September 6, 1966

Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

"BENDING HUR" (Educational, 1927/8) Director: Not stated
With Lupino Lane, Wallace Lupino, Anita Garvin, Stanley Blystone; 2 reels.

"Bending Hur" is actually the British title of this comedy, and there is no trace in the copyright catalogue or other reference sources of a comedy with that title. It fits perfectly, and Lupino Lane is clearly referred to in a title as Ben Hur, but possibly MGM, which couldn’t prevent the parody being made, were able to put their foot down concerning the use of such a title. George Geltzer suggests that the correct title may be "Roamin’ Romeo", which was a Lupino Lane comedy of mid-20s, directed by Tim Whittaker. The semi-phantom title indicates that he’s probably right. (Fox also did a "Ben Hur" spoof a few months earlier, titled "A Roamin’ Gladiator"). Far from being the best of the Lupino Lane comedies -- for top-standard Lane, see "Sword Pointe" in a couple of weeks -- "Bending Hur" (or "Roamin’ Romeo") is still very funny Lane. The opening gala slave sequence is a little gem, there’s a wonderful bit of pantomimic fooling later on when Lane and Wallace Lupino take the place of gladiatorial statues, and the more routine slapstick in between has the usual saving graces of all Lupino Lane comedies -- speed, elaborate production values, and Lane’s own winning personality and acrobatic stunts.

"THE GHOST OF SLUMBER MOUNTAIN" (World - Cinema Distributing Corp., 1919)
Produced by Herbert M. Dawley; Special Effects by Willis O’Brien 1 reel.

Willis O’Brien’s second experimental forerunner to "The Lost World", "The Ghost of Slumber Mountain" is a fairly unambitious little film, but extremely interesting in the light of our knowledge of his later work. Already, we have the familiar construction of the slow-build-up followed by the concentration on shock. The monsters are again conveniently located in a spot cut off from civilization. And although the stop-motion technique lacks the smoothness and conviction of "The Lost World", only a few years away, still it is quite recognisably O’Brien. The monsters seem immediately intent on decimating one another, and the tyrannosaurus rex has a toothy snarl that definitely foreshadows the personality and sense of humor that O’Brien was to give all his movie monsters. Incidentally, some of the shots in this have been used very briefly -- in old and semi-amateur compilation reels like "The Novies March On" as being from "The Lost World". All the monster footage is concentrated into the last half of the film, and is fairly straightforward in that it limits itself to miniatures, and doesn’t try to involve the actors in the same scenes. As a result, some of the cutting is a little clumsy. Shots from this particular print were recently used in England on a BBC television program, and then replaced -- hence the several splices in the monster sequence indicate only reassembly, not missing footage. The print is seemingly standard, but this is such an intriguing rarity that it would be unwise to look a gift-triceratops in the face.

--- Intermission ---

"EYES OF YOUTH" (Harry Garson Productions - Equity Pictures Corp., 1919)
Screenplay and Direction by Albert S. Parker, from the play by Rex Marshall and Charles Quennan; 6 reels

Unseen in its complete form for many years, though a one-reel "version" of the Valentino episode, under the title "The Sheik of New York", is fairly well known, "Eyes of Youth" turns out to be quite one of the best of the generally not too distinguished series of that Miss Young made for Harry Garson. It has always been the best-known of course, primarily because it was the film that was immediately responsible for Valentino being cast in "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse", and also to a lesser degree because it was remade by Gloria Swanson in 1927 as "The Love of Sunya".

In many ways, "Eyes of Youth" is by far the better of the two films. Glory's film was much bigger and more luxurious of course -- starting with the crystal ball, which was twice as big as Clara's, and which was the mansion-sized in Clara's film, but palace-sized for Gloria, and a convenient prop on which she staged much of her dramatic action. Influenced no doubt by her experiences with DeMille, Gloria also added -- as a prologue -- a sequence in ancient Egypt. In so doing she padded the length of an already long film, and when her "Sunya" was finally released, at 7 reels,
In lesser running time, Clara's earlier film takes in all three prophetic stories, plus the framing story, and zips along like lightning. There is no time wasted over logic or "establishment"—titles tell us all we need to know, and right away we're in the thick of things. In both versions of course the story is pretentious and absurd. But Gloria's came late in the 20's, in that marshmallow period of the silents when the shear glitter and technical profanity—camera work by Strus, Beshers and Rowe, production design by William Cameron Menzies on every other picture—merely enhances the artificiality of a story like this. But "Eyes of Youth" comes off rather better, It has that marvellously larger-than-life feel to its absurd story that makes it the unknowable think it is a "typical" old-time movie. There's no such animal of course, but if there were, "Eyes of Youth" would be it. Its magaziney romantic fiction plot is offset by its lack of glamour and the gratuitousness of its melodrama—it's rather like looking at an elongated Biograph from 1912, and even the makeup furthers this illusion. It's all flamboyant, overdramatized, and yet never as corny as one might anticipate. The titles are an absolute delight with their arbitrary philosophies and flights of eloquence, these latter oftentimes combined with pictorial effects. There's a beauty right after the trial sequence which we won't spoil by describing now. Some of these titles admittedly are of questionable logic—such as one that tells us Clara, in her downfall, finds the position of a schoolteacher the only refuge left to her, as though it were only a notch or two above becoming a streetwalker or a toilet attendant. But "Eyes of Youth" accounts for its faults and becomes as apparent as in Gloria's version—and in any case, the whole premise is on rather shaky ground from the beginning since, winsome and appealing as Clara is, it has always been hard to accept her as the irresistible beauty that all men fight over. (Although one can accept her in such a role rather more easily than Vera Huwa Sallaton, forever being referred to by Republican writers who knew where their bread and butter was coming from as being young and beautiful. Clara's writers never once approached the imagery of a Republican who, in the trailer for "Fair Wind to Java", paraphrased over Vera as "Exotic Miss Kim, whose beauty drove men mad")

Clara however holds the whole show together competently and amiably, supported by a whole plateau of prominent leading men-to-be, headed of course by Valentine (Ivan Lloydoff in the remake) who is quite dynamic and certainly attention-getting in his brief but important role. Parker, who directed, also did the remake, and is still very much alive in London.

A note regarding next week's program:

Although we don't anticipate quite the huge crowds that turned up for SHOW BOAT, undoubtedly there'll be a big crowd for SUNNY SIDE UP. We'd like to suggest that you don't make it any bigger by bringing friends along. Much as we like as many people as possible to see these films—such as they should be seen by as many people as possible—there comes a point when it literally works against the film to have too large an audience. This happened last week with SHOW BOAT, when, in order to seat everyone as comfortably as possible, we spread ourselves out over not just a double room, but a triple room. The added room rental is taken care of by the added attendance, so that is not a problem; what IS a problem is that the acoustics in such a large area are NOT good, especially with no carpeting, drapes on only one side of the room, and so on. SHOW BOAT's perfectly adequate track (for a small room) was sometimes just lost in such a large area, and we are fearful that the same thing may happen with SUNNY SIDE UP, which, being '29, has a variable track anyway. Thus we are hoping that we are going to be able to show in our normal sized room for the best possible sound reproduction. Please help us by NOT spreading the word. This situation won't arise too often, but if it does, the only solution may be to have two performances per evening of a given film, and work by some kind of system whereby attendance is staggered. Of course to repeat an obvious or popular item in every show, so that you'll know there are two opportunities to catch a specific film. In this connection, for your own comfort, we recommend early arrival for "Sunny Side Up". Thankyou.