



A FAMILY AFFAIR: THE FILMS OF YASUJIRO OZU

Make Way for Tomorrow

Make Way for Tomorrow

Directed by: Leo McCarey

©: Paramount Pictures, Inc.

a Paramount picture

a Leo McCarey production

Presented by: Adolph Zukor

Screen Play by: Viña Delmar

Based on a novel [Years Are So Long] by

Josephine Lawrence and a play [Years Are So

Long] by: Helen Leary, Nolan Leary

Photographed by: William C. Mellor

Special Photographic Effects by:

Gordon Jennings

Edited by: LeRoy Stone

Art Direction by: Hans Dreier,

Bernard Herzbrun

Interior Decorations by: A.E. Freudeman

Original Music by: Victor Young,

George Antheil

Musical Direction: Boris Morros

Sound Recording: Walter Oberst, Don Johnson

Sound System: Western Electric Noiseless

Recording

uncredited

Executive Producer: William Lebaron

Assistant Director: Harry Scott

Cast:

Victor Moore (*Barkley Cooper*)

Beulah Bondi (*Lucy Cooper*)

Fay Bainter (*Anita Cooper*)

Thomas Mitchell (*George Cooper*)

Porter Hall (*Harvey Chase*)

Barbara Read (*Rhoda Cooper*)

Maurice Moscovitch (*Max Rubens*)

Elisabeth Risdon (*Cora Payne*)

Minna Gombell (*Nellie Chase*)

Ray Mayer (*Robert Cooper*)

Ralph Remley (*Bill Payne*)

Louise Beavers (*Mamie*)

Louis Jean Heydt (*doctor*)

Gene Morgan (*Carlton Gorman*)

uncredited

George Offerman Jr (*Richard Payne*)

Tommy Bupp (*Jack Payne*)

Ferike Boros (*Mrs Sarah Rubens*)

Nick Lukats (*boyfriend*)

Terry Ray (*usherette*)

Gene Lockhart (*Mr Henning*)

Ruth Warren (*secretary*)

Dell Henderson (*Ed Weldon, auto salesman*)

Paul Stanton (*Mr Horton, hotel manager*)

Granville Bates (*Mr Hunter*)

Byron Foulger (*Mr Dale*)

Avril Cameron (*Mrs McKenzie*)

Lelah Tyler, Bernard Suss, Helen Dickson,

Mitchell Ingraham, Gloria Williams

(*bridge players*)

Kitty Mchugh (*head usherette*)

Ralph Brooks (*doorman*)

Bobby Caldwell (*boy*)

Ethel Clayton (*woman customer*)

Ralph Lewis, Phillips Smalley (*businessmen*)

Howard Mitchell (*letter carrier*)

William Newell (*ticket seller*)

Ben Franklin Gibson (*beggar*)

Francis Sayles (*bartender*)

Louise Seidel (*hat check girl*)

Louis Natheaux (*head waiter*)

Joe North (*waiter*)

Dorothy Lloyd (*bird imitator*)

Lee Millar (*animal and bird imitations*)

Don McKinney

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away the film's ending.

You could come to the films of Leo McCarey by a variety of routes. Silent-comedy fans may know him as the man who teamed Laurel and Hardy – and tempered the breakneck pace of Keystone slapstick by adding the reaction shot and the principle of ‘slow burn’. Screwball fans may know him as the director of the notably relaxed *The Awful Truth* (1937), in which Archibald Leach perfected his transformation into Cary Grant, a persona shaped by and even modelled on the expressive, wryly debonair McCarey himself. Marx Brothers aficionados will recognise the McCarey signature on their best movie, *Duck Soup* (1933), the one instance when the brothers’ aggressive anarchism was successfully embedded in a film that spanned near-ballet silent-film pantomime and quasi-surrealist found-footage montage. Weepee fans may know McCarey for his oceanliner tearjerker *Love Affair* (1939) and his own 1957 remake *An Affair to Remember*, the latter comprehensively raided by *Sleepless in Seattle* (1993). Wellreared Catholics will have childhood memories of Bing Crosby’s Father O’Malley crooning his way through McCarey’s moral-guardian drama *Going My Way* (1944) and its sequel *The Bells of St Mary’s* (1945). And avid red-baiters will have done their chewing over McCarey’s almost literal reds-under-the-bed late works, *My Son John* (1952) and *Satan Never Sleeps* (1962).

Ozu fans may wonder what any of this has to do with them, but *Make Way for Tomorrow* (1937) – the film which inspired Kogo Noda’s screenplay for *Tokyo Story* (1953) – is another piece in the strange McCarey jigsaw puzzle. Lauded by critics in its day – and shunned by the public – it is a potent lament for the modern world’s dereliction of its elders; McCarey made the film when his own father died, and persisted with its merciless ending despite the pleas of Adolph Zukor at Paramount. (Paramount subsequently fired McCarey, who proceeded to freelance his way to filing the highest income-tax return in the US in 1944, on the back of *Going My Way*.)

Yet *Make Way for Tomorrow* has nothing about it that’s miserabilist; it has the structure and lightness of touch of a great screwball comedy. It remained McCarey’s favourite of his own movies. Adapted from Josephine Lawrence’s 1934 novel *Years Are So Long* (which reputedly is indeed miserabilist), it’s one of the – very few – great films about old age, a distinctly un-Hollywood topic.

