

# Legacy of Capra: grand style of film directing

"FOCUS on Film" is a service of FOCUS -- Films of College and University Students -- a national film competition presented by Nissan Motor Corporation, makers of Datsun cars and trucks. On March 17th in Los Angeles, the winners of FOCUS '80 were announced, and the winning films were premiered. Winning students were flown to Los Angeles by FOCUS. The Focus Premiere and Award Ceremony was hosted by Chevy Chase.

In a film career that spanned four decades and garnered three Academy Awards, director Frank Capra provided the American movie-going public with a style of screen entertainment that was not only grand, but uniquely his.

Capra's direct legacy to film was his vision of the triumph of home-grown virtue and morality against all odds. This ideal found an effective showcase in the characters he created for such immortal films as *Mr. Deeds Goes To Town*, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* and *It's a Wonderful Life*.

The following is an interview we had with Capra in the airy desert ambiance of the La Quinta Country Club in southern California.

Mr. Capra entered the club through two sliding glass doors just off the first fairway. Dressed in breezy comfortable sporting clothes and visor cap, he seemed to epitomize the golf club culture that is almost a religion in Palm Springs.

After introducing ourselves as spring break expatriots from frigid Minnesota, we took seats across from Capra at a large lounge table. Mr. Capra then ordered a round of Coca-Colas and the interview began.

An attractive aspect of your film work has always been the attention paid to the minutist details. In *Lost Horizon*, during the scenes in the Himalayan mountains, the frosty breath of Ronald Colman and the rest of the cast is clearly visible. This is a realistic effect we have seldom seen in movies of the 1930's and '40's.

The reason you could see the acot's breath was that we shot those winter scenes in an ice-

house, with decorated backdrops painted to resemble snowy mountains. Previously, I had tried putting little chicken-wire cases of dried ice in the performer's mouths in an effort to get that breathy effect.

There was a special high-strength glue we used with which we could then paste the cages to the roofs of the actors' mouths. But as you might imagine the clarity of their dialogue suffered terribly, and I discarded the idea.

You made *State of the Union* with Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios. What were your impressions of working there?

It would have been impossible for me to be a director contracted at M.G.M. Twice I tried working there, and twice they fired me before I started. The production bosses didn't like the idea of any director completely running the show, the old question of limited autonomy again. I made *State of the Union*, one of my best pictures, at M.G.M. because I wanted to work with Spencer

Tracy.

I had organized my own independent film company called Liberty Films and had come to an agreement with the studio's executives that for the services of Tracy in my picture, M.G.M. would have sole distribution rights when the project was completed. They owned a theater chain which stretched from coast-to-coast, and their own marketing agents.

In addition, my company would rent M.G.M. studio space and facilities, but I would retain complete autonomy on any matters pertaining to the production.

I soon realized that our mutual contract with regard to my undisputed autonomy wasn't -- as is said -- worth the paper it was written on. There were problems from the very start. I had a scene in the picture with five people in it and was just about to film when my M.G.M. cameraman approached me and said, "I can't shoot that;" I asked him why not and he replied, "I can't carry that focus with a 2/4 lens; you'll have to move the actors a

little out of line."

Well, I wasn't about to re-block a scene I had been working on for the last half hour just to benefit my myopic cameraman. I said, "Change the lens to a 4/9 and the focus will be perfect; I shouldn't have to tell you that." The cameraman was adamant against changing lenses, so after arguing fruitlessly, I fired him.

I then put in a phone call to the production department telling them that I wanted to hire my own cameraman, and not one from M.G.M. They said the man I had fired was probably the best photographer on the lot. "That makes no difference, I want someone I can work with," I said.

Later that day, I was visited on the set by an impeccably dressed white-haired old gentleman, obviously someone of importance. He asked me what the trouble was, and I told him that my former cameraman had refused to change a 2/4 focal-length lens. He said, "I'm from the photography laboratory and we all shoot pictures here with 2/4 lenses; that way, we can use the same developing process on all our movies."

I couldn't believe my ears, "You mean you make no exceptions? This is ridiculous!" I said. The lab man told me that if I insisted, I could hire my own cameraman and use whatever lens I desired. I insisted.

As filming progressed on *State of the Union* I began to see that every technical aspect of the picture was controlled by the department heads. The prop, set, makeup and sound men, to name just a few, all had bosses to account to. It was a machine studio; pictures were churned out with the regularity of a factory assembly line.

What advice could you give to any aspiring to employment in the movie industry?

Just submit material and don't get discouraged by rejection; any aspirant will have to face a great deal of it. Films are an art form, so if a person is born without a certain amount of creativity he or she probably won't be well-suited to the more imaginative aspects of movie-making. Creativity in most cases cannot be learned. But skills can be.

There are a thousand and one jobs that go into making a film, from initial photography to final editing. Qualified and skillful people are always needed to fill these places. Film courses such as those offered by the American Film Institute, U.S.C. and U.C.L.A. are good starting-points for acquiring filmmaking skills.

