
This little gem perhaps hardly qualifies as "spectacle"—but it seemed too good to hold over until a later program. It is one of several fine old Sennett one-reelers that we have acquired for future screenings, others including "Skyrocketing," "Teaching Lona Astor" and "Rubber's Dramatic Career." "Barney Oldfield's Race For Life" is both one of the most famous, and one of the least frequently revived, of all the earlier Sennett's. All that most people have seen of it is the new classic still of Mabel Normand being chained to the railroad tracks by a leering Ford Sterling, wielding a huge hammer. Through the ages, the question must have persisted: "Why?"

The film, alas, offers no solution. Although Mabel is chained to the track for a full three-quarters of the picture, no real explanation is offered—or does one see necessary in view of the wonderful thrill and comedy that precedes it. Like "The General," the film is one long chase, with the heroes (including the Keystone Cops) striving desperately to reach the stricken Mabel before the gloriously inhuman villains can roar over her in their stolen locomotive. Quite apart from its grand comedy content, the film reveals much genuine and surprisingly advanced movie technique. Well before the advent of "The Birth of a Nation" and "Intolerance," one finds continual use of the moving camera mounted on cars, on the train, and producing lateral tracks as well as full moving close-ups) and of rapid cross-cutting very much in the Griffith style. Some scenes in the train-car chase bear astonishing resemblance to those in the finale of "Intolerance," and while obviously one cannot claim "influence" from that later film, it is a matter of record that Sennett laboriously studied and applied the cutting patterns evolved by Griffith in his Biograph films of the period, so that the time-honored Griffith influence is very much apparent in this film.

MAGIC MOVIE MOMENTS and THRILLS FROM THE PAST (Warner Brothers, 1934. One reel each)

For some years now, Robert O. Youngman, one of the organizers of this group, has been turning out slick little one and one-reelers for Warners, and even a feature length documentary—"Fifty Years Before Your Eyes." The shorts were generally cheerfully realistic affairs, centering in as much mayhem, violence and catastrophe as was humanly possible in a thousand feet of film. Since they were all commercially very successful, and one won an Academy Award, they have naturally passed largely unrecognized by the film students. Now however, Bob has been able to embark on a series that has been long overdue—a series devoted, seriously and intelligently, to a reminder of great films of the past, as opposed to the "Flicker Flashback" type of short which merely ridiculed old product and deliberately sought out the most crude and primitive material.

The first of this new series, "Magic Movie Moments," was shown to the group some months ago. We revive it tonight for the benefit of the several members who have joined us since then, because it is certainly worth a second viewing, and because, by coupling it with its follow-up, one can see more clearly its value as part of an established series.

"Magic Movie Moments" is a meticulous condensation of the staggering Biblical spectacle sequences from 1932's "NOAH'S ARK." The film was directed by Michael Curtiz, and the short includes fascinating scenes of the elaborate Broadway premiere. Dolores Costello, George O'Brien, Noah Beery, Joseph Schildkraut, Miguel de la Fuente and Pauline Williams are among those who appear in this one-reel classic. This is spectacle as it was and should be, but alas is no more—"Que Viva," "The Robe," "Samson and Delilah" and the others seem almost like cheap little programmes compared with this work of footage.

"Thrills from the Past" is adapted from 1927's "OLD SAN FRANCISCO," made by Alan Crosland (one of the most talented and under-rated directors of the twenties) and starring Dolores Costelio and Norman Oarz. A wonderful Fu Manchu type of melodrama dealing with tongues and white slavery among other judy ingredients, it is climax by probably the biggest earthquake ever staged for the screen—and we're not forgetting Van Dyke's monumental efforts in "San Francisco" either. Actually, both earthquakes were handled in vastly differing styles, Crosland's (apparently brought about solely by the prayers of Miss Costello, about to be shipped off to a fate worse than death) was put up for spectacular gloss—as concentrates on the press image, while whole streets being destroyed at one blow, on buildings collapsing night and left Van Dyke's earthquake was perhaps more effective, dramatically, because it never lost sight of the personal element. (Jack Holt's death for example, Gabie's searchings for Jeanette MacDonald) and thus was able to produce emotional as well as physical shock. In any event, the several later talkie earthquakes certainly pale into insignificance compared with the disasters engineered by Meuser. Crosland and Van Dyke both are so good that it is immaterial which of the two is the better—although possibly any earthquake with Gabio has an edge over one without him.
"THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME"