It starts with a gathering of the clan, as Barkley and Lucy Cooper (Victor Moore and Beulah Bondi, playing some ten and 20 years older than their respective ages) welcome home their grown-up children George (Thomas Mitchell), Nellie (Minna Gombell), Cora (Elisabeth Risdon) and goofy Robert (Ray Mayer); a third daughter, Addie, has removed herself from the picture to California. It soon transpires that this is to be the last such homecoming, as Bark and Lucy are about to lose their house. The bank is foreclosing on them (though Bark suspects a personal vendetta on the part of their bank manager, who years ago used to ‘keep company’ with Lucy before Bark cut him out), and time is up – before throwing themselves on the mercy of their children, they’ve already used up their six-month notice period hoping something will show up.

As we will see, Bark stills harbours a valiant belief in his economic potential – answering job ads in shop windows while proudly shunning an offer for him and Lucy to become caretakers. Yet his and Lucy’s initial instinct not to rely on their children for help is borne out when the latter, brows duly furrowed, resolve to split up the old couple: Lucy will stay with George and his wife Anita in New York, while Bark will take a couch with Cora and her husband Bill some 300 miles away. It’ll be purely temporary, of course. Cora can ‘practically promise’ that she’ll be able to reunite them within three months.

Sidney De Grey
John Preston
Bill Begg
Rosemary Theby
Fritzie Brunette
Helen Davis
Richard R. Neill
Alice Keating
Don Brodie
Jesse Graves
USA 1937©
91 mins
Digital

A FAMILY AFFAIR: THE FILMS OF YASUJIRO OZU

Influence and Inspiration

Make Way for Tomorrow

Sat 2 Sep 12:40; Sun 24 Sep 15:50 (+ intro by
season curator Ian Haydn Smith)

Tokyo-Ga

Sun 3 Sep 14:00; Mon 2 Oct 20:45

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Leo McCarey believed in couples – not just romantically but dramatically, comically and, in *Make Way for Tomorrow*, tragically too. Many of his best films explore the synthesis of two idiosyncratic individuals into something greater than the sum of their parts, be they Laurel and Hardy, Charles Laughton's English butler and his new master out west in *Ruggles of Red Gap* (1935), or the ill-starred lovers of *The Awful Truth* and *Love Story*. And as Robin Wood argued in his article 'Leo McCarey and "Family Values"', McCarey's families tend to be inimical to that process – a site of resentments and rivalries. The central 50 minutes of *Make Way for Tomorrow* amount to a calculus of couplings and the disturbance of their delicate, precarious equilibrium when one set is undone; newly rogue elements, Bark and Lucy proceed to rile their reluctant hosts in a litany of ways.

There's a plaintive simplicity to the facts of Bark and Lucy's dispossession. Bark has been out of work for four years (a passer-by makes it clear he's unlikely to get a new job at his age). With 'everything going out and nothing coming in,' as he says, 'so long as I never sent [the bank] anything, they sent for me.' It's 1937, the beginning of the 'Roosevelt Recession'. Are Bark and Lucy to blame for their plight – have they failed to save for these rainy days? Has their softness bred selfish offspring? (Though the children all seem to have their own reasons and economic pressures.) Or is there a wider failing in a society with no net to catch the innocently ageing? These are questions left off-screen – or pushed on to us, another of the film's intruding audiences. *Make Way for Tomorrow* is all action and reaction; a late moment of tooth-gnashing self-reproach on George's part is the closest the film comes to sermonising.

Yet the last half-hour of the film mounts a magical critique of its own reality by showing us how Lucy and Bark's life could be, and in a sense has been. 'I only know I like my characters to walk in clouds, I like a little bit of the fairy tale,' McCarey once said. 'As long as I'm there behind the camera lens, I'll let somebody else photograph the ugliness of the world.' True to Stanley Cavell's concept of the screwball 'comedy of remarriage' – in which a couple must separate, 'unmarry', in order to reteam stronger and wiser – Lucy and Bark are reunited in New York, albeit for just one afternoon before Bark is put on a train to California. Cora has determined that the move will aid his failing health; Lucy, meanwhile, has spared George and Anita's shame by taking ownership of their plan to send her to the Idylwild Home for Aged Women.

It's the first time Lucy and Bark have been away together since their New York honeymoon, and they soon fall into reprising it. An invitation out of the blue to take a test drive around town in a luxury car sets the afternoon on its head, and marks the moment where representatives of American commerce seem to line up to fête the heretofore luckless couple where their duty-bound families could not. (Max the shopkeeper was their only earlier stringfree ally.)

The change of wind takes hold: Bark and Lucy decide to seize their remaining time, blow off their dinner appointment with their kids and revisit their honeymoon hotel. Bark treats Lucy to a cocktail, she invites him to dance, and the hatcheck girl, manager and band-leader all welcome them with touching grace.

Then the clock chimes nine, and the couple must hurry to the train station. With a simple song in the back of the taxi and a farewell in front of the train carriage ('It's been nice knowing you, Miss Breckinridge'), the inexorable final separation is upon them. The couple have been redeemed – only to be finally parted. The music – the walk in the clouds – is over. 'When you're 70,' Lucy has told Rhoda earlier in response to the latter's callow attempts to prove her realism, 'about the only fun you have left is pretending that there aren't any facts to face.' The train pulls away frame right, Lucy's eyes flutter and try to resolve themselves, and she turns to the left as the film fades out. It's one of the most devastating endings in cinema.

Nick Bradshaw, *Sight and Sound*, November 2010