

Comedy & Melodrama from the 20's

"OLD SAN FRANCISCO" (Warner Brothers, 1927) Directed by Alan Crosland
 With Dolores Costello, Warner Oland, Charles Amet Mack,
 Anders Randolph, Anna May Wong, Sojin, Josef Swickard; story by Darryl F.
 Zanuck, scenario by Anthony Goldway; Original length: 9 reels; length of
 this version: 3 reels.

Most of you will be familiar with Bob Youngson's peppy one-reel version of this film, which consisted principally of the last reel of the picture. A few hardy early-risers saw a complete print about a year ago on one of our Sunday morning 35mm shows at the New Yorker. But to most of you the bulk of the film will probably be new, and thus this "Silents Please" version, which won't be shown in NY until after the newspaper strike ends, is a rather handy rocket version of the whole. A slowly if stylishly paced film, it lends itself well to condensation, and most of the plot ingredients and colorful highlight sequences have been retained. A very lengthy prologue has been largely eliminated, and some of the climax has been trimmed, but this version still gives a good idea of its colorful melodrama, and of Alan Crosland's richly visual style. The story is glorious old hokum, basing most of its plot motivation on the casually stated - and presumably then accepted - inferiority of the Oriental to the Western races! And apparently the whole San Francisco earthquake (excellently staged, largely via first-class miniatures) is brought about solely in response to the prayers of Dolores Costello, as the only way to save her from the shame of white slavery! Incidentally, originally, under the old block-booking system, exhibitors had been offered a Dolores Costello vehicle titled "A Million Bid". Failure to have delivered the picture would have given exhibitors legal reason to sue for breach of contract, and exhibitors, far from happy with Warners in the late 20's, were usually only too ready to sue. So to prove that this was actually the same picture under a new title, Warners wrote in a somewhat implausible sequence in which Dolores is auctioned off to a group of lecherous Chinese. One of them, a decrepid Strohheim-esque character, finally wins her when he bids a million dollars -- thus justifying the title. However, the picture had turned out so well that exhibitors found they were virtually getting a "special" under old "programmer" terms, so they were not prone to complain, and thus Warners removed the somewhat hair-brained sequence. However, plenty of colorful Oriental chicanery remains, and it's good to see those two Charlie Chans, Sojin and Warner Oland, here at their villainous best!

"PAY DAY" (First National, 1922) Written and directed by Charles Chaplin;
 photographed by Rollie Totheroh; with Charlie Chaplin, Phyllis
 Allen, Edna Purviance, Mack Swain, Sid Chaplin, Henry Bergman, Allan Garcia.
 2 reels

The seventh of Chaplin's eight films for First National, "Pay Day" rather has Chaplin marking time -- although that in itself is hardly a criticism. Lacking the brilliance of his first (and best) for First National, "A Dog's Life", it is nevertheless still quite superior to some of the others, and most specifically the over-rated "Sunnyside" and "The Idle Class". It is slapstick and visual comedy pure and simple, and as such comparable with the average standard of his Mutual films, though hardly as good as the best of them. If Charlie Chase had made "Pay Day", exactly as Chaplin had made it, it would doubtless be forgotten today, at least by the chroniclers and historians. But as a Chaplin, it is assured a kind of immortality which it doesn't altogether rate. If we're being hard on it, it's only because "The Rink", "Easy Street", "The Immigrant" and "A Dog's Life" have entitled us to expect far more from Chaplin at this stage in his career. But it is

fast, inventive, well-timed, pleasingly free from pretentiousness, and often very funny -- so we really have few grounds for serious complaint.

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

"CLASH OF THE WOLVES" (Warner Brothers, 1925) Directed by Noel Mason Smith
Story: Charles A. Logue; Camera: Edwin DuPar and Alan Thompson;
edited by Clarence Kolster; Art. Directors, Lewis Gelb, Esdras Hartley
With Rin Tin Tin, Annette, Charles Farrell, June Marlowe, Heinie Conklin,
William Walling, Pat Hartigan, Walter McGrail; 5 reels.

One either loves Rin Tin Tin, or sees nothing in him at all -- along with those unfortunate souls who don't like Laurel and Hardy and Shirley Temple. Obviously we like him, or we wouldn't show so many of his films, and you like him, or you wouldn't be here. So it hardly matters that "Clash of the Wolves" is not exactly top Rinty fare. That is to say, it's not up there with "The Night Cry" or "Tracked by the Police". But there's no such thing as a bad Rinty movie -- Rinty himself, plus the always excellent photographic quality and the liveliness of the plots, more than sees to that. "Clash of the Wolves" maintains the good average standard of most of his films, and in terms of plot incident goes even a little wilder than usual. This is the one where Rinty fools the heavies by being disguised with a false beard -- and is discovered only when the beard drops off. Poor Rinty is too smart to take such a gimmick seriously, and looks more than a little relieved when the sequence is over and he can get back to serious acrobatics and dramatics again. Occasionally he gets a little outside help -- a string helps to wag his tail at one point, and a honey paw is injected to ray on a window pane at another -- but one feels that these little deceptions are there only because he felt a little out of sorts that day, or perhaps didn't "feel" the scene the way he felt he should. In any event, the handsome and lovable Rinty effectively wraps up the whole picture as always, and nobody else stands much of a chance -- except maybe the title-writer. Photographically it is as high-calibre as always, and shows real care not only in the lighting and composition, but also in the mechanical set-ups for certain shots -- such as the scene of galloping hooves shot from a camera pit. As always, it's an economical job -- even to lifting a number of impressive forest fire scenes from "Lucrezia Lombard" -- and as always, the slickness of the production hides that economy so well that it never once looks cheap. And the duo-toned print further enhances its handsome appearance.

--- W. K. Iverson ---

COMING PROGRAMS:

NEXT SUNDAY there will be a show at the New Yorker, 9.30 a.m. Because of a busy schedule this week and lack of time to work on silent prints, it's going to be a sound show -- and one aimed primarily at our serial and melodrama addicts. The feature is the British 1935 "The Crouching Beast" with Fritz Kortner and Wynne Gibson, based on the famous "Clubfoot" novels; edited incidentally, by David Lean. Plus; the first 3 episodes of one of the peak-period Republic serials, "The Haunted Harbour", with Kane Richmond and Kay Aldridge, directed by Spencer Bennet. We have it all, and will continue it in large or small doses, depending on merit and general interest.

Tuesday - April 9th - "ONE HOUR WITH YOU" (1932, Lubitsch-Cukor) with Maurice Chevalier, Jeanette MacDonald, Charlie Ruggles, Roland Young. Plus; Ginger Rogers in "Office Blues" (1930) and W.G. Fields' "The Golf Specialist" (1930)

Coming: "The Eagle and the Hawk" (Grant-March-Lombard) ... "The Sorrows of Satan" (D.W. Griffith, with Lya de Putti, Adolph Menjou, Ricardo Cortez, Carol Dempster) ... James Whale's "One More River".
