Newsletter and Program Notes for March, 1957

We're on the move again — and would ask you to make special note of the changed date and venue of our first March program — the John Barrymore show. We had some union intervention at our February show at the Manhattan Towers, and while it didn't develop into anything serious, it is quite apparent that due to an agreement between the projectionists' union and hotels in general, we can expect possible trouble and complications any time we screen in a regular hotel. Especially since the union quite obviously has a member among our members, and is thus appraised of our every move.

Consequently we have arranged to show our other March programs at the Adelphi Hall on 5th Avenue. This is where we held our marathon Saturday session last year, and it proved very satisfactory from all viewpoints. Most important, there is plenty of elbow-room. The Adelphi Hall is at 74 5th Avenue, situated between 11th Street and the 5th Avenue Cinema. Although further downtown than usual for us, it is easily reached by various buses and subways.

Our show itself will dictate whether we screen at the Adelphi, or at 57th Street. We'll be retaining the latter location for shows that we know have limited drawing power, and where the comparatively small turnout can be comfortably seated. We don't in this way want to imply that our 57th St. shows will be inferior to the others, but experience has shown us which films separate the men from the boys insofar as real interest in old films are concerned. Quite personally I feel that "Smouldering Fires" and "Sporting Life" are much better pictures than Chaplin's "Circus", but quite obviously they don't draw as well. So from here on in, please double-check your notes to make sure that you are not disappointed by turning up at the wrong hall on the wrong date.

A number of people expressed disappointment that the western cycle had been so often postponed. In a way this was gratifying, as we didn't know that there was such interest in it. However, any postponements have always been for the very good reason that other films have arrived which have been available only temporarily, and to have played the westerns in their stead would have meant losing them entirely. However, we're glad to announce that our western cycle will definitely take place next month. There will be at least three, and possibly four shows spread throughout April. We are not setting dates at this point as we want to wait and get further details of the Museum's French cycle, so that we can avoid the too-obvious clashes and play Bill Hart and Fred Thompson (or whatever Thompson) on days when the Museum's offerings are comparatively routine — if there are any such days. In all probability, we will also switch back the starting time to 8:00 p.m., giving members time to catch the Museum shows first. However, more of that in our April notes, which will go out at the end of this month.

PROGRAM ONE
In Room 10-D of the Adelphi Hall, 74 5th Avenue, at 7:30 p.m. on FRIDAY MARCH 22nd.

LINDBERGH'S FLIGHT (one reel)

We have been saving this fascinating reel until now, for comparison with Billy Wilder's "Spirit of St. Louis". It is a well-edited reel put together after the flight itself, and containing not only fine footage of Lindbergh's departure, arrival in Paris and England, and the parade in his honor in Washington and New York, but also several rare and grim shots of previous cross-Atlantic attempts, all of them doomed to failure. Two crashes are caught by the camera. The near-reel camera photography is of an unusually high order, and has a genuinely creative and dramatic quality quite absent from contemporary newswheel coverage. The shots in NY harbor look as though they were shot by Joe August under John Ford's direction! The reel is a toned original, and a joy to behold.

CE COMMERCIAL

We're not in the habit of plugging manufacturer's wares, but this little item is a strange oddity of far more interest to the film addict than to the housewife. Made around 1928 by Warner Brothers, it presents such old friends as Warren William, Iraeston Foster, Ruth Donnelly, Walter Miller and Dick Powell. Joan Blondell is introduced, of course, lounging seductively in bed, but perhaps the hit of the show is a part bette Davis extolling the wonders of a washing machine in real Betty Furness style!
Another curiosity, this quite pleasing subject has no real merit, but does contain some good and hitherto not widely seen material of Barrymore on a mid-twenties vacation. Particularly amusing are the cut-in studio shots—obviously posed, carefully lit, designed to show off the famous profile, and not catching up at all with the original footage.

NEAL BRACKETT. (one reel extract; Warner, 1924) Directed by Harry Beaumont; with John Barrymore, Mary Astor, Alec B. Francis.

