THEODORE HUFF MEMORIAL FILM SOCIETY
Program for Thursday April 24th, 1957

HAROLD LLOYD

NEVER WEAKEN

LILLIAN GISH in Victor Seastrom's "THE SCARLET LETTER" with Lars Hanson; Henry B. Walthall (1926); DOROTHY GISH with Blanche Sweet in "Painted Lady" (1918)

BUSTER KEATON
in "The Haunted House"

CHARLIE CHASE in "THE RAT'S KNUCKLES"

CHARLIE CHAPLIN

"CITY LIGHTS"
(EXCERPTS)

WILL ROGERS in "DON'T PARK THERE!"

LUPINO LANE in "MONTIE OF THE MOUNTED"

EDGAR KENNEDY & STUART ERWIN in "A PAIR OF TIGHTS"

BERT WILLIAMS in "A NATURAL BORN GAMBLER"

GEORGE O'HANLON in "SO YOU WANT A MODEL RAILROAD?"

A MACK SENNETT Composite reel presenting MAEFL NORMAND and THE KEystone COps

LAUREL AND HARDY

"TIT FOR TAT"

NEXT SHOW: May 20th
"THE RAT'S KNUCKLES" (Pathé-Hal Roach, 1924) Starring Charlie Chase. 1 reel.

If Chase ever made a bad comedy, we haven't seen it yet; even when his material was routine, his sprightly personality seemed to give it added sparkle. (We have an especially good Chase talkie coming up in June). "The Rat's Knuckles", admittedly not one of Chase's best, has some wonderfully idiotic gags and one or two really unexpected ones.

"A NATURAL BORN GAMBLER" (Biograph, 1916) One reel.

After Griffith left Biograph, the company began to sink rapidly, abandoning both stars and the techniques taught by Griffith, who took most of the talent he had trained, along with him to the west coast. For the most part Biograph now concentrated on inferior imitations of Griffith melodramas and Serrett comedies. The one really bright spot in their schedule was provided by the delightful and original comedies of Bert Williams. Williams, a tremendously gifted pantomimist, had been successful initially back in 1896 with minstrel shows, and was thereafter part of the famous team of Williams and Walker. A fine vaudevillian, and a song-writer with more than 50 popular songs to his credit, he did a tremendous amount towards popularizing, and bettering the conditions for, the negro entertainer. (Incidentally, very light skinned himself, he used black face make up). "A Natural Born Gambler" was one of the very best of his films for Biograph, made when he was a solo headliner for the Ziegfeld Follies. One of his most famous pantomime routines was that of the porter carrying bags from taxi to train through a still-under-construction Grand Central - climbing up ladders, and along girders! This particular routine is not included in the film, but his wonderful card game routine is, and even more notable, his solo poker game pantomime, which is still a classic routine, and as funny, and human, as it was in 1916. We have placed this film fairly early in our program because its humor is of the quiet and gentle kind; later on in the evening, amid hectic slapstick, it probably wouldn't be seen to its best advantage. Nevertheless, despite its "supporting" place on the bill, we consider it one of the finest (and rarest) items of our show.

"MOMIE OF THE MOUNTED" (Educational, 1927) Director: Charles Lamont. 2 reels.

Like Charlie Chase, Lupino Lane never seems to have made a bad comedy -- although admittedly so few are around today for reappraisal that that may be rather too sweeping a statement. Lane, a British comedian who appeared in Griffith's "Isn't Life Wonderful?", Lubitsch's "The Love Parade", and the very successful British show (and film) of the late 30's, "The Lambeth Walk", was a cherubic little comedian, not unlike Langdon, with an incredible acrobatic ability - an ability on continuous display in this film. Although it is ostensibly a satire on westerns, it is far less successfully than Mack Swain's "Cowboy Ambrose". Really it is just a succession of wonderful gags, only a few of which bear much relation to the western scene, and several of which (e.g., the "hands" gag) seem to have been cheerfully stolen from Chaplin. There's some fine foolery with an incredibly realistic-looking phony horse, and more action and movement than in many a feature.

"DON'T PARK THERE!!" (Pathé-Hal Roach, 1924) One reel (condensed from two).

The Will Rogers comedies for Roach were surprisingly variable. The political spoof's tend to date most, and seem rather pointless today. But the less restricted satires sometimes stand up wonderfully well, particularly his jibes at moviedom, as in "Uncensored Movies" and "Big Moments from Little Pictures" (both shown by this society two years ago), and also this fine study in exasperation at the parking problems of the 20's -- a subject still nicely topical. Hordes of model-T Fords are on hand to add to the nostalgia.
"NEVER WEAKEN" (Associated Exhibitors-Hal Roach, 1921) 2 reels. Directed by Sam Taylor; starring Harold Lloyd and Mildred Davis.

