

screened out

GAY IMAGES ON FILM

SCREENED OUT: GAY IMAGES IN FILM (June 2007)
(44 films/6 Decades/1912-1970)

Based on the Book "SCREENED OUT:
"Playing Gay in Hollywood from Edison to Stonewall"
(by Richard Barrios)

Monday, June 4
Screened Out: Gay Images in Film
Night One - The Early Years

At a time when much of the world is hotly debating rights that should or should not be granted to lesbians and gay men, it's useful to recall that the controversy has been present for a far greater time than many people realize. The struggle has, in fact, long been evident in American life, and sometimes even more evident in American film. Richard Barrios's book SCREENED OUT traces the history of the movies' portrayal of gays and lesbians from the earliest years through the end of the 1960s and the birth of the Gay Liberation movement. Many of those portrayals, in the long-ago days of silent movies and early talkies, were brief and fleeting, just as real-life men and women who acknowledged their homosexuality were compelled to lead furtive and sometimes shadowy lives. However, some of the cinematic portrayals of "the love that dare not speak its name," were more substantial, as the first evening's programming of the SCREENED OUT series demonstrates. These early characters provide a window not only on how homosexuality was portrayed in film, but how it was perceived by the general public, and in many cases, by homosexuals themselves. The men were most often flamboyant dandies ("pansies"), the women usually wore close-cropped hair and smoked cigars-stereotypes, to be sure, but with some groundings in gay and lesbian realities, both positive and otherwise, as they existed in the earlier parts of the 20th century.

Algie, the Miner (1912), directed by the pioneering filmmaker Alice Guy-Blache, predates even the Charlie Chaplin comedies with its wild-and-wooly tale of an effeminate Easterner who makes his fortune out west. The Lon Chaney horror-comedy *The Monster* (1925) costars Johnny Arthur, who often portrayed high-strung "nervous nellies" in late silents and early talkies. The 1926 comedy *Exit Smiling*, a vehicle for the comedian and gay icon Beatrice Lillie, was the first feature film appearance of Franklin Pangborn, who became the movies' foremost interpreter of covert gay roles in the 1930s and 1940s. And the Oscar-winning *The Broadway Melody* (1929) was both the first true original film musical and the talkies' first instance of a flamboyant theatrical type-the giggly costume designer played by Drew Demarest. Also running on the first night: *Way Out West* (1930), in which MGM's gay star William Haines occasionally comes close to "outing" himself; *The Office Wife* (1930), with character actress Blanche Friderici donning tweeds to play a cigar-smoking "literary type"; and the backstage epic *Stage Mother* (1933), in which Alice Brady (in the title role) pushes her daughter onto the boards with a big assist from a flaming dance coach (Jay Eaton).

8:00 PM *Algie, the Miner* ('12)
8:30 PM *The Monster* ('25)
10:15 PM *Exit Smiling* ('26)
11:45 PM *The Broadway Melody* ('29)
1:45 AM *Way Out West* ('30)
3:00 AM *The Office Wife* ('30)
4:15 AM *Stage Mother* ('33)

All times Eastern



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GAY IMAGES ON FILM

Wednesday, June 6

Screened Out: Gay Images in Film
Night Two - Gays Before the Code

Prior to the enforcement of the oppressive Motion Picture Production Code in 1934, Hollywood films treated audiences to a smorgasbord of sex, crime, and other transgressive delights. Nor, as is clear from tonight's selections, did the movies shy away from homosexuality. Cecil B. DeMille's *The Sign of the Cross* (1932), with violence and nudity crammed alongside of faith and spirituality, is one of the most extreme of the Pre-Code efforts. Charles Laughton became a top star with his portrayal of a (literally) flaming Nero, but the film's most blatant sequence is undoubtedly "The Naked Moon," a song and dance of lesbian seduction performed by the exotic Joyzelle. *In Our Betters* (1933), with gay director George Cukor filming gay author Somerset Maugham's comedy of manners, the plot crises are resolved only with the over-the-top entrance of the unforgettable Ernest (Tyrell Davis), a dance instructor whose florid and rouged ways raised hackles with both censors and studio chiefs. In the wake of this portrayal, RKO's *Double Harness* (1933) was given a significant piece of surgery: Jean Malin, an "out" gay nightclub emcee in real life, found his one scene reshot with another actor due to studio fears over Malin's fame and notoriety. MGM's *Queen Christina* (1933) also ran into censor difficulties, but these were over its portrayal of the queen's fictitious heterosexual romance; the more authentic love affair between the queen (Greta Garbo) and Countess Ebba (Elizabeth Young) was allowed to remain. Later in the night, the 1934 musical extravaganza *Wonder Bar* memorably features a male-male duo out on the dance floor, and *The Sport Parade* (1932) includes enough gay allusions and undercurrents for its costar, William Gargan, to have later described its depiction of his relationship with Joel McCrea as "Boy meets boy; boy loses boy; boy gets boy."

