



You Must Remember This Presents... "The Old Man Is Still Alive"

A Hole in the Head

A Hole in the Head

Directed by: Frank Capra

©: Sincap Productions

Presented by: Sincap Productions

Produced by: Frank Capra

Production Manager: Joe Cooke

Assistant Directors: Edward Mull, Jack R. Berne

Screenplay: Arnold Schulman

Based on the Broadway play 'A Hole in the Head'

by: Arnold Schulman

Director of Photography: William H. Daniels

Edited by: William Hornbeck

Art Director: Eddie Imazu

Costumes: Edith Head

Make-up: Bernard Ponedel

Hair Stylist: Helene Parrish

Photographic Lenses by: Panavision

Music: Nelson Riddle

Orchestrations: Arthur Morton

Sound: Fred Lau

Cast:

Frank Sinatra (*Tony Manetta*)

Edward G. Robinson (*Mario Manetta*)

Eleanor Parker (*Mrs Rogers*)

Carolyn Jones (*Shirl*)

Thelma Ritter (*Sophie Manetta*)

Keenan Wynn (*Jerry Marks*)

Joi Lansing (*Dorine*)

Connie Sawyer (*Miss Wexler*)

Jimmy Komack (*Julius*)

Dub Taylor (*Fred*)

Eddie Hodges (*Ally*)

George Dewitt (*Mendy*)

Benny Rubin

Ruby Dandridge

B.S. Pully

Joyce Nizzari

Pupi Campo

Eddie Hodges

USA 1959©

120 mins

Digital

When a popular and distinguished director returns to the commercial cinema after an eight-year absence, one is bound to feel some qualms, especially as his best work belonged to a period far removed from the uncertain conditions of Hollywood in the late 1950's. But the first five minutes of *A Hole in the Head* were enough to dispel any lingering doubts. Stylistically at least, Frank Capra had returned – intact. Taking a play by Arnold Schulman as his starting point (necessitating an obvious and rather awkward switch from Jewish to Italian-American family comedy), Capra has embellished its lightweight and fairly predictable comic situations with his old, characteristic warmth and generosity, as well as some eccentric overtones reminiscent of *You Can't Take It with You*. The result is a fast-moving and cheerful *divertissement*, its artful combination of sentiment, comedy and child appeal all a little larger than life and thereby guaranteed to win an audience's approval.

Though the style is as personal and assured as ever, a noticeable change of emphasis in the subject matter reveals how far Capra has moved from his philosophy of ten or twenty years ago. His modern hero (Frank Sinatra) is no longer an innocent stubbornly pitted against a monstrous political machine, but a fast-talking Miami hotel proprietor plagued with money troubles and the necessity to 'think big' and beset with quarrelsome relatives determined to marry him off to some nice, homely woman. Characters are introduced and then dropped after serving their purpose and there is little attempt at dramatic structure. Instead, Capra develops an inconsequential series of very funny character sketches and manages to include some late 'fifties references for good measure – the hero's scatty girlfriend (Carolyn Jones), with her portable radio, surfboard and minimal beach wear, might be described as a 'bongo beatnik', a modern sex symbol with an alarming appetite.

As in the old days, Capra retains the frankly theatrical tone of the original by shooting some of the long dialogue scenes straight on to the players; yet the effect is never stagy or boring. His control is so finely judged that there is always an onward movement, a crisp cutting edge (supplied by an old colleague, William Hornbeck) and a continuously lively surface action. A typical example is the quarrel between the brothers, with Thelma Ritter intervening, in which he actually manages to make funny the lame, repeated gag of a man sitting down on a broken chair. Most enjoyable of all, though, is the direction and shaping of the performances. Capra's effect on his players is rather that of a great conductor on his orchestra. Given reasonably pliable material, he is able to point a phrase here or accent a beat there, at the same time insuring perfect unanimity in timing and expression. It is not surprising that Frank Sinatra here gives his most human and easy performance, that Edward G. Robinson assumes the mantle of a dry, deadpan comedian with monumental assurance, or that the hitherto mannered Eleanor Parker plays with a friendly and relaxed feminine charm. The tender little sequence in her charmingly cluttered flat is typical of this confident ensemble playing.

