

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 409

“Famous Players in Famous Plays”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

Unlike his fellow studio moguls, Adolf Zukor was more interested in the business side of Paramount Pictures than in the creative side.

Under his leadership, Paramount released more films than any other studio, making it the Ford Motor Company of Hollywood. And under his leadership, Paramount’s business practices attracted the attention of the US Department of Justice’s Antitrust Division.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 409. Famous Players in Famous Plays.

This episode is the fifth in our series on the major Hollywood film studios of the era, and today we are going to take a look at the number two studio of the time, Paramount Pictures.

Paramount is the second-oldest American film studio still in business in our time; the oldest is Universal. Its origins trace back to Adolf Zukor, a Jewish Hungarian born in 1873. He lost both of his parents by the age of seven, and emigrated to the United States, the land of opportunity, at the age of 18. He secured an apprenticeship with a furrier. By the age of 20, he owned his own business, designing, sewing, and selling furs. His company quickly expanded, and Zukor became quite wealthy. The land of opportunity, indeed.

In 1903, when Zukor was 30, he was approached by his cousin, Max Goldstein. Max owned a chain of movie theaters in upstate New York and was looking for money with which to expand his business. Max got the loan, and Zukor developed an interest in owning his own chain of nickelodeons.

As was the case with many theater owners, as we’ve seen, in 1912, he made the jump to film production, in order to create a reliable source of films for his own theaters. Zukor was nothing if not ambitious, and named his studio Famous Players Film Company; its advertising motto was

“Famous Players in Famous Plays,” and that’s exactly what he meant, as in one of the company’s first productions, 1913’s *The Prisoner of Zenda*, based on the 1894 novel by British author Sir Anthony Hope Hopkins and starring noted stage actors of the time. Famous players in famous plays, you see?

That same year, 1913, Jesse L. Lasky, an ex-vaudevillian who had graduated to producing shows on Broadway, teamed up with his brother-in-law, Samuel Goldfish, before he changed his name to Samuel Goldwyn, and a Broadway actor and director named Cecil B. DeMille to form his own film studio, which he modestly named the Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Company.

A year after that, in 1914, the owner of a Utah movie theater chain bought five film distribution companies and merged them into one big distribution company. The new mega-distributor was originally named Progressive Pictures, but that was soon changed to Paramount Pictures. Paramount would be the first nationwide film distribution company; previously, studios had to negotiate separate distribution agreements with several distributors to reach different regions of the United States. Paramount provided one-stop shopping, as it were.

The ever-ambitious Adolf Zukor, whose business strategy could be summed up as “bigger is better,” saw the logic in forming a national distribution company and asked himself, “Why stop there?” In 1916, he negotiated a three-way merger of Famous Players, the Lasky Company, and Paramount. The new corporation was named Famous Players-Lasky, with a hyphen between “players” and “Lasky.” Its film distribution division would still be called Paramount Pictures.

The new combined company would be for a time the largest motion picture company in the world, and Adolf Zukor would be its president. Zukor was more interested in the business side than his studio mogul peers, like Jack Warner or Darryl F. Zanuck. He left film production in the hands of Lasky, DeMille, and Goldwyn. Zukor had two basic principles for running a studio, and you already know what they are. The first was “Famous Players in Famous Plays,” and the second was “Bigger is better.”

In the category of “Famous Players in Famous Plays,” Zukor made use of his deep pockets to sign many of the biggest name actors to work for his studio, including Douglas Fairbanks, Gloria Swanson, and Rudolf Valentino, and especially Mary Pickford, to whom Zukor paid \$100,000 a year, quite a lot of money for the time.

In the category of “Bigger is better,” Zukor bought up movie theater chains to provide a captive market for his films. It was Zukor who pioneered the vertical integration of the film industry, with the businesses of production, distribution, and exhibition all conducted under one corporate roof. His huge business operation and his roster of leading stars gave Zukor and his company tremendous bargaining power. It was Zukor who introduced the practice that was known as “block booking,” which meant that if a movie house or chain wanted to book the next Douglas Fairbanks blockbuster, they couldn’t get just that one title; they would have to commit to a schedule of dozens of films, most of which they knew nothing about, in order to get the one film

they wanted. Often the theaters were forced to pay for their block bookings up front, putting up front money for films that had not yet been made, and thus in effect helping Paramount to finance them.

