



## 2009 PARAMOUNT SUMMER FILM SERIES

### MR. DEEDS GOES TO TOWN

(1936) 115m.

**Director:** Frank Capra. **Screenplay:** Robert Riskin.  
**Cinematography:** Joseph Walker. **Editor:** Gene Havlick.  
**Music:** Howard Jackson. **Art Director:** Stephen Goosson.  
**Cast:** Gary Cooper, Jean Arthur, George Bancroft, Lionel Stander, Douglass Dumbrille, Mayo Methot, Raymond Walburn, Walter Catlett, H.B. Warner.

### YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU

(1938) 127m.

**Director:** Frank Capra. **Screenplay:** Robert Riskin from the play by George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart. **Cinematography:** Joseph Walker.  
**Editor:** Gene Havlick. **Music:** Dimitri Tiomkin.  
**Art Director:** Stephen Goosson. **Cast:** Jean Arthur, Lionel Barrymore, James Stewart, Edward Arnold, Mischa Auer, Ann Miller, Spring Byington, Eddie "Rochester" Anderson, Donald Meek, Halliwell Hobbes, Dub Taylor, Samuel S. Hinds, Harry Davenport, Charles Lane.

The cinema of Frank Capra contains a great deal of optimism about the basic goodness of human nature and many of his films show the value of and celebrate the virtues of unselfishness and hard work. His wholesome, feel-good themes have caused some critics to label his films "Capra-corn," but for those who hold his cinematic vision in high regard, the preferred term is "Capraesque." Indeed, many of the types of "feel-good" films which have been made over the years can be said to constitute a genre of their own, one which owes a great debt to the legacy of Frank Capra.

Born in Sicily in 1897, Capra and his family immigrated to the United States in 1903, eventually settling in Los Angeles. Young Capra attended the Throop Institute (now the California Institute of Technology) and graduated in 1918 with a degree in chemical engineering. He served in the U.S. Army during World War I and became a naturalized citizen in 1920, adopting the name Frank Russell Capra.

Capra began his film career working as a prop man in silent films. However, he soon began writing and directing silent film comedies starring Harry Langdon and the *Our Gang* kids. He went to work for Mack Sennett in 1924 and then moved to Columbia Pictures (which, at the time, was considered a "major minor" studio, just a notch above poverty row). It was there that Capra formed friendships with screenwriter Robert Riskin (who was married to Fay Wray) and cameraman Joseph Walker. The three would work together on a number of films over the years.

Capra's first feature for Columbia was *That Certain Thing* in 1928. He worked steadily for the studio over the next few years producing more than a dozen films (both silent and sound) that ranged from comedy to drama to action/adventure. His first hit film was *Platinum Blonde*, a 1931 comedy starring Loretta Young, Robert Williams, and Jean Harlow. He made several films over the next few years before making movie history with *It Happened One*

*Night* (1934) which won five Academy Awards: Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor (Clark Gable), Best Actress (Claudette Colbert) and Best Screenplay (Robert Riskin). That feat went unequaled for forty years until *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* repeated the sweep in 1975. The success of *It Happened One Night* moved Columbia Pictures into the ranks of the major studios and gave Capra the freedom to make a steady stream of inspirational and humanitarian films.

In *Mr. Deeds Goes To Town*, tuba-playing Longfellow Deeds (Cooper) inherits \$20 million and reluctantly leaves his little home in Mandrake Falls and moves into a New York City mansion full of servants and surrounded by the corrupt, cynical citizens of the big city. Both reporter Jean Arthur and press agent Lionel Stander think him a huckleberry at first, but they are won over by his innocence, patriotism, humility, and wisdom. When he decides to give away his money to small farmers who are failing—a controversial plot point—he is forced to undergo a hearing to determine if he's insane. Although loony neighbors from Mandrake Falls claim he's "pixilated," he proves to be the sanest person in court.

*Mr. Deeds Goes To Town* was Capra's first film to really attack the city, to show that it has deprived its people of their basic human values; as in his later films, only the uncorrupted small-town boy can lead them back to the right path and the happy ending seems completely natural and devoid of cynicism. *Mr. Deeds Goes To Town* received five Academy Award nominations including: Best Picture, Best Director (winner), Best Actor (Cooper) and Best Screenplay. It ranks number seventy on the American Film Institute's list of the 100 Funniest American Movies of All Time and became a short-lived television series in the 1960s. Forget the disastrous remake *Mr. Deeds* (2002) with Adam Sandler in the title role. Here's the real thing.

*You Can't Take It With You* is about the idealistic son (Stewart) of a rich, cold-hearted businessman (Arnold) who wants to marry his secretary (Arthur) although her nutty, carefree family will never meet his parents' social standards. Wedding plans seem to be off for good when Stewart brings his parents over for dinner (one night early) and everyone lands in jail. Grandfather Lionel Barrymore, who heads Arthur's family clan, tries to explain to Arnold that having friends, not money, is the secret to happiness and that he must become less interested in business if he's to be a good father to Stewart.

There are many funny moments and the cast is great. However, the film is a bit both preachy and stagey, many of the political and social points made are slightly vague and unconvincing and the theme of "the richest man is the man with the most friends" is one Capra would revisit in his masterpiece *It's A Wonderful Life* (1946). But there are good scenes between Stewart and Arthur where they talk openly about families, hopes, dreams, and their love for each other. These moments are surprisingly quiet and mature for a screwball comedy. Particularly effective is their scene in the park where the camera doesn't cut away during their long conversation.

*You Can't Take It With You* received seven Academy Award nominations including: Best Picture (winner), Best Director (winner), Best Supporting Actress (Byington) and Best Screenplay. It too was made into a short-lived television series.

— Frank Campbell

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