’t help but note that the unsentimental look at Depression-era realities seemed all too familiar.

What was the Production Code? According to Hoffman, the Code was designed to be Hollywood’s moral compass in the days before a rating system, promoting movies with positive, socially-acceptable images and storylines.

“It encompassed films made between 1930, when the Code document was created, and 1934, when it was finally enforced,” says Hoffman. “In the beginning, everyone tried to get around it, and in that brief period, Hollywood experienced the kind of creative license it would not have again until the 1960s.”

Pre-Code films dealt with adult subject matter and tackled issues that would be taboo for years to come – violence, unpunished crime, drug use, infidelity, same-sex attraction, and abortion. For example, in *Heroes for Sale*, a former soldier of the Great War battles morphine addiction— and every other kind of human suffering — during the Depression. In *Baby Face*, Barbara Stanwyck plays a hard luck girl making her way up the corporate ladder “the only way she knows how.” The film also has a brief appearance by a young actor named John Wayne.

In fact, the Pre-Code films were the starting point for a whole host of up-and-coming stars, including Bette Davis, Loretta Young, Miriam Hopkins, Clark Gable, and Fredric March. Stanwyck made her name in a number of excellent Pre-Code films, including *Night Nurse*, which combines elements of bootlegging, swindling, and child abuse into an action-packed 72 minutes.

“None of the films are particularly long and they all move quickly,” Hoffman says, “but they’re not simply meant to shock – not like so many films today. The Pre-Code films provided hard-hitting social commentary through art.”

(cont.)



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Hoffman's unusual series grew largely through word of mouth, with many screenings filled to capacity crowds. A number of viewers came every week. In time the series attracted the attention of Allison Cuddy of Chicago's WBEZ radio, who interviewed Hoffman on the morning program, Eight-Forty-Eight.

"I was glad the films got the response they did," Hoffman says. "They deserve a serious revival. The best part about offering the series was the reaction from the audience – they're often stunned by what they've seen. In a sense they're experiencing that period in American history in a way they've never had a chance to do before."

Hoffman is currently developing the "Legends of Laughter" film series for spring 2011, which features the work of Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, and Harold Lloyd.

For more information on the Pre-Code Hollywood series and other presentations on classic film by Matthew C. Hoffman, contact the Park Ridge Public Library at 847-720-3270, or e-mail at mhoffman@prpl.org.



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FILM SERIES PROGRAMS MODERATED BY MATTHEW HOFFMAN

FILM NOIR

What is film noir? The term usually conveys images of shadow and light, of seedy urban settings and fallen angels. Dark and morally complex, the style haunted American filmmaking during the 1940s and early 50s, capturing the mood of a country recovering from the effects of war.

The Film Noir series showcases examples less well known than famous works like *The Maltese Falcon*, yet considered among the best of their kind.

"We think of it as a genre but it's really more of a style," Hoffman says. "For me, the main appeal was that visual style, how the stories were told."



Certainly there are few better examples in movie-making where cinematography reigns supreme, using the black and white medium to underscore the dark psychological aspects of the story. Critics in post-WWII France coined the term to describe a particular type of film coming out of America at the time – very different, they noted, from the usual studio product.

"I think because of all the real horrors the War gave us, audiences weren't going to accept the kind of feel-good fantasies Hollywood presented in the 1930s," Hoffman explains. "Filmmakers didn't intentionally set out to make 'film noir.' It was just their subconscious response to the reality of world affairs."

Many of the films were based on short crime novels popular at the time, titles like *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and *Nightmare Alley*. Once considered "pulp" fiction, many of the novels are now given serious consideration by critics, with authors like Raymond Chandler, William Lindsay Gresham and others taking their place among better-known American writers like Hemingway and Fitzgerald.

What compels a library to create a series like this? For Adult Program Librarian Gena Zelenka, the chance to offer the Film Noir Series provides an opportunity to support what she calls visual literacy. Films, like other

(cont.)



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forms of storytelling, preserve the past.

"The Park Ridge Public Library definitely provides an opportunity to introduce new generations to these films," Zelenka says. "In a sense, they are our fairy tales."

Hoffman agrees, noting that much of the imagery of film noir pervades popular culture. Hardboiled detectives and femme fatales, for example, may be as quintessentially American as Mickey Mouse. Yet beyond that, he says, the films stand as some of the finest examples of American art.



