As you are aware, the print of SHE GOES TO WAR failed to materialize this month -- we were notified of its non-arrival literally hours after the announcements went out. Then, a week later, again literally hours after our second bulletin went out announcing tonight's substitute program, the same print of SHE GOES TO WAR turned up from another quarter! So we're happy to say that it will be shown, after all -- in November.

A Program of Comedy

As a contrast to the sheer mayhem of Laurel and Hardy, the first part of tonight's program consists of rather gentle comedy, primarily from 1928. We think you'll find some pleasing little surprises here.

KALEIDOSCOPE - PIKE 1 rl

This of course is not a comedy by intention -- far from it; the original German nature footage is good stuff on its own ground, and often quite savage. But we think it makes a most appropriate introduction to the Robert Benchley film, not least in that its rather bumbling and evasive American narration is exactly the kind of thing that Benchley kids so well in his film. The coy and embarrassed skirting of detail in the mating habits of the pike instantly bring the Benchley image to mind.

THE SEX LIFE OF THE POLYP (Fox, 1928) Dir: Thomas Chalmers 1 rl

The second and best of the three "lecture" films that Benchley did for Fox in '28, this delightful little film is too much of an old favorite to need additional comment here.

PINK PAJAMAS (Pathe-Mack Sennett, 1928) Dir: Phil Whiteman 2 rls
With Billy Bevan, Vernon Dent, Natalie Joyce, Alice Ward.

Sennett's "Tired Business Man" series just before sound came in was, generally speaking, a pretty weak group of films. All the wonderful old sight gags were abandoned for bedroom farces of misunderstandings similar to the two-reelers that Leon Errol was later to do for Rko. As comedies they were dull and obvious, overburdened with unfunny gag titles. "Pink Pajamas" however is quite one of the better ones in this series, thanks mainly to Billy Bevan. It often has a certain charm, and despite the scarcity of sight gags, one almost regrets the return to traditional Sennett slapstick for the climax.

THE ELIGIBLE MR BANGS (Coronet-E.W. Hammons, 1928; rel: 1929) 2 rls
Dir: Hugh Paulson; camera: William Hyer
Starring Edward Everett Horton, with Florence Eldridge, Johnny Arthur, Mabel Forrest.

Considering the static, stagey quality of so many early talkie shorts, it's really quite amazing how well these early Horton comedies stand up, based as all of them were on one-act stage plays, and making no bones about it. The fact that they were good one-actors, old reliables like vaudeville routines that had been practised to perfection, helped a great deal no doubt; but it is mainly the Horton personality that puts them over so expertly. His playing and timing are fine; and in terms of photography and sound recording they are of a high standard, so that it is really only the costumes of the women that makes one realise with a start that these shorts are now some 52 years old!

It's frightening how badly some films of the forties have dated; this comedy, which at the time seemed inspired and inventive, now seems flat, obvious and empty--all except this one sequence, which has nothing to do with the story proper, and which was just thrown into the middle of it. Based on an old vaudeville sketch by Morrie Ryskind, it still stands up very well--and also serves as an uncomfortable reminder of those days, not too far distant, when movie houses were always full.


Another delightful Warner cartoon, with more stress on bizarre story angles than on the savagery we've become used to in cartoons.

= INTERMISSION =


We've wanted for a long time to play WAY OUT WEST, and have been held up only by the problems of finding a complete print. So many available prints have turned out to be of TV derivation, with a running time of some 55 minutes, and always with important and sometimes classic sequences deleted. This print in its initial stages was also incomplete, but by adding missing sections from other prints, we've managed to restore it to its original length, although as a result there are frequent changes of print quality. One episode remains a mystery however; when I first saw the film in England it contained a sequence where Laurel and Hardy are confronted by a sign-post which is propped loosely into a whole, and which changes direction with every shift of the wind. It was a long sequence, and not a terribly good one. I have never seen this sequence in any American print, and from the way the film is put together, there just doesn't seem any place for it. Too, many authorities on Laurel and Hardy who know the film well have no knowledge of the sequence. It seems possible that it was discarded over here, but retained for European release, where a few extra minutes of running time often mean a great deal. In any event, that is the only scene now missing from this print.

While SONS OF THE DESERT (shown by this Society recently) is probably the smoothest and best feature comedy L & H ever made, due no little to the comedy talents of William Seiter who seemed to harmonise with them perfectly, WAY OUT WEST runs it a good second. And for sheer concentration on Laurel and Hardy and their routines, it may even be a shade better. There are no diversions here, no silly romantic sub-plots, no time out for boy to sing to girl. The only thing missing perhaps is one of those ritualistic exchanges of mutual indignities and savageries--but the sheer ferocity of the slapstick, especially in the closing reel, makes up for that omission. Hardy has some magnificent small-talk in a stagecoach, ample opportunity for old-world gallantry and grandiose gestures. Laurel gets in some neat pantomime, at least one of his "special" routines (the burning finger!), and provides many opportunities for Hardy's forlorn direct appeal for audience sympathy. There are two quite wonderful impromptu songs and dances from the boys--and Finlayson's villainy has never been surpassed.