No characteristic Capra film would be complete without its demagogue or its final satirical scene of mass movement. Here, the figure of evil is a sharp-talking promoter (a harsh, edgy portrait by Keenan Wynn), who plays up to his old friend until he realises that his main concern is money and the lack of it. Against

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You Must Remember This Presents... "The Old Man Is Still Alive"

The Tiger of Eschnapur Der Tiger von Eschnapur
Tue 1 Apr 20:45; Sat 12 Apr 12:00 (+ pre-recorded
intro by season programmer Karina Longworth)

A Hole in the Head

Wed 2 Apr 20:40; Sat 5 Apr 15:00

The Indian Tomb Das indische Grabmal

Sat 5 Apr 20:30; Sat 12 Apr 15:00 (+ pre-recorded
intro by season programmer Karina Longworth)

Cheyenne Autumn

Wed 9 Apr 20:10; Sat 19 Apr 14:20 (+ intro by
season programmer Karina Longworth)

Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

Sat 12 Apr 17:30; Fri 18 Apr 14:00 (+ intro by
season programmer Karina Longworth)

Red Line 7000 + intro

Mon 14 Apr 18:10 (+ intro by season programmer
Karina Longworth); Sat 26 Apr 20:50

The Liberation of L.B. Jones

Tue 15 Apr 18:00 (+ intro by season programmer
Karina Longworth); Sun 20 Apr 14:50

The Only Game in Town

Tue 15 Apr 20:35 (+ intro by season programmer
Karina Longworth); Fri 25 Apr 17:55

Frenzy

Wed 16 Apr 20:35 (+ intro by season programmer
Karina Longworth); Sun 27 Apr 18:35

Such Good Friends

Thu 17 Apr 20:45 (+ intro by season programmer
Karina Longworth); Mon 21 Apr 13:45

True Grit

Fri 18 Apr 17:50 (+ intro by season programmer
Karina Longworth); Sat 26 Apr 17:35

Rich and Famous

Sat 19 Apr 17:45 (+ intro by season programmer
Karina Longworth); Wed 30 Apr 20:40

Avanti!

Sun 20 Apr 14:40; Wed 23 Apr 20:15

Movie Movie

Sun 20 Apr 18:30; Mon 28 Apr 20:50

Under the Volcano

Mon 21 Apr 18:35; Tue 29 Apr 20:50

the background of a gaudy dog-race track, with the Miami social set in full cry, Capra creates a typical set piece, with overlapping dialogues and a screen full of jagged, gusty movement, beautifully captured in the camerawork of another veteran, William Daniels.

A Hole in the Head, then, is entirely professional entertainment in a familiar American style; it may not break any new ground, yet it is wholly alive and easily enjoyable. The final scenes – the reconciliation between father, son and attractive widow – perhaps belong to a more conventional tradition and are arbitrarily arrived at; but even the last-minute decision of the staid, stolid elder brother to join the carefree vagabond life is so typically Capra in its joyous rejection of reality that one is really rather pleased when it happens. With the exception of the Keenan Wynn episode, there is little of the social moralising which made Capra a major spokesman for the American liberal spirit of the 1930's, for its fervent, sometimes muddle-headed New Deal optimism. But this, inevitably, is a film with a much lower ambition. Capra has clearly recognised the nature of his material and has contented himself with the opportunities afforded to rekindle his own world of wish fulfilment and sentimental fantasy. Always a shrewd showman, he has created a contemporary success-conscious hero who, for better or worse, probably suits the present mood as well as Mr Deeds did that of more than 20 years ago. Deeds will remain longer in the memory; yet, in an age when the average Hollywood product is notable for its numbing anonymity, we should be grateful that he has been able to invest a relatively minor work with so much of his former panache.

Capra is not the only veteran to make a recent creative comeback, although he has remained silent for longer than the others – during the intervening years, he made science documentaries for television. The latest films of Ford, Hitchcock, Hawks and a few others confirm that some of the older generation have weathered the current Hollywood crisis, in a period when America is slowly losing her position as a dominant film power; and it is to these resilient survivors that this article is dedicated.

John Gillett, *Sight and Sound*, Summer and Autumn 1959

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