Note: Perhaps because it's a good film that hasn't yet shown up on TV, and more likely because of the recent interest in earlier Robert Wise pictures, accentuated by New Yorker and Cinema 16 programs, we had quite a few requests to show Robert Wise's "A Game of Death" in its entirety. This we'll be happy to do, and since it was shot to show just highlights tonight, we've withdrawn that excerpt from tonight's program. We'll be showing it in its entirety in June, probably coupled with one of the less familiar Lewtons. This will be in addition to our three regular programs.

STOCK FOOTAGE - USE AND ABUSE

To many, the phrase "stock shot" conjures up merely the idea of an economical use of some old establishing or newsreel shot. And so it was, in the very beginning. But before long, whole pictures came to be built around stock; sometimes shrewdly, sometimes imaginatively, sometimes to the detriment of some great films. Eisenstein, Ford, Pabst, Griffith, Wellman, Cruze, and a hundred others -- all have had their work "lifed" and reworked. And the coming of wide screens made no difference. The Cinemascope "Storm over the Nile" was built solely around stock from the non-Cinemascope "The Four Feathers". MGM's remake of "Tarzan of the Apes" in color used tinted black-and-white footage from the original of 30 years earlier. The current "Master of the World" lifts from "Henny Penny", "Lady Hamilton" and "The Four Feathers"; "The Lost Atlantis" contains reels from "Quo Vadis" -- and so it goes. Having already devoted two complete articles to this subject in "Films in Review", I needn't expand further at this point -- the record is available for those interested in further exploration. Tonight's program is a brief round-up of some of the different ways stock footage has been used in the movies.


Most of Paramount's Zane Grey westerns of the thirties were built around, or used extensively, footage from the silent westerns with the same stories. Often the same players were recast for matching-up purposes. In one chase scene here, you'll see some neat intercutting between old and new, though Jack Holt is identifiable in some of the older shots. The other sequence, a man-va-lion fight, shows Tom Dugan re-cast in the same role so that footage shot a decade apart can be matched up. -- Emile: Tom Kennedy

"KING OF THE WILD" (Mascot, 1930) Dir: Richard Thorpe; with Walter Miller, Tom Santschi, Nora Lane, Boris Karloff. Excerpt from ep.2. Mascot (later Republic) were prolific and none too careful in their use of old footage. Matching up was usually a matter of taking one big stock scene, and cutting to a two-shot of reactions. The melange of stock here, from several sources, achieves an almost surrealistic quality -- quite unintentionally. We haven't identified the source of the great shipwreck footage, but Ince's "Civilisation" seems a possible point of departure.

"CRIMSON ROMANCE" (Mascot, 1934) Dir: David Howard; with Erich von Stroheim, Sara Maritza, Ben Lyon, Brandon Hurst, James Bush.

So little did producers take into consideration the commercial value of reissues (let alone TV) that often quite important footage was sold for stock but a few years after release. So it is here. Mascot gave this well-above-average "B" unusual production values first of all by shooting it at Universal, and using all the standing sets, and secondly by buying up reels of key "Hell's Angels"
material. All you needed was a process screen and an inventive writer; to use a German bomber with a British squadron, Brandon Hurst is blandly given a line to the effect that they've disguised a British plane to look like a Fokker!

THE GREAT ALASKAN MYSTERY (Universal, 1944) Dir: Ray Taylor, Lewis D. Collins. With Milburn Stone, Ralph Morgan, Marjorie Weaver. 2 rls.

Universal used as much stock as Mascot in their serials -- but they did so more adroitly. 90% of this episode comes from "SOS Iceberg" with Gibson Gowland easily recognizable. "Lucky we had all this Arctic equipment along" explains Edgar Kennedy, just before his boat sinks -- paving the way for all the cast to appear with sledges, dogs, eskimo suits and what have you! Audiences who didn't know what was what must really have been impressed with this episode (largely Arnold Fanck-directed!) and felt that the good old days of BIG serials were coming back!


A more legitimate use of stock occurs when a European film is bought up, not released in its original form, and a new film built carefully around it. Siodmak's "Magnetic Monster", built around the German "Gold" was such a film. The key scenes in "Valley of the Eagles" are from a Swedish film with Signe Hasso, "Land of the Midnight Sun". But a unit was sent to Sweden to build a new film around the old, and the matching and juxtaposition is unusually expert.

QUEEN OF THE JUNGLE (Independent, 1935) Dir: Robert Hill; supervised by Herman A. Wohl; with Reed Howes, Lona Andre, Kate McKeel. Episode one; two reels. Dickie Jones.

