

Saturday Night at the Drive-In Movie

By Pat Cook

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STORY OF THE PLAY

It's the 1950s and you're all set for a big night with the family. What do you do? You load up the car and drive to the "Stars Under the Stars" drive-in movie! Return with us now to those thrilling days of yesteryear where Mr. Gleason, the movie manager, announces over squealing speakers the rules to enjoy yourself, "in the comfort of your own car!"

See horrific previews of "Time Travelers in Space Suits" and assorted shorts when aliens come not from outer space but from our own future – 1978! See previews of what it's like for women behind bars and how inmates keep disappearing in the movie "Wicked Wanda, Women's Warden"! And tune in on the latest installment of a Western serial, "The Adventures of Rocky Rhode and the Horse Who Loved Him." Then it's time for the main feature, a horror flick, which has movie-goers Tony and Gloria battling up and down the rows of parked cars. "You didn't tell me it was a scary movie!" she yells at him as the credits for "The Vampire's Hickey" come on.

All the fun of going to the drive-in is here, complete with ads featuring dancing popcorn bags and soda cups to someone trying to find her car in the dark after visiting the concession stand.

This play calls for a large, flexible cast and one practical set, along with other set pieces for "upcoming attractions." Why, it's the next best thing to actually being there – you can almost feel the mosquitoes biting you. And that's what it was like back then, when the sun went down and you all decided to spend "Saturday Night at the Drive-In Movie."

SETTING

Time: 1950s, a Saturday night in summer.

Place: The Stars Under the Stars Drive-In Movie.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

11-15 men, 11-20 women

At the Drive-in

MR. GLEASON: Manager of the drive-in. (*May be voice-over.*)
JANET: Know-it-all young teen girl.
TERRI: Janet's young teen friend.
GLORIA: Panicky older teen girl.
TONY: Gloria's long-suffering teen boyfriend.
HILDA: Young hillbilly girl.
MRS. BARLOW: Disgusted mother, around 35.

On the Screen

ANNOUNCERS: Male; friendly but commanding voices.*
HARRY: Average guy, mid-30s. (*Double with BUSTER.*)
MARTHA: Harry's average wife, also mid-30s. (*Double with OLGA.*)
IRA: Time traveler, robot-like. (*Double with MARK.*)
CAPT. O'MALLEY: Easy going police captain. (*Double with MARCUS.*)
OFFICER BRAGG: Pushy young cop, ready for action.
WANDA: Stout, hard women's prison warden. (*Double with DOTTIE.*)
GEECH: Hard-bitten lady hoodlum. (*Double with LOLA.*)
BEULAH: Wise-cracking prison guard. (*Double with TRIXIE.*)
MATTHEWS: No-nonsense District Attorney. (*Double with MAURICE.*)
MYRTLE: Rather dim prison inmate. (*Double with TERRI.*)
JANE: The average girl-next-door. (*Double with MRS. BARLOW.*)
ROCKY RHODE: Cowboy serial hero, Jaunty.
SKEETER: Rocky's comical sidekick.
BETTY LOU: Rocky's naïve sweetheart.
PETE: No-good gunslinger.
ROWDY: Another gun-slinging thug.
MA BADLANDS: Large, forceful woman in her 50s.
OLGA: Cleaning woman from the old world.

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MARK REDBONE: Hip young man in a leather jacket.

LOLA: Mark's nervous girlfriend.

BUSTER: Mark's wise-cracking buddy.

TRIXIE: Buster's gum-chewing girlfriend.

MAG: Teenage delivery girl. (*Double with JANET.*)

MARCUS REDBONE: Menacing ancient vampire.

AUNT DOTTIE: Mark's conniving aunt, 50-ish.

MAURICE: Meek lawyer.

DANCING POPCORN BAG: (*Doubles with HILDA.*)

DANCING CUP: (*Doubles with MA BADLANDS.*)

*CASTING NOTE: ANNOUNCER may be played by more than one man. Several Announcers would provide a variety of voices and allow the primary Announcer to play an onstage part as well.

