

# No Down Payment/The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker

The Twentieth Century Fox film *No Down Payment* takes a look at life in California suburbia circa 1957, both its surface and its underbelly. When David and Jean Martin move into a new subdivision called Sunrise Hills they are welcomed by their new neighbors, who include three other couples. But all is not idyllic in Sunrise Hills and the new couple in town must contend with alcoholism, racism and promiscuous behavior in equal measures.

*No Down Payment* was Martin Ritt's second movie directorial effort – earlier that year he'd made his film debut with *Edge of the City*. That he was a born filmmaker is in evidence throughout *No Down Payment* – he was an actor's director, but also a director with a simple but potent visual style. He assembled a great cast, including Joanne Woodward, Sheree North, Tony Randall (in an atypical unsympathetic role), Jeffrey Hunter, Cameron Mitchell, Barbara Rush and Pat Hingle. The screenplay was credited to Philip Yordan, even though it was actually written by then-blacklisted writer Ben Maddow.

The film disappeared quickly, probably hitting a little too close to home for the comfort of audiences of the time, who perhaps wanted to believe that suburban life was more like *Father Knows Best* and *Ozzie and Harriet* than the disillusioned life depicted in *No Down Payment*. Viewed today, the movie is a beautifully acted slice of post World War II drama, well directed by Ritt and wonderfully scored by composer Leigh Harline.

Leigh Harline was one of Fox's regular composers throughout the 1950s, providing great scores for such Fox films as *Pickup on South Street*, *Broken Lance*, *Black Widow*, *House of Bamboo*, *The Girl in the Red Velvet Swing*, *Good Morning, Miss Dove*, *The Bottom of the Bottle*, *23 Paces to Baker Street*, *The Wayward Bus* and many others. His score for *No Down Payment* is of his usual high caliber. Beginning with a bustling main title filled with the promise of suburban living, it introduces us to the world of Sunrise Hills. But soon Harline begins introducing undercurrents into his score, undercurrents that will soon turn from idyllic to dramatic. It's a superb score from a master composer who really understood the film medium.

Two years later, Fox released *The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker*, which was based on a Broadway play by Liam O'Brien. Set in the waning years of the 19th century, the titular Mr. Pennypacker has a little secret: He's a bigamist, with two completely separate families and a mere seventeen children between them. He's a freethinker, with some radical ideas about votes for women and other incendiary notions, for which he is not the least bit apologetic. The film does hedge its bets a little by revealing that he's actually a former bigamist, since one of the wives has died several years before. But Mr. Pennypacker's lifestyle and beliefs engender much comedy and drama throughout.

Directed by Fox regular Henry Levin

and shot in Cinemascope by Milton Krasner, *The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker* starred Clifton Webb, Dorothy McGuire, Charles Coburn, Jill St. John, Ron Ely, David Nelson, Larry Gates and Richard Deacon. Just what audiences of the time made of a film that was kind of pro polygamy is anyone's guess, but the cast is fun to watch and Mr. Webb is always a pleasure no matter what the film. Once again, Leigh Harline was the composer.

For *Pennypacker*, Harline created a delightful and tuneful score, never pandering to the comedy and helping to give the film a dramatic underpinning. It's a charming score and a Harline highlight.

This is the world premiere release of these two Harline scores. They have been restored from the original elements in the Fox vault and both are in that great Fox stereo. While every effort has been made to make this release as good as possible, there are a handful of cues with minor damage, but nothing that would warrant leaving them off the CD.

— Bruce Kimmel