Tuesday next: "Conductor 1492" (1923) with Johnny Hines; "Fluttering Hearts" with Charlie Chase, Oliver Hardy, Eugene Pallette; "Easy Payments" (1926).

Tuesday week, August 31st: "THE SINGING FOOL" (1928) with Al Jolson and Betty Bronson; plus a varied collection of Disney and other cartoons.

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August 17, 1965

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

FOUR STARS - "BEFORE" 1 reel (1930-1952)

An interesting collection of excerpts showing major stars to be in some of their earliest roles. In the Italian THE MARK OF ZORRO, Sophia Loren appears briefly as a very well upholstered tavern wench; to my recollection, this was her only scene in the film, which was a spoof that went rather overboard on effeminate comedy. THE VILLAGE SQUIRE (1935) was Vivien Leigh's second film, but the first to give her anything more than a bit. As the heroine, she is poised and lovely, and it's amazing that it still took a couple of years for Korda to notice her and build her into real stardom. In THE OLD CORRAL (1937) singing cowboy star Gene Autry has a tussle with one of the lesser villains - a young, slim and gawky Roy Rogers. Later in the film, Gene even forced Roy, at gunpoint, to croon a song - thereby unwittingly helping to create his own Frankenstein monster, for within a few years Rogers was to get the big build-up and would usurp Autry's throne when Gene entered the forces. Finally, as the villain in THE PAINTED DESSERT (1930) - his first role of any real size - Clark Cable leers at Helen Twelvetrees' cleavage and generally displays all of his tricks, traits and dynamic masculinity that were so soon to make him a real top-liner.

A JOURNEY INTO TIME (USSR, 1959) Directed by Victor Schneyderov; photographed by Yuri Fogelman; narration by Israel Berman; color; 2 reels.

A good educational subject from Russia, designed primarily for children, and re-written on a simplier level over here to appeal to younger children (or perhaps dumber children in the same age bracket!), this may not tell you much that you don't already know about the evolution of life on this earth, but it does go over familiar ground in a rather fascinating way. The blending of cartoon, miniature work and live action is smoothly done, the color is in a pleasing pastel texture, and the new narration is informative and straightforward. The cartoon work, obviously borrowing a great deal from the "Rites of Spring" sequence in Disney's "Fantasia", is often first-class.

FIRE, WIND AND FLOOD (Warner-Pathe, 1955) Written and directed by Robert G. Youngson; one reel.

It has been many years since we played this excellent short, which is one of the best of Bob Youngson's cheerfuly sadistic collections of death, disaster, destruction and general holocaust. Despite the toll in lives and property, it's difficult for him to keep a gleeful tone out of the narrator's voice, and one didn't know that the footage came out of the stock vaults, one might almost suspect Bob of maybe having a hand in starting some of those fires! Quite seriously though, the footage is all first-class, slammed over with top sound effects and music, and expertly cut so that every foot is as full of crashing waves, collapsing buildings and gigantic flames as humanly possible!

- Intermission -


With Jean Gabin, Arletty, Jules Berry, Jacqueline Laurent, Nady Berry, Genin, Arthur Derere, Bergeron, Bernard Blier, Peres, Germaine Lix, Gabrielle Fonta, Jacques B внешне.
For years, "Le Jour Se Leve" has been unseen in New York and now, quite coincidentally, it turns up twice in the space of as many weeks, since the MMA is playing it in about a week. Such duplication was of course unintentional, and our schedule had been printed and distributed before we knew of the MMA showing. We hate to "waste" a playdate, although since our date comes first, we can sit back egotistically and regard the MMA date as the "wasted" date. It was possible of course to substitute a new program, but this would have meant a whole fresh mailing, and the overhead, plus the time involved, just wouldn't have been justified. So "Le Jour Se Leve" remains, and it may be interesting to compare versions. Our British print is in good condition and complete, save for the brief shot of a nude Arletty stepping from the shower. Incidentally, the showing of two different prints within a week once more shatters that hoary old myth about Hollywood wantonly destroying old versions when they do a remake. Through the years, this is a favorite and perennial theme with critics, who use it as a lambasting pad for attacks on Hollywood -- and never bother to issue retractions later on, when with remarkably regularity, such "destroyed" prints as "Gaslight", "Le Jour Se Leve" and "A Star Is Born" turn up either in reissue or in limited non-theatrical distribution. I can't think of a single example of Hollywood actually destroying prints because of a remake; if for no other reason, a negative and/or print would usually be retained as a tangible proof of ownership, and as a physical asset for a later transfer or sale of the property.

