There have been one or two minor changes in tonight's program (affecting only excerpts) for a variety of reasons. For one thing, when edited together we found that the whole show was more than a little unwieldy. running some five reels longer than planned. (Our running time of 13 reels tonight, with a lot of it at silent speed, will still give us a minimum of three hours). Secondly, when we announced an excerpt from "The Americano", many members, asking us to run the whole film, pointed out that it was an unfamiliar Fairbanks which many hadn't seen. This of course is quite true; the Huff Society did run it once, in its very earliest days; and we haven't repeated it because it has always seemed a lesser Fairbanks. But since so many of you obviously wanted to see it, here it is -- not quite in its entirety, since this is a trimmed print, but with very little missing.

The casualties: "Wild and Woolly" (since we now have so much of the "modern" Fairbanks in our shows), "The Gaucho" and "The Black Pirate". But they are only temporary casualties, and will soon be included in a second Fairbanks show. We have a lot of unusually interesting (but as yet unedited) material including out-takes, screen tests and rejected scenes of Fairbanks films, and this material, together with further excerpts and another complete feature, will make up another complete program in the not too distant future.

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Tonight's program, in order of screening:

"FLIRTING WITH FATE" (Triangle, 1916) Dir: Christy Cabanne; supervisor: D.W. Griffith.

The 7th of Doug's Triangle films, "Flirting With Fate" had a good comedy story (later used by Joe E. Brown in a sound film with the same title) and not much else. It was pretty dull stuff, with more excitement in spotting the Griffith players (Lillian Gish as an extra, among them) than in following the rather foolish comedy. This one sequence is quite good however, and the only real action episode in the film.

"THE AMERICANO" (Triangle, 1916) Dir: John Emerson, scenario: Anita Loos; with Alma Rubens, Carl Stockdale, Tom Wilson, Mildred Harris, Spottiswood Aitken, Charles Stevens.

The 14th and last of the Triangles, "The Americano" was the most elaborate, but also one of the weakest. ("American Aristocracy", "Manhattan Ladness" & "His Picture in the Papers" were easily the best, and up to the standard of Doug's later films for Artcraft; "The Lamb" and the strange "Mystery of the Leaping Fish" were the weakest of the Triangles). Something of a blueprint for "His Majesty the American", "The Americano" has a lot of good humor and moves along quite quickly. Huge "sets" borrowed from the Mexican Exposition gave it added production values, but both in terms of action and comedy it disappoints after some of the earlier Triangles. Griffith's supervision on these 14 pictures was presumably in name only, for none of them give any indication of personal participation.

(Doug's "Golden Age" - 1917-1920 - is represented tonight by "The Nut", of which more in a moment. Undoubtedly his best film from this period, and that means his best from any period, was the brilliant "When the Clouds Roll By". Although it has had a couple of NY showings in the past ten years, it is such a delight that a further unveiling wouldn't come amiss, so we may run...
"THE MARK OF ZORRO" (UA, 1920) Dir: Fred Niblo. Excerpt. With Marguerite de la Motte, Noah Beery, Charles Stevens, Robt. McKim. Doug's first swashbuckler (the prologue to the delightful "A Modern Musketeer" excepted) "The Mark of Zorro" combined western action, Doug's cheery comedy and comparative brevity for the last time. A fairly small-scale film, it was still better and far more exciting than the top-heavy and ponderous cloak-and-dagger extravaganzas that were to follow.


Uncertain of public response to "Zorro", Doug reverted to the old style for this film. It was a reversion for one film only, for the reaction to his Zorro was so enthusiastic as to cause him to abandon his old characterization completely, and concentrate solely on swashbucklers. It was a sad decision in a way, but so sad in another way. If "The Nut", with its indecisions and faltering pace, was an indication of things to come, then a clean break and a new style was infinitely to be preferred to a gradual decline. Far from being the weakest of his modern comedies, "The Nut" was also a long way from equalling the best ("When the Clouds Roll By", "His Majesty the American"). It starts beautifully. The invention is there; the breezy Fairbanks character is there; the excessive but enjoyable titles are there; all that is lacking is enthusiasm. Somehow one feels that Doug was getting a little tired of jumping through the hoop, even though the hoop was such fun for his audience. There are some individual comic sequences that rank with Doug's best, and he himself is on top form in these sequences. But in between there is tedium, a kind of desperation to the plot (plots were never models of logic or drama in Doug's comedies, but they did have spontaneous incident and a smooth flow). Second-rate Fairbanks is still several notches above first-rate anyone else however, and with all its flaws "The Nut" remains a spasmically enchanting and always diverting comedy. If Doug's acrobatics are at a minimum, and the villainy ill-motivated, one can always point to Doug's beautifully timed pantomimic bits, the pleasing whimsy of the Cupid device (we'll leave you to discover this delight for yourself) and the ingenious camera effects, and feel well satisfied that Doug has delivered the goods again. "The Nut" is rarely shown nowadays, and apart from a screening a couple of years back for the Museum's Saturday Morning Group, this is the first New York showing in over ten years.

"ROBIN HOOD" (UA, 1922) Dir: Allan Dwan; photography, Arthur Edeson; with Enid Bennett, Alan Hale, Wallace Beery, Sam de Grasse. Excerpt.

After "The Three Musketeers" (shown by this society a year or so back) Doug launched into "Robin Hood". One of his most popular pictures, it was also one of his dullest - overburdened with titles, plot, decor, and magnificent sets. It was a pictorial delight -- but a tedious and frustrating experience, always promising what it subsequently failed to deliver, and rarely allowing Doug to come to life either as a personality or as an athlete. The last two reels of the film (our excerpt) contain the best moments, and the only lively ones; indeed, those of you who haven't seen the preceding nine reels may well feel that we have been unjust. Certainly these two reels give an ample indication of the sheer size of the production; perhaps also they give a sampling of Doug's ponderous approach too, for the plot really finishes at the end of reel 10, yet Doug grinds out another full reel, taking care of loose ends, and dis sipating the excitement by delaying the fade out as long as possible.

-- Wm. K. Everson --