A PROGRAM OF SIMPLE VIRTUES & SIMPLE VILLAINIES

"THE DANCER'S PERIL" (Wm. A. Brady-World Pictures-Peersless, 1917);
directed by Travers Vale; story by Harriet Morris; photographed by Max Schneider. Original working title: "The Snowbird".
Release date: March 12 1917. 5 Reels.
The Cast: Grand Duke Alexis (Philip Hahn); His morganatic wife, Lola Cortez (Alice Brady); Their daughter, Vasta Moscova (Alice Brady); Michael Pavlov (Montague Love); Marta Antonovitch (Auguste Burmeister); Her husband (Louis Orisel); Nicholas, Vasta's dancing partner (Alexis Kosloff); Richard Moraino (Harry Benham); Lamoraux (Jack Drumier); Boris (Sidney D'Albrouck); Ivan (Johnny Hines).
Print shown through the courtesy of Joe Franklin.

Most of the Alice Brady vehicles, shot at the Peerless Studios in Fort Lee in 1916 and 1917, tended to be both dull and in a sense, primitive. They were often quite elaborate as to sets and decor, and made ingenious use of local New Jersey landscapes. But their story-telling was old-fashioned, and in photographic and directorial technique they seemed years behind the far more vigorous films being made on the West Coast by Griffith and Ince. "Betsy Ross" was a dreadful bore, and "The Gilded Cage", though more elaborate, was only a little more cinematic. "The Dancer's Peril" is certainly no masterpiece either, but it is infinitely better than any of the other Brady-World films that have survived, and it is a great deal more fun. It moves faster, takes less time to establish characters and incident, and is surprisingly accomplished in some of its split-screen photography.

One common denominator of all the Brady films is that they all seem like the "typical" old movies envisioned by latter-day historians who really know almost nothing of the silents at all. Actually, in their stilted direction, exaggerated performances and clearly defined villainies and virtues, they are typical only of a lesser grade of production from a specific period. As such they do have a certain academic value in placing one aspect of film development in its proper perspective -- but perhaps, for the sake of film history (which is distorted enough already) it is as well that comparatively few of this category have survived. But, as representative of the species, "The Dancer's Peril" is not only an admirable example, but also a far more entertaining one than most of its brethren.

Montague Love is fine as the evil impresario out to seduce either mother or daughter, and, if time permits, both. He was one of World's best villains of the period, and remained a top heavy ("Son of the Sheik", "Night of Love", "Don Juan") right through the 20's. Alice Brady seems a trifle more animated than usual, though it is always hard to accept her as the ravishing beauty the titles assure us she is, and, as Film Daily pointed out, it is confusing to find her playing both mother and daughter without any change of style or makeup.

Knowing little about ballet history we can't comment on this, but it has been suggested (from a reliable and historically-sober source) that the Ballet Russe is not employed in name only, and that many of the dancers shown are actually members of that troupe. (Still, seem to lack this up). However, since most of the ballet sequences consist of everybody dancing what he or she feels like at the moment ("Method" ballet perhaps), and almost all of the dancers seem to be consistently out of step, one suspects that director Vale knew little about ballet and cared less, as long as his dance sequences carried the story forward and provided a nice cultural background for lochery and romantic intrigue. As the NY Dramatic Mirror remarked on March 10, 1917, "...the spectacular representation of the Russian Ballet is elaborate enough, although the dances would hardly be recognized by M. Jinsky.

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society
November 21 1961
Incidentally, not the least of the film's delights are the cunningly apt art designs behind the titles. Some of them are quite wonderful, and worthy of special study.

--- INTERMISSION ---


Starring RIN TIN TIN, with Nanette, Jason Robards, Virginia Browne Faire, Tom Santachi, Theodore Lorch, Wilfred North.

The Huff Society has always been devoted to Rinty (subject to one day seeing "Mare Nostrum" and being converted, I feel that Rinty Tin Tin had far more to offer the art of the cinema than Rex Ingram) and in the past we've shown THE NIGHT CRY, WHERE THE NORTH BEGINS, LIGHTHOUSE BY THE SEA and two much lesser ones, HILLS OF KENTUCKY and CLASH OF THE WOLVES.

TRACKED BY THE POLICE, very much of a rarity (this is the only 16mm print in existence) is easily one of the amazing performer's best pictures. (If it seems familiar, you may have seen the one-reel version put out by Bob Youngann a few years back). As "Satan -- loyal and true -- with the heart of a lion and the soul of a child" - Rinty has one of his very best parts. It is to Rinty what "The Narrow Trail" was to Hart. A seasoned veteran by now, Rinty takes over the whole show and goes through his entire bag of tricks. He has dramatics, comedy, action, stunts. He performs fantastic feats by a combination of muscle power and canine sagacity. And when battling the villains, spying on Tom Santachi, playing dead and performing Fairbanksian acrobatics begins to seem a little tame for the wonder dog. The script writers throw moral and ethical problems at him too. At one point he has to decide whether to save his four-footed girl friend - or Virginia Browne Faire. Certain death threatens both within seconds -- only one can be saved! And Rinty tops off his feat in "Lighthouse by the Sea" (he re-lit the lamp - averting wholesale maritime disaster) by here saving a whole community from desolation when flood waters are on the rampage.

