Next Tuesday, Oct 19th: A Douglas Fairbanks Sr. Silent/Sound Program--
REACHING FOR THE MOON (1917), a zesty Ruritanian frolic, and REACHING FOR THE
MOON (1931), not a remake, but a spirited modern comedy with music; with
Bebe Daniels, Jack Mulhall, Bing Crosby, June MacCloy, Edward Everett Horton.

October 12, 1965
The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

Two Programmers from the early 30's

If, of late, we seem to have indicated a leaning towards fairly unimportant
programmers of the thirties, it’s not because we’re trying to start a new
cult, or suggesting that unrecognised artistry lies hidden within them. It’s
just that the film society is getting to be the only real outlet for these
interesting and entertaining minor films, wherein is so much of the "little"
film history of Hollywood. With more and more major product available to
TV, the early programmers are shunted aside on television, or relegated to
obscure late shows. The official archives will almost certainly never show
them. More and more attention is being paid to the "rediscovered" classics
of the 30’s, and I think I shall go beserk if one more film magazine
discovers von Sternberg, and does an "in depth" piece on him. Since the
Sterngbers were in widespread reissue distribution in the late 40’s and very
early 50’s, one can only assume that the current re-discoverers are in their
20’s, and bowed over with youthful exhuberance presume that "their" discover-
ies of the values of Sternberg, Sturges et al are being made now for the
first time. Be that as it may, the "little" films of the 30’s are being pushed
more and more into obscurity, and while it may not be a matter of major
import that they be brought back into the sunlight again, many of them do rate
that consideration. At any rate, we can enjoy them now on their own level,
before the cultists exhaust the Sternberg-Lubitsch vein, and launch themselves
into exhaustive and overblown studies of the careers of Nick Grinde, Phil
Rosen and Lew Landers.

"SHOPWORN" (Columbia, 1932) Directed by Nicholas Grinde; original story
and scenario by Sarah Y. Mason; Dialogue: Jo Swerling and Robert Riskin;
Camer: Joseph Walker; editor: Gene Havlick; 7 reels
With Barbara Stanwyck, Regis Toomey, Zasu Pitts, Lucien Littlefield, Clara
Blandick, Robert Alden, Oscar Apfel, Maude Turner Gordon, Albert Conti, Wallis
Clarke, Edwin Maxwell, Joe Sawyer, Harry Semels, Sidney Bracey, Hal Price,
Selmer Jackson, Gertrude Astor.

Nicholas Grinde was one of Hollywood’s most prolific and workmanlike grade B
directors, for years turning out westerns, actioners, melodramas, mysteries
and soap operas. "Sequoia" was probably the closest he ever got to a real
"class" production, and the bulk of that was directed by Chester Franklin.
In his best days - the early thirties - when he had an MGM contract, he
always billed himself as Nicholas Grinde. Later, when he concentrated more and
more on actioners - Buck Jones westerns, Jack Holt melodramas, and such
Warner thrillers and semi-expose films as "Public Enemy's Wife" and "White
Bondage", he dropped the Nicholas in favor of the more zippy Nick. Somehow
Nick Grinde is a name that conjures up an impression of an underworld hood
turning out movies like sausages. So, in an attempt to regain a little
prestige, he added an accent to the "e" in his surname. Unfortunately the
gesture went unappreciated, just as W.C. Fields adding an accent to his
name, "Souse", in "The Bank Dick" didn’t materially alter the image of his
screen character there! However, "Shopworn" is a good, typical example of
the Grinde directorial "style". It borrows from everywhere; when the script
falters, it falters; but it moves. The story is told simply and briefly, and
if at times it all seems very old hat. then one has the feeling that Grinde
wasn’t aware of it and really thought he was doing something worthwhile.
Of course, this type of film was so much a part of the thirties that it's absurd to call it old-hat today. It is, but then so are "The Trespasser", "Platinum Blonde", and half of the Stanwyck-Crawford-Swanson films of the period. Actually, "Shopworn" does have its differences. It starts like Stanwyck's "Baby Face" and continues with the same basic plot, but it's less hard-boiled and cynical than the Warner films. Perhaps the characters are a little more old-fashioned and perhaps more out of a woman's magazine of the late 20's rather than a Hollywood script of the 30's, but there's a certain warmth to it, and a more relaxed pace than one usually gets in the early 30's. The opening mountain exteriors are pleasant and well-photographed; from then on, with time out for the expected tirades, Stanwyck rushes through illicit romance, prison, a lost illegitimate child and an imp robably rapid rise to fame, covering so much ground in 72 minutes that there is literally nothing left for a climax, and so the film just finishes. But it's all enjoyable, simple-minded soap opera - unpretentious, influenced to a mild extent by Capra perhaps, and despite its weaknesses, a good deal better than many similar and far more expensive films ("Bought" for example, and "Illicit") of the same period.

--- INTERMISSION ---

"HELLO EVERYBODY" (Paramount, 1933) Directed by William Seiter; scenario by Dorothy Yost and Lawrence Hazard from a story by Fannie Hurst; camera: Gilbert Warrenton; 7 reels


Designed to launch radio star Kate Smith as a big new movie personality, "Hello Everybody" fell flat on its face at least in that intention. Pulled out of the Paramount before it had played even a week, it also flopped in most of its other first-run situations. However, it is obviously not an expensive movie, so it's hard to believe that it was a boxoffice disaster except in terms of failing to live up to expectations and must have turned out to be a popular little programmer outside of the metropolitan areas. Nobody seems quite sure how to handle Kate. When pathos doesn't quite work in the opening sections of the film, they turn her into a good-hearted Gracie Fields type. They even have her do a jazzy dance, which seems unsuitable to say undignified! And the script is incredibly tactful about her weight. If there had been a casual reference to it, or even a gag or two, one would have found her character a little more human. As it is, it never quite rings true -- but since Miss Smith apparently had the ego of a Jolson, this may be her doing.

How closely it resembles the Fannie Hurst novel, I don't know, but it does very closely resemble the kind of Republic "B" films that the Weaver Brothers were making in the late 30's and 40's. Good production values and Seiter's slick direction lift it several notches above that standard, but it is still essentially cornball rural stuff, mixing sentiment, song and mild melodrama. The cast plays second-fiddle to Miss Smith all the way, although Charlie Grapewin gets in some useful advance practice for "The Grapes of Wrath" and "Tobacco Road". All in all, a pleasant little film that does get consistently better as it goes along. Miss Smith is likeable, but it's easy to see why her subsequent movie career was limited to guest spots. One unique quality of this print is that it contains the famous "Pickencirry Heaven" number, studiously cut from ALL television exposures. It's not difficult to see why, in the light of today's racial tensions, although it's a harmless enough number.

--- FINALIZED OCT. 26 PROGRAM -- SWEETIE and TWO AGAINST THE WORLD, plus excerpts from MARRIED?, HONEY, PARAMOUNT ON PARADE. ---

William K. Everson ---

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