Presented by CARL LAMBEU
Produced by HENRY THALBERG
Directed by WALLACE WORSLEY

A Universal Super-Jewel, Released on September 6, 1923 as a road-show attraction

Adapted from Victor Hugo’s novel by Parley Poore Shakes; scenario by Edward T. Lowe jr.
Photographed by Robert S. Newhard; associate photographers - Tony Koruna
Assistant director: Jack Sullivan
2nd Assistant Director: William Tyler

The Cast: (as a matter of interest, we are adding in brackets the names of the stars who played the principal roles in 1939’s remake for RKO by William Dieterle).

Quasimodo ................................ LOU CHANEY (Charles Laughton)
Belleverde .................................. Patric Knowles (Marie O’Hara)
Clarin ....................................... Bernard Florence (Thomas Mitchell)
Phoebus .................................... Morten Kayne (Alan Marshall)
Louise de Gondelaurier .................. Kate Lester
Jean ......................................... Brandon Hurst (Gabriel Hardwicke, named Frollo)
Orlando ...................................... Raymond Hatton (Edmond O’Brien)
Louis XII .................................... Tully Marshall (Harry Davenport)
Dom Claude .................................. Nigel de Brulier (Walter Hampden)
Monseigneur Neufchatel .................. Henry L. Van Meter
Godlie ...................................... Gladys Brockwell
Marie ........................................ Eulalie Jensen
Fleur de Lys ................................ Winfield Bryan
Monseigneur le Vertueux ............... Nick de Ruys
King’s Chamberlain ....................... Edwin Wallack (Steeve Girardot)
Chereval’s assistant ...................... W. Ray Meyers
Josephus ................................. William Parke sr.
Judge of Court ............................ John Cushar (George Zucco)

and extras
and bit players

Of all the filmic spectacles built around one period or another in France’s history, two stand out above all the others - D.W. Griffith’s ORPHANS OF THE STORM, and Wallace Worsley’s THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME. Actually, Griffith should have made the Hugo film - its whole plot, scene and construction simply cries out for his hand, and it contains many of his most typical ingredients. (The street battles, the lust-daughter theme, the inter-play of unrelated characters and the last-minute rescue from execution are common to both "Hunchback..." and "Orphans...".) But Griffith did not make "The Hunchback of Notre Dame", and despite its spectacle it emerges as a film in which the personallity of the star, rather than the director, has the greater influence and leaves the lasting impression. This is in no way a criticism of a remarkable film, but merely a statement as to the basic difference between two great and not dissimilar films.

Our print was loaned to us through the kindness of Capt. George Mitchell, one of the country’s leading authorities on the work of Chaney, and the author of the Lou Chaney Index which was published in "Films in Review" on December last. It is a fine print with hardly a splice in it (except where they had to be, between reels) and to the best of our knowledge, is absolutely complete. The film is copyrighted as twelve reels, and our print runs for ten. However, it is quite possible that the film was originally cut slightly before release - or that our ten reels were initially spliced out to occupy twelve, in order to exact greater tribute from the exhibitor! In any event, after a careful examination, we were unable to spot any missing footage. Certainly this will be the first screening of such a complete print in New York for many years, the few copies that have been around systematically usually being badly backed up real editions.

For the statistically minded, some facts about production: the 2600 artisans involved worked an average of 12 hours per day on the picture, and altogether some 4000 persons comprised the total personnel employed on the picture, which had a budget of a million and a quarter dollars. Worsley used ten assistant directors (one of whom was William Tyler), getting in some early training before being headed sixes of "B" vertuexes and 26 unit directors. The ten camera, each with his own assistant, were headed by Robert S. Newhard, formerly with Dove. 250 arcs and 50 Electric Coils were used during the production, and to anyone especially interested in the photographic aspect, we recommend reference to "The American Cinematographer" of February 1940, in which Earl Miller wrote a fascinating article on the differing problem involved in lighting the 1923 and 1939 versions of the story.
The sets, dumed by Lloyd for half-a-million dollars, reconstructed with remarkably authenticity, the Paris of 1432 - or "just ten years before Columbus discovered America" as an irrelevant subtitle informs us. These sets include the Court of Miracles, the Place du Parvis, Palais du Justice, the interior of the Bastille - and seven mansions, 35 statues, and eight unused streets, each 200 feet long. The length of the Place du Parvis - 465 feet. The actual Notre Dame is still standing, of course, and puts in an occasional appearance in Universal films - primarily horror subjects ("Frankenstein" was one) or stories with European locales. In 1941's "The Wolf Man", the little Welsh village of Lampydi suddenly found itself endowed with the cathedral!

