

A PROGRAM OF CRIME, COPS, AND VIOLENCE

"THE HOOSEGOW" (MGM-Hal Roach^m 1929) Directed by James Parrott; 2 reels
With: Laurel & Hardy, James Finlayson, Leo Willis, Dick Sutherland

"The Hoosegow" is a Laurel & Hardy that we haven't run before, and is one of the least familiar of their earliest talkies. Though lacking the smoothness and careful pacing of their last silents, it is nevertheless faster-moving and less prone to extended dialogue than most of their 1929 sound films, and the slapstick is both wild and inventive. The salt-shaker gag is of course a harmless plagiarism from their earlier "You're Darn Tootin'!", and the whole messy climax - a battle royal with a kind of rice pudding - is a reworking of the pie fight from "The Battle of the Century". But of course on e is used to L & H reworking their own material, and "The Hoosegow" has plenty of new gags to offer as well.

A. MACK SENNETT CHASE COMPILATION 1 reel

Put together in England, this compilation of clips from Sennetts of the 1916-1930 period is sometimes clumsily done (flipped shots often result in lettering reading backwards) and is hardly as creative in its own right as it could well have been. But nevertheless, the stunts, the timing, and the overall mayhem on view in these Keystone Cops chase scenes are still something to see. Many of the shots are familiar - perhaps over-familiar - but a lot of the material is less common, and the linking shots of Ben Turpin trying to rescue a baby from a plank suspended over a cliff are quite intriguing!

"ZOOM AND BORED" (Warner Bros., 1957) Director: Chuck Jones 1 reel

One of the most violent and hysterically-paced of all the coyote-vs-road runner cartoons, this little gem from Chuck Jones manages rather nicely to match the brutality and viciousness of "Scarface".

- I n t e r m i s s i o n -

"SCARFACE" (UA-Howard Hughes-Caddo Company, 1932) Directed by Howard Hawks
Screenplay by Ben Hecht; scenario by Seton I. Miller, John Lee Mahin and W.R. Burnett from a novel by Armitage Trail; photographed by Lee Garmes and L.W. O'Connell; edited by Edward Curtis; music by Adolph Tandler, Gus Arnheim; Assist. Director, Richard Rosson; 10 rls.
With: Paul Muni, Karen Morley, Ann Dvorak, Osgood Perkins, Boris Karloff, George Raft, Vince Barnett, Inez Palange, G. Henry Gordon, Tully Marshall, Edwin Maxwell, Furnell Pratt, Henry Vejar, Henry Armetta, William B. Davidson, Maurice Black, Bert Starkey, Gino Corrado, Brandon Hurst, Warner Richmond.

With Howard Hawks' films getting longer and duller, and the phoney intellectuals discovering more and more in his films, it's good to look back thirty years to the days when he was regarded as just a darned good journeyman director, and, like William Wellman and William Wyler, was turning out some of the best and most vigorous films of his career. I don't mean to imply that "Scarface" is all action, vigour, and nothing else. There are sub-plots and implied side-issues

for those with the eyes and ears to notice, and they're all the more effective for being handled unobtrusively. "Doorway to Hell", "Me Gangster" and other early crime films had these elements too, all held well in check; it was the much later gangster films, starting with "Blind Alley" and ranging through "Angels With Dirty Faces" and up through "White Heat", that went overboard on the psychological angles and thereby ruined the genre, just as "High Noon" did more harm than good for the cause of the Western.

What "Scarface" has that few of the early gangster films had is pace. Later, more conventional films like "G Men" had that pace, but the early ones - from Cruze's "City Gone Wild" and Sternberg's "Underworld" through to "The Public Enemy", "Little Caesar" and "Bad Company" - were generally, regardless of other merits, just too deliberately and slowly constructed. "Scarface", despite the usual slowness inherent in early 30's dramatic scenes, played without incidental music or dynamic editing, crackles from the word go. If its savagery is overdone, then at least the mood it seeks to create is not; better a gangland that is too much a combination of jungle and battleground than the gangland of "Little Caesar" which is all tough posing and little else.

The action scenes in "Scarface" are flawlessly, blisteringly done; the killings, the machine-gun wars, the car chases, wrecks and bombings. Much of the film is now cliché of course: the No.1 Hood, with his squad of dress-suited body-guards, the terrorising of saloon-keepers into buying beer from the new mob; most of the characters, most of the situations, and almost all of the dialogue. Yet it is to the credit of "Scarface" that here at least it still seems fresh and powerful. Thanks to C. Henry Gordon and Edwin Maxwell, the cops seem more three-dimensional than usual. (And yet Gordon and Maxwell usually played hoods themselves!) Karen Morley is still one of the most provocative of a long line of silken mistresses that ranged from Jean Harlow and Joan Blondell to Evelyn Brent, Mae Clarke and Louise Brooks. And the story itself, being patterned on the career of Capone, and encompassing such incidents as the St. Valentine's Day Massacre, tends to hold up rather better than most of the Cagney/Robinson films from Warners.

Muni's exhibitionistic acting style is singularly suited to the Garmonte/Capone role, and he has seldom been better. Boris Karloff on the other hand, with that English voice and barely disguised cultured tones, just doesn't convince as a rival hood; somehow, one just can't believe that he gives a jot about who runs the North Side! However, Karloff's death scene is one of the most impressive and imaginatively visual moments in the picture; one can't help wondering whether the credit for this should go to writer Hecht or director Hawks -- or even perhaps to producer Hughes, who has contributed moments of real power and originality to pictures that were otherwise thoroughly mediocre. Altogether, "Scarface" continues to make a pronounced visual impact, and a very Germanic one at that, as the stylish opening scenes, and the Fritz Lang-like sequence of the reporter interviewing Karloff in his dingy hideaway, show quite clearly.

Very much cut and reshaped since its original release (one reissue version even faked up a sequence of Muni being tried and hung), this print, we're happy to say, is quite complete and in reasonably good shape. It's a dupe, but a pretty good one, and the harsh quality of the print seems to jell rather well with the seedy nature of the story and settings. However, a redone British foreword rather betrays the Anglo-Saxon lack of familiarity with American gangsterism by listing the prohibition years as being from 1919 to 1924!

- Wm. K. Everson -----
- NEXT FRIDAY -- FILM GROUP meeting --
 - NEXT SUNDAY's 35mm SHOW AT THE NEW YORKER (NO TITLES HAVE BEEN ANNOUNCED AS YET) WILL NOT TAKE PLACE AS I'LL BE OUT OF TOWN AGAIN BRIEFLY.
 - NEXT TUESDAY -- Rin Tin Tin in CLASH OF THE WOLVES (1925); Chaplin in PAY DAY (1922), and the "silents Please" 3-r1 version of "OLD SAN FRANCISCO" (1927)