And it was Zukor who introduced the practice, now standard in the industry, of charging a theater a percentage of its box office receipts, rather than a flat rental fee, for the right to show a film.

In 1927, the name of the company was changed to Paramount Famous Lasky Corporation. That same year, the company began distribution of animated cartoons produced by Fleischer Studios in New York, one of the leading animation studios of the time. I mentioned them before; suffice it to say this was the studio that produced Betty Boop and Popeye cartoons, which were among the most popular cartoons of the Thirties. Later they would produce Superman cartoons. Fleischer Studios animated shorts were distributed by Paramount until 1942, when the studio acquired the animation house outright and changed its name to Famous Studios.

Also that year, the studio established Paramount News as its in-house newsreel business, with the slogan, "The Eyes of the World." When newsreels with sound were introduced, that changed to "The Eyes and Ears of the World."

This was also the year that Paramount Famous Lasky released *Wings*, an action romance about two American fighter pilots in the First World War and the woman they both loved, played by Clara Bow, one of the biggest stars of the time. *Wings* is mostly remembered today as the film awarded the first ever Academy Award for Best Picture. It is also the first, and only, silent film to receive that honor (unless you count *The Artist*, a sort of silent film parody, which won Best Picture in 2011.)

Wings was also a big commercial success, both for its realistic recreations of aerial combat and its good fortune to have been released shortly after Charles Lindbergh's transatlantic flight, which sparked great public interest in aviation in the US. It also had the bad fortune to come out just two months before Warner Brothers released *The Jazz Singer* and the public began to lose interest in silent movies. Zukor's studio hastily produced a soundtrack of music and sound effects to accompany the film.

Under Zukor, Paramount was quick to embrace sound technology. Zukor shrewdly signed the Marx Brothers to a four-picture deal. I already talked about these early Marx Brothers films and their relationship to sound technology in episode 274. The Marx Brothers were an ideal act to put in a talking picture, because their stage shows were based on snappy dialog and musical numbers, two forms of entertainment that can only be performed in a talking picture.

All four of those films were commercial successes, but after the brothers finished out their contract, Zeppo left the group to become a talent agent, and MGM poached the other three, who made their next pictures at that studio.

In the meanwhile, Zukor and Paramount entered the radio business in 1928, when the studio bought a 50% interest in the new Columbia Broadcasting System, a start-up radio network created to compete against industry giant NBC.

Unfortunately for Zukor, although “Bigger Is Better” worked for him as a business strategy most of the time, it failed him when the Great Depression hit. Paramount was in debt and overextended. In March 1933, the nadir of the Great Depression in the United States, Paramount filed for bankruptcy.

The company went into receivership until 1935, when it emerged reorganized and now under the more simple and elegant name, Paramount Pictures. Amazingly, though Zukor managed the studio’s business side and was most responsible for the company’s bankruptcy, he convinced the receivers that it was all Lasky’s fault. He was out and Zukor became head of production for the company.

Afterward, Jesse Lasky worked as an independent producer, and after a stint at RKO, landed at Warner Brothers, where he produced films until his death in 1958.

Paramount and Zukor continued the practice of signing up big name stars who made big box office draws: Maurice Chevalier, Marlene Dietrich, Gary Cooper, Mae West, W.C. Fields, Fredric March, Bing Crosby, Bob Hope, Jack Benny, Carole Lombard, Jeanette MacDonald, George Raft, and Cary Grant, among others.

The formula of star power plus block booking kept Paramount prosperous; in the Thirties the studio was releasing 60+ films every year, though it has to be said that few of them are well known today. There was 1939’s *Union Pacific*, directed by De Mille, which I’ve already mentioned, *Beau Geste*, starring Gary Cooper, and *Gulliver’s Travels*, a feature-length animated film produced by Fleischer Studios, Paramount’s answer to Disney’s *Snow White*.

The year 1940 saw the release of *Road to Singapore*, the first of the Bing Crosby-Bob Hope Road films, and in 1942 the musical *Holiday Inn*, starring Bing Crosby and introducing Irving Berlin’s song “White Christmas.” The hotel chain *Holiday Inn* was named after the movie.

