

Review of Crossed Swords

'Crossed Swords' released by United Artists in 1954, was Errol Flynn's 46th feature film out of his career total of 55. It came right after 'The Master Of Ballentrae' (1953), and right before 'Let's Make Up' (1955) also known as 'Lilacs In The Spring'. 'Crossed Swords' was photographed in Pathecolor by Jack Cardiff, with a running time of 83 minutes. It was produced by Errol Flynn with Barry Mahon and Vittorio Vassarotti. It was written and directed by Milton Krims, with a musical score by Alessandro Cirogivini and Gino Marinuzzi. 'Crossed Swords' was filmed on location in the hills near Lauro, Italy with interiors shot at CineCitta Studios in Rome.

'Crossed Swords' is a romantic fable about sunny, picturesque, seventeenth century Italy in the city-state of Sedona. Errol Flynn plays Renzo, the number one, most elusive bachelor in all of Sedona. Renzo with his pal Raniero, son of the Duke Of Sedona (played by that suave Italian actor Cesare Danova) have been leaping into beds all over the Italian countryside, and just as rapidly leaping out of bedroom windows as irate husbands, fathers, or brothers come in through the door! After another close call Raniero asks Errol's Renzo, as to why do they run away instead of staying and fighting. The wise Renzo responds, 'Raniero, always leap out the window and never fight. For some strange reason, women just don't take kindly to the killing of their fathers, husbands, and brothers.'

Errol and Raniero return to Sedona where political intrigue is afoot. The Prime Minister to the Duke, Pavoncello (well-played by Italian thespian Roldano Lupi) sees Renzo as a possible rival to the Duke's beautiful daughter Francesca (played by Gina Lollobrigida, in the first her film with an American release). Pavoncello has exalted dreams, first to overthrow the Duke, and then conquer all of Italy's city-states, making himself the first Italian Emperor since the days of the Caesars and the Roman Empire. Flynn's Renzo has zero enthusiasm for political intrigue, and only seems to care about the amorous conquest of women! It's immediately apparent to the audience that Flynn's character has had a romance with Gina's Francesca in the past, who although maintaining that she despises Renzo is still in love with him. Errol admits to a lingering attraction, but that would mean ending his life of fun and adventure!

Pavoncello is able to think three steps ahead of his enemies, and prods the Duke and the Council Of Sedona into passing the 'Marriage Act'. The law says that all men over the age of twenty must be married, or get married to the first woman who publicly chooses him, with or without his consent! The Duke reluctantly agrees to the passage of the law as he fears that his daughter Lollobrigida is still in love with Sedona's number one rake, Flynn! The act takes effect as soon as each citizen of Sedona has heard the town crier read

out the proclamation of the law. Flynn doesn't wait and instantly jumps out of the window of the city hall to save his freedom!

The town crier pursues both Errol and Raniero all the way to outside the city gates of Sedona, where Flynn concedes that he will have to give up his palazzo, and all the beautiful women of the city. He advises Raniero to go back, get married and succeed the Duke one day, 'After all, you're young, and it may not be so bad. It would be like learning how to eat olives.' Raniero is furious and accuses Flynn of being in love with his sister, Francesca. 'Love?! Why that's an insult!' retorts our Errol, who then concedes that he will miss Francesca most of all. After all who could blame him, wouldn't any man miss Gina Lollobrigida?!

In the meantime, Pavoncello has decided that with Renzo and Raniero in exile the time is ripe to put his plans into action, by sending a squad of assassins to murder both Flynn and the young prince on the road. At the same time he has dispatched for an army of two hundred Swiss mercenaries to conquer Sedona and imprison the Duke! At a country inn, the hired murderers strike at Raniero who puts up a good fight until Errol awakens and joins him. Together all the assassins are dispatched by our heroes in an exciting and often comical sword fight! In one bit, Errol nonchalantly takes a break in the middle of the swordfight to drink from a jug of wine. Each time the jug gets near his lips, one of the killers shatters it until Flynn loses his temper and smashes the last bottle over the enemy's head!

Renzo and Raniero take to the road and see the approaching mercenary army march right into the gates of Sedona, and realize what is happening. Flynn immediately suspects Pavoncello of seizing power after the would-be assassination of the Duke's son. Not to be out done, Errol Flynn contacts several of his old flames in Sedona and asks them to get every beautiful woman in the city and come down to the town square where most of the soldiers are quartered. Flynn commands, 'Bring three or four girls for every soldier so that the square is packed with crowds, and load up your wagons with all the wine, bread, and cheese you have. Then flirt and romance with each soldier and get them off their guard. Raniero and I will attack the Duke's palace with the peasant men of Sedona!'

