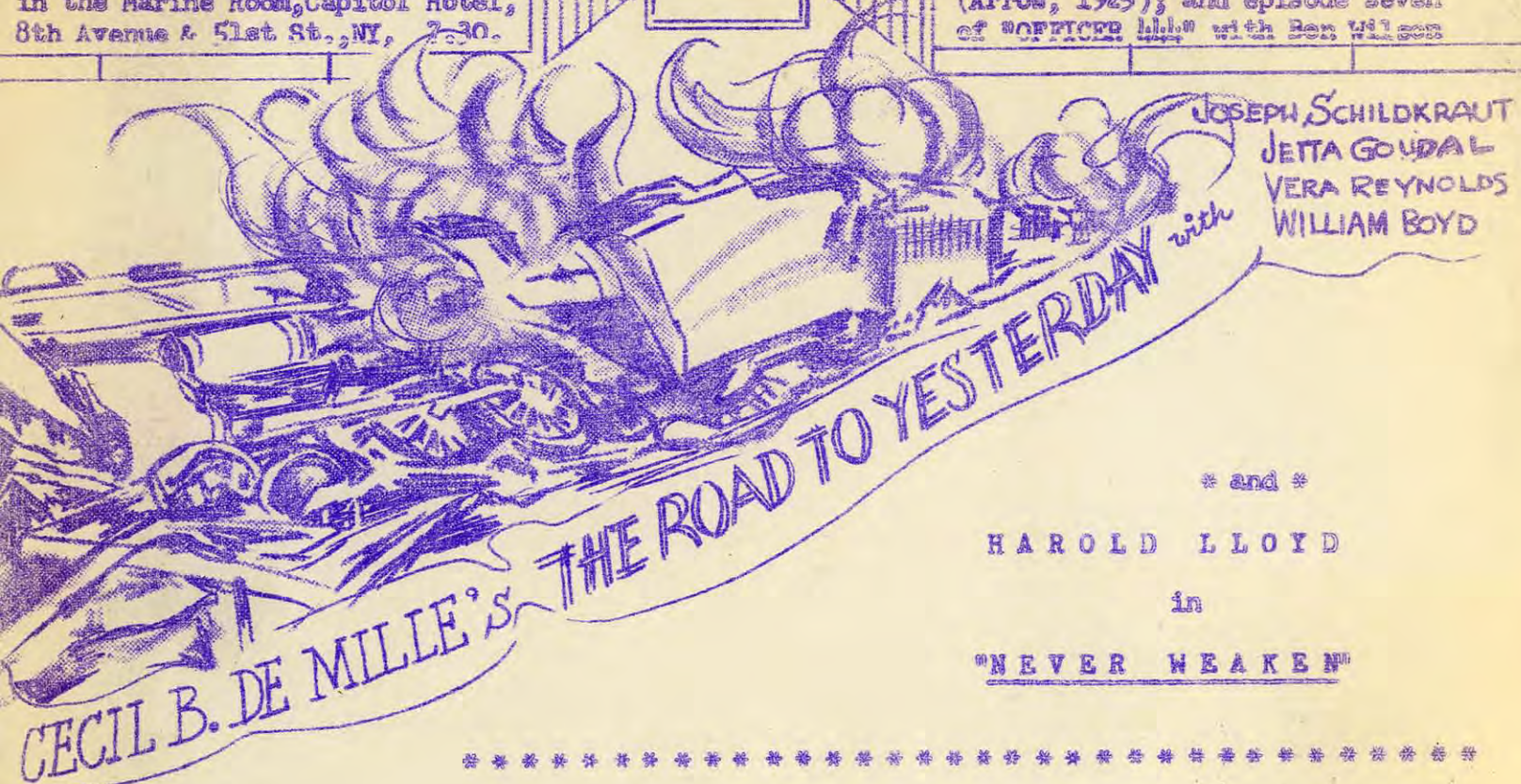


THE
THEODORE HUFF
MEMORIAL FILM SOCIETY

Program for Tuesday Dec. 11th 1956
in the Marine Room, Capitol Hotel,
8th Avenue & 51st St., NY, 7:30.