Also in 1940, the United States Department of Justice began to take an interest in Paramount’s business practices and questioned whether they violated the Sherman Anti-Trust Act. Paramount signed a consent decree with the government, promising to desist from the practice of block booking.

[music: Mozart, *Rondo alla turca*.]

Ernst Lubitsch was born on January 29, 1892, in Berlin. His family was Jewish, his father an immigrant to Germany from the Russian Empire.

At the age of 19, he began a career on the Berlin stage. Two years later, he made his film debut. By 1920, Lubitsch had appeared in about 30 German films and was in transition to directing. After the war and before he turned thirty, Lubitsch had achieved international success and acclaim with his historical dramas, such as 1919's *Passion*, about Madame du Barry, mistress to King Louis XV of France, and 1920's *Deception*, about King Henry VIII of England and Anne Boleyn.

In 1922, Mary Pickford hired him to come to the United States and direct her in *Rosita*, an historical comedy drama. The film was a success, but Lubitsch and Pickford didn't get along and she released him from his contract. Jack Warner snagged him for Warner Brothers, with a six-picture deal that gave Lubitsch unprecedented freedom as a director.

It turned out that Lubitsch had a special gift for a certain kind of romantic comedy, on display in his Warner Brothers films, 1924's *The Marriage Circle* and 1926's *So This Is Paris*. But his first three films for Warner produced disappointing box-office results, so Warner sold the remainder of his contract to MGM and Paramount. His 1928 silent film *The Patriot*, about Russian Emperor Paul I, produced by Paramount, got him his first Academy Award nomination for Best Director.

When talking pictures came in, Lubitsch took up musicals such as his first sound film, *The Love Parade* in 1929, produced at Paramount and starring Maurice Chevalier and Jeanette MacDonald, in her film debut. This film got Lubitsch his second nomination for Best Director. Two more musical romantic comedies followed, also at Paramount: 1930's *Monte Carlo* and 1931's *The Smiling Lieutenant*, Paramount's highest grossing film of that year. In 1932, he went back to straight romantic comedy with *Trouble in Paradise* for Paramount, which he also co-wrote. In 1934, he directed a lavish musical for MGM, *The Merry Widow*, based on the 1905 operetta by Franz Lehár and again starring Maurice Chevalier and Jeanette MacDonald.

By this time, it had become clear not only that Lubitsch had a gift for romantic comedy, but for a specific flavor of romantic comedy, one that struck an elegant balance between cynicism and sincerity in the matters of love and marriage. Or, as one critic put it, Lubitsch's films were "elegant and ribald, sophisticated and earthy, urbane and bemused, frivolous yet profound. They were directed by a man who was amused by sex rather than frightened of it..." His unique take on romance came to be known as "the Lubitsch touch."

In 1935, Paramount hired him as its production manager, but Lubitsch proved not to be much of a manager and was fired after one year. He became a US citizen and returned to full-time directing. He married British actress Vivian Gaye. They had one child together, a daughter Nicola, in 1938. In 1939, Mrs. Lubitsch and their baby daughter were in London when the war broke out. She put the child and her nurse on a passenger liner to North America at once; unfortunately, the liner she chose was *SS Athenia*, which as you know, was sunk by a German U-boat on September 3, 1939, just hours after Britain declared war. Happily, the baby and her nurse survived the sinking.

By this time, Lubitsch was working for MGM. In 1939, he produced and directed *Ninotchka*, starring Greta Garbo and Melvyn Douglas, in which Garbo plays a stern, all-business Soviet emissary who comes to New York to reclaim jewels held by White Russian émigrés, and who falls in love with Melvyn Douglas. Billy Wilder co-wrote the screenplay. It was Garbo's first comedic role and MGM marketed the film under the tagline, "Garbo laughs!" It would earn her her third Academy Award nomination for Best Actress and be her next-to-last film appearance.

His next film was 1940's *The Shop Around the Corner*, a romantic comedy-drama starring Margaret Sullivan and James Stewart, who play two clerks who work in a shop in Budapest and despise each other, though they are unwittingly carrying on an anonymous romance with each other via the mail.