Comparatively few of the films from France's so-called Golden Age of the middle and late thirties really hold up today. "Quai des Brumes", which at the time seemed the loveliest and most poetic of them all, seems forced and phoney today. "Hotel du Nord" and "Les Bas Fonds" likewise date, though on its last viewing "La Bête Humaine" was standing up to the test of time quite well. I suspect that a lot of their values actually came from a direct contrast with the ultra-slick and generally rather empty Hollywood product of those same years. With a few exceptions, the Hollywood film of the 1936-38 years was superficial, "All-American-Family" directed-fodder, and the naivety and "realism" of the French films of the same period stood out in sharp relief. In their own way, the French films were as clichéd as the contemporary Hollywood escapist product. Their much touted "realism" was at least partially a matter of frankness about sex (less nudity then, but many meaningful glances at brass beds, and endless shots of ladies taking off their stockings), and stylised sets and lighting. This latter created a kind of permanent twilight world; the sets were "real" and "honest" enough, but the way in which they were used and photographed, with their melancholy "closing-time-at-the-village pub" air of despair, was a kind of cheating. Too, the often rough pictorial quality -- resulting from the duping of material that even to begin with lacked the accustomed Hollywood sheen -- was often interpreted as a carefully achieved "realism". None of this is really wrong; it was just a way of making pictures, and in its day, it worked. In a few cases it still works, but having been exposed to so many new methods of film-making since then, the artifices in a film like "Quai des Brumes" are today far more apparent.

"Le Jour Se Leve" on the whole is one of the few to retain its original values. I think it was always somewhat over-rated, probably because (a) it was a kind of apotheosis of its type, and (b) it was the last important French film to get out of that country before the Nazi occupation. Distributors in the U.S. and England rationed the releases of their small stock-pile of French films, and "Le Jour Se Leve" had its release delayed a trifle. Thus, when it did see the light of day, it was both a reminder of the great days of French cinema, and a gloomy realisation that it might be a long time before the French would be sending us more films like it. Sentiment therefore, and nostalgia, had a great deal to do with the almost rapturous reviews that the film had. However, if it wasn't quite the masterpiece that was claimed, it was still a very good film, and the values it had in 1939, it has still. It hasn't dated at all in the sense that. "Quai des Brumes" has dated, and its sense of
unrelenting and unavoidable tragedy, with a mood somewhat akin to the post-war Existentialist films, comes across as an honest and unforced framework. Certainly it remains one of the best films of Marcel Carné, and reminds us again how heavily his films relied on the scripting of Jacques Prévert and others. His later films, without them, lacked both poetry and personal style. It'll be interesting to see his newest film, only just finished and shot here in Manhattan.

"Le Jour Se Lève" has its share of cliché of course. Some of it seems a bit labored today (the delicate flower that withers in the sand-blasting plant for example), and the attention paid to fussy supporting "characters", at the time considered one of its prime non-Hollywood assets, today seems a bit irksome. There is even the obligatory overhead shot of the stairwell, which no self-respecting art film passed up in those days. (Curiously, I can only recall two occasions when this visual device ever really worked -- in Borzage's "Seventh Heaven", and Lang's "M"). Photographically it is often very beautiful, and structurally it still impresses as having the smoothest and best-utilised flashback construction outside of "Citizen Kane".

Gabin's performance is one of his best, though as with Edward G. Robinson, the vintage Gabin performances seem a little less original today through years of personal repetition and imitation from others. Gabin's inevitable mad tirade is well worth the waiting for; what a pity that he and Barbara Stanwyck were never co-starred so that they could let loose simultaneously! The two women are rather too pat in their type-casting, but Jules Berry comes off marvellously as a really slimy and unhealthy villain. It's not unusual for a player like Karloff or Chaney to be able to combine terror and pity, but Berry pulls off something rather more difficult. One is never quite sure how to really take his character; one finds oneself being won back to him as soon as he makes a direct, if synthetic, bid for sympathy, and the end result is a character that one loathes and despises, and yet has compassion for too. It's a remarkable performance.

The American remake, "The Long Night" (directed by Anatole Litvak, 1947) was enlarged, lushed-up with a thundering Tiomkin score, and was rather too self-consciously a prestige ART film. Nevertheless, it wasn't nearly as bad a film as was claimed by the critics hopped up on their "Hollywood destroys another masterpiece" kick. The casting was quite ingenious -- Henry Fonda for Gabin, Ann Dvorak for Arletty, Barbara Bel Geddes for Jacqueline Laurent, and Vincent Price, with incredible pasty-faced makeup, for Berry. Only in the climax was there a real sellout -- Fonda, after his imitation-Gabin tirade, is persuaded to give himself up, and there is some vague "all-men-are-brothers" propagandizing with a negro lighting a cigarette for Fonda before he is marched off by the police to one of those convenient short-term Hollywood prison sentences and, presumably, the ultimate waiting arms of Barbara Bel Geddes.

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William K. Everson