NATIONAL FILM THEATRE

Programme

6d.
THE BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE

presents

Bread and Butter: Part three

THE SECOND SEX

August 29th - October 15th, 1961

A STAR IS BORN

(1954)

National Film Theatre
A STAR IS BORN
U.S.A.
1954

Production Company .............................................. Transcon Enterprises - Warners
Producer ............................................................... Sidney Luft
Director ................................................................. George cukor
Screenplay by ......................................................... Moss Hart
Based on a screenplay by ......................................... Dorothy Parker
From a story by ....................................................... William A. Wellman
Photography ......................................................... San Leavitt
Editor ................................................................. Palmar Blangsted
Art Direction ......................................................... Malcolm Fert
Production Design .................................................. Gene Allen
Art Direction and Costumes for 'Born in a Trunk' .......... Irene Sharaff
Original Music ....................................................... Harold Arlen
Original Lyrics ..................................................... Ira Gershwin
Musical Director .................................................... Ray Heindorf
Song 'Born in a Trunk' music and lyrics by ................. Leonard Gershe
Choreography, created and staged ......................... Richard Barstow
Set Decoration ....................................................... George James Hopkins

Cast
Vicki Lester - Esther Blodgett ................................. Judy Garland
Norman Maine ....................................................... James Mason
Matt Libby ............................................................. Jack Carson
Oliver Miles .......................................................... Charles Bickford
Danny McGuire ...................................................... Tom Noonan
Lois Lavery ............................................................ Lucy Marlow
Susan ................................................................. Amanda Blake
Graves ................................................................. Irving Bacon
Miss Wheeler ......................................................... Hazel Sherman
Clenn Williams ...................................................... James Brown
Miss Markham ...................................................... Lotus Robb
"With A Star is Born Hollywood seems more itself than it has for a long, long time."

"It begins with a Hollywood occasion. How the boulevard glitters and seethes! Palaces loom, cars shriek, waving mobs press forward, and cut steps -- who? The new queen to be miked up the aisle! Smiling, she radiates her gown, speaks her few magic words, is swept on to high thrones of glamour. A curtain has gone up, and on the stage--dancing a drunken way through chorus girls and stage hands, horses and managers--has burst the Star in Decline (James Mason). The early morning sees him wandering, sober, through empty bars and dead jungle haunts, till in some retreat with the choir piled up he finds a band session going on and the person and voice that have caught at him out of debauch--the Star in the Ascendant (Judy Garland).... This penetration in depth of the New Babylon, or Old Boloney, has been so accomplished--with such press flashes and screen width brilliantly employed--as to make the entry of Moulin Rouge seem tame.

"And as it has started, so it goes on. There is just enough satire to resist the dreadful claim of fable; song--to the accompaniment of falling Masonry--keeps sensation going. Miss Judy Garland is a world in herself. A new world; sometimes she seems almost a humped old-timer, till her eyes light up and the hard voice and mouth melt; then a devil gets into her, she sheds feminine attire and in black tights and a kind of brief kimono she'll become all eyes, action, and appeal.

"Her songs are superb, and especially that one which relates how she was born in a trunk in the Princes Theatre; every verse or phrase of a show-girl's career is enacted in this film within a film, which goes on and on exploiting a dream-technique--and what does it matter that the whole thing's supposed to be a first try-out in a movie house? It could go on forever in the splendid knowledge that it's got something: something as good as Astaire or Kelly at his best. Miss Garland really is one of those feminine wonders that script-writers are always trying to conjure up out of the relentless tedium of Hollywood's self-intoxication.

"The film has got something, too, if not quite as much as Miss Garland. Directed by George Cukor, it matches vivacity of colour with movements as vivacious, and--for, I think, the first time--the wide screen seems not a foot too wide. The scene when Miss Garland is pin-pointed distantly beyond an auditorium while to the right every word and action are enlarged on a big television screen, is only one example of this new awareness. The earlier stages of
"With A Star is Born Hollywood seems more itself than it has for a long, long time.

