

Programs for November, 1957; Room 10-D, Adelphi Hall, 74 Fifth Avenue
(at 14th Street) at 7.30 p.m.

Tuesday November 19th

"WHAT DRINK DID" (Biograph, 1909) One reel. Directed by D.W. Griffith.
Starring Florence Lawrence, with Gladys Egan and Adele de
Garde as the children; players appearing as extras include
Mary Pickford, George Nicholls, Owen Moore and Tony
O'Sullivan.

Florence Lawrence subjects are somewhat of a rarity today, and in this one the movies' first real "star" is in fine fettle. Mary Pickford, her successor at Biograph, is also seen in two very brief shots as a working girl leaving a factory. The film is one of Griffith's several preachments against the evils of drink -- a cause that presumably didn't concern him too much, but which he found useful in his mass production days at Biograph. During his years of peak creativity, he seemed to switch to the opposite extreme, attacking the bluenoses who saw evil in liquor. Yet it seems that the subject did have a certain fascination for him, since he returned to it in the early 30's when he made "The Struggle". "What Drink Did" is pretty powerful stuff for 1909, and D.W. has no hesitation in loading the dice a bit to get the point across. Before the father discovers drink, he is both harder-working and neater than all of his co-workers; on the first "morning after" he is already too surly even to be pleasant to his uncomprehending children! Biograph's original publicity material further strengthened the film's punch by a florid quotation from Shakespeare dealing with the "madness" brought on by drink! Most of the film's exteriors were shot in Fort Lee, which seemed to have a positive plethora of saloons in 1909!

"SLIPPING WIVES" (Hal Roach-Pathe, 1927) Two reels. Directed by Fred Guiol; photographed by George Stevens; supervised by F. Richard Jones; edited by Richard Currier; starring PRISCILLA DEAN, with Herbert Rawlinson, Stan Laurel, Oliver Hardy, Albert Conti.

Made just before Roach joined MGM, and also before Laurel and Hardy were established as a team, "Slipping Wives" is a curious little comedy. It was one of a group made by Roach under the delusion that big name stars were what two reel comedies were needed. Unfortunately, the only stars who agreed with him were those who had begun to slip badly -- like Priscilla Dean here, erstwhile "Virgin of Stamboul" for Universal, and now no longer of much importance. Roach even tried to get Griffith to direct comedies for him in this period, but Griffith quite naturally, and with some indignation, refused. To our knowledge, this is the only print of "Slipping Wives" in existence, but that is not why we are showing it. As a comedy, it is only occasionally really amusing, and often falls flat. What makes it really interesting is the work of Laurel and Hardy, playing against each other rather than with each other. Hardy, minus his moustache, and playing the sort of role that Jimmy Finlayson normally essayed in these comedies, is far from the Hardy that we all love, but Laurel is pretty much the same as ever! Making the film doubly interesting, we feel, especially as a commentary on the rapid development of Laurel and Hardy, is the fact that it was remade by them as a talkie. We'll be playing both films together and the comparison is really quite striking.

"THE FIXER-UPPERS" (Hal Roach-MGM, 1935) 2 reels
Directed by Charles Rogers.
Starring LAUREL & HARDY, with Charles Middleton

And here's the remake -- essentially the same in story, but completely reshaped to fit Laurel and Hardy's now-established characters, and to eliminate some of the solo bits of business. Charles Middleton, taking over from Herbert Rawlinson as the jealous husband, also gets far more humor from a role now drawn in much broader vein.

- INTERMISSION -

"R A F F L E S" (Hyclass Producing Company, 1917); 75 minutes; directed by George Irving; scenario by Anthony B. Kelly based on the stories by I.W. Hornung and the play by Eugene Presbrey.

Starring JOHN BARRYMORE as RAFFLES, with Frank Morgan, Kathryn Adams, Mathilde Brundage and Evelyn Brent.

"Raffles" has been brought to the screen several times, the 1930 version with Ronald Colman perhaps being the best (just as Colman's "Bulldog Drummond" of 1929 was easily the best Drummond film). Next to the Colman version however, Barrymore's film was the best of all the others, being far superior to those with House Peters (a singularly dull version, shown by this society some years ago), Georges Barraud and David Niven. Vitagraph also made a short "Raffles" around 1904, and a little later Raffles was curiously supplanting Moriarty as the no.1 menace in some Scandinavian Sherlock Holmes adventures. Most versions of "Raffles" have stuck pretty closely to the original story-line, an unremarkable one for the most part, and thus the whole entertainment stands or falls by the personality of the star involved.

