



The Main Feature

Season 41 – Issue 17 – Screening 26 May 2022

Larceny Inc

US 1942

95 mins. Certificate PG

Director	Lloyd Bacon
Screenplay	Everett Freeman and Edwin Gilbert
Music	Adolph Deutsch
Photography	Tony Gaudio

Cast

Edward G. Robinson	J Chambers 'Pressure' Maxwell
Broderick Crawford	"Jug" Martin
Edward Brophy	"Weepy" Davis
Jane Wyman	Denny Costello
Jack Carson	Jeff Randolph
Anthony Quinn	Leo Dexter
Harry Davenport	Homer Bigelow
Barbara Jo Allen	Mademoiselle Gloria



The final film of the Season is a little known – but quite charming – light comedy-drama from 1942.

Larceny, Inc centres on 'Pressure' Maxwell, a small-time, suave, silver-tongued crook winningly played against type by Edward G Robinson. Released from Sing Sing jail along with his nice-but-dim partner Jug (Broderick Crawford) he reunites with Weepy, a dapper pound-shop Del Boy (Edward Brophy), and renews acquaintance with his adopted daughter Denny (a perky but underused Jane Wyman, then the first Mrs Ronald Reagan).

His dream of going straight and buying a dog race track in Florida flounders when the bank declines his loan request, so (as you do) he arranges to take over the next-door luggage store with a plan to dig a tunnel from the basement to the bank vault and help himself. Denny learns of the plan, and with the unknowing connivance of her suitor Jeff (a go-getting luggage salesman) ensures the store becomes such a success that the plan eventually falls by the wayside. Meantime, Pressure accidentally earns the gratitude of the local traders by smoothly sorting some problems with a local builder. All is in place for a happy ending on Christmas Eve, until a fellow con Leo (played with some menace by Anthony Quinn) turns up to execute the original plan.

The film was not a success at the box office. The source material was "The Night Before Christmas" by Laura and S. J. Perelman, which lasted just 22 performances on Broadway in mid-1941. None of the cast transferred to the film, though the play was noteworthy as the debut of Shelley Winters (*Alfie* in 1966, *The Poseidon Adventure* in 1972 amongst many others).

It is interesting that the same studio (Warner Brothers) proved early the next year that an unsuccessful stage show could be re-named and re-tooled into a banner film ("Everybody Comes to Rick's" becoming *Casablanca*).



Larceny, Inc. was released just 6 months after Pearl Harbor, and the stiff-upper-lip wartime drama *Mrs Miniver* easily topped the 1942 US box office. Audiences may still have craved escapism but instead turned to the musical *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (number 3 at the annual box office), the Hope-Crosby-Lamour vehicle *The Road to Morocco* (no 4) and *Holiday Inn* (at 5).

I suspect cinemagoers were not ready to see Edward G

Robinson in a light comedy. Robinson was then famous for playing "nasty" gangsters as in 1931's *Little Caesar*. *Larceny, Inc.* was his final film under his contract with Warner Brothers, and he subsequently enjoyed a long career as a reliable character actor in films as varied as *The 10 Commandments* (1956), *The Cincinnati Kid* (1966) and *Solyent Green* (1972).

In truth the film is a little too frantic, with some rather overdone slapstick, verbose dialogue and a weak ending. Even the venerable Halliwell's Film Guide (which tends to eulogise any film made before 1960...) sniffed that it was a "tepid comedy-drama."

Time is a healer, and the film's virtues are probably more apparent today. It's slickly paced and warm-hearted. An article in Entertainment Weekly in 2018 named it one of the 8 best heist movies (and dubbed it "charming") and the current rating on the IMDb website is a very respectable 7.3 from over 2,700 votes. The sincerest flattery was Woody Allen's remake *Small Time Crooks* in 2000, with Tracey Ullman and Hugh Grant. Though the source was unacknowledged the plot mirrored the original (the store involved sold bread not luggage - dough for dough I guess?)

So sit back and enjoy a likeable if lightweight film, and immerse yourself in a by-gone monochrome world full of anachronisms like stores staying open until 9pm on Christmas Eve -- and where a High Street bank is ultra-keen to take on more space to expand.

Eugene Smith

Here is the second part of Eugene Smith's forty-first season quiz. Questions 1 to 20 were included in Issue 16; the remainder are here. To remind you – no prizes; and the answers will be on the club website and in the first notes for the forty-second season in the autumn.

Oscar, Oscar

2021's Best Film winner was *CODA*

21. What does CODA stand for?
22. It is a remake of which 2015 French film (shown by the Club in 2017)?
23. Which streaming service bought the film (for \$25m) after its debut at the Sundance Film Festival?
24. Who was (possibly) "walking in the air" after the film's success?
25. What was the Danish winner of the Best Foreign Film Oscar in 2020?

Everyone's a Critic

One of the joys of the Club is making comments on the films (and reading other members' views). Match the comment to the film

26. "One can only hope that the husband has an awful life in future"
27. "Some great action sequences, but really just high-class hokum"
28. "Uplifting and depressing at the same time"
29. "Gave a historical context for the French to invent photography"
30. "Packs an emotional wallop"

A *Permission*



- B *Crimson Pirate*
- C *The Farewell*
- D *Nomadland*
- E *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*

Name...

31. The two functioning alcoholics cited in *Another Round*
32. The bare-chested star of the *Crimson Pirate*
33. The title music of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*



34. The instrument toted around in *Limbo*
35. The director, supporting actor and writer of *Jojo Rabbit*
36. Where Katherine Gun worked in *Official Secrets*

Rest in Peace

Name the recently departed stars of

37. *In the Heat of the Night*
38. *A Bout de Souffle (Breathless)*
39. *Body Heat*
40. *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg*



And finally...who links

41. Stalin and Dickens?

Comments and reactions to: **My Dog Tulip**

No of reaction slips received = 15

Average score = 2.47

Score	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	1	3	6	2	~	2	1	~	~	~	~

No comment. No score. I left before the interval. No cakes either, tonight

Why is J R Ackerley so obsessed with the dog's bottom?

Good animation, but otherwise a bit of a dog's mess

Worst film ever

Nice colour animation, but very boring and too much on bodily functions

Not a dog-lover, and such a charmless and vulgar film was never going to change my mind. Irritating animation. A brave choice nonetheless!

Bloody humans!

Position	Film	Average score
1	Official Secrets	8.15
2	Breakfast at Tiffany's	7.20
3	Another Round	7.17
4	Nomadland	7.13
5	Parasite	7.07
6	The Farewell	6.85
7	The Personal History of David Copperfield	6.67
8	Permission	6.60
9	Pain and Glory	6.59
10	The Crimson Pirate	6.42
11	Portrait of a Lady on Fire	6.22
12	Baby Driver	6.19
13	Limbo	6.18
14	JoJo Rabbit	6.04
15	Bait	5.35
16	My Dog Tulip	2.47



The club's 42nd season begins in the autumn - details of dates and programme on the website: wncc.org.uk