



Lights, Camera, Action!

Hepburn in Chaillot

The old charm is still there

By DAN MERKUR

In 1932, king of the independent producers, David O. Selznick, cast a tall, skinny, awkward Eastern socialite in *A Bill of Divorcement*, in the lead role, playing the daughter of the great John Barrymore.

The Bryn Mawr graduate, angular, flat-chested, had been rejected by major studio casting, and Selznick was her last hope. She made the film, and left Hollywood quickly. She had come to agree with Hollywood about the likelihood of their separate futures, and was in mid-Atlantic en route to Europe when the picture opened, and she became a star.

Skinny, long-legged, Katharine Hepburn photographed as tremendously graceful, gliding over floors — none of her loping gait had come across. And so a star was born.

Between 1932 and 1938, Katharine Hepburn made quite a number of films, including *Alice Adams* (1935) and *Morning Glory* (1933), which won her her first Oscar. Others of the period are *Sylvia Scarlett*, where Cary Grant first really began to act on screen; *Mary of Scotland*, where Frederic March was hard put to match her fiery temper; and *Break of Hearts*, a mid-thirties romance with Charles Boyer.

And then her contract with RKO Radio ran out, and some producer decided something to the effect of he didn't want "no skinny broads with no tits" in his movies. So Katharine Hepburn left Hollywood.

But she wasn't gone long. She went to Broadway to play in *The Philadelphia Story*, which ran a very successful season to much acclaim. Now Hollywood pursued her, brought her to Metro (1939) to film the play with Cary Grant and James Stewart (who won an Oscar for his performance). Also in that period she made *Bringing Up Baby*, an incredibly funny film with Cary Grant, as a paleontologist.

Then, between 1941 and 1957 she made eight films with Spencer Tracy — *Woman of the Year*, *Keeper of the Flame*, *Without Love*, *Sea of Grass*, *State of the Union*, *Adam's Rib*, *Pat and Mike*, and *The Desk Set* — while she kept making films. Fewer now, but she kept her hand in.

During the 50s, she turned out performances as a spinster in *The African Queen*, in *Summertime* and as the maiden sister in *The Rainmaker*. She retired in 1962, after playing a neurotic in *Suddenly Last Summer*, and a madwoman in *Long*

Day's Journey into Night, only to make *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* with Spencer Tracy, shortly before his death in 1967. Since then, she has made *Lion in Winter* and *The Madwoman of Chaillot*.

The relevance of Katharine Hepburn's history to a review of *The Madwoman of Chaillot* is just this — each performance is built on the top of her total image. In the 30s she played romantic leads. In the 40s she played the loving wife. In the 50s she played the spinster or the mother. In the 60s she has played old women — neurotics, or madwomen — old women. And not just 55 like Bette Davis, but women of 65 and 70.

She is an old woman now, but an old woman who was young once, and shows it. Dame Edith Evans plays an old woman who seems never to have known youth. She seems to have been born aged, wrinkled and senile.

Hepburn is not that way at all. She is still lovely, still graceful, still able to move the audience. Her smile is still there, even though her lips tremble a bit more. Her tears still flow on cue, even though her eyes seem to have seen much pain. Katharine Hepburn is still what she has always been. In a word — charming — with a kind of magical charm beyond compare.

Each and every film in her long career has been a Hepburn vehicle. Since 1932 she has had top billing, and with few exceptions she has always played the lead. *The Madwoman of Chaillot* is a vehicle that, but for a quirk of time, could have been written for her.

Hepburn films have never been less than very good, and several have been somewhat more than excellent. *The Madwoman of Chaillot* is not in the first group, but it doesn't quite make the second one either.

Katharine Hepburn is 61 now, and is showing her age in the long-shots as well as the close-ups. Gauze, soft focus, and gellatincovered lights cannot bring back the youth of the thirties. But she still has her charm.

Katharine Hepburn has performed for four decades of movie-goers and four decades of critics. Many of today's critics have never seen her early films. They know Hepburn only as an established star, without ever wondering how she became established. They dismiss her performance as "typical" and "average", which is all very fine and good except that "typical" for Katharine Hepburn is a level of competence beyond most current acting.



