

On the Director's Centennial

Otto Honored By The Academy

By Alan Rode

"...So there will be no Christmas trees, but there will be delousing with ice water from the hoses."

That line, delivered by Otto Preminger in a clip from his famous role as the camp commandant in *Stalag 17*, opened a two week tribute to the legendary director this month at the Motion Picture Academy in Hollywood. (The same series played last month at the Museum of Modern Art in New York; other versions are scheduled around the country.)

Preminger's life and career was artfully articulated by program host Peter Bogdanovich on opening night, November 2. His commentary was interspersed with guest interviews and excerpts from the director's films.



Otto Preminger

The audience at the Samuel Goldwyn Theatre in Hollywood got a keen sense of Preminger as a consummate *auteur*, but one whose life resembled an ad-hoc version of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

Otto's well-earned reputation as a directorial autocrat was balanced by the enduring friendships he had with Bogdanovich and guests Eva Marie Saint and Carol Lynley. He was also a doting husband and father according to his widow, Hope, and daughter Victoria, also in attendance.

More than his paradoxical personality, the evening's tribute focused on Preminger's diversified body of work.

From his breakthrough 20th Century-Fox classic, *Laura* (1944), Otto Preminger plumbed noir depths with films such as *Fallen Angel* (1945), *Whirlpool* (1949), *Where the Sidewalk Ends* (1950), *The Thirteenth Letter* (1951) and *Angel Face* (1952), before moving into different genres with varied, if frequently spectacular, success.

After his landmark hit *The Moon is Blue* (1953) was released without a MPAA code approval due to the director's insistence on using such robust language as "virgin" and "pregnant," Preminger insisted on inde-

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First Installment of a Regular Sentinel Series

EUROPEAN EXILES IN '40s HOLLYWOOD: THEIR IMPACT ON FILM NOIR

By Marc Svetov
Special to the Sentinel

Fundamentally, forties films featuring émigrés haven't dated. They still speak to us, strongly. Shall we make a list?

Directors: Otto Preminger and Billy Wilder; Robert Siodmak and Fred Zinnemann, John Brahm, André de Toth, Michael Curtiz, Fritz Lang, Anatole Litvak; Max Ophuls, Josef von Sternberg, William Dieterle, Curtis Bernhardt, John Auer, Alfred Zeisler, Max Nosseck; Charles Vidor, Edgar G. Ulmer, Douglas Sirk, Rudolph Mate.

Cameramen: Karl Freund, John Alton, Franz Planer, Theodor Sparkuhl, Boris Kaufman, Eugene Scheftan, Ernest Laszlo and Mate;

Film composers: Miklos Rozsa, Max Steiner, Franz Waxman, Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Daniele Amfitheatrof, Frederick Hollander, Bronsilau Kaper, Hans Salter;

Art director: Hans Dreier.

Finally, those who had the hardest lot in America due to the loss of their native language:

Actors: Paul Henreid, Peter Lorre, Conrad Veidt, Fritz Kortner, Oscar Homolka,

Turhan Bey, Steven Geray, Philip Van Zandt, Curt Bois, Walter Slezak, Ernst Deutsch; also Kurt Kreuger, Martin Kosleck, Helmut Dantine, Otto Waldis, Carl Esmond, Paul Lukas.

Actresses: Marlene Dietrich, Hedy Lamarr, Lilli Palmer, Micheline Chierel.

European scholars tend to overstate what the émigrés brought to noir in terms of "Old World" styles, while American scholars seem to understate this influence — or, at least, mischaracterize it. We need a fresh perspective.

However we begin to approach the influence these Europeans had, we need to understand that their talents fit into a trend in *Hollywood* filmmaking at the time. We have two sides meeting: European exiles and American filmmakers, taking account of a nebulous but palpable mood — filtering it, expressing it as it coalesces as historical serendipity — both sides enriching and reinforcing each other. What dark fruit was brought forth!

Whatever artistic effects these filmmakers exerted — reaching back to aesthetic and intellectual roots in German Expressionist and Weimar film — they did so with-



Was it coincidence that Austrian actor Paul Henreid chose to make his debut as a producer with the fatalistic crime story *Hollow Triumph*? Or that he chose Hungarians Steve Sekely and John Alton to direct and photograph the film?

in *American* filmmaking. They became part of an unnamed movement, co-creating a new type of crime film.