"It begins with a Hollywood occasion. How the boulevard glitters and seethes! Palaces loom, cars shriek, waving mobs press forward, and cut steps--who? The new queen to be milked up the aisle. Smiling, she radiates her gown, speaks her few magic words, is swept on to high thrones of glamour. A curtain has gone up, and on the stage--dancing a drunken way through chorus girls and stage hands, horses and managers--has burst the Star in Decline (James Mason). The early morning sees him wandering, sober, through empty bars and dead jungle haunts, till in some retreat with the choir filled up he finds a band session going on and the person and voice that have caught at him out of debauch--the Star in the Ascendant (Judy Garland). ... This penetration in depth of the New Babylon, or Old Boloney, has been so accomplished--with such press flashes and screen width brilliantly employed--as to make the entry of Moulin Rouge seem tame.

"And as it has started, so it goes on. There is just enough satire to resist the dreadful claims of fable; song--to the accompaniment of falling Masonry--keeps sensation going. Miss Judy Garland is a world in herself. A new world; sometimes she seems almost a humped old-timer, till her eyes light up and the hard voice and mouth melt; then a devil gets into her, she sheds feminine attire and in black tights and a kind of brief kimono she'll become all eyes, action, and appeal.

"Her songs are superb, and especially that one which relates how she was born in a trunk in the Princes Theatre; every verse or phrase of a show-girl's career is enacted in this film within a film, which goes on and on exploiting a dream-technique--and what does it matter that the whole thing's supposed to be a first try-out in a movie house? It could go on forever in the splendid knowledge that it's got something; something as good as Astaire or Kelly at his best. Miss Garland really is one of those feminine wonders that script-writers are always trying to conjure up out of the relentless tedium of Hollywood's self-intoxication.

"The film has got something, too, if not quite as much as Miss Garland. Directed by George Cukor, it matches vivacity of colour with movements as vivacious, and--for, I think, the first time--the wide screen seems not a foot too wide. The scene when Miss Garland is pin-pointed distantly beyond an auditorium while to the right every word and action are enlarged on a big television screen, is only one example of this new awareness. The earlier stages of
A Star is Born -- which, despite cuts, lasts two and a half hours -- are decidedly sardonic; and even when the sentimentality of star love comes into its own, with Garland up, and Mason down, the spell-binding still works. At the end he asks her for a broken little song, and swims out into the sunset; and there's a weird satisfaction in that. One can't imagine Mason's romantic bitterness better seized. One can't imagine the new Judy Garland at all without seeing her."

(Review by William Whitebait, New Statesman, 12th March, 1955)
FILMS OF GEORGE CUKOR

1930 GRUMPY (with Cyril Gardner)
    THE VIRTUOUS SIN (with Louis Gasnier)
    THE ROYAL FAMILY OF BROADWAY (with Cyril Gardner)

1931 TARNISHED LADY
    GIRLS ABOUT TOWN

1932 WHAT PRICE HOLLYWOOD?
    A BILL OF DIVORCEMENT
    ROCKABILLY

1933 DINNER AT EIGHT
    LITTLE WOMEN

1934 DAVID COPPERFIELD

1935 SYLVIA SCARLETT

1936 ROMEO AND JULIET
    CAMILLE

1936 HOLIDAY
    ZAZA

1939 THE WOMEN

1940 SUSAN AND GOD
    THE PHILADELPHIA STORY

1942 TWO-FACED WOMAN
    A WOMAN'S FACE
    HER CARDBOARD LOVER

1943 KEEPER OF THE FLAME

contd.-
Films of George Cukor (cont.)

1944  GASLIGHT
       WINGED VICTORY

1947  A DOUBLE LIFE
       DESIRE ME

1948  EDWARD, MY SON

1949  ADAM'S RIB

1950  A LIFE OF HER OWN
       BORN YESTERDAY

1951  THE MODEST AND THE MARRIAGE BROKER

1952  THE MARRYING KIND
       PAT AND MIKE

1953  THE ACTRESS

1954  IT SHOULD HAPPEN TO YOU
       A STAR IS BORN

1956  RHONAN JUNCTION

1957  LES GIRLS
       WILD IS THE WIND

1960  HELLER IN PINK TIGHTS
       SONG WITHOUT END (although credited to the late
       Charles Vidor, directed for the most part by
       Cukor)

       LET'S MAKE LOVE

1961  LADY L (to be released)

The credits and filmography information in this programme
was supplied by Kieran Hickey and David Thomson.