I've already confessed to being a big fan of radio star Jack Benny. He appeared in a few films during this time. Most notable are 1940's *Buck Benny Rides Again*, a parody Western that included all the main cast of his radio show, and 1941's *Charley's Aunt*, which involves Benny's character forced to put on a dress and pretend to be a woman, a la *Mrs. Doubtfire*.

When Lubitsch began work on his next film, which again he produced, directed, and co-wrote, this time released through United Artists, he wrote the main character with Benny in mind for the part. Benny was flattered and jumped at the opportunity to work with a director of Lubitsch's stature. Similarly, when Carole Lombard learned Lubitsch was looking for a leading lady for the project, she approached him to ask for the role.

The film, released in 1942, was called *To Be or Not to Be* and was...how should I describe it? A romantic dark comedy thriller, in which Benny and Lombard play Joseph and Maria Tura, who are the lead actors in a theatre company in Warsaw when the Germans invade Poland. The title refers to Benny's character's fondness for playing the lead role in *Hamlet*. When a Nazi spy arrives in occupied Poland with a list of names of members of the Polish resistance, the Turas and their theatre troupe employ their acting skills to waylay the spy and seize the list before he can deliver it to the Gestapo, while simultaneously Joseph Tura is given reason to believe his wife is cheating on him with a dashing young Polish pilot, played by Robert Stack.

To Be or Not to Be is an outstanding farce, made all the more remarkable by its application of Lubitsch's sly satire to the decidedly unfunny subject of Nazis. Audiences in 1942 had some difficulty reconciling themselves to the sensitive subject matter. Benny's own father walked out of the film just minutes into it, at the sight of his son in an SS uniform. Critics were split on whether the juxtaposition of romantic comedy with the bombing of Warsaw, or the scene in which Benny is left alone in a room with a corpse, were brilliant or tasteless. Some critics made reference to Lubitsch's background as a German, suggesting it made him a little bit too sympathetic to Nazis.

And then there's the line in which a Gestapo officer, noting that he has seen Benny's character play *Hamlet* on the stage before the war, remarks, "What he did to Shakespeare, we are doing now to Poland."

In our time, the film is regarded as a classic, one of the high points of Lubitsch's film career and certainly the apex of Jack Benny's.

Lubitsch's next film, 1943's *Heaven Can Wait*, was a return to Lubitsch's favorite subject, romance, and also his first color film, starring Gene Tierney and Don Ameche. Ameche plays a rakish old man, recently deceased, who appears before the Devil to tell his life story in order to make the case that he belongs in Hell—the place, he says, which is "where innumerable people had told me so often to go." This serves as the framing device for Ameche's character to tell his life story literally from the moment of his birth to the moment of his death.

This film was more successful and it received three Academy Award nominations, including Best Picture and Lubitsch's third for Best Director. Lubitsch got three nominations for Best Director overall, but never won, although the Academy gave him a special award in 1947 for his contributions to motion pictures. Eight months afterward, he died of a heart attack at the age of 55. The story goes that upon leaving his funeral, fellow director William Wyler remarked to Billy Wilder, "No more Lubitsch," to which Wilder replied, "Worse than that. No more Lubitsch pictures."

Ten years later, in 1957, Billy Wilder would travel to Lubitsch's native Germany to establish the Ernst Lubitsch Prize, to be awarded annually to the best German-language comedy. The Prize is still awarded each year in our time, and is regarded as one of the most prestigious awards in German cinema.

[music: Mozart, *Rondo alla turca*.]

Edmund Preston Biden was born August 29, 1898 in Chicago, Illinois, the son of Edmund Biden and Mary Estelle Dempsey. The elder Edmund was Mary's second husband. When young Edmund was two years old, his mother took him with her to Paris, where she divorced his father. When Mary and young Edmund returned to the United States, she married a stockbroker named Solomon Sturges, who adopted the boy. He became Preston Sturges.

It was odd that Mary would choose to marry a stockbroker, since she was herself a bohemian free spirit who traveled to France frequently and hung out with the likes of Aleister Crowley and Isadora Duncan. Her son came along and grew up fluent in French.

Preston served in the US Army Air Service during the First World War, though he never saw combat. Afterward, he got a job in New York at a shop owned by his mother's fourth husband.

