

As a counter-balance to the cold-blooded cynicism of Ben Hecht's little work, the earlier part of tonight's program consists of a full-blooded dose of corn, nostalgia and slapstick.

GLAD RAGS TO RICHES (Jack Hays Baby Burlesks, 1933) Dir: Charles Lamont
Starring Shirley Temple; one reel

Unlike Hal Roach's "Our Gang" comedies, which were admittedly more popular (and were two-reelers), the short-lived Baby Burlesks were snappier and shorter, and often more imaginative. (In "Kid In Hollywood" Shirley Temple essayed a fine takeoff on Dietrich's Lola Lola, under the tyrannical direction of one Frightwig von Stumblebum!) They are hardly remarkable as comedies, although their slickness stands up well today, but they have a perennial fascination thanks to the trouping of Shirley Temple who, at the age of four, seems to understand most of what is going on, and performs delightfully. Why the comedies weren't built more exclusively around her, and why she wasn't signed to a fool-proof contract immediately, is one of the Hollywood mysteries that ranks with Metro's decision to let Valentino go.

THE DOCTOR (Educational-Skibo-Fox, 1933; released in 1934) Directed by Johnnie Walker; story by Gene Buck; screen treatment by Betty Laidlaw and Bob Lively; music by Hugo Riesenfeld; one reel
Starring Helen Morgan, Montague Love, Herbert Rawlinson, Dorothy Werner, with music by Henry King and his orchestra.

This Al Christie-supervised novelty, shamelessly sentimental, is a strange throwback to the series of "illustrated paintings" that Mary Astor had done as two-reelers in the early 20's - "The Young Painter", "The Beggar Maid", "Hope". Most people who like old film automatically like honest sentiment and unstinted emotions too, but for those that don't, there's still the voice of Helen Morgan, now nearing the end of her career, but still in fine voice, though looking rather more wan than in "Applause" (of four years earlier) which we showed last month.

THEIR FIRST MISTAKE (Hal Roach-MGM, 1932) Directed by George Marshall;
starring Laurel & Hardy; with Mae Busch. Two reels.

It is quite a few years since the Huff Society last unrecled this minor masterpiece, and a re-viewing seems well in order. It is one of their oddest (and if you like to use the current vernacular, "sickest") works, and one of their best. The early exchanges with the shrewish Mrs Hardy are marvellous, and the infantile bedroom scene, in which the boys, in child-like fashion, discuss the advantages of having a baby, is one of the best things they've ever done. If the film rather falls flat at the end, it's because there's just nowhere else it can go, and one can readily forgive these few faltering moments in the face of the preceding brilliance.

TABASCO ROAD (Warners, 1957) Dir: Robert McKimson; voices, Mel Blanc.

Another comedy and cartoon show is in the offing for the near future; in the meantime this savage and zany Warner cartoon is a welcome reminder of a genre we've rather overlooked of late. Not too long ago, the Mexican Government officially protested to the United States film industry about the demeaning portrayal of all Mexicans as slothful drunkards, mice, and savage cats! Films like "Speedy Gonzales", "Two Crows from Tacos" and this later Speedy Gonzales opus were primarily what they had in mind!

- INTERMISSION -

CRIME WITHOUT PASSION (Paramount, 1934) Written, produced and directed by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur; associate director and cameraman, Lee Garmes; special effects by Slavko Vorkapitch; with Claude Rains, Margo, Stanley Ridges, Whitney Bourne, Paula Trueman, Leslie Adams, Greta Granstedt, Esther Dale, Charles Kennedy, Fuller Mellish, and Helen Hayes as an extra. 8 reels.