That they had influence cannot be disputed. However, an influence was not a sufficient explanation of why these films started being made when they did, by them and oth-

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DICK POWELL – NOIR ICON? The Jury's Still Out

By Don Malcolm

When it comes to "noir heroes," we have a few actors — Humphrey Bogart, Robert Mitchum, Burt Lancaster, Robert Ryan, John Garfield — who are clearly in the top echelon. There are several more who can play both sides of the law — Dan Duryea, Edmond O'Brien, Richard Conte, who reside in a special niche because their screen personas seem to mesh so perfectly with the noir sensibility.

And then there's Dick Powell.

Like John Payne, Powell started his film career as a crooner, but made a switch to "tough guy" roles. For many noir fans, Powell's transformation remains problematic, while Payne — younger, more sullen and physical — seems to fit seamlessly into the harder-edged universe of '50s noir.

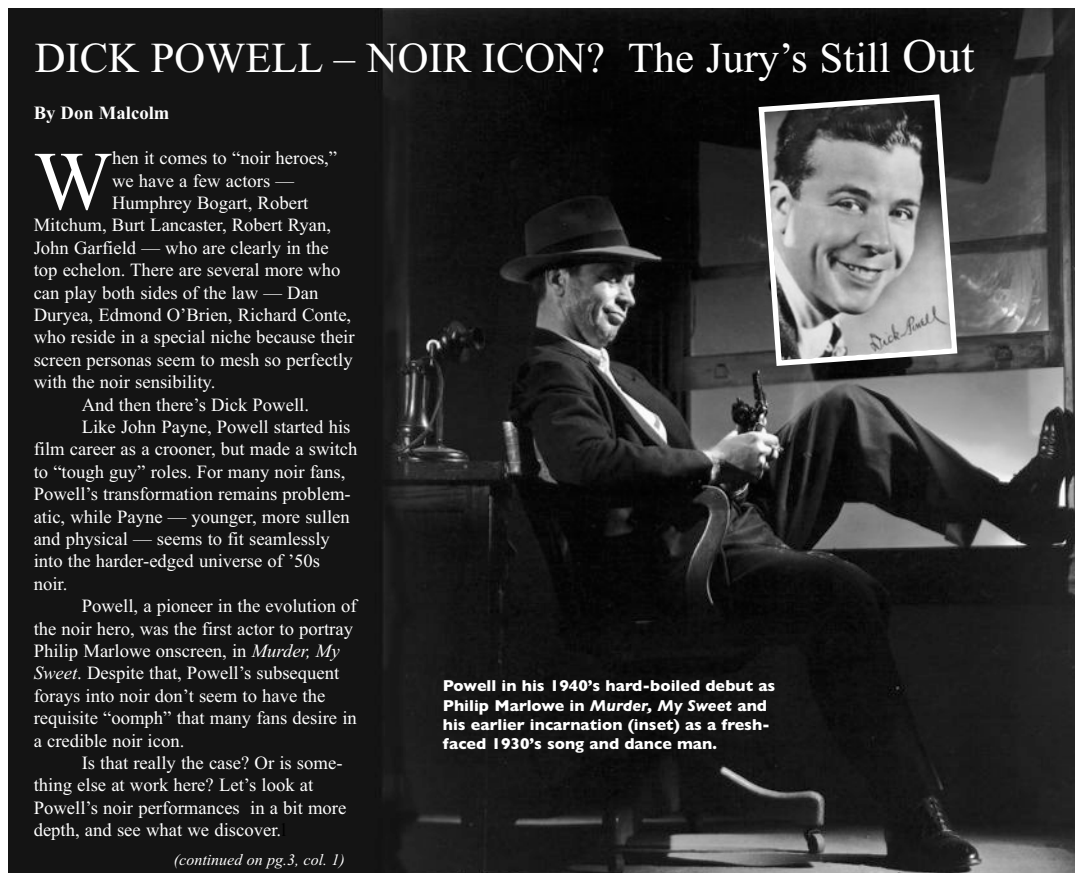
Powell, a pioneer in the evolution of the noir hero, was the first actor to portray Philip Marlowe onscreen, in *Murder, My Sweet*. Despite that, Powell's subsequent forays into noir don't seem to have the requisite "oomph" that many fans desire in a credible noir icon.

Is that really the case? Or is something else at work here? Let's look at Powell's noir performances in a bit more depth, and see what we discover.

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Powell in his 1940's hard-boiled debut as Philip Marlowe in *Murder, My Sweet* and his earlier incarnation (inset) as a fresh-faced 1930's song and dance man.



Otto (continued from pg. 1)

pently producing his own projects.

