MACEL'S DRAMATIC CAREER - RUBBER TIRES

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Replete with the usual fast knockabout typical of Sennett, "Mabel's Dramatic Career" has perhaps greater interest from another aspect. One of the first films about movie-making, it contains fascinating glimpses of work in progress in the Sennett studios, and of a show in a typical nickelodeon. In the "movie within the movie" Sennett offers a wild burlesque both of his own comedies, and of the hard-breathing melodramas of the period.

RUBBER TIRES
A Cecil B. DeMille production for P.D.C. Rel: Feb.7, 1927
Directed by Alan Hale
5 reels

The Cast: Mary-Ellen (BESSIE LOVE); Ma Stack (MAY ROBSON); Bill James (HARRISON FOED); Charlie (Junior Coughlan); Dudley Blake (John Patrick)

Something of a combination of "It Happened One Night", "Le Million" and "Genevieve", "Rubber Tires" isn't of course as important a film as any of them. Nor was it intended to be. One of the slick programmers made by DeMille towards the end of the twenties, it is a friendly, pleasing trifle that still retains a lot of appeal. During the twenties, the cross-country excursion from coast to coast was very much of an adventure, cars and automobiles being what they were. Several films were built around the then-popular craze for such jaunts, and two of them, "California Strait Ahead" and "Roboken to Hollywood" were shown by this society last year. Nostalgic members will probably enjoy the stress placed on old cars, primitive roads, and delightful shots of rural America (most of the film takes place out-of-doors) ... and for the others, there is still Bessie Love!

Alan Hale, already established as a top-notch character star ("The Covered Wagon", "Robin Hood") was enjoying a temporary fling as a director at this period. After he had directed "The Scarlet Honeymoon" for Fox, DeMille signed him to direct Leatrice Joy's "The Wedding Song", "Rubber Tires" and others. His direction of this film perhaps isn't remarkable, but is certainly a good, competent job — except for the unnecessary and even irritating use of lap dissolves, although possibly this is a flaw that cannot be blamed on Hale.

A good deal of "Rubber Tires" was shot around Newhall, rugged outdoor country that is conveniently close to Hollywood. Now, much more than then, it is used very extensively by Hollywood, particularly for pictures shot forPackard, saving expensive location trips to more picturesque but further afield scenery.

The two stars of "Rubber Tires" were early casualties of the sound era and the fickleness of the star system. The lovely, petite and charming Bessie Love, one of the leading runners-up in the school of feminine appeal of which Betty Bronson was undisputed Queen, was here at the peak of her career. Behind her were such delightful items as "Fanny of Top Hill Trail", "A Harp in Rock" and "The King on Main Street"; ahead, a short-lived period of stardom with MGM in "Broadway Melody", "Hollywood Revue of 1929" and others. The early thirties however saw her playing in minor quickies — i.e., Tiffany's "Morals for Women". Currently Bessie is back doing bit work in films made in Europe, "The Barefoot Contessa", not yet released, is one of her current chores. And recently we spotted her in a British prison film, "The Weak and the Wicked".

However, since the film is to be cut by two reels before release, it is possible that her fleeting appearance will be among the casualties. Harrison Ford's career likewise went downhill with the coming of sound. In 1932 he was at Mayfair, a very minor company, in a little opus entitled "Love in High Gear".

Our print of "RUBBER TIRE", by the way, is a fine toned original.
The Lost World

A First National-Whitterson R. Rothacker Attraction. (1925)


The Cast: Paula White (Bessie Love); Sir John Borston (Louis Stone); Edward Malone (Lloyd Hughes); Professor Challenger (Wallace Reily); Professor Swimmerle (Arthur Hoyt); Gladys Hungerford (Alma Bennett); Marqueta (Virginia Brown Paire); The Apa Man (Bull Montana); Austin (Finch Salies); Zemo (Jules Coules); Mrs Challenger (Margaret Melville); Major Hibbard (Charles Wellesley); Colin McAdoo (George Bunny).

