The Theodore Haff Memorial Film Society
Tuesday Oct. 27th 1959

Program in order of screening:

LENA AND THE GESE (American Biograph, 1912, 1 reel) Dir: D.W. Griffith
With Mary Pickford, Mae Marsh, Kate Bruce, Claire McDowell, Charles H. Nailes, Grace Henderson, Christie Miller, Alfred Paget, Charles West.

"Lena and the Geese" is really more of a Pickford vehicle than a Griffith film. Quite elaborately mounted, it nevertheless has comparatively little of note directorially (after all, this was the year that Griffith made "A Girl and Her Trust"). "Musketeers of Pig Alley" and other early masterpieces of style and technique. But Mary is just delightful, and quite effortlessly walks away with the whole film in a performance graphically foreshadowing the delightful portrayals that were to follow within a few years at Paramount.

HELLIES - 1903-1907 - 1 reel

This little reel is a compilation of four short trick films by Hellies - "The bewitched Trunk", "The Marvelous Wreath", "The Mysterious Box" and "Extraordinary Illusions". The jump cuts and the matching up are astonishingly smooth and still a good deal more facile than similar trick work today. The ingenuity never flags, and every so often it all erupts into a blaze of violence which predates by some four decades the kind of ultra-sadistic humor that made the later cartoons of Warners and MGM so delightful.

HER TERRIBLE ORDEAL (American Biograph, 1910, 1 reel) Dir: D.W. Griffith
With Florence Parker, Owen Moore, Christie Miller, George Nicholls, Tony O'Sullivan, D.W. Griffith.

Again hardly a remarkable Griffith, "Her Terrible Ordeal" is still a darned good one, and shows D.W. once more extracting the maximum of suspense from a single situation - in this case, a girl suffocating in a safe, while the boss - the only man with the combination - is about to take a train out of town!! There are the usual Griffithian delays, and even without titles (presumably the film did have them originally) it plays beautifully. There are some nice shots of old New Jersey, and D.W. himself plays a good humored bit, as the Svengali-attired gentleman on the railway platform.

THE WOODEN SOLDIER (Universal, 1928, 1 reel) Dir: Jacques Rollin; with Leon Janney.

This curious little film starts out beautifully, in Universal's best Gothic-Leni style, and looks like being a weird and bizarre little work. Then, halfway through, macabre fantasy turns into sugary whimsy, and it falls apart - although interesting camerawork remains. It's a pity -- but it's still a strange and off-beat short subject.

GIDDAP (Sennett-Pathé, 1924, 1 reel) With Billy Bevan, Helen Kehrmann, Yorke Sherwood, Kathryn McDouire, Andy Clyde.

This is one of the most enjoyable Sennett's we've run across in a long while, and we wish we knew who directed it. Del Lord perhaps? It's a most enjoyable mixture of quite subtle gags and wildly insane slapstick, with lovable rogue Billy Bevan on top form. The gag of the same incident being described - in flashback - in three quite different forms is particularly well done, and it's only a matter of time before some film historian informs us that here lies the film which was the inspiration of "Rashomon"!

- INTERMISSION -
"MADONNAS AND MEN" (June 1920, 5 reels) Directed by B.A. Rolfe
Written by Edmund Goulding and Carey Wilson;
cameraman - A.A. Caldwell; starring Edmund Lowe and Raye Dean, with Anders Randolf, Gustav von Seyffertitz, Evan-Furrows Fontaine, Faire Binney, Blanche Davenport.

Every so often the Huff Society runs a film of no very great artistic or historical significance for no reason other than that it's darned good fun—and that if we didn't show it, nobody else would! MADONNAS AND MEN falls into that category. It's one of the first of that popular cycle in the 20's ("Man-Woman-Marriage"; "The Ten Commandments"; "Noah's Ark") that drew parallels between contemporary life and that of an ancient historical era. But whereas most of them used a modern story that drew benefit from a peep into the past, this one reverses the process. It starts out in ancient Rome, with Christian girls being thrown to the lions, and a title informs us that "No civilization is permanent which is founded on the debasing of women." To prove his point, the Emperor's soothsayer (who else but Gustav von Seyffertitz) spins a tale of the 20th century—an ultra-wild jazz age tale, quite nonsensical, but loads of fun. And of course, the lesson learned, we return to Rome to apply it. Nobody took it seriously back in 1920, and all the reviews pointed out that it was a completely unbelievable tale. Film Daily wondered whether the elaborate production and the sensations compensated for the absurdity of it all—and decided that they did—just. Certainly none of it can stand up to too close a scrutiny—least of all the predicament of having Faire Binney torn between loving two men—Gustav and Anders Randolf! That seems to be carrying thing a bit too far. However, we're exercising a little levity here only to prevent your expecting too much from the film—one expects a typical States Rights roadshow attraction of the 20's, and you'll probably enjoy it to the hilt. Certainly for an independent picture it's very elaborately mounted. The cabaret scenes are wonderful, and the Roman sequences seem to be done without any use of stock footage either. Leading lady Raye Dean is quite pretty, and Evan-Furrows Fontaine, a noted dancer of the day, is given ample opportunity for abandoned dancing both in the arena and in the "Midnight Revels" cabaret. Her coy striptease, behind a screen, is rather confusingly intercut with a cabaret number however, and it's only later that you realise it wasn't part of the show! B.A. Rolfe, who directed, seems to have had a singularly unspectacular career, with only a handful of productions of this type, and a Houdini serial, to his credit. On the whole, with all its shortcomings, "Madonnas and Men" is a slick and interesting film, a fine print, and quite typical of the sort of film that was turned out en masse then—and is now seldom revived.

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