We've had many requests to repeat this very rare Lloyd ever since we first ran it a couple of years ago, and this seemed the ideal place. It's one of the best of the Lloyd two-reelers, made just before his switch to features. The building-climbing material is up to his top standard, funny, thrilling and almost unbelievable, and is preceded by some cheerfully sadistic fooling so completely typical of comedies of the silent era.

"SO YOU WANT A MODEL RAILROAD?" (Warner Brothers, 1954) Written and directed by Richard Bar; photographed by Ellsworth Fredericks; music by William Lava; starring George O'Manlon and Jane Frazee. 1 reel.

You may possibly feel that we are really going round the bend by including a comedy short of only a few years ago in a program devoted to comedy greats, and primarily those of the silent era. Well of course, there is no attempt to pretend that this film should be compared with the work of Keaton or Laurel and Hardy. Nevertheless, Richard Bare does deserve a tremendous amount of credit for his sadly under-rated Joe McDake's series. They were the last really creative short film comedies. The short comedy was all but dead. The Columbia two-reelers (The 3 Stooges, etc.) were so cheap and inane as to be an absolute affront. Quality was no longer demanded in comedies— all that was needed was footage, to pad out a dying shorts schedule. Bare could have relaxed, and turned out junk, and collected his pay just the same. But, even with a limited budget, he— as writer-director— tried hard. The weakest of his films still had moments of fine humor, and consistent production gloss. The best of them were often very fine indeed— and this is a good sample. We won't spoil your fun by tipping off the gags in advance, but they're the sort of gags that Keaton would have had fun with in the 20's. One of Bare's very best was a fine satire on "The Lost Weekend," but devoted to horse players. Next to that, this particular one is perhaps the best of the several dozen that we've seen. Incidentally, Bare always used top flight cameramen on this series, sometimes even using two. Ellsworth Fredericks ("The Friendly Persuasion") and Gilbert Warrenton ("The Cat and the Canary") frequently worked together on these comedies.

A MACK Sennett Composite Reel

Including highlights from THE R.A.R.A. GIRL, a Sennett feature of 1923, directed by F. Richard Jones, and starring Mabel Normand, Ralph Graves and Vernon Dent. Our scenes are from the Hollywood sequence, showing Mabel's screen-test (with William Desmond as a guest star), and the famous sequence of Mabel leading a lion around the studio, fondly believing it to be dog-star Teddy. Also in the reel will be typical, fast, Keystone chases from MOVING PICTURE NEWS AND AUTO TROUBLE (1916, directed by Dell Henderson) starring William Collier and Mae Busch, and BECAUSE HE LOVED HER (1916, directed by Dell Henderson) starring Sam Bernard.

"TIT FOR TAT" (Hal Roach-MGM, 1935) Director: Charles Rogers. With LAUREL & HARDY AND MAE BUSCH.

One of the last of Laurel and Hardy's two-reelers, and one of their best. "Tit for Tat" is a direct sequel to "Them Thar Hills," and something of a remake of "Big Business" in its basic plot. Like "Big Business," it is the very apotheosis of Laurel and Hardy, their basic routines stripped to the barest essentials. What more need one say? Our past notes have covered...
so much Laurel and Hardy ground that further comment here would be superfluous, except to say that if you dislike their sadism, you're going to loathe this one! However, since only the maladjusted or the retarded can really dislike Laurel and Hardy, we have no serious qualms on that score.

- INTERMISSION -


How much better, on the whole, were the Hal Roach comedies of the late 20's than those of Sennett. Sennett may have made greater individual comedies, but Roach's overall standard was infinitely higher. (Sadly, Roach's standards dipped badly in his sound period, save for the films of Laurel and Hardy and Charlie Chase). "A Pair of Tights" is a classic of sorts, which frankly looks as though it were designed for Laurel and Hardy. It has their systematic building of a simple problem into a state of frenetic chaos; it has casual sadism developing into a mass orgy of bad tempered kissings and beatings; and it has gags that are borrowed right out of "The Battle of the Century" and "Two Tars" -- with many of the same hapless Roach victims. It is, in short, a minor classic, and one long overdue for rediscovery. This film, being shown for the first time since its release, is without titles -- but no film ever needed titles less. And being right off the original negative, it is a sparkling print. In error, we earlier stated that this was directed by Edgar Kennedy himself. It wasn't. We were confusing it with "You're Darn Tootin", a Roach comedy of the same period (and type) that he did direct. The similarity of this film to the best of the Laurel and Hardy comedies suggests that perhaps Roach and supervisor McCarey exercised more personal supervision than is generally supposed, for certainly nothing else that Hal Yates directed was ever quite as good as this, and none of his later Rko sound comedies with Kennedy and Leon Errol even approached the wonderful inventiveness, timing and sheer pantomime of this one. Even Kennedy seems to have surpassed himself here too. This is really a lulu of a comedy.

"CITY LIGHTS" (Chaplin-United Artists, 1931) Starring Charlie Chaplin, with Hank Mann, Harry Myers and Virginia Cherrill. 2 reel excerpt.

Obviously this is not the place for a lengthy discussion of this wonderful film - possibly Chaplin's best - nor is such a discussion needed. Our excerpts cover, primarily, Chaplin's hectic night out with his millionaire friend, their drunk driving the "morning after", the prelude to the boxing match, and most of the fight itself. Disappointingly, the excerpt ends just before the fight itself ends, but we are extremely lucky to have any material available from this film, and these two odd reels do seem to combine most of the comic highlights of the film, which unfortunately hasn't been shown at all in the past five years or so, and which doesn't seem much of a possibility for further revival for a very long time hence.

"THE HAUNTED HOUSE" (Keaton-Metro, 1921) Directed by Buster Keaton and Eddie Cline. Two reels.

Any Keaton film of this period is a real find these days, and what a pleasure it is when the film so fully lives up to expectations? "The Haunted House" is full of really great, typically Keaton gags. Since so many of the laughs derive from Keaton's surprise reactions, it would be unfair to discuss the comic content here, except to say that it is WELL up to top Keaton standard. The print is of French origin, carries the title "Malax Chez Les Fantomes".
and has French subtitles throughout. But even those who do not read French will find this a small handicap, as like all great silent comedies, it is completely, thoroughly, visual throughout. Like "Cops", it is divided into two: some wonderful, imaginative fooling (in a bank) in the first half, and some more wonderful, rather more slapstick comedy, in the second half, set in the "maison hantée". Every so often (though not often enough) a fine old Keaton is re-discovered. This is the first one since "Balloonatics". Can they ALL be this good? So far there hasn't been a let-down. Let's hope that more turn up -- and soon.

- - - - - - - - - - - - Wm. K. Everson - - - - - - - - -

In conjunction with the showing of "The Haunted House", we are issuing an index to the work of Buster Keaton (up to 1936), specially prepared for us by George Geltzer, to whom we are most grateful. Done at top speed in order to be ready for issuing today, this is merely a listing of titles and dates and is not meant to be an "index" in the accepted, detailed, sense. This, no doubt, will come later. In the meantime, this is, we believe, the first complete and accurate list of Keaton's work to be published, and thanks are due again to George Geltzer for his research.

NEXT MONTH

we are devoting our programs to Lillian and Dorothy Gish. Program one will consist of Lillian's "THE SCARLET LETTER" and Dorothy's "PAINTED LADY", a very rare old Griffith-Biograph, plus at least one other item.

Program two will be Griffith's "ORPHANS OF THE STORM", co-starring Lillian and Dorothy Gish. We have had many requests for this wonderful film, which is only very rarely shown by the Museum of Modern Art, and NEVER at the correct silent speed, always so important in any Griffith film. We're planning a really ambitious program note for this showing. Following "Orphans of the Storm", we will be playing a tape recording of Erich von Stroheim's broadcast tribute (via BBC in London) to D.W. Griffith.

We hope to have the print of Chaplin's "THE PILGRIM" in very shortly, and so this will form the nucleus of a second comedy program in June. We have plenty of fine material left over that just couldn't be fitted into tonight's program.

Secondly, we'd like to ask your opinion of a possible JOHN FORD marathon screening some Saturday afternoon and evening shortly? Because most of this material is reasonably familiar, and some of it is now on TV, we wouldn't devote one of our regular showings to it. But if there are enough Ford devotees who would like a concentrated session of his films - uncut, as opposed to some of the TV prints, and in the case of "DRUMS ALONG THE MÖHAWK" in color (theatrical prints for years have been only in black and white) - we'll be happy to set up such a session. Tentatively, the idea would be to run about four films complete - possibly DRUMS ALONG THE MÖHAWK, PRISONER OF SHARK ISLAND, YOUNG MR LINCOLN and SUBMARINE PATROL - along with lengthy excerpts from STAGECOACH, LONG VOYAGE HOME, THE PUGILIST, WAGONMASTER, THEY WERE EXPENDABLE, etc. If those of you who are interested will drop me a line, we'll see if it's worth planning such a show. Of course, we can't get everything we want of Ford, but there are about 20 of his sound films available to us.

Program notes & enquiries: Wm. K. Everson, 2156 Broadway, New York City Committee: Dorothy Lovell (art work), Charles Shibuk, Edward Gorey