According to Bogdanovich, Preminger's work from the middle 1950s to the early 1960s represents some of the best American filmmaking of that or any other period:

Carmen Jones (1954), *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955), *Anatomy of a Murder* (1959) — Bogdanovich: "one of the best talking pictures of the last century..." *Porgy and Bess* (1959), *Exodus* (1960), along with *Advise and Consent* (1962) and *In Harm's Way* (1965), are emblematic examples of Preminger's most creative period.

All of Otto Preminger's motion pictures display the style of a highly disciplined, but artistic *auteur*. The supple camera movement, his long continuous takes (Preminger described a cut as an "interruption"), the nuanced performances of his actors, and his attention to detailed composition. Nonetheless, the director did not make movies to please himself, but crafted films that he believed people wanted to see. As Bogdanovich put it, "Otto always had the highest respect for the audience."

Through the generosity of the Preminger family, negative elements and original prints of several of the director's wholly-owned productions have been donated to the Motion Picture Academy for preservation and presentation to future generations.

The Academy's tribute includes new prints or restorations of *Laura*, *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, *The Moon is Blue*, *Daisy Kenyon*, *The Man with the Golden Arm*, *Bonjour Tristesse*, *Whirlpool*, *Bunny Lake is Missing* and *Anatomy of a Murder*, with all screenings scheduled at the Academy's Linwood Dunn Theatre in Hollywood.

Even though the director's work was paid deserved tribute, there was still time for family and friends to remember Otto as ... well, Otto.

Asked by Bogdanovich if she remembered any specific direction from Preminger during the filming of *Bunny Lake* (1965), actress Carol Lynley recalled being nervous



Where the Sidewalk Ends

acting opposite the legendary Laurence Olivier.

When Preminger asked why she was so "stiff," Lynley confessed to being intimidated by Olivier.

Otto pointed to a blonde-haired, blue-eyed ingénue standing off-set.

"You see that girl over there? You have until after lunch to get over this. If you don't, she is going to start playing your part." Otto then walked away.

Miss Lynley laughed and said, "I went and had a long talk with myself and I got over it before lunch ended."

For more about the Otto Preminger Centennial Tribute, go to:

http://www.oscars.org/events/preminger/ind_ex.html.

FNF members in the Bay Area can see a portion of the series at the Rafael Film Center in early December, including a screening on 12/1 of the restored Where the Sidewalk Ends, hosted by Eddie Muller and Susan Andrews (Dana's daughter).

http://cafilm.org/06_Preminger/06_preminger.html

EXILES (continued from pg. 1)

ers; what was European became something American, that is, the resulting product was a hybrid.

1940: It was as America was about to go to war that these films began to appear in movie theaters. From 1940 to 1945 we see a flowering of the émigrés, coinciding with the initial burst of creativity producing American film noir. And these half-dozen years were arguably its darkest years, a classic period — visually, psychologically, thematically.

Why did pessimism and darkness become the dominant mood and overriding theme? What happened? Was this a European implant? Hardly.

One obvious cause was purely practical: wartime production conditions. It dictated smaller budgets, and increased austerity in "B"-rank productions. Art directors had to re-use sets already created; studios employed tarped-over studio back lots, because blackouts prohibited shooting at night outdoors on the West Coast. Cameramen cloaked film sets in darkness, which facilitated further employment of the same for other projects.

What did a blacked-out Los Angeles downtown street look like in 1943 if not like a burg in a German Expressionist film, with its long slanting shadows, pitch dark corners, buildings leaning crazily this way and that, the whole *chiaroscuro* spiel? Émigrés and America were meeting each other. The conditions in which they worked had, so to speak, merged together.

What made European exiles suitable to make these films? An émigré was *par excellence* one who had experienced the existential sensation of having absolutely no ground under his feet. He or she knew what it was to have all certainties lost — to live continuously in danger. Indeed, in much of his recent experience, the world had been a place where certain human beings were simply doomed, without escape; what for many might seem pure coincidence worked out for them as fate.

In the 1940-45 time frame, radio was a completely deficient medium for conveying any requisite images of the war. Newspapers could only hint at the violence occurring on

such a world scale. Americans watched the newsreels and war documentaries, but at a remove that was almost surreal. Notice of a loved one's death appeared almost at random, in a telegram from the War Department. In this numbed environment, wives and daughters worked shifts at the defense factory.

Newsreel documentaries — as well as crime films — were most emblematic of what was occurring to the American psyche. The movies we now call film noir were being eagerly seen by American audiences; they were the war era's condensed spirit. Wartime noirs (including those notable hybrid noir-horror films produced by Val Lewton) were informed by a brooding sense of loss and despair.

