

Canning's Celluloid Classics: Lesser-known Gems from Hollywood's Golden Era

From time to time, this site will single out certain movies from the major Hollywood studios produced during the so-called "Golden Era" of American filmmaking, those roughly two decades dating from the advent of sound pictures (1927) until after World War II and with the emergence of television (1948). The criterion is personal, but the films cited are those that, while successful upon release, have been largely forgotten except by film historians and buffs—and addicts of Turner Classic Movies.

Pictures of this vintage were once the fare for repertory houses and film clubs that sprang up in the 1950's and 1960's but then were mostly unseen until video outlets and online collections became available. Those recommended herein are cited because they are now available for rental or purchase by regular video outlets—and ready for re-discovery. Most offer well-known stars and directors at the peak of their performing powers, just not in movies that have become household names.

The trigger for compiling these forgotten classics came from a project with which I was involved for 10 years. "Films on the Hill" was a regular series of classic films shown on Capitol Hill at the Capitol Hill Arts Workshop. The series ran from 1999 to 2009, over that time showing hundreds of vintage films in excellent 16mm versions from the vast assortment held by local film collector John Stone (and others). With films accompanied by thoughtful program notes and introductions, the series was unique at the time in the Washington area and was a boon to film buffs as well as to younger filmgoers discovering these motion pictures for the first time.

While these classics are almost all in black-and-white and may seem staid to some, don't let that deter you from giving them a chance. They stand up because of the individual quality of their writing, directing, and acting, a basic combination that has always produced the best movies. The Celluloid Classics are listed below: