

THE THEODORE HUFF MEMORIAL FILM SOCIETY

Program for Tuesday December 22nd., at 8.0.p.m., Room 318 (Radio Writers' Guild) 2 E.23rd St., N.Y.

A MESSAGE TO OUR MEMBERS

Our plans to screen "FROM MANGER TO CROSS" and "EXTASE", announced at the last meeting, have by no means been abandoned. However, last-minute complications made it impossible to guarantee arrival of these two prints and thus, rather than run the risk of disappointing our members, it was considered wiser to postpone that program temporarily. We are endeavouring to obtain these two films for one of our January shows, and an announcement about this will be made at the forthcoming meeting.

Our current show contains several extremely rare items, and in keeping with the festive season, the emphasis is on light-hearted material. With the exception of the Chaplin film, these are subjects that are very difficult to see, and our prints are in first-class condition, so we know we can look forward to a good turnout for this program.

As announced last time, we are making an attempt to cut down quite heavy expenses in every way possible - the less spent on unnecessary overheads, the more available for renting better films. One of our biggest expenditures is on a very large mailing list, and while naturally members are entitled to receive (and we are pleased to supply) advance program notes, we do feel that many of the names on our list are of people who have but scant interest in our activities, and seldom if ever appear at our meetings. Thus, we have attached a simple form to the end of these notes. Those members who wish to continue receiving notes are asked to sign them and either hand them in at the next meeting, or mail them to W.K. Everson at the Manhattan Towers Hotel, 2166 Broadway, New York City. Members who do not wish to continue receiving notes need not, of course, take any action, and accordingly will be dropped from our circulation lists.

In conclusion, the Committee of the film society wishes all members the very best for Christmas and the New Year ... here's hoping for bigger, better, older and rarer films in 1954!

PROGRAMME: (In order of screening)	MICKEY'S CHRISTMAS	(one reel)
	GRASS	(one reel)
	THE GANGSTER AND THE GIRL	(two reels)
	HIS TRYSTING PLACE	(two reels)
	Intermission	
	SKINNER'S DRESS SUIT	(seven reels)

MICKEY'S CHRISTMAS

Walt Disney's early talkie black-and-white cartoons are always a delight today. This is one of the best of his Mickey Mouse shorts - made before Disney got too cute, and before inventive gags in cartoons were supplanted by sadistic violence.

GRASS Paramount, 1925. Produced by Merism C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack. Photography by Ernest B. Schoedsack.

The mid-twenties provided the richest material that American cinema has contributed to the documentary field ... Flaherty's films "Nanook of the North" and "Moana", "Grass", "Chang", and later, "Tabu" and "White Shadows". "GRASS" - which deals with the Baktyari tribe of North West Persia, and their twice yearly migration in search of grass - is one of the most famous. Curiously, it is a rather detached sort of documentary, and has little of the humanity, and the love of people, of Flaherty's films; in its own unemotional way though, it is superlatively done and contains some of the most spectacular and genuinely exciting sequences of any documentary film. Our version is a condensation of the original feature - a condensation that incorporates the two primary highlights, namely the crossing of the glacier-swollen river, and the great climax of the trek over the mountain range. These two sequences are wonderfully photographed and edited, reaching considerable heights of tension and excitement.

Following "Grass", Schoedsack and Cooper followed up with another great documentary, "Chang", and the spectacle "The Four Feathers". Considering their remarkable background (and success) with documentary, their careers following the coming of sound are rather surprising. Cooper became associated with John Ford at the time of "The Last Patrol", is now a partner with Ford in Argosy Films, and is of course one of the big names of Cinema. Schoedsack on the other hand, launched himself into a series of hair-raising stunt "shockers" - "King Kong", "The Most Dangerous Game", "Son of Kong", "Dr. Cyclops" and "Mighty Joe Young". With the exception of "The Last Days of Pompeii" his other talkies were mainly infrequent "B" subjects, and except for an expedition into Arabia in the early thirties to secure footage for Radio, he did not return to the documentary field.

HIS TRYSTING PLACE

Keystone: released November 9, 1914.
Written and directed by Charles Chaplin; with Mabel Normand,
Mack Swain and Phyllis Allen. (This film is also referred to
occasionally as "Family House".

In his year at Keystone, Chaplin made 35 films, of which the sole feature - "Tillie's Punctured Romance" - is probably the most famous. Although this series is marked for its rather crude slapstick and violence, many of the films contain interesting improvisation and spontaneous charm, along with the first appearance of many of the familiar Chaplin traits. During 1914 too, Chaplin's costume became fixed - but not his character. His Keystone characterisations were basically unsympathetic, though often engaging - the obnoxious drunk, the sharper, the blunderer, the thief and the philanthropist - all of them often cruel almost to a point of sadism. Not until the following year at Essanay did the "real Charlie" begin to appear. "His Trysting Place" is one of the best of the Keystone series, and certainly one of the most polished; there are some very funny moments in a restaurant and later in a park. One of its most amusing images is of Charlie carrying a small baby by the scruff of its rompers!

(These notes, very much condensed, are taken from the Keystone chapter of Ted Huff's biography of Chaplin).

THE GANGSTER AND THE GIRL

Ince: 1914. Produced by Scott Sidney; scenario by Thomas H. Ince and Richard V. Spencer.

Starring CHARLES RAY, ELIZABETH BURBRIDGE, MARGARET THOMPSON, ARTHUR JARRETT.

Whether or not "The Gangster and the Girl" was actually directed by Ince as the credits claim is a matter that is hard to prove or disprove. Ince certainly, has acquired a reputation that he certainly does not deserve - French and Italian magazines, devoted seriously to the film, still run frequent tributes to Ince, revering him as a pioneer and a creative artist on a plane with Griffith. While he undoubtedly could and did direct, he seemed mainly to hover around in a supervisory capacity, pouncing down on the finished product with a director credit if it turned out well, leaving well enough alone if it didn't! Certainly many of the early William S. Hart and Francis Ford westerns credited to him were actually directed by the stars themselves, while his epic "Civilization" was likewise directed by another.

All of that is perhaps neither here nor there, except to emphasize that one cannot, without knowing the facts, regard this film as having been made, personally, by Ince. Regardless of who directed it, it is a tremendously interesting film from a period which is very badly represented in film archives. A full-blooded melodrama, it was made well before Charles Ray established his familiar "small-town-dick" character. It is interesting to note too, that the leading lady - Elizabeth Burbridge - switched to writing scenarios in 1929, and became probably the most prolific of all screenplay writers for "B" westerns, turning out script after script for Autry, Bob Steele and other sagebrush heroes at Republic, Monogram and other companies, and so far as we are aware, still going strong at it.

Mr. John E. Allen, the well-known New Jersey film collector and one-man archive, now controls the rights to this film and has been kind enough to loan the society a copy of the original shooting script, complete with Ince's pencilled notations. This script offers such interesting data as the facts that shooting started on May 27 1914 and was finished on June 6, 1914. The first print was shipped from California on June 19th., and the film was in release on August 7th! Certainly this script offers proof-positive that no matter how much off-the-cuff shooting was being done, rigid discipline was practised by some production companies. There are but few deviations between the original and the finished film, and those deviations were caused by unforeseeable circumstance and are duly recorded on the script. (I.e., a sequence showing a girl arrested for shop-lifting had to be scratched because it was subsequently impossible to shoot in a department store as planned. So instead, the versatile young lady was arrested on the street for another offence!) The script makes interesting suggestions for obtaining the right alum sets, insists that "a crook atmosphere" be stressed throughout, and indicates that if the planned individual make-up doesn't succeed in establishing the different "types", the director should get around this by inserting additional close-ups.

Altogether this is a fascinating document, and we are grateful to Mr. Allen for loaning it to us. Interested members may examine it prior to, or after, the screening.

SKINNER'S DRESS SUIT A Universal Jewel, presented by Carl Laemmle. (1925, released 1926)

Directed by William A. Seiter. Script by Rex Taylor, from the original story by Henry Irving Dodge, Lawrence Marston and Edward Fawcett. Photographed by Arthur Todd.

With: REGINALD DENNY (Skinner); LAURA LAFLANTE (his wife); Ben Hendricks Jr., E.J. Ratcliffe, Hedda Hopper, Henry A. Barrow, William Strauss, Lila Leslie, Betty Morrissey, Arthur Lake.

This equivalent pre-Christmas week of 28 years ago saw Broadway ablaze with interesting titles and names - the holiday moviegoer could choose from STELLA DALLAS, THE BIG PARADE, THE MERRY WIDOW, PHANTOM OF THE OPERA, EAST LYNN, PARISIAN LOVE, WOMAN OF THE WORLD, TUMBLEWEEDS, SIEGFRIED, A KISS FOR CINDERELLA, LADY WINDERMERE'S FAN and BEN HUR. (Alas, the 1953 holiday moviegoer will have no such good fortune!) And that same week, the film trade was looking at advance screenings (for early 1926 release) of the two latest Reginald Denny comedies from Universal.

The first of them, "What Happened to Jones" (also directed by Seiter) rated rave reviews, and was considered Denny's best to date. Then, a few days later came "SKINNER'S DRESS SUIT", and this time the trade critics outdid themselves. "Harrison's Reports", for example, stated: "Mr. Denny has appeared in many good comedies, but none of them equals this in entertaining value ... it can be shown anywhere and under any conditions. It is sure to give satisfaction". The verdict of "Film Daily" was: "Denny's best yet .. after a succession of real comedy hits, Denny scores another knockout and you have another boxoffice hit. Surefire entertainment - you cannot afford to lose out on this one!" It is interesting to note that each and every review commented on the film's "clean and wholesome" appeal, and its complete absence of the vulgarity which was characterizing so many other contemporary comedies.

"SKINNER'S DRESS SUIT", which had been made previously by Essanay in 1917 with Bryant Washburn, Virginia Valli and Hazel Daly, is the type of slight but slick "Saturday Evening Post" comedy which has almost completely disappeared from current cinema. (The only recent example was the very pleasing and overlooked Republic film, "The Lady Wants Mink", a film very much in the tradition of "Skinner". Perhaps it is no mere coincidence that it was also produced and directed by Seiter).

In plot it is slim, but full of gentle charm and fast-paced humor; it builds itself around the old cliché that "clothes make the man", and comments on the "problems" of acceptable social life in the twenties, the ways to "advancement" through keeping up with the boss socially - and complications of trying to do all this on an inadequate budget. The party sequences feature a spirited rendition of the Charleston, considered one of the film's highlights at the time.

Incidentally, "SKINNER'S DRESS SUIT" provides an interesting example too, of the star-vehicle-series of the twenties - a type of movie-making that has now almost disappeared. Today, the only remaining vehicles in the strictest sense are the grade "D" catastrophes with Jungle Jim and the Bowery Boys - and at the opposite end of the scale, the Alan Ladd, John Wayne or Doris Day vehicles. However, no Warner salesman who valued his job would dare talk about "six John Waynes" when signing an exhibition contract - the big vehicles today are handled strictly as individual subjects. (The disappearance of the series films and the vehicles has come about primarily because they had degenerated into "B" product, as with the Richard Arlen and Richard Dix films of the forties, and the various "family" series, and were thus no longer considered good financial risks). SKINNER'S DRESS SUIT shows that the vehicles of the twenties were considered of real importance - they were given the top talent available, and packed with production values. Laura LaFlante's film prior to this, for example, was "The Midnight Sun" - one of Universal's biggest epics, which in itself testifies to the importance of the Denny films commercially.

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COMMITTEE OF THE FILM SOCIETY: Charles Turner (Chairman); Robert G. Youngson (Program Secretary); Herman G. Weinberg; Bill Kenly (Musical Scores); Warren Rothenberger; William K. Everson (Program Notes).

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PLEASE ENSURE THAT I AM MAINTAINED ON YOUR MAILING LIST TO RECEIVE REGULAR PROGRAM NOTES AND OTHER NOTIFICATIONS:

(Signed) _____
Address _____