At the conclusion of our talk, we offered to pay for the drinks. Mr. Capra brushed this aside with, "They don't use money around here, fellas. The waitress will just add it to my bill." He then added with a wink, "I figure they figure I'm good for three cokes." After he had left the table, our waitress arrived and exclaimed, "He's such a dear little man." In view of his film accomplishments, we felt sure this was a feeling shared by many.

## Guilford College Notebook

The *Guilfordian* has information concerning Ralph McGill Scholarships for journalism and African Summer Study Programs. Contact us at Box 17717.

Open Mike Night! The College Union Coffeehouse is sponsoring an Open Mike Night April 8 from 9-12 p.m. in Boren Lounge. There is now a sign-up in Founders Lobby. Any questions should be left in the Union mailbox at the Information Desk.

The College Union Coffeehouse Committee is sponsoring a Jazz Concert on Wed., March 26 from 9-12 in Sternberger. Guilford's Mark Lewis will be the featured bass player. There will be no admission charge and refreshments will be served.

Administration of Justice Career Day: Sternberger Auditorium, Wednesday March 19 from 1:30 to 4:00 p.m. and 5:30 to 8:00 p.m. No appointment necessary.

Wanted: Student Leaders to Help Instruct in Effective Study Skills. We are again planning to conduct the Impact Program as an extension of Orientation. This program uses peer leaders to help freshmen with their initial adjustment to effective studying in college. It is a separate program from FAC but begins immediately following Orientation. If you would be interested in being involved as a peer leader, contact Paula Swonguer by March 24.

Anyone who has not picked up their mid-term grades may do so now from their advisor.

March 31 is the last day to withdraw and receive tuition deposit refund.

Dr. Orlando Patterson, a native of Jamaica and a professor of Sociology at Harvard University, will speak twice on Friday, March 21 in the Gallery, Founders. At 10 a.m. he will speak on "The Intellectual Roots of Western Ethnicity," and at 1:30 p.m. he will speak on "The Black Experience in America and the Caribbean: A Comparison."

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Want to help "commemorate" the Three Mile Accident Anniversary, March 28? Contact Guilford PIRG, 852-3811, or stop by the office, 2nd floor Founders Hall.

The campus Judicial Board is now seeking applicants to serve for the 1980-81 school year. Applicants can obtain petitions at the housing office located in the basement of Bryan Hall. Petitions should be presented to the Dean of Students office no later than April 1, 1980. If you have further questions, please call 292-5511, ext. 149 or the Dean of Students Office.

Six copies of C.S. Lewis' book *Till We Have Faces* needed for Mel Keiser's course *Dreams, Mythology and Metaphor*. If you have a copy and would like to sell or lend it, please bring it to Duke 102, Correspondence Center. Ask for Ginny Odum.

*Tole Painting*: Tuesday, March 25 for Advanced Students -- 9:30 a.m. at Craft Recreation Center. Thursday, March 27, 9:30 a.m. for beginners at Craft Recreation Center. Instructor: Norma Brande, \$12.00 for 6 weeks.

*Basic Beginner* - Sketching with Introduction to Oils will begin Monday, April 21, 7:30 p.m. at Craft Recreation Center. Students will need sketch pad and charcoal pencil, also a 3-B drawing pencil & eraser to begin. Instructor: Barbara Gill - \$12.00 for 6 weeks. It is important to pre-register. Call 621-4400.

The Dance Studio, located on Battleground Avenue, is now registering for spring classes in classical ballet, modern dance, jazz dance, and dance exercise. Interested students will be encouraged to perform in a performance at Guilford College in April. Please call Mary McGehee at 273-8810 for further information.

*Colloquium*: On Wednesday, March 19 at 3:30 p.m. in the Gallery, Bill Schmickle will speak on "The Politics of Sports in the Soviet Union." There will be a film put together by Intourist entitled "The Olympics Await You."

Main Campus Students: How do you use your "Wonderful Wednesday"? Tell the faculty

curriculum committee by turning in your "Wednesday" questionnaire. Check your campus mailbox today!

Guilford College, The Greensboro Writers Club, and G.T.I. are co-sponsoring a Creative Writing Festival which will take place on the Guilford campus Friday, May 9. The festival involves a contest (deadline April 1, 1980) as well as workshops and readings by poets, fiction writers, and non-fiction writers. For entry blanks and program, please drop a note to Ann Deagon.

Security Guards wanted for 1980-81. Applications are now being accepted for security guards for next year. Anyone interested should come by the Housing Office for more information.

"Hamlet," perhaps the best known of William Shakespeare's tragedies, will be presented by the UNC-G Theatre in Taylor Building March 20-22 and 25-30.

The Ohio Ballet, one of America's most popular dance companies, will perform in Aycock Auditorium at 8:15 p.m. on Thursday, March 20. They are also appearing at High Point Theatre March 19 at 8 p.m.

Carlos Bonell, one of Europe's most popular classical guitarists, will perform in concert at 8:15 p.m. on Friday, March 21, in Aycock Auditorium.

Those students interested in becoming members of the German House for next semester should contact Dennis Granzen (Box 17196) or Dave Hotchkiss (17253).