

TWELVE ANGRY MEN (1957)

Cast - Henry Fonda - Lee J. Cobb - Ed Begley - E.G. Marshall - Jack Warden -
Martin Balsam - Jack Klugman - Edward Binns - Robert Webber (all as
members of the jury) -----

Screenplay and Production (jointly with Henry Fonda) - Reginald Rose

Director - Sidney Lumet

Distributor - United Artists

We've already seen Sidney Lumet biting the hand that fed him and putting his television experience to vitriolic effect in "Network" (shown at the Club just before Christmas and who of those present will forget that moment of suspense at the end when hand to projector resuscitation had to be administered!). Now here is his first big success which brought him from television to the cinema.

"12 Angry Men" was in fact something of a milestone in the histories of both media. Until "Marty" came along in 1955 T.V. was treated as something of a joke. Paddy Chayevsky's filmed teleplay changed all that (at least in the States). It was like a breath of fresh air to Hollywood who began to take television talents more seriously. With the success of "12 Angry Men" those talents could never again be ignored. T.V. "spin-offs" were underway!

What made (and still makes) this film so special? Firstly, it proved once and for all that you don't need a vast screen to tell a great story. Remember that in 1957 just about every other film appeared in Cinemascope, Superscope, Vistavision, Technirama or Cinerama - not to mention glorious Technicolor and stereophonic sound!

"12 Angry Men" is good old "black and white" with no frills and no spectacle. The drama and the action are confined to just one set - a jury room on an intensely hot day. This is brilliantly conveyed by Lumet and scriptwriter Reginald Rose. The claustrophobic atmosphere, heat and tension mount as the 12 (not so) good men and true consider their verdict on a slum kid accused of killing his father.

Many facets of human nature are revealed in the tortuous path taken to get to the truth - or as near as dammit as far as some of the jurors are concerned. Their characters are all tightly drawn and as the story grips so they show their true colours. All this is done impeccably as a result of not only Lumet's taut direction and Rose's meticulous screenplay but also the extraordinarily high standard of acting of all concerned.

The performances in particular of Lee J. Cobb and Henry Fonda must rank amongst their finest. Cobb is as good if not better than he was with Brando in "On The Waterfront". Fonda now a grand and sadly, ailing, old man of the cinema is certainly "On Golden Pond" and at one of the many peaks of his long and illustrious career as he steers a steady and triumphant course to screen immortality as the juror who has his doubts.....

Tony Rozelaar

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