



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Remember the Night

At the studio, writing Remember the Night for my new producer, Al Lewin, almost caused me to commit hara-kiri several times, but I postponed it for some later assignment... As it turned out, the picture had quite a lot of schmaltz, a good dose of schmerz and just enough schmutz to make it box office. – Preston Sturges

Before becoming one of Hollywood's first writer-directors, Preston Sturges was one of its savviest writers (the first to secure a percentage of a film's gross). Two of his best scripts from this period – *Easy Living* and *Remember the Night* – were directed by Paramount comedy stalwart Mitchell Leisen, whose appreciation of Sturges's unique voice laid some valuable groundwork for Sturges's own firecracker career.

Remember the Night is an unpredictable romantic comedy of surprising dramatic adroitness and poignancy. When shoplifter Barbara Stanwyck's trial is adjourned, she ends up spending a cosy country Christmas with the loving family of prosecuting attorney Fred MacMurray (who made nine films with Leisen, and whose shifty amiability works well here). Romance buds but that courtroom awaits, and Sturges confidently sidesteps genre expectations, with love tempting the essentially honest lawyer towards wrongdoing, just as the criminal starts feeling that justice should be done. The leads are excellent in this warm-hearted prelude to 1944's *Double Indemnity*, and Sturges's knack of turning on a dime from loopy comedy (cow-milking antics and flaming wastebaskets) to straight-shooting sincerity affords *Remember the Night* an affecting human dimension. Just 13 months after its release, Sturges was soaring, having released three films as director and bagged the first Original Screenplay Oscar.

Patrick Fahy, *Sight & Sound*, February 2015

From the outset, Preston Sturges specialised in what Peter Bogdanovich called 'fresh, unusually vigorous scripts, which quite overpowered their directors'. Indeed, Sturges's proudly sole-authored script deal for the heavyweight drama *The Power and the Glory* (1933) was revolutionary, as was producer Jesse Lasky's order to William K. Howard to shoot it verbatim. Despite its earnest playing, this time-shifting, flashback-filled tale of the ascent of Spencer Tracy's ruthless railroad tycoon (which prefigured *Citizen Kane*) shows how versatile Sturges could be as a dramatist. So does the sparkling *Easy Living* (1937) which gives us the flipside of a tycoon's travails, this time as screwball comedy, pinballing adorable innocent Jean Arthur on a pavement-to-penthouse journey of misunderstandings triggered by a fallen fur coat. Director Mitchell Leisen's elegant, overwrought aesthetic (that ornate white wonderland of an apartment) nimbly sets off Sturges's cynical class-clash comedy, and makes the film's sweet slapstick (an automat food-fight, Arthur and Ray Milland sliding like wet puppies around a giant, squirting bathtub) resonate.

Prominent in these 30s screenplays are themes that Sturges would go on honing into the 40s – strong, independent female leads, rags-to-riches stories with capricious benefactors, spiky social satire. Though it's notionally a

romantic comedy, *Remember the Night* is full of unexpected genre and tonal shifts, a try-out for the bolder complications of *Sullivan's Travels*. Barbara Stanwyck's smart-mouthed shoplifter, dragged home for Christmas by dogged DA Fred MacMurray, displays the deftness of *The Lady Eve*'s seductive trickster. But the film blends road-trip screwball with a dark detour to her monstrous mother, and an engagingly – and uncharacteristically – warm outcome. Nonetheless, Sturges, irritated by Leisen's ruthless pruning of his script to lend MacMurray a quiet decency, resolved to run his own show.

Kate Stables, *Sight & Sound*, March 2016

REMEMBER THE NIGHT

Director: Mitchell Leisen

Production Company: Paramount Pictures

Producers: Mitchell Leisen, Albert Lewis

Screenplay: Preston Sturges

Director of Photography: Ted Tetzlaff

Editor: Doane Harrison

Art Directors: Hans Dreier, Roland Anderson

Set Decoration: A.E. Freudeman

Music: Frederick Hollander

Cast

Barbara Stanwyck (*Lee Leander*)

Fred MacMurray (*John Sargent*)

Beulah Bondi (*Mrs Sargent*)

Elizabeth Patterson (*Aunt Emma*)

Sterling Holloway (*Willie*)

Paul Guilfoyle (*District Attorney Garvin*)

Willard Robertson (*Francis X. O'Leary, Lee's defence lawyer*)

Charles D. Waldron (*judge – New York*)

Charles Arnt (*Tom*)

John Wray (*Hank, owner of field*)

Snowflake (*Rufus, Sargent's servant*)

Tom Kennedy (*'Fat' Mike, bail bondsman*)

Georgia Caine (*Lee's mother*)

Thomas W. Ross (*Mr Emory*)

Virginia Brissac (*Mrs Emory*)

Spencer Charters (*judge at rummage sale*)

USA 1940

94 mins

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

The Apartment

Wed 1 Dec 18:00 (+ pre-recorded intro by critic and improviser Tara Judah); Mon 13 Dec 14:30; Wed 22 Dec 20:40; Tue 28 Dec 18:10; Thu 30 Dec 20:30

Remember the Night

Thu 2 Dec 14:30; Mon 27 Dec 13:00; Thu 30 Dec 18:00

Meet Me in St Louis

Fri 3 Dec 20:45; Sun 19 Dec 12:20; Wed 22 Dec 18:00; Tue 28 Dec 12:20

Miracle on 34th Street

Sat 4 Dec 15:50; Sat 11 Dec 18:00; Fri 17 Dec 14:30

A Christmas Tale (Un conte de Noël)

Sun 5 Dec 17:50; Tue 28 Dec 15:15

Scrooge (aka A Christmas Carol)

Mon 6 Dec 18:30; Thu 16 Dec 21:00; Fri 17 Dec 18:20; Sat 18 Dec 18:10; Sun 19 Dec 15:40; Mon 20 Dec 18:10; Tue 21 Dec 14:30

Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas

Tue 7 Dec 18:30; Sat 11 Dec 16:00; Tue 21 Dec 21:00; Thu 23 Dec 20:45

Gremlins

Wed 8 Dec 17:50 (+ intro by Justin Johnson, Lead Programmer); Sat 18 Dec 20:45; Wed 22 Dec 20:45; Wed 29 Dec 20:50

Bad Santa

Fri 10 Dec 20:45; Mon 13 Dec 20:50; Fri 17 Dec 21:00

It's a Wonderful Life

From Sun 12 Dec – Thu 23 Dec

Tokyo Godfathers (Tokyo goddofazazu)

Tue 14 Dec 20:45; Mon 20 Dec 20:45

Carol

Wed 15 Dec 17:50; Mon 27 Dec 18:00; Thu 30 Dec 14:20

BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at bfi.org.uk/join

BFI PLAYER

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on player.bfi.org.uk

Join the **BFI mailing list** for regular programme updates.

Not yet registered? Create a new account at www.bfi.org.uk/signup

BFI SOUTHBANK

Welcome to the home of great film and TV, with three cinemas and a studio, a world-class library, regular exhibitions and a pioneering Mediatheque with 1000s of free titles for you to explore. Browse special-edition merchandise in the BFI Shop.

We're also pleased to offer you a unique new space, the BFI Riverfront – with unrivalled riverside views of Waterloo Bridge and beyond, a delicious seasonal menu, plus a stylish balcony bar for cocktails or special events. Come and enjoy a pre-cinema dinner or a drink on the balcony as the sun goes down.

Programme notes and credits compiled by the BFI Documentation Unit

Notes may be edited or abridged. Questions/comments? Email prognotes@bfi.org.uk

The British Film Institute is a charity registered in England and Wales No. 287780