Although there have been several versions (American and otherwise) of both "Orphans of the Storm" and "The Hunchback of Notre Dame", the remakes certainly haven't reached the prodigious totals of those other old reliables, "The Three Musketeers", "The Count of Monte Cristo" and "Les Misérables". And so, no two versions have been quite alike. Here, Phoebe is the hero, and Gringoire little more than a comic relief. In Dister's remake, Gringoire's role was enlarged to that of straight dramatic hero. So far, no version seems to have followed through to Hugo's original climax, in which Phoebe was in fact hanged, and her body spirited away by the Hunchback to disappear entirely, until the skeletons of both were discovered, walled in together, many years later. In view of these liberties, it is amazing to note that Carl Laemmle, in a press release at the time, stated that Hugo's original had been followed to the letter, and concluded with the statement "...in the interest of continuity, which forms the basis of every photoplay, I have changed a few superficialities in the story construction". At the same time, Laemmle also remarked: "We have found it necessary to eliminate a great deal of gore; blood-curdling murders and massacres may be described on the cold surface of the printed page, but when reproduced, photographically, on the realistic screen, they are a bit gruesome". A strange statement indeed, from the head of Universal, which built its fortune on the exploitation of gore, horror and supernatural myths!

One could ramble on indefinitely about the merits of the film - the classic glass-chute, the interesting use of nautical wax by Chancy, the staggering spectacle of the closing sequences. But we'll leave most of this for you to discover yourself, and close with a quotation from George Mitchell's Index to Chancy's work. (Incidentally, we hope to have a number of copies of this valuable reference item available at the screening).

Mitchell writes: "...it was Chancy's masterful acting in Universal's 1923 production of 'The Hunchback of Notre Dame' that made him an important star and brought him world recognition. In recreating the character of Quasimodo, Chancy so scrupulously followed Hugo's description of the deformed creature that when critics later accused him of overlooking the make-up, he could say with scorn: 'Read the book'..." His make-up as Quasimodo consisted of a breast-plate attached in front to shoulder pads like those football players use. The hump (made of rubber weighing 70 pounds) was attached to the back. A light leather harness connected breast-plate and pads in such a way that Chancy could not stand erect. Over all this, he wore a skin-tight, flesh-colored rubber suit to which animal hair was affixed. His nose was mis-shaped with modelled putty, and black dough-like teeth there was a device that held his mouth open. On his head was a wig of matted, filthy hair. Every day, for almost three months, Chancy presented himself in this guise to director Wallace Worsley".

The $500,000 starting time of 6:00 p.m. which will partially counteract late Sunlight streaming through the windows. We are hoping for a curtain or some other device to form a complete counter-action. Our doors are always open from 7:00 p.m. onwards, and we'll be happy to see any members that care to drop along earlier for informal chitchat on anything and everything about the movie, one of our greatest drawbacks as a society has been our lack of personal contact, something we hope to remedy shortly.

There is still a little doubt about the actual date of our next program - the German/English orgy is still very much up on the agenda, but it may be necessary to bring it forward, or take it back, a day or two. We anticipate announcing full details at our "Hunchback" screening, and of course members will be notified well in advance by mail. One slight change in the program see MARGIE LESCOTT to take place, and JEAN R ANDY'S THE TOURNAMENT substituted, along with THE BLUES LIST, THE SACRED MOUNTAIN AND LASSITER. We have by no means lost MARGLE LESCOTT - it has suddenly become available on 10mm as well (the other items are still on 9.3mm) so will be held over until the following show, when we expect to have something really special to accompany it. Posters detail in the programme.