Probably the best of the group of off-beat films that Hecht-MacArthur made for Paramount (the others were "The Scoundrel", "Once in a Blue Moon", "Soak the Rich") "Crime Without Passion" is certainly the most bizarre of them all.

full of photographic and literary pyrotechnics, floridly over-written in Ben Hecht's most malevolent and cynical style, it is essentially a movie of deliberate tricks. However, this isn't necessarily a bad thing. Tricks are only annoying when they are used to conceal production cheapnesses or plot paucity, and by the very cunningness with which they are employed trap the unwary into believing that they are seeing great art. John Ford's much over-rated "The Informer" relied on such tricks. But the tricks in "Crime Without Passion" are more obvious and more honest -- as are the tricks of Hitchcock and Roland West. They are not designed to be unobtrusive elements contributing, unscen, to the whole; they are part and parcel of the entertainment package; a big part, and intended to be noticed. It's worth noting that the best directors reserve their tricks for their least important material, it's no coincidence that these tricks have worked best in thrillers -- and conversely, it's likewise no coincidence that some of the best thrillers and melodramas have been those that were the most imaginative in their use of filmic tricks -- for example, "Alibi", "The Bat Whispers", and the best work of Tod Browning, Jacques Tourneur, Robert Siodmak, Fritz Lang and Alfred Hitchcock.

"Crime Without Passion" is something of an off-shoot of that colorful cycle of early-30's courtroom melodramas, in which John Barrymore, Lionel Barrymore and Warren William headed the list of Hollywood's shyster-lawyers, all of them drawing more than a little inspiration from the famous Fallon Rains' lawyer is superficially in the same colorful mould, but is far less stereotyped, and certainly more inherently corrupt and evil than any of those smooth-tongued mouthpieces. One of the dramatic delights of "Crime Without Passion" is one's inability to pin down the basic character not only of the lawyer, but of all the protagonists. None are wholly good, and none are wholly evil. More interesting, none are consistent either. Just as we decide that this character is sympathetic, or unsympathetic, or that we understand him, we are told just enough more about him - or her - to confuse us all over again. To a certain extent this dissipates dramatic power, as we wind up not really caring what happens to any individual. The spectator becomes rather like a child watching a spider devouring a fly -- dispassionate and emotionally aloof from the tragedy, yet thoroughly fascinated by the mechanics of it all.

Like last month's "Applause", "Crime Without Passion" was shot in Paramount's Long Island Studio. There are some fine large stages there - as witness the elaborate night-club set. Yet the crews there had a peculiar talent for using to the utmost the "natural resources" of the studio itself. Margo's dressing room in the film is actually one of the second-echelon star dressing rooms. The spiral staircase by the side of which Rains stands as the chorus girls descend is cunningly made to look like the centre of a beehive of activity; actually that staircase is in a dark corner of one stage, seemingly in such a cramped position as to make shooting of it next to impossible. And the three furies who leap so spectacularly through space in the fantastic surrealist prologue (a prologue that often used to be cut in theatres, and sometimes is on tv today -- not that it has had much exposure as yet) do their leaping from the wooden cat-walks above the main stage.

Incidentally, the Spewack's hilarious play about Hollywood, "Boy Meets Girl", was allegedly based on the unorthodox careers of Hecht and MacArthur. The movie, with Cagney and O'Brien in the lead roles, was great fun, but it did tend to minimise both the stature and achievements of Ben and Charlie!

----- Wm. K. Everson -----

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Due to an unexpected trip out of town, I've had to change the date of next Tuesday's show (THE INFORMER; THE TOURNAMENT; DON'T PARK THERE) and that show will now be held on Friday of next week, October 27th. An official mailing will go out to our whole mailing list later this week, notifying the change, and at the same time listing our November shows. (Other October showdates are unchanged). Shows in November will include HELL'S ANGELS; THE SATURDAY NIGHT KID (Clara Bow, Jean Arthur, James Hall, Jean Harlow in a 1929 sound remake of "Love 'Em and Leave 'Em"); Laurel & Hardy's 1928 classic THE FINISHING TOUCH, unseen for many years; THE DANGER'S PERIL, 1917, Montagu Love out to seduce mother and daughter, both played by Alice Brady; a fine and rare Rin Tin Tin - TRACKED BY THE POLICE, with Jason Robards & Tom Santschi, and other goodies. December shows will include a comedy program, and a show of British films from the 20's - THE BOHEMIAN GIRL (1922) with Ivor Novello, Ellen Terry, C. Aubrey Smith; and (substantial) condensations of two rare Hitchcock films - THE MANKMAN and THE RING.