

I Believe...
Time Has A Short Memory
By Rhett DeVelay
(c)2004-2009 Ardecy Music, R. DeVelay (Clements)

I believe...it's truly sad that Time has a way of erasing each generation's memory of once famous movie actors, in particular. And, I'm not talking about the silent screen actors who started it all. A lot of people still remember the American super stars of the 30's, 40's or 50's such as Clark Gable, Spencer Tracy, Bette Davis, Joan Crawford, Humphrey Bogart, Elizabeth Taylor, and Katherine Hepburn. But, how many remember the recently deceased Alan Bates, Uta Hagen, and Ann Miller? Or, those who are long gone: Norma Shearer, Carole Lombard, Tyrone Power, William Powell, Frederick March, Jean Arthur, Marjorie Main, Charlie Ruggles, Charles Laughton, Elsa Lanchester, Walter Pidgeon, Joan Blondell, Ed Wynn, Joseph Cotton, Rudy Vallee, Richard Widmark, Randolph Scott, Veronica Lake. Why are they, and countless others, forgotten when they were as famous, then, as Nicole Kidman, Bill Murray, Kate Hudson, Tom Cruise, Reese Witherspoon, Mike Myers, Jennifer Aniston, and Keanu Reeves are, today?

Those actors of yesteryear also inspired fashion and hair styles, as do our current actors, but although some of them were famous supporting actors that audiences actually cheered when they came onscreen (Mischa Auer, Eugene Pallette, Billie Burke, Margaret Dumont, Eve Arden, Mary Boland, Joe E. Brown, Charlie Ruggles, Joan Blondell, Ed Wynn, Elsa Lanchester) almost all the others I've listed were downright famous 'A' list actors. Out of curiosity, to see if this was strictly a generational thing, I conducted a test using my "research team": I E-mailed 12 friends of various ages and asked them to put an asterisk next to all the names they recognized and, if possible, what film they were remembered for. Of all the responses eight people said they had no clue who most or any of these actors were. Two people said they knew of about five of the actors, and two people could name films for about half of the actors and knew of the names of several more, but no one remembered Charlie Ruggles: He was a staple of any good comedy in the 30's and was as famous as John Belushi was in his day.

Of all the actors I listed, Tyrone Power should arguably have been the most recognizable name since he was a huge heartthrob, however, Norma Shearer and William Powell were by far the biggest stars of them all. But, how many people under 50 can name one film either of them starred in? Powell's most famous film(s) were probably the "Thin Man" series with Myrna Loy (remember her?). As for Norma Shearer, who was nominated six times for an Academy Award but never won, her most famous film was probably "The Women" also starring a few names some might remember: Joan Crawford, Rosalind Russell, Paulette Goddard, Joan Fontaine. And Marjorie Maine: Again, another great supporting player that always made an audience smile when she came on screen. She was the equivalent of someone like Whoopi Goldberg, and Marjorie was actually the leading actress in a wildly popular series of films, made in the 50's, about mountain folk in the "Ma and Pa Kettle" film series.

Some of our current super stars may be remembered 60 to 70 years from now, but who knows? And, I'm speaking only of film actors, not singers, painters, or composers. They can have an even shorter shelf life even though we may still sing their songs and be accustomed to their artwork and yet not know who created it. And all these people made a lot of money for their respective studios. Three in particular, Mae West, Esther Williams and Shirley Temple, actually saved their studios from going bankrupt yet the current crop of studio executives who run the major studios probably have little or no clue who those wonderful actors were. And what's even worse, they don't care. But we should try to remember some of them. I encourage those of you who don't know anything about films from the 30's to the 50's to experiment and rent some older films: You may be surprised at how enjoyable a lot of these old films can be, plus, it's fun to see a bit part played by an actor that would later become famous in their own right. Even if we didn't live when these long gone actors did, whether we realize it or not, they can still make us laugh, cry or think. By the way, if you're looking to buy almost any film that's really hard to find contact moviehunter@moviehunter.tv. They'll have it. Please feel free to contact me at: Musical.Theatre@hotmail.com.