Sure enough the women of Sedona pour into the town square and the Swiss troops are having the time of their lives, thinking they have conquered the city-state and that all of its beautiful peasant women (who look suspiciously like voluptuous Italian starlets!) are welcoming them as victorious heroes! In a plan that would garner the envy of the Borgias, the soldiers are all relaxed, disarmed, amorous, and getting drunk while Raniero sneaks into town with an army of peasant men. Errol Flynn decides to rescue Francesca and the Duke

by jumping into a bedroom window, which is a big change from his always having to jump out of one. In the Duke's quarters Francesca embraces the gallant Flynn, and confesses that she still loves him. When Flynn admits that he still loves her, the Duke shouts, 'Ah ha! I would never let you marry my daughter Renzo, your a lothario!' Errol does a hilarious double-take and gasps, 'Marry?!...' Gina Lollobrigida gets between them saying, 'Now Father, why did you have to go and frighten him with that terrible word?! Renzo, stop looking out that window!' A visibly perspiring Flynn says, 'Well it is getting rather warm in here!'

Pavoncello and his few remaining effective guards break open the doors to the Duke's quarters and attack. Raniero and his peasants counter-attack, and we have an exciting battle that spills into the throne room and council chambers of the Duke's palazzo! The Swiss guards are soon overcome by the brave peasants fighting for their city, and Errol duels to the death with the villain! When Flynn finally runs his sword through the ambitious Pavoncello, the people of Sedona cheer him. Then the peasant men block Flynn's path and hold up the town crier, who finally get to shout the complete 'Marriage Act' to him! Renzo, the great liberator of Sedona is caught at last, he's as good as married! Errol Flynn immediately embraces Gina Lollobrigida, and with love in his heart says, 'All right, you've caught me. I'll marry you Francesca!' Gina scoffs and says, 'Marry you Renzo? I wouldn't marry you if you were the last man in Sedona....', but she is interrupted by a passionate kiss from Errol Flynn! The watching Duke smiles, and the people of Sedona cheer! The music swells, the picture fades-out, the end.

'Crossed Swords' is easily Errol Flynn's most obscure adventure film, as to my knowledge it has never appeared on American television, and has never been telecast on Turner Classic Movies, even though it should be part of the United Artists titles of the TCM film library. 'Crossed Swords' is an absolutely delightful, often hilarious swashbuckling romp. This forgotten Errol Flynn film is a very lavish, handsomely-mounted production with hundreds of film extras, and some of the most gorgeous Pathecolor cinematography ever shot by the great Jack Cardiff. Cardiff made the location scenery of the Italian hills of Lauro, with its authentic medieval palaces, and villages into a living vibrant picture postcard. The musical score by Italian film composers Cirogivini and Marinuzzi is first-rate, and a joy to listen to as they highlight the charming festivals of ancient Sedona.

'Crossed Swords' was well-directed by Milton Krims, making his directorial debut with this film. Milton Krims was earlier a top screenwriter in Hollywood, and even wrote the screenplays for two of Errol Flynn's previous films, 'Green Light' (1937) and 'The Sisters' (1938). He also wrote the screenplays for the superb 'Prince Of Foxes' (1949) with Tyrone Power, and the classic western,

'Tennessee's Partner' (1956) with John Payne and Ronald Reagan. 'Crossed Swords' would be Milton Krims' first and only feature film as a screen director, which is a shame because he handles both the comedy and action scenes with great skill and deft. Milton Krims would return to writing screenplays, and his final credits were for scripting several episodes of 'The Outer Limits', the imaginative science-fiction television series (1963-1965). Milton Krims died in 1988.

Cesare Danova became a top leading man in Italian films, and then made the trip to Hollywood in the late 1950's to become a staple playing handsome, romantic, elegant Italians on both television and the big screen. He appeared in fluff like 'Gidget Goes To Rome' (1964), but also did a great turn as a private detective in 1890's New York, in the frightening mystery film 'The Chamber Of Horrors' set in a wax museum, which co-starred Patrice Wymore and Wilfred Hyde-White! Cesare Danova died in 1992.

