Sound Series - Program One, Tuesday, June 20th 1955.


Are any, program notes necessary on a Laurel and Hardy comedy? This is one of their better sound comedies of the early thirties - not up to the standard of the silent "Big Business" and "Two Tars" perhaps, but vastly superior to almost all of their first talkies. The plot is almost classic: Hardy seeks the aid of Laurel in clearing up the devastation of a wild party before his wife returns from a trip. Needless to say, the chaos is never disposed of but rather is added to in no uncertain manner, as the rumbling efforts of Laurel heap further disaster and catastrophe upon the patience heard of Mr. Hardy, subjected in this film to even more than the normal quota of poop in the eye, falling coats, jet-propelled flights into piles of dishes and maddeningly exploding gas-ovens. The print somewhat reflects the wear and tear of the proceedings, but like Mr. Hardy, just about manages to emerge in one piece, battered but all there.

"LET'S GO TO THE JOULES" (one reel)

Whatever else they may need, our members don't have to be urged to go to the movies - and thus the propagandist element of this short can be ignored. Produced by Ector, it was one of the early series of industry-sponsored public relations shorts, dealing with various phases of motion picture activity. Its content is of course, superficial - it tells the "history" of the movies in some four minutes, and then spreads out to touch on manufacture of film, (from cotton-fields to laboratory!), on thesethe world around the world, on publicity, distribution, and sundry other facets of the industry. En route we are treated to brief but enjoyable chunks of Mary Pickford and Henry B. Walthal in "Hills of Old Kentucky", "The Birth of a Nation", Jolson in "The Jazz Singer", John Barrymore in "The Show of Shows" and so on. The 1930-1935 era seems to be represented solely by "Night Song", coincidentally an RKO Radio production!

"BLUEBERRIES MY LOVE" (Paramount, 1936; Produced and directed by Ernst Lubitsch, screenplay by Billy "D" and Charles Brackett from the play by Alfred Savoy; photographed by Leo Tover; art direction by Hans Dreier and Robert Usher; music by Varnen Heymann. The Cast: Nicole de Lisle (LAMBERT'S GODFATHER); Michael Brandon (SERGE COOPER); The Marquis de Loslais (CHARLIE HORTON); Albert De Begnier (DAVID RIVET); Aunt Hedville (ELIZABETH PATTISON); Monsieur Popinard (HARLEY BICK); Kid alligan (JULIEN AYER) Asst. Hotel Manager (FRANKLIN PARRISH); Professor Urganoff (LAMBERT'S GRAND); Uncle Andre (TOM RAYMOND); Uncle Fornandez (LAMBERT'S ORLAND); M. de la Corte, President (CHARLES HILTON). Length: Nine reels.

"Bluebeards Eighth Life", originally a stage vehicle for Ina Claire in 1921 and two years later screen material for Gloria Swanson under Sam Wood's direction, represents very much of a turning point in Lubitsch's career. In many ways it was the end of the old Lubitsch, of breezy sex farce in Paris and Monte Carlo. It was Lubitsch's last film for Paramount, and while it was a long way below the standard of the best Chevaliers and especially the wonderful "Trouble in Paradise", it still retained much of their delightful use of incidental music. Admitting that the film is not top-grade Lubitsch, one must go farther and state that it was nevertheless better than almost anything that followed. What happens to people who leave Paramount and go to work for Metro? The Marx Brothers lost 90% of their vitality when they made the move, and Lubitsch himself, transferring Chevalier, McDonald, Horton, Bing and company over to Metro in 1931, succeeded in making of "The Merry Widow" a rather stodgy affair. Back at Paramount again, he moved back to his former style - only to lose it once again at Metro with "Hisotchka". (Enjoyable though it was, it's merits were those of performance and writing rather than of direction. Though Lubitsch had good films ahead of him, none were to regain the charm and spirit of this Paramount frolking). The basic theme of "Bluebeards" is perhaps a little tasteless, but so sprightly is the playing and the direction that it never becomes in any way offensive. A slick production in every way, with some wonderful trouping from Horton, Herman Bing and others of the Lubitsch "stock company", it dates only in its over-obvious use of back-projection. Incidentally, it was this film which established the writing and later writing-producing-directing) team of Billy "D" and Charles Brackett. Earlier 'D' had written one or two Lubitsch-type items ("Champagne Waltz" for example), and with this film he brought them. They followed up with "Midnight", and of course "Hisotchka" which really launched their careers with a vengeance. By the way, Ted Hugg once pointed out that Sacha Guitry may be seen in this film, emerging from a Vienna hotel in one of the process shots!

--- W.K.E. ---

July 19: Jack Pickford in TOM CAZIER (1927); Edmond Cobb in THE WOLF'S TRAIL (1927) & shorts
July 26: Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire in THE STORY OF VERNON & IRIS CASTLE (1939) shorts