Barrymore of course is perfectly cast as the dashing amateur cracksman. Apart from this one, none of his pre-20's films seem to have survived, and it's good to see such a young and debonair Barrymore again. And it's amusing too, to note that even then - and in cinematic trifles - he was playing to the hilt and using all the mannerisms which he was later to exploit in running the gamut from Beau Brummel to Jekyll and Hyde. All of his little tricks and gestures are here - the jaunty walk, the whimsical stare with the head cocked at an angle, and the sudden switches from bland complacency to insane rage (hardly appropriate in "Raffles", but enjoyably present nonetheless). Barrymore is just wonderful, and nobody else has much of a chance. Evelyn Brent has merely a couple of scenes in this version, which, however, has obviously been slightly shortened.

Barrymore's breezy playing helps the film from becoming too stagey, since most of the action does take place indoors. The sets and decor are quite elegant however, and the camera work is of a high order. The plot is of course laid in England, and for the most part the illusion is well-maintained. A cricket match is particularly convincing, as are most of the other exteriors. At one point, New York's Players' Club sees service as Raffles' London apartment. Only once is realism shattered -- that when we look from the window of Raffles' apartment and see the New York Public Library in the background!

Acquiring film these days often takes on an aura of international espionage a la Dr. Mabuse -- this print, by devious means, arrived from France, and is equipped with both French and English titles. Some of the grammatical and spelling errors in the French "English" are really quite delightful! One complete reel has only French titles, but of an elementary nature that should present no difficulties to our informed and cultured audiences.

Tuesday November 26th:

1929 - 1930 - 1931

Three off-beat films from the last days of silents, and the first days of sound.

"L'ARGENT" ("MONEY") (France, 1929) Written & directed by Marcel L'Herbier
Based on a novel by Emil Zola.

The Cast: Nicholas Saccard (Alcover); Gundermann (Alfred Abel); Baroness Sandorf (Brigitte Helm); Lina Hamelin (Mary Glory); Jack Hamelin (Henry Victor); Massias (Jules Berry).

Attendees of the Museum of Modern Art's Saturday morning sessions were all much impressed, some months ago, by a documentary on the making of this film. The most amazing photographic affects were achieved by a maximum of initiative and a minimum of equipment. The camera was trundled about on every conceivable kind of vehicle; it was thrown out of a window, on a cord, for the remarkable overhead shots of the stock exchange; the most incredible types of platforms were constructed in lieu of camera cranes. The film on the making of this film was perhaps even more fascinating than the work itself, and it is to be hoped that one day the Museum will show it publicly. This version of "L'Argent" is apparently all that is left of what must have been a marvellous production; the Cinematheque in Paris states that neither prints or a negative of the original are still in existence over there. This print, running only an hour, is another condensation a la "Spione", shown last month, and while it is sad that the complete version apparently is no more, it's good to have at least this much. Again, it is a blow-up from an English 9.5mm print - the quality for the most part is good enough, though not as good as in "Spione". Both plot (something of a more complex "Executive Suite") and technique are off-beat -- possibly a little too much so, for the film is hard to keep up with. And like many of the late silents, it is rather over-obsessed with the moving camera. But better too much concern for the technique of the film, than none at all, which is the case with nine out of ten contemporary films. The cast is interesting, with Brigitte Helm and Alfred Abel, graduates from "Metropolis", joining the French players. Jules Berry seems to have been little more than a bit player in this one. Like most of L'Herbier's films, "L'Argent" is odd, unpredictable and absorbing. Apart from the quite brilliant and neglected "La Nuit Fantastique" (given very sparse distribution in this country), L'Herbier's later work was less interesting, with a stress on talkative comedies and occasionally rather dull spectacles. His mediocre "The Last Days of Pompeii" was made even less exciting in this country by some awful dubbing and a hatchet job that removed some ten reels of footage!

"ZAMPA" (Joseph M. Schenck-UA, 1930) 1 reel. Produced by William Cameron Menzies and Hugo Riesenfeld; supervised by Orville O. Dull; directed by Eugene Ford; photographed by Karl Struss.