When Sturges was 29 years old, he went out on a date with an actress, who behaved strangely during the evening, until finally she announced to him that she was experimenting with him for a

play she was writing. She had no romantic interest in him whatsoever, but was merely using him as a guinea pig to help her work out scenes for her play.

Sturges did not take this news well. Infuriated, he told her that he could write a play too, and his would be better than hers. That same night, he wrote the third act of his play, called *The Guinea Pig*, inspired by this catastrophic date, and completed the script in two months. When he showed it to the young woman, she confessed that she had lied about writing a play, but she looked at some pages from his script and conceded they were pretty good.

He raised money on his own to get the play produced on Broadway, where it was a success. The now thirty-year-old wrote his second play in less than a week, a romantic comedy titled *Strictly Dishonorable*. This play was a huge hit on Broadway, playing from 1929 to 1931, earning Sturges \$300,000, a huge amount of money for the time. It instantly made Preston Sturges a theatre celebrity. It also attracted a letter from his biological father demanding repayment of the money Mr. Biden had spent on him in his infancy.

Naturally, his success also attracted the attention of Hollywood. Sturges was a master of snappy dialog, which was just what the studios needed for their new talking pictures. He polished scripts on hire for Columbia, Universal, and MGM. In 1933, he submitted a spec script he had written for a film titled *The Power and the Glory* to Jesse Lasky at Fox. He envisioned it as a vehicle for Spencer Tracy.

Lasky was amazed. It would have been standard practice to hand off such a script for re-writes by the studio's staff writers, but in this case Lasky declared the script "perfect" and saw no need to touch it. Sturges agreed to a deal that included a percentage of the profits, which at the time was highly unusual for a screenwriter.

This deal raised Sturges's profile in Hollywood, not necessarily in a good way. A screenwriter with no track record gets his script produced as is, no re-writes, no work for other writers, and gets an unprecedented payoff for it. Many Hollywood screenwriters took offense, and held it against him.

The Power and the Glory was about the life of a railroad tycoon, loosely based on the life of Sturges's grandfather-in-law, C.W. Post, the breakfast cereal magnate, and that's a story I really need to tell you sometime, but there's no time today, alas. Sturges's script tells the protagonist's story in a series of flashbacks as mourners at his funeral recall his life. It is likely this script had some influence over Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane*, eight years later.

Critics hailed the film, but the public reception was lukewarm. That share of the profits Sturges had been given never amounted to much.

Sturges also served as a dialog coach on the film, insuring that the actors delivered his clever lines correctly, as he had done for his stage plays. Afterward, he returned to doing rewrites for

the studios, though now on salary, and a generous one at that. Nonetheless, he was frustrated at how the directors of his scripts couldn't handle his dialog properly.

So when he managed to interest another studio in one of his spec scripts—it was Paramount this time—he made an unprecedented offer. He would sell the script to Paramount for \$10, on condition that he would direct the film himself. Released in 1940, it was called *The Great McGinty* and the opening credits included a card that said, “Written and directed by Preston Sturges.” Once again, he had gotten himself an unprecedented deal. There were other writer-directors in Hollywood, like Charlie Chaplin and Ernst Lubitsch, whom I just told you about, but those people were directors first, and then success as a director gave them the freedom to contribute to the scripts. This was the first time a screenwriter had leveraged his success to become a director.

The Great McGinty is a very Preston Sturges kind of story, a comedy about the rise and fall of a corrupt politician who becomes governor of his state, then loses everything when he decides to tell the truth about his corrupt past. It includes the memorable line, “If it weren't for graft, you'd get a very low type of people in politics.”

The film drew a mixed result at the box office, but it turned a profit for Paramount and was praised by critics. It won Sturges an Academy Award for Best Screenplay, launching his directing career and cementing his reputation as one of Hollywood's top writers. He was soon being compared to Frank Capra for the deft balance his films struck between comedy and humanity.

Next came *Christmas in July*, also a 1940 film. This was a screwball comedy about a man named Jimmy MacDonald, played by Dick Powell, who enters a slogan contest for a coffee company. As a prank, his co-workers trick him into believing he won the \$25,000 prize. He goes on a spending spree, buying presents for his mother, his girlfriend, and his neighbors before discovering the deception.