8:00 PM *The Sign of the Cross* ('32)

10:15 PM *Our Betters* ('33)

11:45 PM *Double Harness* ('33)

1:00 AM *Queen Christina* ('33)

2:45 AM *Wonder Bar* ('34)

4:15 AM *The Sport Parade* ('32)

Monday, June 11

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Night Three - Men and Women Behind Bars

Homosexuality has frequently been a feature of prison movies, perhaps because the censors seemed to be more permissive when such frankness was made part of a penal environment. In the 1932 chain-gang expose' *Hell's Highway*, a corrupt prison official enjoys some down time with the camp's effeminate cook. The following year, in *Ladies They Talk About*, Barbara Stanwyck finds herself behind bars with a cigar-smoking type and her fluffy girlfriend. The central conflict in Warner Bros.'s *Caged* (1950), the ultimate women's prison melodrama, is that of a sadistic matron (Oscar nominee Hope Emerson) tormenting young inmate Eleanor Parker, who also attracts the fond eye of vice queen Lee Patrick. Also from 1950 is the reform-school saga *So Young, So Bad*, which ran into censor trouble with its blunt hints of affection between runaways Anne Jackson and Enid Pulver.

The 1957 drama *The Strange One* starkly portrays a prison of another sort: a brutal military academy dominated by a sadistic Ben Gazzara, who enjoys terrorizing his adoring acolyte "Cockroach" (Paul). *Women's Prison* (1955) features a self-explanatory title and yet another sadist: ultra-nasty warden Amelia Van Zandt, played to the manner born by Ida Lupino.

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GAY IMAGES ON FILM

8:00 PM *Hell's Highway* ('32)
9:15 PM *Ladies They Talk About* ('33)
10:30 PM *Caged* ('50)
12:15 AM *So Young, So Bad* ('50)
2:00 AM *The Strange One* ('57)
4:00 AM *Women's Prison* ('55)

Wednesday, June 13

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Night Four -The Dark Side: Film Noir and Crime

At a time when some real-life lesbians and gay men were compelled to live secretly or even illegally, gay and lesbian characters and undercurrents were often a part of movies dealing with the shady side of the law. In 1955, the tough and violent film noir *The Big Combo* (TCM Premiere) featured Lee Van Cleef and Earl Holliman as another gay couple definitely on the wrong side of the law, working as mob hit men. The film version of Tennessee Williams's play *Suddenly, Last Summer* (1959) was the most controversial film of its day, with its all-star cast (Elizabeth Taylor, Katharine Hepburn, Montgomery Clift) and A-list director (Joseph L. Mankiewicz) put at the service of some sensational subject matter--the mysterious and ghastly death of a New Orleans poet who, it turns out, was a gay predator. Ms. Taylor returned to gay-tinged material in John Huston's *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1967), adapted from Carson McCullers's gothic tale of murder on an army base in the South. Marlon Brando stars opposite Taylor, giving a memorable performance as her closeted officer-husband who is obsessed with enlisted man Robert Forster. Rounding out the evening are two classics from the 1940s. *Gilda* (1946) features the every-which-way romantic triangle of Rita Hayworth, at her most electrifying, plus Glenn Ford and George Macready. And John Huston's *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) features a definitive portrait of deviousness: Peter Lorre as the gay crook Joel Cairo.