In the early days of sound, Menzies and Riesenfeld made a whole series of one-reels, shot silent, and designed to fit - and illustrate - well-known musical classics. The plots of some of them were quite inane, but all of them had top-notch camerawork and solid production values. Often quite elaborate sets were "borrowed" from important feature pictures then in production. "Zampa", based on the music of Joseph Ferdinand Herold, is one of the best of the series and a really interesting little film. No cast is supplied, and we haven't been able to identify the heroine as yet, but the hero is a grade-B western star, Buddy Roosevelt (still active in bits) and the villain is Wallace MacDonald, a quite popular leading man of the twenties and early thirties, and now a good low-budget producer for Columbia Pictures.

"CORSAIR" (Roland West Productions-United Artists, 1931) 7 reels.
 Produced, directed and adapted (in collaboration with Josephine Lovett)
 by Roland West; based on the novel by Walton Green; photographed by
 Ray June; edited by Hal Kern; music by Alfred Newman;
 Starring CHESTER MORRIS with Alison Lloyd (Thelma Todd); Fred Kohler, Ned Sparks,
 Mayo Metho, Frank McHugh, Emmett Corrigan, Al Hill, Gay Seabrook, Addie
 McPhail.

When we ran "The Bat Whispers" some months ago, we stirred up a great deal of
 interest in the wonderful - and forgotten - director, Roland West. Therefore,
 although it has been shown spasmodically on television, in somewhat cut versions,
 we are glad to be able to show this, his third film with Chester Morris ("Alibi"
 and "The Bat Whispers" being the other two), and his last film. When Thelma
 Todd (her appearance in this film under another name has never been explained)
 was found dead, there was more than a hint of murder. And Roland West, with whom
 Todd had had a romantic liason, was one of the number one suspects. Murder was
 never actually proven and thus West was cleared, but many still considered him
 guilty. He was out of films -- and until his death, lived only on the fringe of
 Hollywood activity, as the proprietor of a restaurant.

Like most of West's films, "Corsair" doesn't make it easy on the audience. The
 plot development is far from straightforward, and the motivations often extremely
 involved. Many of the strongest plot elements are not present in the original
 novel at all - a fairly routine tale of gangsterism and bootlegging, written by
 Walton Green, a prohibition inspector. At a time when so many talkies were just
 that, "Corsair" is all movie, with a reliance on the same technique that so
 distinguished "The Bat Whispers" - dramatic lighting and closeups, superb moving
 camera shots, an excellent use of shadows, and, in this film, some really lovely
 night exteriors. As a part of the gangster cycle of the early 30's, it has
 something in common with "The Finger Points" in its casual acceptance of crime,
 and in its total lack of any kind of "moral compensation" for the criminals -
 even though their crimes have included cold-blooded murder. Chester Morris and
 Fred Kohler make a fine pair of rival bootleggers, and there is an interesting
 performance from Ned Sparks too. All in all, "Corsair" is one of the most
 interesting of the many interesting films that got lost in the shuffle in the
 early 30's -- and not the least of its many appealing qualities, is the lovely
 period background music by Alfred Newman.

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 Program Notes & enquiries: William K. Fverson, 2166 B roadway, New York City 24.
 Committee of the film society: Dorothy Lovell, Edward Gorey, Charles Shibuk.

 NEXT PROGRAM: December 17th: ELMER CLIFTON's "DOWN TO THE SEA IN SHIPS" (1922)
 starring Raymond McKee with Clara Bow; and shorts to be announced.

With this mailing we're enclosing a circular from one of our members, Richard
 Kraft, which we think may be of interest to the 349 other members. If we were
 writing the circular we'd have described Eick as "formidable" rather than "genial"
 - however! While we're doling out free advertising, we'd also like to
 mention the one-man archive, Johnny Allen, who can be found (figuratively speaking)
 in box 78 of the Radio City Post Office. Johnny has been very kind to this
 society, loaning "Down to the Sea in Ships" and other priceless items. To the
 collector of stills, posters, pressbooks, prints and other film memorabilia, he's
 invaluable. Johnny sells and trades; we recommend the former. The latter rather
 tends to resemble the scene in "David Harum" wherein Will Fogers and Charles
 Middleton whittle at a stick as they do their horse-trading!

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