



GINGER ROGERS: ALL THAT SASS

Storm Warning

Storm Warning

Director: Stuart Heisler

Production Company: Warner Bros.

Producer: Jerry Wald

Screenplay: Daniel Fuchs, Richard Brooks

Director of Photography: Carl Guthrie

Editor: Clarence Kolster

Art Director: Leo K. Kuter

Set Designer: G.W. Berntsen

Costumes: Milo Anderson

Make-up: Perc Westmore, Frank Westmore

Music: Daniele Amfitheatrof

Music Director: Ray Heindorf

Cast:

Ginger Rogers (*Marsha Mitchell*)

Ronald Reagan (*Burt Rainey*)

Doris Day (*Lucy Rice*)

Steve Cochran (*Hank Rice*)

Hugh Sanders (*Charlie Barr*)

Lloyd Gough (*Rummell*)

Raymond Greenleaf (*Faulkner*)

Ned Glass (*George Allen*)

Walter Baldwin (*Bledshoe*)

Lynn Whitney (*Cora Athens*)

Stuart Randall (*Walters*)

Sean McClory (*Shore*)

Paul E. Burns (*Hauser*)

USA 1951

89 mins

A BFI National Archive print

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When Marsha Mitchell (Rogers, in one of her strongest roles) visits her sister (Doris Day) in the Deep South, she witnesses a Ku Klux Klan murder involving her brother-in-law. This frighteningly tense and atmospheric anti-Klan thriller was made on the cusp of an increasing conservatism in 1950s America and so, bizarrely, has no explicit references to the Klan's racism. Nonetheless, this powerful drama strongly emphasises their terrifying grip on small-town communities.

A contemporary review

Warners, who pioneered the social reform pictures of the 1930's, have contented themselves in the post-war period with the vague idealisms of *Key Largo*, and the journalistic sensations of *Caged*. In *Storm Warning* they return to their former territory with an expose of Ku Klux Klan methods. The Klan is reported to be gaining new strength by adopting an anti-Jewish, anti-Communist line: whether or not this is so, *Storm Warning* has all the appearance of dealing with a genuine rather than a fabricated problem. It is the story of a town dominated by the Klan, which is pictured as a crooked but business-like concern, whose leaders take advantage of their position to make off with funds subscribed by lesser members.

Storm Warning has a taut, controlled and exciting script by Richard Brooks and Daniel Fuchs. The fault of most problem pictures is that the problem is allowed to get in the way of the picture – that considerations of character and plot logic are sacrificed to the temptation to preach at the audience in very clear and simple terms. Richard Brooks, in *Crisis*, fell into this trap when he allowed his characters (notably the dictator) to express their views in this over-simplified dialogue, rather than resolving the conflict satisfactorily in terms of action. *Storm Warning* presents a credible situation, allows its audience to work out its implications for themselves, and does not attempt to weigh the film down with more generalisations than, as a dramatic story, it will bear.

At least two scenes convey a really striking impression of the temper of the frightened, uneasy little town. The opening – Marsha's arrival by bus, the strange silence, the darkness, the empty streets, the sudden shock of the encounter with violence (apparently shortened by the censor for British audiences) – is beautifully tense and compact, and introduces the theme with the greatest economy. Later, before the trial, atmosphere is suggested by a clever device: the crowds, sullen, suspicious, angry and ashamed at the notoriety which has struck their town, are seen through the eyes of a broadcaster who is vainly attempting to obtain their comments.

Storm Warning is consistently exciting, on its own level, being capably directed and well acted by a rather surprising cast. Ginger Rogers, whose previous excursions into the serious field have been not altogether happy, does extremely well as Marsha, and Doris Day plays the easier part of the sister very sympathetically and with considerable technical skill. As the killer Steve Cochran, previously seen in a number of conventional gangster parts, suggests a cross between the familiar hoodlum, and the husband in *A Streetcar Named Desire*: it is a very assured and capable performance.

Storm Warning, being better written, more compact in scope, and less

GINGER ROGERS: ALL THAT SASS

Gold Diggers of 1933 + Office Blues

Mon 27 Mar 18:20; Sat 15 Apr 12:30

Shall We Dance

Tue 28 Mar 18:20; Sat 8 Apr 14:00 (+ illustrated talk on the magic of Fred and Ginger by Miles Eady, film writer and curator)

The Major and the Minor

Wed 29 Mar 20:40; Tue 11 Apr 20:30;
Sat 22 Apr 12:40

Backwards and in High Heels

Thu 30 March 18:20

Vivacious Lady

Sat 1 Apr 15:40; Fri 14 Apr 18:20

Stage Door

Sun 2 Apr 15:30 (+ intro by Sandi Toksvig);
Tue 4 Apr 20:40; Fri 7 Apr 18:10

Black Widow

Wed 5 Apr 20:40; Sat 22 Apr 20:45;
Sun 30 Apr 18:45

Bachelor Mother

Fri 7 Apr 14:20; Tue 18 Apr 20:50; Sat 22 Apr 15:30

The Barkleys of Broadway

Sat 8 Apr 17:30; Mon 10 Apr 12:50;
Tue 25 Apr 20:40

Monkey Business

Mon 10 Apr 15:30; Fri 21 Apr 18:30;
Sun 30 Apr 12:00

25 & Under: Introduction to Ginger Rogers

Wed 12 Apr 19:00

Lady in the Dark

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Primrose Path

Sat 15 Apr 15:10; Wed 19 Apr 20:50

Kitty Foyle: The Natural History of a Woman

Sun 16 Apr 12:20; Thu 20 Apr 20:40

Roxie Hart

Mon 17 Apr 18:30; Sat 29 Apr 14:30

Storm Warning

Sun 23 Apr 15:30; Sat 29 Apr 18:00

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Ginger Rogers and All That Sass

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generalised, is a more rewarding picture than many of the recent black-and-white cycle. It shares, however, their failure either to admit that there is no immediate solution to the problem depicted, or to suggest a solution both consistent and convincing.

Penelope Houston, *Sight and Sound*, March 1951