KINONIK

SULLIVAN'S TRAVELS (1941)

Directed by Preston Sturges

WEDNESDAY February 18th 7PM



John L. Sullivan makes hit comedies: *Ants in Your Pants of 1939, Hey, Hey in the Hayloft*. He's rich, successful, beloved. And he hates it. He wants to make *O Brother, Where Art Thou?,* a serious social drama about suffering and poverty. His studio bosses laugh at him: “You're a millionaire who's never missed a meal, what do you know about hardship?” So Sullivan disguises himself as a hobo with ten cents in his pocket and hits the road to learn about trouble.

Preston Sturges made this in 1941 while America was still clawing out of the Depression and premiered it three weeks after Pearl Harbor. Sullivan asked an urgent question for the time: what should art do when everything's falling apart? He finds real poverty, real violence, real despair. The film's six-minute silent montage through breadlines and flophouses is as bleak as anything Warner Bros made in the Pre-Code era. Then Sullivan ends up in the same brutal Georgia chain gang system we showed in January; beaten, anonymous, presumed dead.

And there, in a Black church that opens its doors to white prisoners, Sullivan watches convicts laugh at a Disney cartoon. Men who have nothing, who've been stripped of dignity and freedom, finding relief in Playful Pluto. Laughter as survival. Perhaps comedy is a mode of resistance.

Sturges dedicated the film "to the memory of those who made us laugh: the motley mountebanks, the clowns, the buffoons, in all times and in all nations whose efforts have lightened our burden a little." His question about art is urgent now, too. Not escapism, but sustenance. And beyond sustenance, succor. Art is more than fun, and even if it were, fun is not an indulgence; it’s how we build relationships and maintain community.