"Here at the Library, people will get a chance to see film noir the way it's meant to be seen: on the big screen. Once they do, it'll change the way they think about movies." (M. dalton, PRPL Newsletter 3/2009)

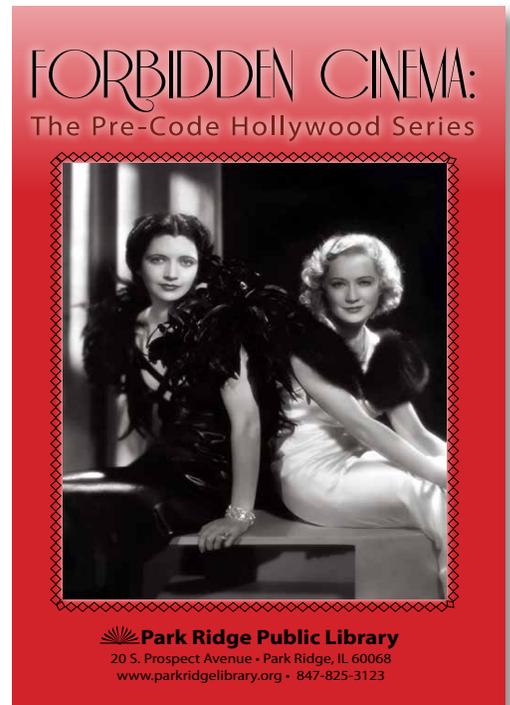
The Film Noir Series consists of 6 films.

FORBIDDEN CINEMA - THE PRE-CODE HOLLYWOOD SERIES

The pre-Code era was one of the most dynamic in American cinema. In the days before a ratings system, Hollywood's moral compass came in the form of a document called the Production Code. Pre-Code films were those made between 1930, when the Code was created yet ignored, and 1934, when it was enforced.

In that brief period, Hollywood experienced the kind of creative freedom it would not have again until the 1960s. These often shocking films dealt with adult subject matter and tackled social issues that would be taboo for years to come— violence, unpunished crime, drug use, infidelity, same-sex attraction, and abortion.

The Forbidden Cinema Series consists of 9 films.



MEDIA CLIPPINGS



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UNIVERSITY

'Forbidden Cinema' shows racy side of 1930s film industry

'Forbidden Cinema'
"Midnight Mary," 7 p.m., May 19; "Baby Face," 7 p.m., May 20; "Murder at the Vanities," 7 p.m., May 27; at the Park Ridge Public Library, 20 S. Prospect Ave., Park Ridge. (847) 825-3123 or www.parkridgpubliclibrary.org. Discussion and screening of various short films will take place before the featured presentation.

By J.T. MORAND
jtmorand@pioneerlocal.com

Matthew Hoffman was pleased to hear the gasp from the audience at the Park Ridge Public Library when they saw the ending of the film "Three on a Match," which involves drug addiction, child abuse, kidnapping and bedroom scenes.

"To have this effect is really amazing," he said.

Amazing because the film was released in 1932 and it goes against a popular belief that movies in the 1930s were all Shirley Temple and Fred Astaire, singing and dancing.

But that's what the film series "Forbidden Cinema," hosted by Hoffman, strives to do. It began March 25 and ends May 27 and features films made in the Pre-Code era, when filmmakers were exercising creative freedom with such taboo subjects as abortion, adultery, drug use, same-sex attraction, unpunished crime and violence.

However, when the film industry's self-imposed Production Code began being enforced in 1934, films of these kinds would not be seen again until the 1960s.

The Pre-Code films were the first to tackle such heavy and racy topics and are worthy of being recognized as significant in the history of American cinema, said Hoffman, who studied film at Columbia College and managed the LaSalle Bank Cinema (now the Bank of America Cinema), where he was put in charge of showing classic movies.

He points to the 1932 film "Trouble In Paradise," about two crooks attempting to cheat a society widow out of her fortune, as a classic romantic comedy that has inspired subsequent romantic comedies. But, recent films in this genre just don't hold up as well as the Ernst Lubitsch-directed original, he said.

"His 'Trouble In Paradise' is often cited as a masterpiece of the genre," Hoffman said. "Now, ask some teenager off the street to name a romantic comedy and chances are they'll cite a movie with Ryan Reynolds or Dane Cook, and that's a tragedy."

"Forbidden Cinema" has been popular with the over-30 crowd, but Hoffman would like more under-30 film fans to attend so they can see how relevant Pre-Code movies are today, even though they're not as flashy as modern films. He doesn't like hearing young people say, "Well, that's old," when it comes to viewing Pre-Code films.

For example, he said, "Heroes for Sale" (1933) depicts the struggles of a World War I veteran upon returning home, including drug addiction and making his way in the country on the verge of economic collapse

the Great Depression.

Plus, he said, classic movies deliver a more effective punch than modern films because they tell stories more economically than today's movies. He pointed to "Three on a Match," which is only 64 minutes long.

Patrons can enter their name to win a "Forbidden Hollywood" DVD collection. A winner will be picked May 27.

"I want people to appreciate our cinema heritage," Hoffman said. "I want young people to view these films in a different way."