Sturges released two films in 1941. *The Lady Eve*, another screwball comedy with a fair amount of slapstick, takes place aboard an ocean liner, where a scheming con woman, played by Barbara Stanwyk, pretends to be a British aristocrat, hence the title, in order to romance and fleece a wealthy naïve young American, played by Henry Fonda.

The other is *Sullivan's Travels*, a comedy about a successful Hollywood director of comedies, not unlike Sturges himself, played by Joel McCrea, whose burning desire is to direct a serious drama about the downtrodden. In order to prepare for this project, he becomes a hobo himself. The experiment goes well enough at first, until he is hit over the head, loses his identification, and ends up in prison, where he gets a real taste of what “downtrodden” feels like, and decides that making people laugh is a more meaningful pursuit than he'd realized.

Sullivan's Travels got mixed reviews, and the wartime US government refused to permit it to be shown in other countries, because of the brutal image it presents of poverty in America. But in our time, the film is regarded as a classic.

The same is true of 1942's *The Palm Beach Story*, another screwball comedy dismissed by critics at the time but much more highly regarded today. The year 1944 saw the release of three Sturges films. There was *The Miracle of Morgan Creek*, about a woman named Trudy Kockenlocker (yes, that's her name), who gets drunk, marries a soldier whose name she can't remember, and then discovers she is pregnant, because this is as close as the Hays Office would let a film get to telling a story about a single mother. It got Sturges a nomination for an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay.

The second was *Hail the Conquering Hero*, a wartime story about a small town boy named Woodrow Lafayette Pershing Truesmith, who receives a medical discharge from the military for severe hay fever. Unable to face his mother, he writes a series of letters to her, pretending to be fighting in the war, while he is actually working in a shipyard. A well-meaning Marine, a veteran of Guadalcanal, offers Truesmith his coat, which bears the insignia of the First Marine Division, so that Woodrow can return home while maintaining his cover story that he served in combat overseas. The deception works too well, though, when the entire town turns out to welcome home their "hero."

Hail the Conquering Hero managed the feat of satirizing hero worship in wartime. It was well received and many would point to this one as Sturges's greatest film, including Sturges himself. It got him a second Academy Award nomination for Best Original Screenplay in the same year.

The third was *The Great Moment*, a biographical film about the inventor of anesthesia. Yes, you heard right. Not really his kind of material. The film flopped and Paramount, which at the time was dealing with a backlog of films, let Preston Sturges go.

And that was the end of his remarkable run of successes. He next went into partnership with millionaire aviator and film dabbler Howard Hughes, who by this time owned RKO, but the erratic Hughes was an impossible partner and their partnership fell apart. Sturges began drinking heavily.

Indulge me for one more here. In 1948, Darryl F. Zanuck gave him an opportunity at Twentieth Century-Fox, where he produced, wrote, and directed a film called *Unfaithfully Yours*, another sort of dark screwball comedy about a symphony orchestra conductor, played by Rex Harrison, who has reason to believe his wife has been unfaithful. As he conducts a concert of three pieces of classical music, he fantasizes about three different ways in which he might confront her about her infidelity. In each case, the mood of the music he conducts matches the mood of the fantasy. When the concert ends, he goes home to confront her for real, but reality proves to be nothing like any of his fantasies.

Critics liked it, but it lost money, and Sturges now parted ways with Twentieth Century-Fox. You know I like it, because it's about classical music, but I'm not alone. This is another Preston Sturges movie the reputation of which has only grown over time.

Preston Sturges died in 1959, while he was working on his autobiography, which he had titled *The Events Leading Up to My Death*. He was 60 years old.

We'll have to stop there for today. I thank you for listening and I'd like to thank Jonathan for his kind donation, and thank you to Harry for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Jonathan and Harry help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone always, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. If you'd like to become a patron or make a donation, you are most welcome; just visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

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Next month, I plan to be at both Readercon in Boston and then Confluence in Pittsburgh, so if any of you happen to be attending either of those conventions, look me up and say hi.

Next week is a bye week for the podcast, but I hope you'll join me in two weeks' time, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we return to Italy to check in on events on the Italian front. That's in two weeks' time, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. Remakes were always a big part of the business in Hollywood, and a number of these Golden Age films I've mentioned today have endured remakes in the decades that followed.

