"Slap Happy Mouse" (Warner, 1956) One reel; dir: Robert McKimson

Another happy collaboration between Mel Blanc's voices and some fast-paced and violent sight gags; only average perhaps as Warner cartoons go, but the mere adjective "average" is high praise where these are concerned.

"BEAU HUNKS" (EMI-Hal Roach, 1931) 4 reels; directed by James W. Horne; starring Laurel & Hardy, with Charles Middleton, Broderick O'Farrell, Harry Schultz, Abdul Basim Khorne.

Usually badly chopped on tv, this curious Laurel & Hardy four-reeler, something of a tryout for the later "Ronnie Scotland", hasn't been seen in its complete form for some time. Made at a time when the team were making their first features, and also turning out both shorts and "featurettes" (three reels and in this case, four), it is one of their lesser efforts and would certainly have benefitted from a shorter running time. Apart from a wild fall onto a piano near the beginning, the slapstick is mild, and though there is plenty of verbal humor, much of it is rather labored and even familiar. Nevertheless, their team work (and admirable support from Charles Middleton) keeps it going at a lively pace, and Hardy—singing a love song, telling Laurel of his approaching marriage, and of course finding his little world crumbling about his ears—is on top form. The basic plot bears more than a coincidental resemblance to "Friends and Lovers", released by RKO the same year, and even if the boys aren't exactly kidding that, it seems safe to assume that it probably gave them their idea. And their grenade gag near the end seems to owe its origin to Keaton's shoe gag in "The General" too! In a production sense, "Beau Hunks" rather shows its cheapness. The backdrops, probably not intended to convince anyone, are just a shade too slapdash; occasional jump-cuts, to avoid fresh camera set-ups, are a little jarring, and once as the camera is supposed to move forward through some stacked rifles, a stage hand yanks them out of the camera's way just a trifle too quickly and abruptly! But these are minor quibbles, and in any case the early sound Laurel & Hardy devotees (and aren't we all?) certainly won't quibble about such matters, and in fact the only serious protest one can raise is that we are denied the ultimate pleasure of seeing James Finlayson cast as the villainous Shilk. Somehow, the name Abdul Basim Khorne doesn't ring quite true however, and one wonders whether this couldn't perhaps be director Horne himself having a little fun -- and doing it most effectively? The cast-list by the way includes a nice dig at Mr. Griffith and other old spectacle directors who list all their extras, by number, along with their horses!

"Go Fly A Kit" (Warner, 1936) One reel; dir: Chuck Jones

The best of our four Warner cartoons today, this one is stronger on story values than most. It's the kind of story that Disney so often did, in a completely sentimental and syrupy vein; here the sentiment is inherent in the story, but the cries of pain, shock and fear never allow the syrup to settle, let alone congeal.

"Hollywood Stuntman" (Columbia, 1955) A Screen Snap directed by Ralph Staub; with George Montgomery. One reel.

We ran this particular short a couple of years ago, but it supplements our other stuntman short today that a repeat seems in order. An interesting, if over-written and over-dramatized parade of stunt scenes, it offers some excellent western action scenes -- Isaksa Ganutt, Cliff Lyons et al doubling for Ken Maynard, Tim McCoy etc., along with car crash and other stunt sequences. Unluckily, once again, we must report that a good deal of obvious neverscreen footage is passed off as staged material.


Daffy Duck in an amusing satire on Superman; it's merely a succession of gags and has no way of reaching a climax, but it's certainly full of lively action.

"Thrilla for Spills" (Warner, 1941) Two reels; directed by Deacon Anthony; narrated by Roy Manning; with Harvy Payne, Allan Posey, Mary Higgins, John Ridgely.

There have been very few worthwhile films about stuntmen; Rko's "Lucky Devil" and "The Lost Squadron" were two of the better ones. Gene Autry made a couple that were at least amusing ("The Shooting High" and "The Big
"Sons of Adventure", despite direction by Yakima Canutt, was weak and contrived, and the recent "Hollywood Thrill Makers" was merely a parade of old Dick Talmadge stunts clumsily interpolated into new footage. Despite the inherent phoniness and "dane-for-effect" quality that seems to permeate so much Warner material, "Thrills for Spills" is nevertheless one of the best produced and assembled films of its kind, and makes interesting use of freeze-framing to demonstrate the development and timing of stuntage. The material is top calibre stuff, culled from both silent and sound features; you may recognize "San Quentin", "Lilac Time", "Six Day Ride Rider" and some of the others. Rin Tin Tin is there too, and, though not identified, Ken Maynard is easily recognizable doing some of his own leaps and falls.

"Tree Cornered Tweety" (Warner, 1955) One reel; dir: Friz Freleng

Another good and appropriately sadistic encounter between Tweety and Sylvester rounds off our selection of cartoons.

= Intermission =

"SHEILD OF HONOR" (Universal, 1927) Produced and directed by Emory Johnson; written by Emile Johnson; photographed by Ross Fisher; titles by Viola Brothers Shore; 5 reels
Starring NEL HAMILTON with Dorothy Gulliver, Ralph Lewis, Nigel Barrie, Thelma Todd, Harry Northrup, Claire McDowell, Fred Emerson, Joseph Girard.

In the twenties (and on into the early thirties) Emory Johnson spawned a seemingly endless supply of vigorous (and decidedly non-assembly-line) actioners which nearly all seemed to offer one of three variations on a single theme: the aged policeman, fireman or locomotive engineer, facing retirement, proves that he isn't a has-been by foiling crooks, arsonists or train-wreckers. In most cases, the potential pensioner was played by that grand old veteran Ralph Lewis, and between the two of them they brought this kind of stuff to a fine art. "Shield of Honor" is typical. It's only a programmer, but done with such style and polish that it not only seems as important as the bigger movies, but in many cases represents much more solid film-making too. The story certainly moves right along, with a shrewd blend of pathos, romantic drama and all-out action, working up to a rousing, due-tinted climax with cops, planes, firemen and a burning building all dished up in exciting portions. Photographically the film is quite exceptional; and apparently the director and cameraman so fell in love with one exterior location (the picnic site with the pond and the ever-present cow) that they not only returned to it an often as possible, but afforded it the full Griffith-Sherdog treatment, with gowns, filters and special lighting denied the rest of the picture! And talking about D.W., those three old Griffith stalwarts, Neil Hamilton, Claire McDowell and Ralph Lewis, certainly perform well together, with the two old-timers stealing most of the footage! To over-praise "Shield of Honor", or over-emphasize its not very great importance, would be a mistake; but if you approach this for what it is - a programmer, pure and simple - I think you'll be pleasantly surprised by both its style and its still solid entertainment value. It seems hardly dated at all except perhaps in its over-romantic regard for American policemen!

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

Next program: Tuesday next, January 23rd = British films of the 20's

"THE BOHEMIAN GIRL" (Britain, 1922) with Ivor Novello, Genevieve Smith, Gladys Cooper, Ellen Terry.

"PICCADILLY" (condensation) directed by E.A. Dupont, with Anna May Wong, Gilda Gray, Jameson Thomas, Charles Laughton.

"THE HANGMAN" (condensation) directed by Alfred Hitchcock, with Carol Bruce.