8:00 PM *The Big Combo* ('55)
10:00 PM *Suddenly, Last Summer* ('59)
12:00 AM *Reflections in a Golden Eye* ('67)
2:00 AM *Gilda* ('46)
4:00 AM *The Maltese Falcon* ('41)

Monday, June 18

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Night Five – Horror

We move now from the melodramatic shadows of crime films to out-and-out horror, a genre in which gay characters have served as villains and victims since the 1930s. The sophisticated haunted-house story *The Uninvited* became somewhat of a cult movie in 1944 when it became obvious, at least to some lesbian and gay audiences, that its (female) ghost had been in a highly-charged relationship with one of its live characters, the domineering Miss Holloway (Cornelia Otis Skinner). The following year, MGM's adaptation of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* raised the hackles of the Roman Catholic censorious Legion of Decency after critics commented on how well writer-director Albert Lewin had been able to convey the homosexual undercurrents in the classic Oscar Wilde tale. *Voodoo Island*, from 1957, is a notably less prestigious horror yarn than its two predecessors this evening, despite the presence of Boris Karloff in the starring (and non-villainous) role. It's also one of the major

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GAY IMAGES ON FILM

surprises in SCREENED OUT, as it features the most explicitly frank lesbian character (played by Jean Engstrom) in American film since the pre-Code days. Robert Wise's *The Haunting* (1963; not to be confused with the 1999 remake) is one of the most genuinely chilling of all cinematic ghost stories. Claire Bloom costars as the beautiful and sophisticated Theo, who hails from Greenwich Village and is both a psychic and a lesbian. Also from Greenwich Village, and also lesbian, are the chic devil-worshippers in *The Seventh Victim* (1943), one of the most affecting and subtle of the Val Lewton horror classics.

8:00 PM *The Uninvited* ('44)
10:00 PM *The Picture of Dorian Gray* ('45)
12:00 AM *Voodoo Island* ('57)
1:30 AM *The Haunting* ('63)
3:30 AM *The Seventh Victim* ('43)

Wednesday, June 20

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Night Six – Comedy

Movies frequently laugh at gay characters. Fortunately, and almost as often, they laugh with them, and so tonight's lineup features a varied group of gay-themed comedians. *Manhattan Parade* (1931) is one of the lesser-known Warner Bros. wisecracking comedies. Set at a theatrical costume house, it costars Bobby Watson as Paisley, the company's ace designer. (In later years, Watson moved from playing gay characters to being the movies' foremost portrayer of Adolf Hitler.) In George Cukor's *Sylvia Scarlett* (1935), Katharine Hepburn stars as Sylvia, who cuts her hair and masquerades as Sylvester, thus causing sexual confusion in costars Brian Aherne and Cary Grant. Confusion also runs rampant in the supernatural 1940 comedy *Turnabout*, which features an upwardly mobile husband and wife (John Hubbard and Carole Landis) who magically manage to exchange bodies. In a supporting role, Franklin Pangborn essayed one of his most explicitly gay roles, thus bringing down the wrath of the Motion Picture Production Code. Gay themes frequently turned up in the sex comedies popular in the early 1960s, especially those starring Doris Day. Case in point: *That Touch of Mink* (1962), in which Gig Young's psychiatrist suspects him of having an affair with Cary Grant. The laughs continue late into the night with *The Producers* (1968). No targets are safe from writer-director Mel Brooks, and this includes Broadway director Roger DeBris (Patrick Hewitt) and his exotic partner Carmen Giya (Andreas Voutsinas). In Vincente Minnelli's 1957 *Designing Woman*, sports writer Gregory Peck has a culture clash with wife Lauren Bacall's world of fashion and theater, as embodied by dance director Randy (played by famed choreographer Jack Cole).

8:00 PM *Manhattan Parade* ('31)
9:30 PM *Sylvia Scarlett* ('36)
11:15 PM *Turnabout* ('40)
12:45 AM *That Touch of Mink* ('62)
2:30 AM *The Producers* ('68)
4:00 AM *Designing Woman* ('57)

Monday, June 25

Screened Out: Gay Images in Film

Night Seven - Code-Busters (Part One)/Out and Open (Part One)

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GAY IMAGES ON FILM

C-B (Part 1): After years of domination by the restrictive Motion Picture Production Code, movies began, in the later 1950s, to explore franker themes and ideas. Among the films to successfully extend the limits of the Code were several having gay themes as their central premise. It took MGM nearly three years to come up with a Code-viable adaptation of the Broadway smash *Tea and Sympathy*. In Vincente Minnelli's 1956 film version, John Kerr repeats his stage role as the pre-school teenager accused of being gay (or, in this Code-softened version, a "sister boy"). Another high-profile director, William Wyler, first filmed Lillian Hellman's stage hit *The Children's Hour* in 1936, with both the title and the subject matter—accusations of lesbianism hurled at two women running a girl's school—changed. (This version was retitled *These Three*.) When Wyler decided to refilm the story in 1962, the Production Code was still objecting—but this time, after extensive wranglings, Wyler reinstated both the title and the theme with the assistance of some major star power: Audrey Hepburn, Shirley MacLaine, James Garner, and Oscar nominee Fay Bainter.