The novel *The Prisoner of Zenda* was made into films six more times in Hollywood, most recently in a 1979 comedy version starring Peter Sellers. The 1937 version, starring Ronald Colman, directed by John Cromwell, produced by David O. Selznick, and released through United Artists, is considered the best of the lot. The story was also made into films four times in India, once in South Korea, kind of, and into an Australian animated film for children.

Holiday Inn featured "White Christmas," Irving Berlin's most successful song. Bing Crosby's 1942 recording of "White Christmas" is the best-selling music single of all time. The song was used again in the 1954 film *White Christmas*, starring Bing Crosby, Danny Kaye, and Rosemary Clooney, directed by Michael Curtiz, and distributed by Paramount Pictures. Besides reusing the song, the plot of *White Christmas* the film is loosely based on *Holiday Inn*.

Trouble in Paradise was the inspiration for 2014's *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, starring Ralph Fiennes, directed by Wes Anderson, and distributed by Fox Searchlight.

The Shop Around the Corner was remade as a 1949 musical, with the setting changed from Budapest to Chicago, starring Judy Garland and Van Johnson, directed by Robert Z. Leonard and produced by MGM. The plot was used again, this time updated for the age of email, in 1998's *You've Got Mail*, this time set in New York City and starring Meg Ryan and Tom Hanks, directed by Nora Ephron, and released through Warner Brothers. Meg Ryan's character in the film owns a bookstore called "The Shop Around the Corner," in a nod to the original film.

1942's *To Be Or Not to Be* was remade in 1983 into a film with the same title, starring Mel Brooks and his real-life wife Anne Bancroft as Joseph and Maria Bronski, directed by Alan Johnson, and distributed by Twentieth Century-Fox.

1943's *Heaven Can Wait* hasn't been remade, to the best of my knowledge, but its title was repurposed for 1978's *Heaven Can Wait*, which was itself a remake of 1941's *Here Comes Mr. Jordan*, a film I somehow neglected to mention before this. *Here Comes Mr. Jordan* was about a boxer accidentally taken to Heaven prematurely. It starred Robert Montgomery, Claude Rains, and Evelyn Keyes, was directed by Alexander Hall, and produced by Columbia Pictures. *Here Comes Mr. Jordan* was based on a 1938 stage play titled *Heaven Can Wait*—aha, there's the connection. The 1943 *Heaven Can Wait* film has nothing to do with the play, apart from reusing the title. I suppose it was up for grabs since *Here Comes Mr. Jordan* didn't want it. (Are you confused yet?) The 1978 *Heaven Can Wait* reclaims the title from the stage play, but otherwise has nothing to do with 1943's *Heaven Can Wait*. The 1978 *Heaven Can Wait* starred Warren Beatty, this time playing an NFL football player, not a boxer, Buck Henry, and Julie Christie, was directed by Beatty and Henry, and distributed by Paramount. Here's another fun fact: this picture made Warren Beatty the first filmmaker since Orson Welles and *Citizen Kane* to receive Academy Award nominations for Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor, and Best Screenplay for the same film, though Beatty didn't win in any of those categories.

Then there is 2001's *Down to Earth*, a remake of the 1978 *Heaven Can Wait*, this time starring Chris Rock as a comedian taken to Heaven before his time. It was directed by Chris and Paul Weitz and released through Paramount.

1941's *Sullivan's Travels* has not been remade either, to the best of my knowledge, but the title of the fictional novel that protagonist John Sullivan wants to adapt into a film, *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* was used as the title of a satirical 2000 film starring George Clooney, John Turturro and Tim Blake Nelson, and written and directed by Joel and Ethan Coen.

1941's *The Lady Eve* was remade in 1956 as *The Birds and the Bees*, starring George Gobel, Mitzi Gaynor, and David Niven, directed by Norman Taurog, and distributed by Paramount.

And finally, 1948's *Unfaithfully Yours* was remade into a 1984 film with the same title. This picture was originally conceived as a vehicle for Peter Sellers, but Sellers died before it could be made, so instead it starred Dudley Moore and Nastassja Kinski and only gives us one imaginary scenario instead of the three in the original. It was directed by Howard Zieff and released through Twentieth Century-Fox.

Okay, I'm done now.

[music: Closing War Theme]