NEXT SHOW: December 18 1956

WILLIAM RUSSELL in "THE STILL
ALARM"; (Universal, 1926)
CLARA BOW, Stuart Holmes, Tom
Santschi in "THE PRIMROSE PATH"
(Arrow, 1925); and episode seven
of "OFFICER HLB." with Ben Wilson



JOSEPH SCHILDKRAUT
JETTA GOUDAL
VERA REYNOLDS
WILLIAM BOYD

* and *

HAROLD LLOYD

in

"NEVER WEAKEN"

(NOTE: Due to the limited availability of this print of "The Road to Yesterday", our originally announced screening of "Nju" and "The Golden Clown" has been postponed until January or February)

"NEVER WEAKEN" (Hal Roach, 1921; 30 mins; written by Roach and Sam Taylor)

As we go to press with these notes, the print of "Never Weaken" has not yet come to hand, so we cannot attempt a serious re-examination. We do recall it as being one of the very best of Harold Lloyd's fine two-realers for Roach - crammed with the sort of slapstick mixed with thrills that was Lloyd's forte, and with more of the magnificent building-climbing nonsense that made "High and Dizzy" and "Safety Last" so enjoyable. Recent viewings of those films tend to confirm that Lloyd's best work never really dates, so we're quite sure that "Never Weaken" will stand up to the fondest memories of it.

"THE ROAD TO YESTERDAY" (Cecil B. DeMille-FDC, 1925; 10 reels)

Directed by Cecil B. DeMille; photographed by Peverell Marley;
adapted by Jeannie MacPherson and Beulah Marie Dix from the stage play by
Beulah Marie Dix and E.G. Sutherland; art direction by Anton Grot, Mitchell
Leisen and Paul Iribe; assistant director, Frank Urson; edited by Anne
Bauchens.

The Cast: Kenneth Paulton (Joseph Schildkraut); Malena Paulton (Jetta Goudal); Beth Tyrell
(Vera Reynolds); Jack Moreland (William Boyd); Dolly Foyles (Julia Faye); Adrian
Tompkins (Casson Ferguson); Aunt Harriett Tyrell (Trixie Friganza); Hugh Armstrong
(Clarence Burton); Anne Vener (Josephine Norman); Watt Earnshaw (Charles West);
with Chester Morris as an extra in the party scene in reel four, and Junior Coghlan.

"THE ROAD TO YESTERDAY" is very much of an "exclusive" for this society. The film, DeMille's first personal production after he left Paramount (following dissection of "The Ten Commandments") to form his own unit, has not been shown in New York in many years. Apart from this print - a brand new one recently struck off from the original negative - the only other existing print is one held by John Hampton's Silent Movie Theatre in Hollywood.

The rarity of the film makes it very much of an "item"; we cannot - and do not - pretend that it is a re-discovered masterpiece. But it is certainly an oddity, and an interesting example of DeMille's independent work, and thus well worthy of a re-viewing today.

DeMille's own publicity at the time understandably pulled no punches. The press book advised exhibitors that the film "...marked an epochal advance in motion picture achievement a triumph of screen art". Strangely enough though, the trade press almost duplicated these raves - although perhaps we should not be so naive as to say "strangely enough", as it was probably even easier to buy the trade press then than it is now. In any event, the Motion Picture World reported: "DeMille exceeds his best records; in production and direction he has never done better ... has every quality of greatness". The Motion Picture News agreed: "Hits the mark artistically, dramatically, boxoffice-wise - a fine picture, a great picture, a credit to DeMille, and a golden thing for PIC and the exhibitors who will play it". And "Motion Picture Weekly" went even further: "The greatest boxoffice picture ever made ... (everything) so much bigger and better than ever before ... the religious dashes in the picture, while dangerous material, will not serve to lessen its popularity".

