

FILM FORUM

40TH ANNIVERSARY

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"Lee Tracy was a quintessential talkie star. Once seen and heard, this squawky, insinuating dynamo is impossible to forget—in part because he is almost always the best thing in the movie. The brash, cleverest motor-mouth newshound to ever slang a source or elbow his way through the urban jungle."

— J. Hoberman, *The Village Voice*

[Click here](#) to read J. Hoberman's article on Lee Tracy in *The Village Voice*

[Click here](#) to read Imogen Sara Smith's profile of Tracy in *Bright Lights Film Journal*

"You watch Tracy execute a patch of scripted dialogue, and it's like watching a spider web-spin in fast-motion. How did audiences keep up? Tracy was a slight, rubber-faced squirt of a man, but his mouth was the size of the great outdoors, and his inimitable way with streaming banter favored such raw velocity over nuance that there's almost something Ramones-ish about him, an amused, deliberately plebeian dedication to youthful chaos."

— Michael Atkinson, *The L Magazine*

Alphabetical List Of Films In Series:

Series Ended

APRIL 13 TUE (2 FILMS FOR 1 ADMISSION)



BLESSED EVENT

(1932, ROY DEL RUTH) The apotheosis of Lee Tracy, here machine-gunning his way through a raucous send-up of Walter Winchell, and attaining utter delirium when he talks Allen Jenkins through his own imagined electrocution.
1:00, 4:00, 7:00, 10:00

"One of the best of the high-pressure irreverent comedies of the early 30s."
— William K. Everson

"Milking the role of a newly minted, fantastically manic radio gossip columnist, Tracy wheedles, whines, and manipulates his way through an assortment of scoops and scrapes."
— J. Hoberman, *The Village Voice*

"A raggedy masterpiece of solipsistic showboating." — Donald Phelps, *Film Comment*

"Quick and pacy and very likeable." — Pauline Kael

"Witheringly funny." — Janet Maslin, *The New York Times*

ADVICE TO THE LOVELORN

NEW 35mm PRINT! (1933, ALFRED WERKER) After reporter Lee Tracy drunkenly sleeps through an earthquake, he's demoted to writing the sob sister column — which becomes a Good Spot to Be In when his fed-up girlfriend Sally Blane writes in for advice. Loosely based on Nathaniel West's *Miss Lonelyhearts*.
2:40, 5:40, 8:40

"A springy vehicle for Lee Tracy."
— Leslie Halliwell

"Good fun."
— *The New York Times*



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APRIL 19 MON (2 FILMS FOR 1 ADMISSION)



THE STRANGE LOVE OF MOLLY LOUVAIN

(1932, MICHAEL CURTIZ) Even reporter Lee Tracy's got an angle as Ann Dvorak, stuck with an illegitimate kid, must fend off both him and killer Leslie Fenton.
2:30, 5:30, 8:30

"Tracy makes an indelible impression, and thanks to his spectacularly cynical banter with Dvorak, takes over the picture."
— J. Hoberman, *The Village Voice*

"Lee Tracy steals the show! There's lots of Pre-Code activity."
— Elliott Stein, *The Village Voice*

"A lightning-paced, Ben Hecht–styled melodrama, full of irreverence, bite and ironic humor. A neglected reminder of what a versatile and dynamic director Michael Curtiz was. Once again Tracy steals every scene he's in, and wraps up the whole proceedings effortlessly. As a thorough heel, he creates such a dynamic screen character that even the last-reel reformation seems thoroughly logical and convincing. Exciting, impressive, and moving, it's a Warners product all the way."
— William K. Everson

"Though Tracy doesn't appear until halfway through the story, he instantly takes over the movie and toys with it nimbly, like the telephone he constantly juggles. (Lee Tracy without a telephone would be like John Wayne without a horse. His speed was both a response and a challenge to new technologies of instant communication.) The other actors look suddenly obsolete, left behind like pony carts in the wake of a racecar."
— Imogen Sara Smith, *Bright Lights Film Journal*

LOVE IS A RACKET

(1932, WILLIAM WELLMAN) Lee Tracy and gal Friday Ann Dvorak spectate as nympho actress/heiress Francis Dee pursues gossip monger Douglas Fairbanks Jr. — and then there's this murder.
1:00, 4:00, 7:00, 10:00

"The plot, in any case, takes a back seat to wisecracks and leg art, hot jazz and art deco penthouses. A bubbly cocktail, *Love Is a Racket* is also startlingly astringent. Only Pre-Code Hollywood — with the help of actors like Lee Tracy — could concoct a movie at once so pessimistic and so amiably effervescent."
— Imogen Sara Smith, *Bright Lights Film Journal*

"The Broadway scene at its sleaziest."
— Clive Hirschhorn



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APRIL 20 TUE (2 FILMS FOR 1 ADMISSION)

DOCTOR X

(1933, MICHAEL CURTIZ) "Synthetic flesh! Synthetic flesh!" Amid the eerie oranges and greens of two-strip Technicolor, scoop-sniffing Lee Tracy trails the cannibalistic "moon murderer," with love interest Fay Wray in fine scream.
1:00, 4:05, 7:15, 10:25

"One of the major horror films of the early 1930s, directed with great visual style by Curtiz... Throw in a bit of cannibalism, necrophilia, and dismemberment and mix with some screams from perpetually endangered Fay Wray, and you get your money's worth of goose bumps."
— Elliott Stein, *The Village Voice*

"Remains one of the most enjoyable films of its period, if not one of the most stylish. A grand thriller of the old school, replete with clutching hands, a weird laboratory,

a hooded villain, gas jets, secret panels and the whole works – a wonderful group of suspects for the hidden villain. So much happens, the settings are so fascinating, and the dialogue from Tracy so snappy, that it never slows down to a stagey walk.”