When we showed the complete 10-reel version of this film some four years ago, it aroused no great enthusiasm, and it is indeed a rather stodgy and unimaginative, if handsonomely mounted, film. It was of course a big success in its day, and, good film or not, was vastly preferable to M.H.'s recent remake. Barrymore was great however, and his final mad-house scene not only one of the best things he has ever done on the screen, but also particularly typical of his love for the bizarre. It is this sequence—the last real picture—that we are showing. First-rate in its own right, it also makes an interesting comparison with the smooth and less nightmarish playing of the versatile Barrymore some eight years later in our feature, "STATE'S ATTORNEY".

STATE'S ATTORNEY (RKO, 1932, 8 reels) Directed by George Archainbaud; written by Gene Fowler and Rowland Brown from a story by Louis Stevens; edited by Charles Kline and William Hamilton; cameraman—Leo Tover; recording engineer—George Ellis.


It is frequently astonishing how basically similar films from the same year fare so differently with the passing of the years. Barrymore's "Counselor at Law", made the same year, likewise based on a stage play, but directed by William Tyler, remains a much more vital, and certainly more cinematic, piece of work than does "State's Attorney", which frankly has many of the faults of the early talkies. It snatches more of the theatre than the screen, and looks somewhat older than its mere 25 years.

But forget all that. It's Barrymore material at its best—almost hand-tailored for him by his friend Gene Fowler. Based on the story of the famous lawyer Fallon (also well played by Warren William in "The Guilepiece", and by George Brent and Edward C. Robinson in subsequent remakes) it gives Barrymore full rein for deliberate theatrics (as in the several dynamic court-room episodes), for any comedy (a delightful drunken scene for example) and for those moments of almost unbearably affecting pathos which nobody could do as well as Barrymore. (The sequence wherein Barrymore, with genuine remorse, tells his mistress that he has just married, is a beautifully acted episode.) In every gesture and in every scene, Barrymore is just great, completely transcending the somewhat dated aspect of the rest of the film. Perhaps his completely unadulterated performance merely serves to emphasize the somewhat old-hat film-making methods of the rest of the film.

Not that the non-Barrymore aspect of the film is dull. The dialogue similes with lines and situations that would never pass muster today. Ralph Ince, C. Henry Gordon and William Boyd make a formidable trio of underworld hood. The gangster era and prohibition lend their own delightful flavor to the proceedings. And of course Helen Twelvetrees remains as appealing as always. Perhaps the film's greatest fault is in its direction by George Archainbaud, a man who is just fine on melodrama ("The Lost Squadron") and action (he made some of the best Hopalong Cassidy westerns, as well as films like "The Kansas"), and such earlier silents asals Selsnick's "Handcuffs or Kisses" but who seems a little non-plussed when dealing with non-action material.

In any event, "STATE'S ATTORNEY" is something to see, and this is its first NY showing in many years. The print is a brand new one, but presumably the original negative had deteriorated, since the print is obviously made from a new negative which in turn was made from a print rather than a film grain. Accordingly, it is a little soft, and probably below the standards required for TV. Thus, while we're not using this as a "come-on", it seems very possible that "STATE'S ATTORNEY" will not be shown on television.

Additional notes on John Barrymore will be circulated at the screening, and back issues of FILMS IN REVIEW (Dec.1952) containing Spencer Berg's fine article on Barrymore, together with a superbly illustrated index to his films, will be on sale.
PROFESSIONAL Tuesday March 26th, 7:30 p.m. at 400 West 57th Street.

"JUSTICE" - episode 10 of "OFFICER BLUE" (1955, 2 reels)

The moment you have all been anxiously waiting for the past ten months, Officer Blue, with the new Realistic Public Assistance of August Vollmer (in person) finally unseals the sinister "Frog". Your last chance to get your bets down as to his identity!

