Tuesday Sept 6th: "EYES OF YOUTH" (1919) with Clara Kimball Young, Milton Sills, Rudolph Valentino, Garth Hughes and Edmund Lowe, plus Willis O'Brien's "THE GHOST OF SLUMBER MOUNTAIN" (1919) and "ENDING HUR" (1926) with Lupino Lane, Wallace Lupino, Anita Garvin and Stanley Blystone.

In "The White Rose", D.W. Griffith composed a title referring to the erring Ivor Novello thusly: "Like David the Sinner of Old, he heaped ashes of repentance upon his head and wrapped his heart in sack-cloth". We now know too well how Mr. Novello felt -- in the new Bulletin, issued last week, we referred to "The Kennel Murder Case" as starring Basil Rathbone as Philo Vance. We should of course have said William Powell! We may have made errors of fact and judgement before, but nothing quite as monstrous as this! Our abject apologies.

August 30th 1966

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

GAUMONT SOUND MIRROR (Gaumont British, 1929, 1 reel)

As an early British sound "primitive", and rival to the still active "Pathé Pictorial", we offer this rare curiosity for its academic rather than its entertainment values. It is interesting historically, and as being illustrative of the kind of news items that we once found interesting, and for being a perfect specimen of the kind of thing that Robert Benchley lamented so beautifully. The opening bit, with a learned professor discoursing quite seriously on absurd inventions, is pure Benchley all the way.

DONALD'S DILEMMA (Warner Bros.-Eko Radio, 1947, 1 reel)

In Technicolor. Director: Jack King

A partial spoof of the post-war psychological cycle, then nearing its end, and with a few side-swipes at the Sinatra craze, "Donald's Dilemma" is an above-average Disney of its period, and genuinely amusing. Daisy Duck is given her more prominence than Donald, and her ruthless selfishness makes her quite endearing!

GIFT WRAPPED (Warners Brothers, 1951, 1 reel) Dir: J. Freilang; Technicolor

We should have kept this Christmas cartoon for December, when its savage commentary on Yuletide good will might have made a pleasing antidote to the prevailing sentiment. But it was too good to keep, and we won't spoil the fun by describing its shock cuts and inventive gags. It's one of the best in the long series of encounters between Tweety, Sylvester and the bulldog.

INTERMISSION

"SHOWBOAT" (Universal, 1936) Directed by James Whale; 11 reels

Produced by Carl Laemmle Jr.; Screenplay by Oscar Hammerstein II and Jerome Kern from the novel by Edna Ferber; music and lyrics by Hammerstein and Kern; camera: John H. Halas; special effects, John Fulton;


Unfortunately I never saw the 1929 version of "Showboat" with Laura LePlante, Joseph Schildkraut and Alma Rubens -- and having missed any original version of a remake film automatically puts one in the same position as the ashamed Oriental who must apologise for having only daughters and no man-children. Since it was directed by Harry Pollard, who did such a bang-up job on "Uncle Tom's Cabin", one can only assume it may in some ways have been as superior to this version as this one is to the later MGM remake with Kathryn Grayson, Howard Keel, Ava Gardner and Joe E. Brown. (Otis Harlan must have made a superb Captain Andy in 1929!)"
it went into release about a month after James Cruze's costly and old-fashioned
"Sutter's Gold" which was such a commercial failure that it could well have
wrecked Universal almost single-handed, had not Whale's fantastically
successful "Show Boat" bailed them out.

In terms of music, this version delivers the original score even more
generously than did the later remake. Hit song follows hit with amazing
rapidity, and when there seems to be a lull, there's always another well-
remembered song just around the corner to liven things up again. Helen
Morgan's "Bill" comes very late in the day -- which is perhaps just as well,
as it would be impossible to top it. Both she and Robson are so good --
as performers as well as singers -- that it is too bad that they virtually
vanish from the latter portions of the film.

The final reel, admittedly, is a little hard to take. This is lugubrious
Edna Ferber at her worst, wallowing in that love-over-the-decades sentiment
that she loved so well, and that she was also quite generous with in another
1936 release "Come and Get It". (But such sentiment is easier to take via
Edward Arnold than via an unconvincingly aged Allan Jones!) The remake with
Kathryn Grayson, it must be admitted, had a much tidier structure and
avoided the syrup of the modern ending.

However, the basic flaws of "Show Boat" -- specifically a story-line that
Constantly slackens in interest -- have been present in all versions, stage
and screen. They are anticipated by now, and thus never quite as bad as we
assume. "Show Boat" otherwise is a production guaranteed to please since
it delivers precisely what is wanted: all the songs, a sprawling canvas of
a story, big scenes, big sets, huge crowds, and a fine cast. It's a pleasure
to see Irene Dunne in a romantic musical again, and Charles Winninger gives
one of his best performances -- especially in his virtuoso scene where he
acts out a melodrama. The photography, with its stress on long-held full
closeups, is quite fine though not too well served by our print. The print
has been made from an original too shrunken for further projection, and it
posed so many problems that we're genuinely lucky to have it at all. It's a
little grainier than we'd like; a problem accentuated by the many night shots,
process plates, and the overall soft-focus technique so prevalent in films
of the mid-30's. However, it has been so many years since "Show Boat" was
last shown that we're sure you'll make allowances for print deficiencies
which, after a while, aren't that noticeable anyway.

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William K. Everson
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