– William K. Everson

“It almost makes Frankenstein seem tame and friendly.” – *The New York Times*



THE NUISANCE

(1933, JACK CONWAY) Ambulance chaser Lee Tracy, aided by accident faker Charles Butterworth and his hard-boozing mentor doc Frank Morgan, wins one outrageous court case too many, so it's time for a trap baited by private eye Madge Evans. But...
2:35, 5:40, 8:50

“A farcical and often witty film, which cannot boast of much in the way of a moral any more than of its plausibility, but there is no gainsaying that it is for the most part a hilarious diversion. The adaptation and the dialogue possess a wealth of bright lines, and Tracy makes them count for their full worth.”

– *The New York Times*

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APRIL 27 TUE (3 FILMS FOR 1 ADMISSION)



THE POWER OF THE PRESS

**NEW
35mm
PRINT!**

(1943, LEW LANDERS) Really venal editor Otto Kruger stops at nothing — even murder — to keep his rag's isolationist stance, with copy editor Lee Tracy doing his bidding, until... Based on a story by Sam Fuller.
1:15, 5:35, 9:50

“Shows Sam Fuller in his full-on, hysterical-didactic mode... his voice can be heard loud and clear... Fuller's fingerprints are particularly prominent on the hero, played by Lee Tracy. He is the first of Fuller's many protagonists named Griff, and the first to undergo the distinctive transformation, from cynical self-interest to idealistic enlightenment, that drives much of Fuller's work.”

– Dave Kehr, *The New York Times*

“A curious little melodrama... crazily entertaining, and fascinating as one of the few films of the '40s to deal with the nation's bitter internal debate over whether to get involved with the war.”

– Noel Murray, *The Onion Av Club*

THE LEMON DROP KID

**NEW
35mm
PRINT!**

(1934, MARSHALL NEILAN) On the run when he's robbed of a race-tip sucker's C-note bet, “horse medium” Tracy finds himself involved with Helen Mack and infant legend Baby Leroy. Based on Damon Runyon story.
2:45, 7:00

“As is true of all Runyon yarns, the plot is not as important as its characters and the picture adds a few new portraits to the Runyon film album. Mr. Tracy fits happily into the title role.”

– *The New York Times*



NIGHT MAYOR



(1932, BEN STOLOFF) Hizzoner Mayor Lee Tracy fends off those darn reformers, while romancing showgirl Evelyn Knapp. Take-off on playboy NYC Mayor Jimmy Walker — who resigned two weeks after the premiere.
4:10, 8:25

**NEW
35mm
RESTORATION!**

“Gave Tracy another career role (plus the opportunity to show off his Charleston moves) as a ward-heeling bon vivant modeled on hizzoner ‘Gentleman Jimmy’ Walker—so convincing that decades after his Hollywood career petered out, Tracy returned for one last hurrah in *The Best Man, as the President.*”

– J. Hoberman, *The Village Voice*

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MAY 4 TUE (2 FILMS FOR 1 ADMISSION)



THE BEST MAN

(1964, FRANKLIN J. SCHAFFNER) Decent candidate Henry Fonda is pitted against stop-at-nothing ultra-right-winger Cliff Robertson in the presidential race, but which one will feisty ex-prez Lee Tracy endorse? Tracy's sole Oscar-nominated performance was his swan song. Screenplay by Gore Vidal.
1:00, 4:30, 8:00

“In a more complex and nuanced role than any he had tackled on screen in his heyday, Tracy is sly and folksy, shrewd and anti-intellectual, honest but willing to hand out fake sentiment, honorable but ready to fight dirty. Over all this hangs the pathos of mortality — he is dying of a cancer, as Tracy himself would in 1968 —yet he still brings a crackle of electricity into a room.”

– Imogen Sara Smith, *Bright Lights Film Journal*

“This disenchanting peek behind the scenes of an American election still bites, thanks to the Vidal script which dissects with gleeful cynicism the machinery of tub-thumping, image-building and chicanery that goes into motion as rival presidential candidates. Memorable lines galore, and a whole string of brilliant performances.”

– Tom Milne, *Time Out* (London)

“Has a lot of verve, with the look of crackling intelligence thanks to Haskell Wexner’s black-and-white cinematography and the sure, fast-paced direction. It seems like a hot, inside view.”

– Pauline Kael

WASHINGTON MERRY-GO-ROUND

**NEW
35mm
RESTORATION!**

(1932, JAMES CRUZE) Pre-*Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, as Congressman Lee Tracy teams up with the Bonus Army to expose a lobbyist/bootlegger/murderer. Adapted from muckraker Drew Pearson's bestseller by poetic playwright Maxwell Anderson.
3:00, 6:30, 10:00

“A snappy, Pre-Code movie. 1932 was an election year, and Hollywood was quick to cash in on that with a number of melodramas and satires that were far from kind to the political arena, and took graft and inefficiency pretty much for granted.”

– William K. Everson

“Fascinating.” – Elliott Stein



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Independent premieres at Film Forum are selected and programmed by Karen Cooper and Mike Maggiore. Repertory screen is programmed by Bruce Goldstein. (Schedule subject to change).
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