Next-Five UPERS FROM "COLUMBIA" THIS WEEK

behave as the virtuous of "officer" produced (or supervised) biographies on many an occasion, so we won't elaborate here on the patterns of cutting, and the restrained acting, that characterized so many of these films. These three great little chase pictures, all quite different in their way, but all based on techniques evolved by Griffith, speak fluently for themselves.

A TERRIBLE DISCOVERY (1911) Dir: Griffith starring "Blind Lucas"

An interesting gangster melodrama with a slightly bizarre twist: the killer masquerading as an old woman in a "The Unjust Thrice"(

MEET THE "ANARCHY" (1912) Director: Tony O'Sullivan; camera: Jolly Kitter, with Henry B. Walthall, Claire McDowell, Johnny Tansey (Tommy, the boy); Lionel Barrymore, Charles Kent, Jack Hylton.

This is one of the best of the films made by a "Griffith protege" Tony O'Sullivan, who also acted in many of the biographies. (Some of his films, such as "The Telephone Girl" and "The Lady", were a little untidy, if exciting; but this one is beautifully conceived and photographed, and shows a remarkable fidelity to the teachings of D.W.J.


Smugglers, and a well cut chase at sea, this is a fast moving little melodrama with a strong plot element. Although otherwise complete, the print is lacking titles, and thus the meaning of the title is not readily apparent unless explained here. The crooked captain, basically a decent fellow (and allowed to escape Scott free) has only one bullet left when the crew mutinies. Shall he use it on Blanche, and save her from a dreadful fate - or shall he use it on himself? He decides to do the noble thing, and use it on Blanche. Luckily, the coast guard arrive in time. Apart from one slip in continuity - following a lengthy sea chase, the captain manages to swim ashore in a matter of moments - "The Lesser Evil" is a durned good, and beautifully photographed, thriller.

"SPORTING LIFE" (A Universal film, 1925, 7 reels) Directed by AURICE TOURGIR

based on the Drury Lane success by Seymour Hicks and Cecil Raleigh; adaptation: scenario by Curtis Henton; camera - Arthur Todd; edited by g.yor Robinson; titles by Walter Anthony; art direction: L.B. Kuter and E.S. Cashley.

With KEAT LYTLE, MARVIN WILSON, George Siegmann (Limehouse Kid), Cyril Chadwick, Charles Farley, Paulette Duval, Oliver Eckhard, Ted (Kid) Lewis, Myrna Loy and Arthur Lake as extras.

It is discoveries like this that make life worth living in the Cinematic age - a beautiful toned original print, absolutely complete (except for a five second jump in a fight scene), and a perfect example of the real style and production value that went into pictures quite unjustly forgotten. Based on an English stage success, it has the leisurely and civilised tempo of the English, but handles its melodrama - particularly the fights and the Limehouse rooftop chase - in roaring style. The cast are great and lavish in the extreme. When Tournour wanted to spend money, he spent it. One cannot help wondering what effort went into the simple shot of doves flying past the young lovers, outside a cottage set, at just the right moment during the Perkins chase, though padded with newswheel footage - it's stuck on a very large scale. Wanting to suggest that his players were there, and not just playing to newswheel scenes, Tournour obtained a London bus, literally hundreds of extras, dressed them all in the latest English fashions, and obtained a truly spectacular shot - just for about ten seconds! Although the subject doesn't offer the same opportunities for pictorial design as did another Tournour that we ran recently, "Lorna Doone", there's no doubt about the fact that it is a Tournour production in every sense of the word. The compositions are right out of his top drawer! (Tournour had also made the subject earlier, for Paramount in 1919, and evidently had a real fondness for it). The Hollywood reconstruction of English atmosphere is remarkably good, the California hills excepted, and the characters have a real English theatrical turn-of-the-century flavor to them. Bart Lytell, about whom a title tells us "he always played it square" is fine, while Cyril Chadwick ("The Iron Horse", "Peter Pan", "Happiness") and Siegmann make a great pair of heavies. The opening musical numbers are a delight, Myrna Loy is readily visible in the crowds, and altogether we're most enthusiastic about this rediscovery.

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