Katherine Hepburn, starring as "The Madwoman of Chaillot", has a wonderfully wild scheme to save the world in the Warner Bros.-Seven Arts film.

Her legend has created an image that she must walk onto the screen to fill. But too few critics have seen the angular, lovely girl with the soft voice; all they know is the harsh voice of the neurotic of later films. To them, it's as though the early years never were. Perhaps this gives them objectivity on an individual film, but it blinds them to the magic of her films.

The Madwoman of Chaillot, as a screenplay, is witty, clever, humorous and touching at times, but somewhat disjointed. The story "is a story of the triumph of Good over Evil. Obviously it is a fantasy". Thrown into the mixture are stories of love fulfilled and love unrequited. Add for good measure the defense and condemnation of money and capitalists, a plot to raze Paris in order to dig for oil, et cetera, et cetera, and you have a film worthy of the talents of Bryan (The Wrong Box) Forbes. He gives each line its due, but the tailoring of a play to fit Hepburn's requirements left him with material that was somewhat difficult to juggle.

The photographers have done everything in their power to aid Hepburn. One shot even had gauze built into the set in such a way that in close-up the shot was soft, and then the camera dollied back to reveal a piece of loose weave burlap hanging in front of her. Other effects used were the soft, dust-filled sunlight of darkened rooms with high windows, and warm colours to give strength to the illusion. One really bad move was the slow motion of the illusion love scene, which is a direct copy of the one Forbes used in *The Wrong Box*.

The music is okay, the editing is clear, the technical side is fine. The sets and costuming are nothing special. But the acting, oh, the acting.

Paul Henried (Casablanca) plays a French officer who is quite secure about international power because when Europe goes off, he says, there will be a French bomb right in the thick of it all.

Oscar Homolka plays a commissar the way a commissar has never been played. A devout capitalist, he throws a speaker off a party platform for referring badly about his latest scheme, and speaks of her as "the late chairwoman".

Claude Dauphin offers his services at an accident, and the cop asks him: "Do you have any medical qualifications, sir?" To

which he has to answer: "Possibly not, but I am a doctor." Typical dialogue throughout the film.

Donald Pleasance turns out a masterful performance as a capitalist mastermind. Yul Brynner gives one of his greatest performances as Pleasance's accomplice. Add in John Gavin as an evangelist from Texas and Charles Boyer, as Charles Boyer, both in the plot as well, and you've got the general idea.

Danny Kaye, as the ragpicker, creates a character in his brief period on the screen that easily steals the film.

In one scene, a kangaroo court where the madwoman tries the plotters, the ragpicker speaks in their defense by proxy. His eloquence and his power have been unequalled on the screen in an oration for the defense since Paul Muni played Emil Zola in 1937. And I am not forgetting Spencer Tracy in *Inherit the Wind*. There has been some talk of Kaye being up for an Oscar, but then there was some talk about John Wayne winning one for *True Grit*.

The film is made of whimsy; the kind of whimsy that only a well-loved actress can bring to the screen and give life. No one but Katharine Hepburn could deliver a line like, "The world is not beautiful any more. The world is not happy" and get away with it. Nor could anyone else answer in reply to a comment that a friend is innocent and a V-I-R-G-I-N: "She can't be that innocent. She keeps canaries."

The film's final line would close this article well, but it's too good to kill. Instead, let me quote another of the speeches: "It's an old song that you might remember some day. Stay and fall in love."

THE MADWOMAN OF CHAILLOT
(Warner Bros.-Seven Arts, 1969) Directed by Brian Forbes, Produced by Ely Landau. Based on the play by Jean Giraudoux, translated into English by Maurice Valency. Screenplay by Edward Anhalt. Photographed by Claude Renoir and Burnett Gaffey. With Katharine Hepburn, Charles Boyer, Claude Dauphin, Edith Evans, John Gavin, Paul Henried, Oscar Homolka, Margaret Leighton, Guilietta Masina, Nanette Newman, Richard Chamberlain, Yul Brynner, Donald Pleasance and Danny Kaye.



Danny Kaye delivering the greatest screen defense since Paul Muni as impassioned French lawyer Emile Zola defended Jewish Captain Dreyfus.