NOTICES

Next program: Tuesday Sept. 24th: PAINT & POWDER (1925, dir: Hunt Stromberg) with Elaine Hammerstein, Theodore von Eltz; NATHALIE NAVOURNEEN (1913) and FAST AND FURIOUS (1924).

In our regular Bulletin, we erroneously announced Sat. Oct 11 as the date for Bert Gray's "Trade Winkle"/"Moonlight and Pretzels" program; the correct date is Friday Oct. 11, Adelphi Hall, 7:30.

Finally, a more personal notice. Don't be frightened off by the appearance of the projectionist this evening, or offended if he doesn't talk to you! As these notes are written, I look rather like Ralph Morgan in "The Monster Maker", due to having had a brace of teeth removed last night. This hideous quality should have been slayed by show-time, but other than Frankensteinian grunts, my vocabulary will be somewhat limited. This if course puts me completely at the mercy of those two or three members who love to talk, and will probably never get such a golden opportunity again!

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

Thursday Sept. 5

"Roaring Wheels" (Warner Bros., 1948) Written and produced by Robert G. Youngson; one reel

One of Bob Youngson's earliest shorts, "Roaring Wheels" isn't given over as entirely to shock effect and adrenalin as some of his later masterworks. For instance, he's content to let most of the crashes and sudden deaths play straight, without adding sound-track screams! But it's a tense and exciting little compilation, full of good footage, and purporting to tell something of a history of the development of the auto, although it's really more of a chronicle of the disasters that accompanied that development. The last line of narration is a gem of diplomacy, which quite unconvincingly tries to explain away and justify the reel of wrecks and slauters we've just sat through!

"Fast Performance" (Warner Bros., 1954) Technicolor; directed by Charles M. Jones; one reel

The Pepe le Pew cartoons were never as savage or rich in comic incident as most of the Warner cartoons — with a single gimmick as a plot-line, the repetition began to show very quickly — but they all had a certain charm, and this one, For film buffs especially, is one of the best of the series. It's set in an anachronistic French movie studio, where the big stars of the 20's and the primitives of pre-WW, are being made side by side.

"The Western Hero" (CBS-20th Century, 1953) Written and researched by Don Miller; produced by Isaac Kleinerman; 3 reels

Of course it isn't possible to give an "in depth" study of the Western or its hero-image in a mere 3 reels, and this documentary by Don Miller, who also did "The Movies Learn To Talk", wisely doesn't try. But it is a refreshing, unpretentious and enjoyable survey of the Western, and pleasingly free of errors. Inevitably, none of the footage is familiar — much of it has been seen at this society — and where key footage is not available, a few minor liberties have been taken. Buck Jones and Tom McCoy footage from the early 30's is passed off as being from their silent films of the 20's for example. But one can hardly carp at that, especially since the narration is at pains to not make any positive statements about titles or years. Among the stars represented are Hart, Mix, Hoot Gibson, Texas Guinan, Don Barry, Leo Mankisy, George O'Brien, Bob Russell, Ken Maynard, William Boyd, William Dunne, Gene Autry and John Wayne; plus some interesting behind-the-scenes footage, and a little bit too much of Stanley Kramer expounding on the over-rated "Oh Noon". But there are often good commercial reasons for the inclusion of seemingly unwanted footage, and at least the Kramer interlude should satisfy the highbrows who need a little more than fights and horse-tales!

-INTERMISSION-
THE MIRACLE OF MORGAN'S CREEK (Paramount, 1944)  
Written, produced and directed by Preston Sturges; camera,  
John Seitz; music by Leo Shuken and Charles Bradshaw;  
edited by Stuart Gilmore; 10 reels  
With Betty Hutton, Eddie Bracken, Diana Lynn, William Demarest, Porter Hall,  
Emory Parnell, Alan Bridge, Julius Tannen, Victor Fothergill, Alan Bridge, Jack  
Norton, James Millican, Torben Meyer, Almira Sessions, J. Farrell MacDonald,  
Jim Conlin.  

Like some of Chaplin's films, Preston Sturges' films have a habit of seeming  
to change values with the passing years. Some that were considered sub-  
Sturges on their initial release now re-emerge as among his best pictures; and  
of course the process works in reverse too.  

"The Miracle of Morgan's Creek" was one of Sturges' most successful films at  
the time, both critically and at the boxoffice. Betty Hutton, who was then  
at the peak of her popularity, helped the boxoffice angle. So did the story  
itself, which was so much part and parcel of the times. Perhaps that's why  
it dates a little "Christmas in July", though set in a late-depression  
period, put forward a universally-oriented story that could apply at any  
time. So, in a different way, did the completely wacky "Palm Beach Story".  

Possibly "The Miracle of Morgan's Creek" dates too because Sturges is far  
less sold than usual -- he seems to accept the conventions of morality rather  
than ridicule them -- or perhaps this is just one of those films that  
should not be seen without an audience. Certainly (as did "The Nickle-  
shopper" last week) I suspect that this film will benefit tremendously from audience  
reaction.  

In any event, disappointing Sturges or not, slow in getting started or not,  
it's still a most enjoyable frolic, with some delightful performances and  
some typical Sturges throw-away lines, although not as many as we'd like.  
In so many Sturges films, the supporting characters (especially Raymond  
Waldron in "Christmas in July") supplement the basic story-line admirably;  
here it seems to be that these players completely dominate the whole picture.  
Such sequences as the marriage ceremony, with Porter Hall officiating, and  
 Alan Bridge's little speech about marriage, are so good and so sharp that  
one wishes there were far more of them. It's curious how Bridge, an ideal  
dyed-in-the-wool villain in hundreds of "B" westerns, became such an  
expert comedian under Sturges' direction. Curious too that no other  
comedy director exploited him in a like manner.  

Betty Hutton, playing in a milder vein than usual, more on a Ginger Rogers  
level, is quite effective, though 20 years later it's hard to understand her  
enormous appeal. But Diana Lynn's teen-age sister is still a charming and  
charming performance, and probably the best thing she ever did, as well as  
being one of the few teen-age performances on the screen (from the '40's on)  
that was not totally unreal and utterly obnoxious.  

-- Wm. K. Everson --