

Thin Man series finds success in husband-wife detective team

Myrna Loy will receive a special Oscar this year at the Academy awards for her lifetime achievements. I can give you at least six reasons why she is receiving it: "The Thin Man" in 1934, "After the Thin Man" in 1936, "Another Thin Man" in 1939, "Shadow of the Thin Man" in 1941, "The Thin Man Goes Home" in 1944 and "Song of the Thin Man" in 1947.

The Thin Man series featured Hollywood's most famous husband-wife detective team, Nick and Nora Charles, as played by William Powell and Myrna Loy.

Dashiell Hammett — author of "The Maltese Falcon" — sold his best-selling 1932 mystery novel "The Thin Man," to MGM for \$14,000. Director W.S. (Woody) Van Dyke II immediately showed an enthusiastic interest in making the film. However, no one else supported his enthusiasm, contending that the detective-mystery genre was overdone and would fail to interest moviegoers.

But Van Dyke persisted, assigning Albert Hackett and Frances Goodrich to write a series of scenes emphasizing the cozy, laid-back marital relationship between the mystery-prone Nick and Nora and their dog Asta — the same dog-actor featured in "The Awful Truth."

The results pleased MGM studio guru Louis B. Mayer, but he considered the casting of Powell and Loy as a risk, reasoning that they were "serious actors" unsuited to the sparkling comedic content of the film. Finally

Gray Faces by Michael Stock

Mayer consented to including Powell, but refused to cast Loy until director Van Dyke threatened to walk off of the film.

Mayer relented, on two conditions. First, Loy was to be cast in another film, "Stambul Quest." Secondly, she was to start the film 21 days after filming for "The Thin Man" was to begin. Thus, the film was shot in 14 days, allowing 2 days for retakes — quite a dubious schedule, considering the picture was a full-budget "A" movie release for MGM.

"The Thin Man" proved to be an enormous box-office hit, drawing Oscar nominations for Best Actor for Powell, Best Director for Van Dyke, Best Screenplay for Hackett and Goodrich and Best Picture. The film was up against tough competition, being one of 12 pictures nominated for Best Picture. However, "It Happened One Night," starring Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert won Best Picture — and also walked away with four other Oscars.

Like its five sequels, "The Thin Man" features sophisticated wit, an involved plot and witty dialogue. "The Thin Man" included a wonderful scene shot from the waist up. The scene is a

bright dog-walking sequence in which the unseen and always scene-stealing Asta jerks his leash in the direction of passing lampposts and fire hydrants.

The sly and flippant bantering and bickering between Powell and Loy make up some of the highlight of the clever film — showing the imperfect "perfect" couple in their fun-loving relationship of loving cocktails, tomfoolery, and each other.

In one scene, Powell is called upon to explain why Asta has run into a restaurant while the sprawling package-laden Loy makes her first appearance in the film — again improvised during the shooting of the film.

"It's my dog and my wife," Powell introduces.

"Well, you might have mentioned me first on the billing," Loy retorts in her inimitable dry style.

"Well... the dog is well-trained," Powell answers.

There are often instances of the '30s version of a sexual joke. When the cops crash into Powell and Loy's bedroom to capture a man who had broken in, a police officer asks Loy, "You ever hear of the Sullivan Act?"

To which, Loy answers innocently, "Oh, that's all right — we're married."

The constant rapport that Powell and Loy shared on-screen captivated audiences — and studio head Mayer who casted them together in 14 films. The films included such hilarious screwball comedies as the 1936 films "Manhattan Melodrama" with



Courtesy of Carol Publishing
William Powell, Maureen O'Sullivan and Myrna Loy in "The Thin Man."

Clark Gable and "Libeled Lady" with Spencer Tracy and Jean Harlow, whom Powell was engaged to at the time of her death.

Powell and Loy were considered to be one of Hollywood's greatest couples, though they were never married. Although Powell was only married once, to Carole Lombard from 1931 to 1933, Powell and Loy always remained very close.

"We became very close friends, but, contrary to popular belief, we were never really married or close to it. Oh, there

were times when Bill had a crush on me and times when I had a crush on Bill, but we never made anything of it. We worked around it and stayed pals," Loy said in her autobiography.

The Thin Man series spanned 13 years and six films, always featuring sophisticated mysteries and the perfected banter and love between Powell and Loy — as well as some of the best entertainment in filmmaking history.

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Audience not Cryin' over Drivin' concert

By Robert Richardson
Senior Reporter

Wednesday night's concert at Omaha's Ranch Bowl was full of ups and downs, as the Personics and Drivin' N Cryin' rocked with an audience of about 150.

Local Omaha cover band Personics tried to warm up the small crowd with tunes from the Cure, Smotherses, The Cult and Black Crowes. Like most cover bands, they lacked the intensity they needed to pull off such hits. Judging by the crowd's reaction, members of Personics probably shouldn't quit their day jobs.

But once the main act appeared, the evening began to rock.

Kicking off its show, Drivin' N Cryin' was everything that the Personics were not. Drivin' had an experienced sound, but its members also looked hungry, eager to please.

