

American MASTERS

20
years

thirteen
WNET NEW YORK

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press information

A Production of
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New York for PBS



THIRTEEN/WNET NEW YORK'S *AMERICAN MASTERS* PRESENTS ENCORE PORTRAIT OF FILM COMEDY GENIUS PRESTON STURGES WITH *THE RISE AND FALL OF AN AMERICAN DREAMER*, THIS SEPTEMBER ON PBS

Winner Of 1990 Emmy Award And CINE Golden Eagle

One of Hollywood's greatest innovators, Preston Sturges produced, wrote and directed a string of blockbuster "screwball" comedies in the 1930s – including *The Great McGinty*, *The Lady Eve*, *Sullivan's Travels*, *Palm Beach Story* and *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek*. Characterized by satirical humor and literate, ironic dialogue, these films made Sturges a star in an era when few screenwriters were known by name, and won him a permanent place in cinema history.

Sturges' meteoric rise and plummeting fall is chronicled in *AMERICAN MASTERS Preston Sturges: The Rise and Fall of an American Dreamer*, which encores Wednesday, September 13 at 10 p.m. (ET) on PBS (check local listings). The film is part of the 20th anniversary celebration of *AMERICAN MASTERS*. *Preston Sturges: The Rise and Fall of an American Dreamer* is a Barking Dog Production in association with Thirteen/WNET New York. The film is produced and directed by Kenneth Bowser, and co-produced by Caroline Baron. Executive producers are Susan Lacy and Marilyn Haft.

"Sturges was an extraordinary talent, a writer/director who used humor and wit to create an enduring commentary on the human condition. His films will always be relevant," says Susan Lacy, creator and executive producer of *AMERICAN MASTERS*, a five-time winner of the Emmy Award for Outstanding Primetime Non-Fiction Series and a recent recipient of its seventh Peabody Award.

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The reminiscences of Sturges' colleagues and friends complement the rare photos and generous footage from his landmark films, creating a one-hour program that paints an entertaining and moving portrait of a genius doomed by his own success.

Featured in *The Rise and Fall of an American Dreamer* are actors Eddie Bracken and Cesar Romero; actresses Betty Hutton and Frances Ramsden; Sturges' widow, Sandy Sturges; and his personal secretary, Edwin Gillette. Narrated by Fritz Weaver, the film also features classic interviews with actors Joel McCrea and Rudy Vallee and film critic Andrew Sarris. Throughout the program, clips from Sturges' films – which often featured characters and situations based on his own experiences – serve to illuminate his life and career.

Sturges was nearly 30 when he decided to become a playwright. Almost instant success on Broadway was followed by a move to Hollywood, where one of his first scripts, *The Power and the Glory*, was bought for \$17,500 and a share of the profits – an unheard-of deal that outraged studio heads. Soon, he had become Hollywood's most prolific screenwriter.

Consistently dissatisfied with directors' interpretations of his work, in 1939 Sturges convinced Paramount to let him direct his script for *The Great McGinty*. A tremendous hit, the film earned him an Oscar for Best Original Screenplay and set the precedent for other writer-directors.

Conflicts with Paramount forced Sturges to leave the studio in 1944, and a series of failed marriages and business ventures, tax troubles and financially unsuccessful films – including the innovative *Unfaithfully Yours* and the disastrous *The Sin of Harold Diddlebock*, which was produced with Howard Hughes – all but destroyed everything he had worked to achieve. After a short spell in France, Sturges died of a heart attack in New York in 1959, but his influence on filmmakers lives on today.

“What Preston Sturges was to comedy is the same thing that John Ford was to the Western,” explains screenwriter and director Paul Schrader, who is also interviewed in the program. “He is that shining ideal that people stumble over trying to emulate.”

Preston Sturges: The Rise and Fall of an American Dreamer is a Barking Dog Production in association with Thirteen/WNET New York. The film is produced and directed by Kenneth Bowser, and co-produced by Caroline Baron. Executive producers are Susan Lacy and Marilyn Haft. Susan Lacy is executive producer of ***AMERICAN MASTERS***. Barry Schulman is director of cultural and arts programs for Thirteen/WNET New York.

To take ***AMERICAN MASTERS*** beyond the television broadcast and further explore the themes, stories, and personalities of masters past and present, the companion Web site (<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters>), created by Thirteen/WNET New York, offers interviews, essays, photographs, outtakes and other resources.

AMERICAN MASTERS is produced for PBS by Thirteen/WNET New York. This acclaimed series, now celebrating its 20th season, has become a cultural legacy in its own right. The ***AMERICAN MASTERS*** film library is one of the most highly honored in television history with profiles of more than 140 artistic giants. In addition to seven Peabodys, an Oscar and two Grammys, ***AMERICAN MASTERS*** has won 16 Emmys, including Outstanding Primetime Non-Fiction Series for 1999, 2000, 2001, 2003, and 2004.

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Thirteen/WNET New York is one of the key program providers for public television, bringing such acclaimed series as *Nature*, *Great Performances*, *American Masters*, *Charlie Rose*, *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly*, *Wide Angle*, *Secrets of the Dead*, *NOW With David Brancaccio*, and *Cyberchase* – as well as the work of Bill Moyers – to audiences nationwide. As the flagship public broadcaster in the New York, New Jersey and Connecticut metro area, Thirteen reaches millions of viewers each week, airing the best of American public television along with its own local productions such as *The Ethnic Heritage Specials*, *The Thirteen Walking Tours*, *New York Voices*, and *Reel New York*. Thirteen extends the impact of its television productions through educational and community outreach projects – including the *Celebration of Teaching and Learning* – as well as Web sites and other digital media platforms. More information can be found at: www.thirteen.org.

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