A Program of Comedy & Melodrama

"TWICE TWO" (MGM-Hal Roach, 1933) 2 reels; directed by James Parrott; starring Laurel and Hardy with Charlie Hall.

With the possible exception of "Bollo" and "Fm Big", "Twice Two" is about the weakest Laurel and Hardy we've seen, silent or sound -- and because it is such an extreme, it's an interesting example of the problems of working for Hal Roach and having to turn out comedies on schedule whether there's time to develop them properly or not. Most of the time Laurel and Hardy liked that problem; here, for once, they couldn't. The idea - Laurel and Hardy playing themselves and their wives - is wonderful (especially with Mary Carr's voice dubbed in for Hardy), but the gag material itself is skimpy, and never as well developed as in "Frats", wherein they played their own children. Nevertheless, there are some very funny scenes; the first five minutes are fine, and though it lags thereafter, the pantomime - particularly Hardy's - is always worth watching.

RINTY'S RIVALS

There were any number of dog stars competing with Rin Tin Tin in the 20's. The rather lazy and moth-eaten Dynamite was the least talented, and Napoleon Bonaparte the most colorfully named. But the two that came closest to Rinty's boxoffice appeal were first and foremost, Strongheart (who had preceded Rinty as a canine star), and Peter the Great. We have here typical examples of both of them at work.

"THE RETURN OF BOSTON BLACKIE" (Chadwick, 1927) Dir: Harry Hoyt; scenario by Leah Baird; photographed by Ernest Miller and Ted Tetzlaff; edited by Gene Milford; starring Strongheart, Raymond Glenn (later known as Bob Custer) and Corliss Palmer.

EXCERPT FROM REEL TWO.

Strongheart, rather past his prime now, was rather dragged into this routine mystery by his fetlocks, and had comparatively little chance to shine as he had in former years at First National. This sequence, from quite early in the film, is the liveliest and best episode in the six reels.

"KING OF THE PACK" (Lucas, 1926) Dir: Frank Richardson; scenario, James Bell Smith; camera, Ed Geller. With Peter the Great, Charlotte Stevens, Vera Lewis, Robert Gordon, Frank Norcross, Frank Brownlee.

The climactic reel of this wonderfully hokey old thriller dwells more on the plight of the heroine (a lovelingly pseudo Betty Bronson miss named Charlotte Stevens) than on the heroics of Peter -- but even so, Peter comes through in far more determined style than the completely ineffectual hero (Robert Gordon) who gets lost, falls over, and generally is of no help whatsoever! There are only three-frame flash titles, which are alas impossible to read - especially as they're all written in rich Ozark brogue - but all you need to know is that Vera Lewis is trying to force the heroine to tell where a cache of money is hidden -- and waiting her up in a cave, a few stones every day, until she's left completely in the dark with, as the title puts it, "all them crawly things!" Two lecherous old moonshiners have ideas of their own too, and they wind up with a singularly savage fight which seems physically quite impossible, but which is certainly a great deal of fun.
"FEET OF MUD" (Mack Sennett-Pathe, 1924) Starring Harry Langdon, with Natalie Kingston, Vernon Dent, Florence D. Lee. 2 reels

Of the 15 or so Sennett Langdons that we've seen (how many were there, altogether?) "Feet of Mud" is the most uniformly good of the batch. Others had far greater individual sequences, but this is the one that moves best, remains the purest Langdon throughout, and also concentrates more on situation than on Harry himself. It also rather astonishingly anticipates key sequences in Lloyd's "The Freshman", Chaplin's "City Lights" and Keaton's "The Cameraman" -- as well as itself borrowing (the subway sequence) from Gloria Swanson's "Manhandled", released a few months earlier in 1924. Harry is just as delightful as always, and though the print is only a dupe, its quality is good enough for the most part.

(INTERMISSION)

"THE COMING OF AMOS" (Cecil B. DeMille-FDC, 1925) Dir: Paul Sloane; starring Rod La Rocque, Jetta Goudal, Noah Beery, with Trixie Friganza, Richard Carlyle, Arthur Hoyt, William von Brinken. From the novel by Wm. J. Locke; scenario: Garrett Fort, James Creelman. Most of the Rod La Rocque vehicles for DeMille at FDC were generally mediocre; "Stand and Deliver" was one of the stiffest of all time, and so many others, like "Braveheart" were just pictures that were nicely done but had nothing special to recommend them. Among the better ones were "The Fighting Eagle" (which we played), and "Captain Swagger". Best of all was the quite delightful "Cruse of the Jasper B", on which no prints appear to have survived.

If you don't like La Rocque of course, nothing can make his vehicles even remotely tolerable, but that considered apart, "The Coming of Amos" is one of the best of the group. Being one of the earlier ones, it was given more care, a bigger budget, and a better cast, than the succeeding ones. The production values throughout are good, and there are some really lovely glass shots which beat to a frazzle all the horrible and shaky matte work in the new "Ben Hur". It's always a pleasure to watch Jetta Goudal, and Noah Beery is in his element with some beautifully tongue in cheek villainy. The ultra-melodramatic climax - the big dungeon scene - is splendidly done, and the whole film is nice and amiable about everything, never taking its romance or its villainy too seriously. The titles -- there are few without a pun - enter into the spirit of fun very nicely too, and one doesn't even feel like quibbling over an Australia peopled almost exclusively by London cockneys!

Through the years, director Paul Shan has made some incredibly bad pictures ("Climbing Vines") and some darned nice ones. The last work I saw of his was a modern color version of "Madam Butterfly", that he made in Japan in the early fifties. It was a well done film -- and gave an interesting supporting role to old friend Sojin, who died a year or so later. So far as I know, it has never been released here, although it was peddled around the usual 7th Avenue channels for a long period.