They ripped through two songs before they acknowledged being in Omaha. After a big cheer from the audience, Drivin' N Cryin' started to play several songs from its latest release, "Fly Me Courageous."

"Chain Reaction" was a clean, enthusiastic mix of rock. The tempo

was broken up by a strobe light blinking on and off. It could have made for a disillusioning effect, but the song was anything but overdone.

Proving its versatility, Drivin' shifted into a slower gear as it moved to "Let's Go Dancing." Vocalist Kevin Kinney's nasal scratch vocals added depth to his strong straight shooting voice. He sang each song with conviction.

In a pre-show interview, guitarist Buren Fowler said the band could rock as hard as any other band. He was proven right, as Fowler combined with Kinney on guitar. They made a strong dual string effort and never stepped on each other's riffs.

Clearly the best song of the night was the band's second encore performance, "Straight To Hell." Kinney and Nielsen provided for a sweet harmony, one that is rare in a stage show. During this song, it was clear that Drivin' N Cryin' was having just as good a time as the audience.

Drivin' N Cryin' is not composed of musical geniuses, but band members did provide the audience with an all-around good show. These guys were true professionals.

Production of 'Lend Me a Tenor' lends itself well to Lied audience

By James Finley
Staff Reporter

Most people hate reading promotional ads for comedies. They all employ cliches like "riotously funny!" and "best I've seen in years!"

These insincere and phony phrases can be justly applied to Wednesday night's performance of "Lend Me a Tenor" at the Lied Center for Performing Arts. Overall, the actors presented a polished and professional production of this Tony Award-winning play. "Lend Me a Tenor" is a modern version of "Comedy of Errors" with a few twists. Tito Mirelli, also known as "Il Stupendo" (Ron Holgate), is a famous opera singer coming to Cleveland to perform "Othello."

While waiting in his hotel suite, Tito gets into an argument with his wife (D'Jamin Bartlett), and then accidentally takes too much nerve medicine. The head of the opera company mistakes Tito's comatose state for death, and in a panic, gets the

assistant director, Max (Michael Waldron), to impersonate "Il Stupendo." As can be expected, Tito comes around, and rushes to the opera.

After the opera, Max returns to the hotel and discovers that Tito's body is missing. As he leaves the room through one door, Tito enters through another. Hence, the humor of being the wrong man in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Everything works out in the end, but not without an abundance of mismatches that keeps the audience laughing.

The actors all gave respectable performances, but Michael Waldron as Max and Ron Holgate as Merelli were the outstanding members of the cast.

Waldron had a surprisingly decent singing voice, and he did a good job of capturing the mannerisms of a scared performer. Later in the play, he assumed the inflated ego that characterized "Il Stupendo" excellently.

Holgate managed to keep the gar-

gantuan ego throughout the play without letting it get obnoxious. Holgate also was able to play the role more as "Il Stupido" rather than "Il Stupendo," as the mix-up confuses him more and more.

The great costumes added to the situational humor. Both Max and Tito, dressed for the role of Othello, looked like bad James Brown impersonators, but it worked. Seeing them running around the stage, neither completely aware of what was going on, was hilarious. Had the costumes been less flamboyant, the comedy wouldn't have been conveyed.

One thing that really distracted from the production was the sound system. Too many times, it sounded like the actors were relying too much on having their voices amplified. They needed to project better on their own. Waldron seemed to be the only person who didn't have this problem.

The next time "Lend Me a Tenor" is being performed anywhere around here, someone, please, lend me a ticket.

Marsalis

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the aid of Marsalis on the saxophone. The world tour was promoted by a double-live LP and accompanying movie, both entitled "Bring on the Night."

Although Marsalis' success caught on quickly as a jazz saxophonist for a pop band, he still

followed modern jazz repertoire closely, touring with his own band to promote his "Royal Garden Blues" LP released in 1986.

1987 and 1988 proved even busier for the ever-growing success of Marsalis, who toured with

Sting's band and his own, as well as recording the score for Spike Lee's critically acclaimed film "Do the Right Thing." In his spare time, he

made acting appearances in "Throw Momma from the Train" and Spike Lee's "School Daze."

"Crazy People," which Marsalis released early last year, has brought even more attention to Branford's talent. He is no longer just

Wynton's brother, he's a star by the merits of his own talents, and the sold-out Lied audience will expect him to prove it Saturday night.

Fifth

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that bitch "Ain't Nothin' But a Word to Me."

That is the whole problem: Misogyny may mean nothing to this pair, but all women are hurt by attitudes like this: "Grab a bitch by the throat/ And slam her ass..."

Yeah, I hear you telling me about how you've got a 'ho every night and everywhere and that you know how to control her, but these are more than words to me.

The goal here is not to establish my own rating system of whether or not bands display "correct" attitudes or "model" behavior, but an album full of such ideas certainly deserves commentary.

Too Short is almost more a storyteller than a rapper with his smooth and soulful sound and long songs, but I can not see how the same man who slaps his 'ho around can support the Stop The Violence movement.

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You're smart enough to know
the difference between perestroika
and glasnost.
And you're still smoking?