As the war progressed, film censorship lifted: American audiences saw more graphic violence. This slackened censorship, too, had an objective influence on the making of crime films, as noir scholars as different as Sheri Chinen Biesen and Arthur Lyons point out. For émigrés, this was an entry point into a widened *zeitgeist*, a continuation of their pre-war experience.

Visual effects that had conveyed the crisis of the European soul — sinister shadows, *chiaroscuro* effects, bizarre camera angles, portrayals of individuals caught in a net of circumstances, going deeper into mortal entrapment — these transferred seamlessly into American wartime life and its lurking uncertainty. European exiles in Hollywood already knew this backwards and forwards.

More specific examples will follow as we develop portraits of the most notable émigrés from the list. As we'll see, the German cinematic tradition, with its visual, intellectual and spiritual themes, complements the American hardboiled crime story. And it's clear that European exiles had a unique affinity with these shadowy, laconic, doom-laden American movies as they emerged from Hollywood.

A marriage formed in hell had heavenly results, which resonate to this day.

OBITUARIES

PHYLLIS KIRK, 79, died from a post-cerebral aneurysm at the Motion Picture and Television Country House and Hospital in Woodland Hills, Ca.

Kirk's notable noir credit was Andre de Toth's *Crime Wave* (1954). She played Gene Nelson's wife, Ellen Lacey, who is memorably held hostage by the tender mercies of teeth-gnashing heavy Timothy Carey.

She was best remembered for being stalked by mad sculptor Vincent Price in *House of Wax* (1953). A seminal 3-D film that remains on the list



of the top 100 grossing films (inflation-adjusted) of all-time, Miss Kirk originally wanted nothing to do with the production.

In a 2000 interview with writer Tom Weaver, Kirk recalled: "I bitched and moaned and told [Warner's executive] Steve Trilling that I was not interested in becoming the Fay Wray of my time. And I was told, 'Tough titty, you're under contract' ... I went on to have lot of fun making *House of Wax*."

Born in New Jersey, Kirk studied acting in New York under Sanford Meisner, appearing in several plays before heading to

Hollywood in 1950. After her screen debut with Farley Granger and Ann Blyth in *Our Very Own* (1950), she appeared in several MGM titles before being signed by Warner Bros. in 1952. Kirk starred on television as "Nora Charles" opposite Peter Lawford in *The Thin Man* from 1957-59. As her film and television career declined, she started a second career as a publicist for CBS.

JANE WYATT, 96, one of last surviving leading ladies of the 1930s and an Emmy-winning actress on *Father Knows Best*, died in her sleep last month in her Bel-Air home.

Wyatt's career encompassed seven decades of work on stage, screen, radio and television. She was also a socially conscious member of the Committee of the First Amendment who went to Washington with Philip Dunne, John Huston, Marsha Hunt, and others to protest the House Committee on Un-American Activities in 1947.

Born to a well off New Jersey family in 1910, Wyatt became more of an accomplished actress than a movie star. She made her screen debut in *One More River* at Universal in 1934 and eventually appeared in more than 30 movies, while dividing her time between the stage and Hollywood.

Wyatt's most memorable screen role was as "Sondra Bizet," Ronald Colman's



Jane Wyatt and Lee J. Cobb in the 1951 noir *The Man Who Cheated Himself*, a rare femme fatale role for Wyatt.

Shangri-La sweetheart in *Lost Horizon* (1937). Wyatt was the last surviving cast member from this early 'mega-production,' which established Columbia as a major film studio.

Her noir credits are topped by *Pitfall* (1948) a superb André de Toth picture with Dick Powell, whose postwar midlife-crisis affair (with Liz Scott) wrecks his sedate suburban existence. Wyatt was terrific as the cuckolded wife who reacts with dignified outrage at her husband's betrayal. She played a more traditional spouse in *Boomerang!* ('47) opposite Dana Andrews, a rare femme fatale in *The Man who Cheated Himself* ('50) and strove to escape the clutches of a murderous Louis Hayward in Fritz Lang's gothic *House by the River* (1950).

Her propensity for playing the fulsome spouse led to her iconic TV role as Robert Young's wife, "Margaret Anderson" in *Father Knows Best*. Although later knocked by critics as unrealistic and syrupy, the family comedy ruled prime time during the 1950s and earned Wyatt three Emmy awards.

The seemingly ageless actress would in 1967 play Mr. Spock's mother in the original *Star Trek* TV series and reprise the part nearly two decades later in *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home* (1986).

Wyatt worked steadily into her eighties, including a recurring role on the series *St. Elsewhere*. She made her final television appearance in 1996.

QUERIES & SUBMISSIONS

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