Although the plot and pattern of "The Lost World" have been absorbed in the stock-in-trade of the horror film, the film was never made nor exploited as such. When the film opened at the Astor in 1925, on a two-show-a-day basis, it was advertised solely as a spectacular adventure story. "A Story of the Past and Not of the Hereafter" was one catchline in prominent use. Another was "They sought a virgin world, untroubled by men and his passion - and even found LOVE!"

Spectacles and novelty offerings were big boxoffice in the mid-twenties, and "The Lost World" (which had "Quo Vadis" at the Apollo for competition) was one of the year's biggest stunt attractions. The reviews were unanimously raves - nothing quite like this had ever been seen before. In many ways, it still hasn't been equaled. Comparison with "King Kong" of the early thirties is inevitable - both films used the same technical creator, the same type of motion control equipment, the same plot. Despite the fact that "Kong" is credited to Edgar Wallace, its similarity to the earlier film is remarkable. It utilizes the same plot construction, down to the smallest item - the slow, deliberate build-up, the journey to the sinister land where theprehistoric monsters are conveniently concentrated in a small area, the sudden, hysterical change of pace when the huge beasts appear to wreak havoc, a pace that is sustained until the capture of the principal monster. Then a brief lull, followed by even greater mayhem when the savage creatures burst loose in a terrified city (New York in "King Kong", London in "The Lost World"). Even in minor incidents was "Lost World" material repeated in the later film - as for example, the episode of the ape man trying to recover the woman and her baby dangling from a rope cast over a precipice. (Lloyd Hughes here, Fay Wray and Bruce Cabot later).

In only two aspects did "King Kong" differ essentially. For one thing, it introduced a strong sex angle and a beauty-and-the-beast motif. Deriving from ancient mythology, the idea of beauty (and purity) undoubtedly destroying evil was exploited at length in the German films of the twenties ("Monserrat" etc.) and in many subsequent horror films. "King Kong" went so far as to stress it by an opening title (allegedly an "Old Arabian Proverb") which read: "The beast looked upon the face of beauty, and lov'd from that day on the beast was as one dead". This angle is completely absent from "The Lost World", although admittedly that might well be due to the problems of cultivating a beauty-and-the-beast relationship between Bessie Love and a brontosaurus. "Lost World" also differs from most of its species in that the monster escapes quite unhurt at the end, despite its sins.

Harry Hoyt, who directed, was frankly a hack. His picturesque start in movie life (he sold a script to Biograph for $5, who turned it over to Griffith as a Mary Pickford vehicle) wasn't matched by later achievements. "The Lost World" and "The Principe Path" were probably his biggest silent successes; in the early thirties he was directing quickies like Monogram's "Jungle Bride", a Charles Starrett/Annita Page vehicle. The fact that his work as a director was negligible does not, however, affect "The Lost World" which is essentially a creation of technical wizard Willis O'Brien. The story, the romance and the dramatic matter not one iota - occupying the interest and the footage to a much greater degree are the superbly created tricks of O'Brien - the savage fights between monsters (it's a matter of some agreement that any wild life has survived at all on the lost plateau, since the death rate among dinosaurus and pterocoptails is quite startling) and the brilliantly constructed episode of the brontosaurus stampeding in the streets of London. Most, if not all, of the effects have never been equalled since - particularly a wild stampede of scores of monsters, and a delightful shot of a playful family of six brontosaurus (or brontosaurus!) feeding from the remains of another beast.