About the Play

This play takes place in the '50s, a more formal world than current day. In the first preview "Time Travelers in Space Suits" and assorted shorts, even though Harry is at home he is probably wearing a long-sleeved, buttoned white shirt, narrow dark tie and buttoned cardigan vest (*Think Ward Cleaver in "Leave It to Beaver."*) Same is true with Martha – full dress with strand of pearls. Even Janet and Terri could possibly be wearing full skirts and petticoats and sport ponytails.

In Act II, Janet says, "Because, Mrs. Leonard Friskie of Omaha, Nebraska, YOU ASKED for it!" Janet is referring to the popular '50s TV series ("You Asked For It") which allowed viewers to send postcards to the show requesting something they would like to see on the air. There were no interstate highways, air travel was expensive, and top-name entertainers tended to appear only on the coasts. The series allowed middle-Americans to see things and acts that they would otherwise never experience.

This being said, I do hope you enjoy the show. A LOT of us older types miss the old drive-in movies – maybe this, in some way, will explain why.

So, it's just getting dark outside and Mr. Gleason has gone into the projection booth ... what did I do with my popcorn?

- Pat Cook

SET DESIGN

The overall set is a drive-in movie lot with a '50s bench-style car seat far DSR, perhaps on the stage apron. Another same style car seat with different upholstery pattern is located far DSL. For more elaborate sets, the cars could have crank down windows and slightly rusted metal speakers stationed nearby to hang on the glass.

Mr. Gleason's projection booth and concessions stand may be unseen or, if space allows, near one of the stage aprons. The booth should be taller, raised above the concessions stand, if possible.

The movies are played on the main set, a large living room area. Utilized in this floor plan are three doors, one hidden door and a staircase.

The first door, on the SR wall, leads outside. US of this door is a curtained window. The second door, which leads to a closet, is located on the US wall and the third door leading to a kitchen is located on the SL wall. The hidden door, blended into the wall, is located USR, just SL of a bureau in the corner. The staircase begins SL, just US of the third door, runs a few steps to a landing and then leads off SL.

The furniture in the room is old and battered. There is a writing table and chair DSR against the wall below the door over which hangs a large empty wooden frame. A large old overstuffed sofa rest just right of CS and faces out. There is a coffee table in front of it. Around the rest of the room are various knickknacks, paintings, vases, small tables, etc., to round out the room. This set is used for the "Rocky Rhode – and the Horse Who Loved Him" serial and "The Vampire's Hickey" feature.

Other set pieces, such as a desk, chair, bench, etc. will be called for earlier in the show for the "shorts" and "Coming Attractions" and will be located DSL, DSR and DC.

ACT I

(AT RISE: It is a gentle summer's dusk in the 1950's. The early evening SOUNDS, such as crickets, night birds and such, are heard. The sun has just set, leaving its gentle rays to highlight the latecomers to the drive-in theatre. They meekly park their cars, crank down their windows to half and pull up their individual, slightly rusted metal speakers to hang them on the glass. Before the previews and feature begins we hear a booming deep-voiced announcer.)

ANNOUNCER: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen and get set for your best bet for family entertainment. Where else can you enjoy the best in motion picture previews, exciting serials and top-rate features all in the privacy and comfort of your own car? Sit back, kick your shoes off and get ready for the best time of your lives!

(LIGHTS come up on the far DSR car seat where JANET and TERRI sit, keyed up.)

JANET: This is SO neat! I LOVE coming to the drive-in!

TERRI: Oh, for heaven's sake, will you not get all excited. We don't even know what the feature is.

JANET: *(Looks to HER right.)* I do. Ooh, there's Jack Tyler and he's with --

TERRI: *(Scoots close to JANET and also squints to see.)* Who? Who's he with?

JANET: *(Eyes wide.)* Mary Logan! *(SHE and TERRI look at each other.)*

TERRI: *(“For shame!”)* Ah MMM!

JANET: Who do you have over there? *(THEY scoot over and look to their left.)*

TERRI: Looks like Cleo Thompson.

JANET: Wasn't she the one who got thrown out of the cheerleader squad?

TERRI and JANET: Oooh! *(The GIRLS stare out as LIGHTS fade out.)*

GLEASON: Uh, ... hold on a sec ... wait ... *(SFX: microphone squeals.)* What's the matter with this ratty -

End of Freeview

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