The human actors matter but little. Jason Robards spends most of the film depending on Rinty to get him out of a scrape. Ill-matched in a fistic battle with Tom Santachi, he does (presumably) win, but the knockout punch takes place off-screen! As for Tom, his villainy is of the good old-fashioned variety --- evil for its own sake, so much so that we never really find out just why he is so disagreeable. He seems to have but three major aims in life --- to wreck the dam, seduce the girl, and above all, kill Rinty. Disposition of the hero becomes quite unimportant in the face of such spectacular intent.

TRACKED BY THE POLICE has top production values --- excellent locations of river, dam-site, mountain and desert, beautifully photographed by Edwin Duvall, who also photographed "The Night Cry", and who died just recently. Pictorially it is superlative, sharp, well composed, and covering Rinty's energetic action from a variety of angles. The principal dam location, referred to in a title as the "Colorado Reclamation Dam", presumably utilises some of the preparatory work on the Hoover Dam and its environs, which was officially launched in 1933, but which was being planned and much talked-about a year earlier, when this film was made. (What thrills the old breached-or-sabotaged-dam films offered? How we miss them today?) The dam location, and the other admirably selected locales, give the film a real gloss and completely hide the competent economy of the whole production. With a small cast, a maximum of exteriors and a minimum of studio scenes, it must have been fairly cheap to make, yet never once does the economy show. Even when the unit goes to Iverson's Ranch in
Chatsworth for some pickup shots, DuPar's cameras are placed high up, out of the rocky scrubland, so that the normally drab and unphotogenic location matches well with the other (presumably Colorado) footage.

Certainly TRACKED BY THE POLICE gives Rin Tin Tin admirers full value for money, and only those poor misguided souls who, even in 1928, thought that Rinty's movies had to be taken seriously, could have any cause for complaint. Like Shirley Temple's films of the 30's, the Rin Tin Tins were both fairy tales and vehicles for a remarkable talent. To say that the "plot" is slight is both an exaggeration and an understatement. There really is no plot; there are just two reels of establishment and build-up, and then four solid reels of climax. Oh, for more films that moved like this one, and started to pay the way for the climax as soon as the credits fades!

Incidentally, don't fatigue yourself by trying to justify the title, which has NOTHING to do with the film whatsoever. In these days, exhibitors would block-book by title and star long before the films were made. Warners guaranteed a "Tracked by the Police" with Rin Tin Tin — and since non-delivery of a given title gave exhibitors the legal right to void the whole contract, or such of it as remained, such a title had to be presented — even if there was no story to back it up. Warners were not popular with exhibitors at that time, and as a result exhibitors needed little excuse to renege on a deal. One title at the end solves the whole problem quite neatly. For his initiative in rounding up the heavies, Rinty is made an honorary cop — and newspaper accounts thus say that the miscreants were "Tracked by the Police". None of this is shown at all of course, and merely told to the audience in one lengthy title!

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William K. Everson

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Next Tuesday, the 28th — HELL'S ANGELS — with Ben Lyon, James Hall, Jean Harlow

Next Sunday, New Yorker Theatre, 9:30 a.m. —

THE BROKEN MASK (1928, dir: James Hogan) with Cullen Landis, Barbara Bedford

ROSE OF KILDARE (1927, dir: Dallas Fitzgerald) with Henry B. Walthall, Pat O'Malley, Helen Chadwick, Carrol Nye

QUEEN OF THE NORTHWOODS — ep.7 — with the big forest fire sequence

Comes: THE BOHEMIAN GIRL (1922) with Iver Novello, Gladys Cooper, Ellen Terry, C. A. Smith
THE HANDBAND (Hitchcock) with Carl Brisson
THE RING (Hitchcock) with Carl Brisson, Ian Hunter, Gordon Harker
FRUSTRATION — one of the earlier, better, and least known Ingmar Bergmans
THE CANARY MURDER CASE (1929) with Louise Brooks, William Powell, James Hall
THE DARK HORSE (1932) with Warren William, Bette Davis, Guy Kibbee (Dir: Alfred E.
FOUR FRIGHTENED PEOPLE (1934, deMille) Colbert and Marshall Green
CHANCES (1931, Alan Dwan) with Douglas Fairbanks jr., Rose Hobart
TAI (1932, Ray Del Ruth) with James Cagney, Loretta Young, George Raft