O'Brien later went on to "King Kong", "Son of Kong", "The Lost Days of Pompeii" and of course "Mighty Joe Young". A recent independent venture, "The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms" (made by a protege of O'Brien) proved the value of the tried-and-true "Lost World"-"King Kong" formula by completely reorganizing it. It introduced its monster too casually and too soon, eliminating an effective build-up and necessitating much repetition. But it was certainly several notches above the many prehistoric-type quickies now in circulation. That this species has now caught on as an established "B" program type is due largely to the existence of a film called "One Million B.C." (also known as "Men and His Mate" and "The Cave dwellers"). It was made for UA
in 1940 by D.W. Griffith, although subsequently the film underwent considerable re-workings (including substitution of gibberish for the original dialogue) and D.W.'s name was removed from the film, to be replaced by that of Hal Roach jr. who actually had little or nothing to do with the film. In due time, all the footage of the fights between monsters and a volcanic eruption found their way on to the stock-shot market, and since then there has been a steady stream of short, a dozen quickies ("The Lost World", "Unarmed Women", etc.) building themselves entirely around this material. Other lamentable and cheap productions - "The Lost Continent", "Unknown Island" - attempted to create their own special effects, but without achieving any kind of thrill or conviction. The monsters were crude and artificial - and looked it. Only "The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms" could be seriously considered for comparison with the original "The Lost World" - and it certainly fell far short of it.

Complete prints of "The Lost World" do not appear to have survived through the years, but our print is a meticulously edited version which retains all the highlights and gives no evidence at all of chopping. Indeed it is hard to believe that although our print is a 70 minute version, the original ran for a full ten reels. It is, however, simple to account for the missing footage when one recalls the plot construction of "King Kong", which duplicated that of the earlier film. There, Kong didn't make his initial appearance until some 44 minutes after the film had begun. Those 44 minutes consisted of, initially, by-play, and later, a tense buildup. And so it was here. The first two reels were spent entirely in London, a good deal of footage being devoted to squabbles between Lloyd Hughes and his fiancee, who doesn't figure in our print at all. All of real three was spent at "a trading post on the Amazon", likewise eliminated from our print. Two more reels were devoted to exploratory ventures at the base of the plateau, hence the essential monster-footage and other action didn't appear until half-way through the film, in real five. By real three in our version, we're already in the thick of it, and the pace is maintained until the final scene, where being further cutting down an route in love scenes and straight dramatic sequences. It's always unfortunate of course, when complete versions are not available, but in this case not too serious. Possibly it is even an improvement, with the mediocre Hoyt material shortened, and the superlatives O'Brien footage emphasized.

Incidentally, our print also offers some interesting contrasts. For the most part, it is a fine original two-toned print. For odd sections however, where the original was deteriorating, replacements have been made with black-and-white duped stock. Hence in one scene, one can often see two kinds of stock — and the contrast will show you why we always make a point of avoiding, scrupulously, inferior dupes. (The dupes inserts, let it be added, are short and infrequent!)

A final point in passing — despite unanimous raves from all the trade press, the film was severely criticized for including a shot of the London Pavilion, with a prominent neon display for another current First National epic, Milton Sills' "The Sea Hawk". Advertising plugs in motion pictures at that time were quite common, and always aroused storms of protest from critics and exhibitors alike. ("Rubber Tires" was similarly attacked, for including a harmless scene of a small-town garage which had a sign for Goodrich Tires!)

For those members more interested in personalities than properties, perhaps we might term this show a "Bessa Love Festival" — the charming little player is on top form as the heroine of both films. And Lewis Stone provides a refreshing and pleasing reminder of those bygone days when screen heroes were Gentleman in the strictest sense of the word.

Our next program: Maurice Tourneur's "LOMA DUCHE" (1923)
American premiere of a fascinating new British film:
"HERE TODAY, GONE TOMORROW" — a compilation of rare sequences from movie hits of the silent era

And selected shorts.

Coming features include: "THE LIGHTHOUSE IN THE SEA" (Director: Hal St. Clair, star: Rin Tin Tin); "THE DROP KICK" (Richard Barthelmess, Hadda Hopper); "THE PRANCE PIRATES" (Harry Carey, Fred Kohler, Trilby Clark, Robert Edeson); "SKY SCRAPER" (William Boyd, Sue Carol, Alan Dale); D.W. Griffith's "AABRAM LINCOLN" .... and some interesting "surprise" items that we'll announce on our next set of notes.