Comment: pioneerlocal.com

FORBIDDEN CINEMA:
The Pre-Code Hollywood Series

Park Ridge Public Library
20 S. Prospect Avenue • Park Ridge, IL 60068
www.parkridgpubliclibrary.org • 847-825-3123

The Journal | Wednesday, May 26, 2010 | Page 11A

Library Film Series' Final Act Thursday

The last of the Park Ridge Public Library's film series exploring the "Pre-Code" age of movies before the ratings system will be Thursday, May 27.

The "sin in soft focus" series featured nine films made between 1930, when Hollywood created a Production Code and 1934 when enforcement of the code began. During those years, Hollywood films dealt with adult subject matter and tackled social issues that would be taboo for years to come such as violence, unpunished crime, drug use, infidelity, same-sex attraction, and abortion.

Each film will be preceded by a discussion hosted by Matthew C. Hoffman. Hoffman works in the Circulation department of the library. For four years, he was the program director and sole projectionist for the LaSalle Bank revival house in Chicago. He studied film at Columbia College in Chicago.

The last film in the series is "Murder at the Vanities" from 1934, a stylish murder mystery set backstage at a lavish musical world."

The other films screened during the series were "Trouble in Paradise" from 1932, "Night Nurse" from 1931, "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" also from 1931, "Merrily We Go to Hell" from 1932, "Three on a Match" from 1932, "Heroes for Sale" from 1933, "Midnight Mary" from 1933, and "Baby Face" from 1933.

IN OTHER WORDS...



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I've thoroughly enjoyed the movies we've seen so far. Matthew's talk before the movies is interesting and informative. I wish the room was larger to accommodate everyone more comfortably.
Lee Deere

The Film series is absolutely wonderful. IT SHOULD BE KEPT WE WANT MORE.
Matthew does an outstanding of INTRODUCING the MOVIE!
VAL 'DERER

I really have enjoyed the FORBIDDEN Cinema series I think MATTHEW'S TALKS and documentaries are very entertaining and educational. I hope to see more such series. Thank you to MATTHEW AND THE LIBRARY.
Bobbie PERCIVAL

Matthew's "Pre-Code" film series is historical and educational. The attendance is more abundant than most other Thursday programs.
Hilary Sopata

Greatly Enjoying
The Pre-Code movie series. Bravo to Matthew
Chris Sopata

Pre-Code Hollywood
A treasure! I love the pre-film lectures & documentary. Would like more series like this, e.g., Film Noir, Great Directors, 1935-1945, All Singing & Dancing, Great Actors & Actresses, Screwball comedies. Thanks, Matthew!
Scott Sebaedel

The series is outstanding in every respect:
✓ quality of presentation
✓ selection of films
✓ pre-screening commentary.
Thank you for all of your efforts. They equal or surpass 2009's series of films noir.
Bill
P



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IN OTHER WORDS...

Ms. Janet Van De Carr,
Library Director
Park Ridge Public Library
20 Prospect Avenue
Park Ridge, Illinois 60068

Dear Ms. Van De Carr,

I am writing to express my appreciation for the outstanding "Forbidden Cinema: The Pre-Code Hollywood Series" program offered by the Park Ridge Public Library. For those of us who savor the rich artistic legacy of the early films, this program provides a welcome respite from the creative drudgery that all too often passes for a movie today. It is quite a treat to see such a wide range of topics being presented through this impressive genre, especially when the subjects are enhanced by the well-crafted dialogue and superb acting that became the hallmark of films from this era in cinema history.

I must also commend the erudite and thoughtful commentary provided by the program host, Mr. Matthew Hoffman. His detailed explanation of the film's background combined with his insight about the director and actors made the entire experience an absolute delight. I could have listened to him speak for hours. Not only did Mr. Hoffman's obvious enthusiasm and knowledge of this art form generate a heightened appreciation for the film being presented, he left me wanting to know more about the entire series. I loved it.

Please accept my gratitude for making such a marvelous film program available to our community. I hope the Park Ridge Public Library will continue to feature these exceptional movies – and others like them – for years to come.

Sincerely,

Karen Nagel
1130 N. Lincoln Avenue
Park Ridge, Illinois 60068



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IN OTHER WORDS...



June 10, 2010

Dear Matthew:

Thank you for providing the Park Ridge Public Library with the incredible Pre-Code Hollywood Film Series! Our patrons were overjoyed with your film selections, and your commentary added so much. I heard rave reviews from many people, and the publicity was also fantastic.

Thank you for sharing your expertise, enthusiasm, and energy with us. We are thrilled at your willingness to curate these programs, and hope that a third year will be possible. The buzz is already building!

Thank you very much, Matthew.

Sincerely,

Laura Scott
Adult Programming Librarian
Park Ridge Public Library
847-720-3389