Errol Flynn's co-star in 'Crossed Swords' was none other than the soon to be world-wide famous Gina Lollobrigida! Billed by United Artists as 'Italy's Marilyn Monroe', Gina Lollobrigida's Italian accent was so thick that her voice, like Mr. Danova's was dubbed by an American actor. Even so, Gina Lollobrigida is effective as the fiery Francesca, and Errol Flynn enjoyed playing opposite 'La Lollo'! Already an Italian star, Gina Lollobrigida would next co-star in Rome with Humphrey Bogart, Jennifer Jones, Robert Morley, and Peter Lorre in 'Beat The Devil' (1954). Directed by John Huston, 'Beat The Devil' was a box-office flop despised by Bogie and movie audiences, but adored by the American film critics! Bogart said 'Aww, it's a stinker! Only the phonies like it'. He was right. However Gina Lollobrigida was not to be denied international stardom, which came through 'Trapeze' (1957) with Burt Lancaster, and Tony Curtis. She also made 'The Hunchback Of Notre Dame' (1958) with Anthony Quinn, 'Solomon And Sheba' (1959) with Yul Brynner and George Sanders, 'Fast And Sexy' (1960) with Dale Robertson, 'Never So Few' with Frank Sinatra, and even two Rock Hudson comedies 'Come September' (1961), and 'Strange Bedfellows' (1964). Lollobrigida made the dramas 'Woman Of Straw' (1964) with Sean Connery, and 'Imperial Venus' (1963) with Stephen Boyd, along with three very different comedies. 'Hotel Paradiso' (1966) was a charming drawing room comedy for MGM with Alec Guinness, followed by the very funny, but slightly off-color 'Buena Sera Mrs. Campbell' (1967) with Phil Silvers, Telly Savalas, and Peter Lawford! She then made the often side-splitting 'The Private Navy Of Sgt. O'Farrell' (1968) with Bob Hope, Jeffrey Hunter, and Phyllis Diller. Bob grabbed Gina, and left poor Jeff Hunter with Miss Diller! Gina Lollobrigida returned to Europe for the rest of her film career, except for a stint on the 'Falcon Crest' television series in 1983. In Germany, she co-starred with the impeccable David Niven in a tasteless, unfunny comedy, 'King, Queen, Knave' (1972), and traveled to Spain to appear in the spaghetti western, 'Bad Man's

River' (1972) with Lee Van Cleef and an embarrassed James Mason.

Gina Lollobrigida is still with us and looking as beautiful and alluring as ever. She is semi-retired but may take a film part in Italy if it suits her. Gina Lollobrigida always had a reputation of working very hard in her 64 films, being a good actress, and more importantly a very kind and sweet person to friends and fans alike.

According to Jack Cardiff's autobiography 'Magic Hour', Errol Flynn was very ill during the making of 'Crossed Swords'. After collapsing on the set, Flynn was sent to a hospital in Naples, where the doctors said he was on his deathbed with his liver shutting down completely. By some miracle, Errol Flynn got out of that hospital bed, and returned to complete 'Crossed Swords'. None of this is visible on screen. In fact it's quite the opposite as Errol Flynn leaps from balconies, and fights up and down staircases as if he had wings on his feet! One can always spot a stuntman, but in most of these shots the camera is in close and it's really Errol doing all this physical swashbuckling! Errol Flynn loved making comedies, and most of all poking fun at himself. While making 'Crossed Swords' Flynn is having a ball, hamming it up for the audience. When any performer or star has that genuine 'joy of performing' that Errol Flynn displays with such sparkling wit in 'Crossed Swords', then film audiences take him into their hearts. It's a great loss that one of Errol Flynn's most fun-filled, and enjoyable performances has been unseen by the vast majority of his fans. In fact Errol Flynn was quite angry with United Artists for botching the distribution and promotion of 'Crossed Swords', and thereby robbing him of a potential money-making hit. Instead of 'ballyhooing' this Pathecolor comedy/swashbuckler, United Artists simply dumped it on the lower half of a double feature! After 'Crossed Swords', Errol Flynn went ahead with his production of 'The Story Of William Tell' and asked Jack Cardiff to both film and direct in what would have been his first feature film as a film director. The 'William Tell' debacle is another story that was covered previously and is stored in the ship's archives. Errol Flynn's film career would never fully recover from these two losses.

Errol Flynn, take a deep bow for 'Crossed Swords', you deserve it.

Ralph Schiller