



Raoul Walsh Season

Eden Court Cinema
27th September 2016
at 7.15pm

Review by Tony
Janssens (InFifa),
film notes compiled
by Mark MacLennan
(InFiFa).

High Sierra

1941, USA, B&W, Drama, Running time: 100 mins. Rating: U

Cast: Humphrey Bogart, Ida Lupino, and Alan Curtis

Written by John Huston and W.R. Burnett (based on the novel by Burnett);

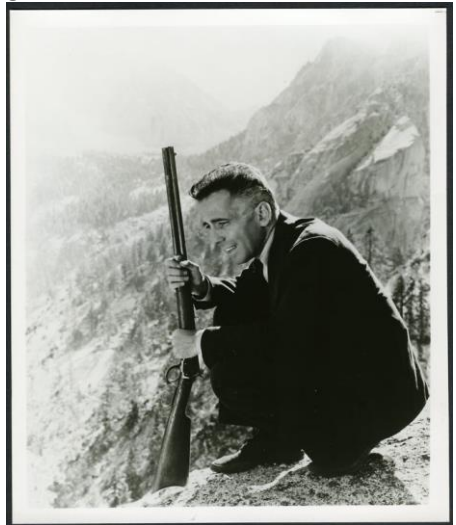
Director of photography Tony Gaudio

When Roy "Mad Dog" Earle (Bogart) is released from prison after serving 8 years for bank robbery he is met by a henchman of Big Mac (MacBride), a crime boss who has planned a daring jewel heist at a resort for rich tourists. It's obvious Earle has been freed earlier because of the underworld influence, and the payback for that favour is doing one more job, leading a couple of young hoodlums (Curtis and Kennedy) who will help him, together with an inside man (Wilde) at the resort, with the robbery. When he meets these young recruits he has nothing but contempt for them, but the girlfriend of one of them, Marie (Lupino), is immediately attracted to him, although he pays no attention to her at first. Her presence violates the criminal code of



professionalism by which Earle lives. Before he met up with them however, Roy stopped to reminisce at a small farm his family used to own and later is almost run off the road by an old pickup truck driven by Velma, a beautiful girl (Leslie) who has a foot deformity, and her uncle (Travers) whom he befriends. He asks the doctor who is treating the dying MacBride to fix the clubfoot. Very soon Earle is on the run again after the heist goes wrong and all his associates are either killed or captured. The only companions, and true friends, left to him are Marie and a mongrel dog he took a shine to. Velma on the other hand wants nothing more to do with him. The one person he has shown his sensitivity is the one who shuns him. Chased by the police (in the longest chase scene Walsh ever filmed) and forced deeper and deeper into the Sierra where he starts climbing Mount Whitney, it is obvious that Earle fatalistically pursued the only goal he understood, the final hold-up. His desire for value has been thwarted and disappointed; this is a man whose family fell victim to the Depression and resorted to crime as a revenge on the

society that failed him and his loved ones. The more inhospitable the landscape, the more inward and quietly desperate Earle becomes. Crime indeed as an existential choice, a path he must follow to its logical conclusion. But in the process the gangster, who knows his days are over, has become humanized, has gained a majestic sadness. The journey itself preserves him from the vulgarity around, found for instance in the crowd, gathering to see what will become of him. The value and the meaning of freedom are at the heart of this great and complex film. After all, this is about a guy who's first act after coming out of prison is "to see if the grass is still green" and to feel that grass beneath his feet.



The celebrated climax on the slopes of Mount Whitney (highest summit in the contiguous United States and the Sierra Nevada) where director of photography Tony Gaudio and his

crew were shooting at a level up to 11000 feet, is simply one of the great and most gripping moments in American cinema, emphasised by a striking close up of the archetypical American figure, perched on a ridge. It is an episode that has been many times referenced in films afterwards.



Raoul Walsh, right, on set with Bogart

Bogart was not the first actor considered for the role of Roy Earle. Six (!) A-listers had already turned it down: five of them because they were offered it after first choice George Raft had refused. Bogart certainly wasn't an A-lister yet. He was second-billed under Ida Lupino, but this landmark film turned him into a star. He infuses his character with gallantry and a stoic kind of romanticism; he doesn't self-aggrandize, yet is reluctant to show his feelings to the one person who truly loves him. He continued to play the outsider in his best films and it is the one that would turn him into an icon, even more so when he was put on the right side of the law. His next role would be detective Sam Spade in "The Maltese

Falcon", another classic that would also mark the directorial debut of writer John Huston.

Huston collaborated with W.R. Burnett, the author of the novel on which "High Sierra" is based. According to Burnett he never had so much fun in his life: "John and I working together? We laughed most of the time. I worked fast on the typewriter and he dictated. He liked to sit down and completely talk out a scene, which would take a day and wear me out. But we got a fine script that broke rules. We had a girl living with two guys and got away with it... in 1940!"

One scene that isn't in the script is pure Walsh. When Earle is driving en route to what will be the botched heist, he chances upon a jackrabbit that crosses the road, swerves to save himself and to avoid the old jalopy behind him. When Walsh was driving around scouting for locations for his first talkie, in which he would also play a lead role, a jackrabbit crashed through his car window and a piece of glass went deep into his right eye. His career as an actor came to an end, the focus on directing took over completely. You could call this referencing an altruistic frankness of mixing myth and fact, where the real man and legend meet.

The girl living with two guys was Ida Lupino, who had a great deal of

publicity on the strength of a previous Walsh picture (*They Drive by Night*). Lupino was always a compellingly good actress (and a very fine director, a pioneer for women in the field) who rarely got the parts her talent deserved. She lends pathos and toughness to the young girl who's been given the pivotal last words in the film. She is a typical Walsh heroine, who does not cry, has acquired a wisdom from the streets, has youth and infinite bravado but a frailty hidden inside that flamboyant exterior. Arthur Kennedy, one of the most reliable supporting actors in American cinema, who at his best was unfailingly subtle in depicting impotence or bitterness in outwardly friendly men, gives early hints of his talent.

The rest of the cast is splendid too. Bad acting is rarely found in a Raoul Walsh movie. Hitchcock claimed that "actors are like cattle"; Walsh, although a hard task master, adored them. His is therefore also a cinema of *faces*, captured by skilfully chosen camera angles. The main characters often stare at us or catch the edge of the lens, and no matter how violent their actions may be, there is always this subtle sense of flirtation, a craving to be liked. Like in so many of his best films, performances seem to have been caught immediately by the roving eye of the camera, which gives them such a stark sense of reality. Even the small roles are not merely 'extras', they are charged with characteristic energy.

Our next screening..... **Pursued**

The last film in our.....**Raoul Walsh Season**



Eden Court Cinema

Tuesday 11th October
2016 at 7.15 pm

A young man looks to have his revenge upon the people who murdered his family. Psychological western starring Robert Mitchum and Teresa Wright, and directed by Raoul Walsh



www.facebook.com/infiFa

Inverness Film Fans (InFiFa) meet fortnightly at Eden Court Cinema for screenings and post film discussions. To join us for free and for more info go to:

www.invernessfilmfans.org