O/O (Part 1): When the Motion Picture Production Code was finally dismantled in 1968 in favor of the new rating system (G, R, X, etc.), the movies were finally free to tackle previously taboo material. It seemed for a while that gay/lesbian themes would be part of Hollywood's newfound explicitness, but after some early efforts the movies essentially relegated the gays to the fringes, or put them back in the closet completely. Stanley Donen's *Staircase* (1969) was one of the highest-profile of these "out" titles, in large part because it featured an improbable (if memorable) romantic star teaming: Rex Harrison and Richard Burton as a bickering pair of London hairstylists. The "Out and Open" programming continues with the ground-breaking film made just prior to, and released right after, the Stonewall Riots that marked the beginning of the new gay movement. Fittingly, *The Boys in the Band* (1970), adapted by William Friedkind from Mart Crowley's play, looks both backward to a more closeted time, and forward to a freer time for gay men and lesbians. The Boys contains a fair number of the old stereotypes, to be sure, along with some indications of new directions for real and reel gays alike..

While Production Code seals were given to *Advise and Consent* and *The Children's Hour*, the Code's approval and seal were denied the British drama *Victim*, which remains as timely today as it was in 1961. Dirk Bogarde, England's leading film actor at the time, raised eyebrows and remade his career by starring as a prominent barrister being blackmailed for a long-ago gay infatuation.

Code-Busters (Part One):

8:00 PM *Tea and Sympathy* ('56)

10:15 PM *The Children's Hour* ('61)

Out and Open (Part One):

12:15 AM *Staircase* ('69)

2:15 AM *The Boys in the Band* ('70)

Overnight/Code-Buster bonus title:

4:30 AM *Victim* ('61)

Wednesday, June 27

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Night Eight - Code-Busters (Part Two/Out and Open (Part Two))

On this, the final night of the SCREENED OUT series, we look at some of the major films to challenge the weakening Production Code with explicit gay content, and then a pair which depicted "out" lesbianism in the first flush of the movies' new, ratings-system-mandated liberality.

C-B (Part 2): In 1962 Otto Preminger, no stranger to cinematic provocation, pushed hard and successfully against Code strictures to feature a gay-themed subplot—and the screen's first visit to a gay bar—in the multistar political drama *Advise and Consent*. That same year saw the Code challenged some more when veteran star Barbara Stanwyck was

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GAY IMAGES ON FILM

cast as a New Orleans madam having an affair with one of her "girls" (Capucine) in the aptly titled *Walk On the Wild Side*. O/O (Part 2): *The Fox* (1968) was one of the first films to be given an "R" rating, in large part because of its graphic depiction of the lesbian portion of the love triangle that had been somewhat less overt in the D.H. Lawrence story. Sandy Dennis and Anne Heywood are the lovers, and Keir Dullea is the "fox" coming between them. The series concludes with another provocative theater adaptation. Robert Aldrich's grimly funny tale of London lesbians, *The Killing of Sister George* (1968), is in some way similar to *The Boys in the Band*--making use of the old stereotypes while also exploring new possibilities.

It has been nearly forty years since these pioneering films came to the screen, and debates about gay rights still rage on many fronts: marriage, adoption issues, spousal rights, health benefits, and numerous others. Despite the occasional success of a *Brokeback Mountain*, the movies, too, are still grappling. SCREENED OUT, then, is the prologue to everything still being discussed both on and off the screen.

Code-Busters (Part Two):

8:00 PM *Advise and Consent* ('62)

10:30 PM *Walk on the Wild Side* ('62)

Out and Open (Part Two):

12:30 AM *The Fox* ('67)

2:30 AM *The Killing of Sister George* ('68)