The producers of this little opus really deserve some kind of award for the sheer gall of assuming that anyone would sit still for it! Not even bothering to copyright it, they built the whole film around a 1922 serial, "Jungle Goddess". All of the connecting footage was shot in a tiny studio. There isn't a single action or exterior scene that didn't come from the silent. And some of it is pretty impressive too, with great animal stuff and a fine sinister idol. However, it doesn't help that much of it was beginning to decompose, and the enterprising producers went ahead and used it anyway, decay and all, without even trying for cutaways over the damaged portions! Kate McKeel, ageless as always, played the High Priest in both versions. But time doesn't always deal so gently, especially with the ladies. Thus it's a little hard to accept a quite pretty young Tiger Lady, playing happily with the beasts, and then cutting to the same lady 15 years later -- MUCH plumper, much older, and with a voice like a Brooklyn longshoreman. (We have nothing against Brooklyn longshoremen, but it seems unlikely that their voices would be ideally suited to the soothing of wild animals!) We are merely showing episode one of this little masterpiece. It gets better (or worse, depending on your point of view) as it progresses, and contains one immortal scene. An ape has tried to kill the heroine, and she explains it all to the hero with the bald statement "Uglah!" He replies: "You say the ape tried to stab you? Someone must have put him up to it."

I KILLED GERONIMO (Eagle Lion, 1952) Pro: Jack Schwartz; dir: John Hoffman; with James Ellison, Virginia Herrick, Thundercloud.

Pillaging John Ford's "Stagecoach" and using key scenes throughout the film as well as taking credit for the entire chase across the salt flats, wasn't quite enough for Jack Schwartz -- he had to pick up some big-scale Indian scenes from Paramount too. These big scenes are liberally scattered in
our excerpts -- hundreds of Indians (paid by Nat Holt) riding across a Utah plain, intercut by running inserts of Thunderolouer and a couple of straggly indians (paid by Schwartz, if they were lucky) galloping along at Iverson's Ranch. We've let our excerpt, the last reel of the film, carry on to the end so that you can see that, even after the salt flats, Schwartz isn't going to leave "Stagecoach" alone. He manages to get in quite a few nice shots of Lordsburg before the end title. The crowning touch, of course, is the title itself -- since nobody killed Geronimo.

INTERMISSION


Here of course the stock footage -- a 2 reel condensation of the Biblical half of DeMille's "The Ten Commandments" -- is openly admitted and exploited, and is in fact the raison-d'etre for the picture. It's spectacular and impressive footage, but somehow doesn't have the real sweep and grandismo one expects. And Paramount's use of it is somewhat uninspired and typically cheap too -- retention of the original titles, rewarding though that may be to movie buffs -- quite destroys the illusion that a Biblical tale being told by a priest. In its present context, it's as though the priest had pulled out a 16mm movie projector, and the combination of original titles plus odd bits of narration doesn't work. It's vastly enjoyable -- but it remains patently an economy move.

For the rest, the film holds up surprisingly well -- especially for one directed by Louis "Perils of Pauline" Gasnier. Neatly photographed by Karl Struss, and well paced, it dates hardly at all -- except intellectually perhaps. As an indictment of Communism as it was understood (or misunderstood) in 1932, it is naive and often ludicrous, albeit well intentioned. Communism seems to have been the convenient peg on which to hang (a) an expose film; and (b) a legitimate use of the DeMille footage. But at that, it's far less wild, and probably contains more basic truth, than some of the hysterical anti-Red films of the late forties and fifties -- "I Married a Communist", "The Red Menace", "The Big Lie" etc. And we must admit that Comrade Maritza in brief lingerie is certainly a persuasive argument for conversion to the Red dogma. If only the communists didn't use the word "bourgeoisie" quite so frequently (it seems to be the only anti-Capitalist insult they're capable of.) .... and if only Gene Raymond didn't seem quite such a dunce! In fact, for an anti-Communist film the film rather surprisingly puts all the trumps on the side of the State, and leaves democracy to the church and the dimwits! Marguerite Churchill, representing all the solid "old" virtues of faith, loyalty and love, is quite overshadowed by Miss Maritza in that Red underwear.

Next show -- Tuesday next, May 23rd. Adelphi Hall, 7:30, room 10-D
"RUBBER TIRES" (1926, dir: Alan Hale) Besale Love, May Robson, Harrison Ford
"SECOND FIDDLE" (1922, dir: Frank Tuttle) Mary Astor, Glenn Hunter

Sunday May 28th, New Yorker Theatre, 9:30 a.m. Prevue (untitled, undubbed) of Fritz Lang's latest, THE THOUSAND EYES OF DR. MABUSE.