

The Wrecker

UK / Germany | 1929 | 74 minutes

Credits

Director Géza von Bolváry
Screenplay Angus MacPhail/Benno Vigny
Photography Otto Kanturek

Cast

Ambrose Barney Carlyle Blackwell
Mary Shelton Benita Hume
Roger Doyle Joseph Striker
Sir Gerald Bartlett Sir Gerald Bartlett

In Brief

Based on a play co-written (with Bernard Merivale) by Arnold Ridley, best remembered for playing Private Godfrey in *Dad's Army*, 1929's *The Wrecker* was originally announced as Britain's first talkie, but it took so long to convert the silent film to sound (and then it was mostly sound effects rather than dialogue) that Hitchcock and *Blackmail* beat it to the punch. Future Hitchcock screenwriter Angus MacPhail made his debut with this film, though there's little to hint at his impressive subsequent work. It's a rather silly potboiler about an evil bus operator wrecking trains in spectacular crashes to boost his business while retired cricket hero Joseph Striker tries to flush out his identity and stop him while wooing Benita Hume along the way. It's formulaic stuff, but what makes it stand out are the crash sequences, for which the producers really did wreck a locomotive and set it on

fire. The same crash shot from multiple angles is used for all the film's crashes, but the angles are varied enough to give each a different look and character, and the film does a particularly vivid job of portraying the aftermath of one of them. The wonderfully named director Geza von Bolvary is rather better with steam and speed with people: no-one particularly embarrasses themselves, though Leonard Thompson's comic relief detective Rameses Ratchett is neither particularly comic or much of a relief, but Carlyle Blackwell's treacherous railway employee earns his top billing with a more convincing performance than you might expect. It's no classic but it is a decent enough entertainment. Oh, and look out for the shadow of the cameraman hand-cranking away on one of the passing trains.

The film was massively reworked into the much more enjoyable 1936 comedy thriller *Seven Sinners* which left in little but the train crash (using the same footage) while changing the motive – in the latter version it was to hide a single murder – but this doesn't outstay its welcome at seven reels and will probably be manna from heaven to railway buffs with its plethora of vintage locomotives and scenes set in Waterloo Station. Network/Strike Force's UK DVD has more than decent picture quality - the version that survives only has one moment of sound - and is complimented by an impressive array of extras, including brief archive footage of one of 'Head-On' Joe Connelly's head-on train crashes that he staged at state fairs in the US in the 1930s and a look at the location of the crash scene from the film: the *Wrecker's* evil plan to destroy the railway in favor of road transport may have failed in the film, but in reality the branch line was closed and turned into a road less than a decade later!

- TrevorAclea



Géza von Bolváry

Von Bolváry was born in Budapest. He attended the Imperial Military Academy in Budapest and subsequently served in the Hungarian army (Honved Hussars). After World War I he left military service with the rank of Royal Hungarian Rittmeister.

He then earned his living in the new Hungarian film industry. He began his career in about 1920 as an actor in various silent films, but soon changed to the Star-Film company, where he was first active as a director and made his debut as director and screenwriter with *A Kétarcú asszony*. In 1922 the film concern Emelka in Munich hired him as a director for four years.

Between 1926 and 1928 he worked for the firm Fellner & Somlo in Berlin, after which he went to London for a year to work for British International Pictures. After returning to Berlin, he worked until 1933 with Superfilm Berlin and then until 1935 with Boston Films, also in Berlin. From 1936 Bolváry worked for a number of production companies in Vienna, notably for Styria-Film, Terra-Film and Wien-Film.

After World War II Bolváry went to Rome and up to 1949 made a number of films as director for Cinopera. In 1950 he settled in Munich and four years was promoted chief of production of Starfilm.

Between 1920 and 1958, when he made his last films, he directed about 100 films and also wrote scripts from time to time. Aged 63, he died of heart disease on 10 August 1961 in Altenbeuern (now Neubeuern), near Rosenheim in Bavaria, Germany. - Wikipedia

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