Perhaps if we were smart, we'd let these reviews serve as our sale notes, and just stand back and await the crowds! However, one is so completely at a loss to reconcile these reviews with this picture that it isn't possible.

It's so fashionable among high-brow critics to assail DeMille as a poor director that we hesitate to do so for fear of bracketting ourselves with that crowd. However, fashionable or not, it is true. DeMille has never made a really good picture, nor is his showmanship always justified as a substitute for craftsmanship. (Boxoffice is not necessarily the answer; shrewd publicity has generated the falsehood that, if nothing else, DeMille is surafire commercially, but several of his biggest "hits", "King of Kings" among them, lost money). "Road to Yesterday" is especially valuable in assessing DeMille's true worth as a director - here he is on his own, dependent on his own resources and his own money. Thus he plays it safe, keeps a tight eye on the budget, keeps the spectacle under control, and relies solely on talent rather than show to put it all over. The results speak for themselves - the direction of "Road to Yesterday" of 1925 is quite inferior to the direction of Griffith and even of Ince more than a decade earlier.

It's really difficult to know how to take this story - based on what was, in 1925, already a twenty-year old play on a "Bridget Murphy" theme of reincarnation. It starts off in deadly seriousness, with DeMille's accustomed mixture of sex and religion. Then, mid-way, a train wreck transports all the principals back to a prior existence. Literally before the smoke has cleared, the mood changes to bantering comedy - something of a cross between Fairbanks and "The Boys from Syracuse". Even the titles, and there are some beauties in this section ("Tis written in the stars that our love shall be bitter as hemlock", or "Thou art apter to hurt than heal") seem to be written very much with the tongue in cheek. Then, suddenly, it is quite serious again, and finishes (as did "The Volga Boatman") on a glorious conglomeration of sex and brutality -- Jetta Goudal being burned at the stake, writhing very sensuously in the flames, but somehow managing to avoid even being singed in her closeups, and William Boyd being whipped to death in Vera Reynolds' bedroom prior to a forced marriage with Schildkrant! Religion, which has been completely forgotten for seven reels, suddenly puts in a re-appearance in reel 10! All of which is good fun, but none of which is good cinema.

The critics were unanimous in raving about the train wreck, hailing it as the greatest thrill ever screened. This again is hard to stomach, as, quite well done that it is, it isn't a patch on the wreck in 1915's "The Juggernaut", and is actually fairly crudely done for a film as late as 1925. Certainly, if the critics had gone back only 2 years to DeMille's own "10 Commandments", they would have found greater screen thrills -- and if they had gone back to "Intolerance", "The Birth of a Nation" and "Way Down East" they'd probably have collapsed from the excitement of it all!

Of course, the film does have many good things. A duel between Boyd and Schildkrant is exceptionally well done; so is the aftermath of the train wreck. The photography by Harley is fine, and there are some beautiful Grand Canyon exteriors (plus one hideously obvious studio replica); the fashions and decor are always interesting, and the acting, by Boyd especially, generally good. (Charles West, by the way, had played his same role in the stage version years earlier). The last two-reels are exciting and vigorous stuff, and a couple of sets are quite elaborate in the best DeMille manner. Apparently DeMille didn't mind spending real money on his castle sets, as he knew he'd use them again. (They turn up in "The Volga Boatman" and many others).

DeMille's publicity stunts included the usual pre-screenings for the clergy, a tie-up with insurance companies, and the use of such catchlines as "DID YOU LIVE 300 YEARS AGO? WHAT EFFECT HAS YOUR PAST HAD ON YOUR PRESENT LOVES AND HATES?", and "MERRIE ENGLAND - WHEN INTOLERANCE RULED AND MAIDS WERE BURNED AT THE STAKE AS WITCHES!"

As you may have guessed by now, "ROAD TO YESTERDAY" is not a great film - but it is an interesting and unusual one, and we think you'll find it worth while. This, at any rate, will be the only chance to see it in New York.

Program Notes & Enquiries: Bill Everson, Manhattan Towers, 2160 Broadway, New York City 24