Tuesday November 22nd: A Program of Gothic Terror! CORRIDOR OF MIRRORS (1948), directed by Terence Young, with Eric Portman, Edana Romney, Barbara Nelloni and Christopher Lee; and THE UNINVITED (1944), directed by Lewis Allen, with Ray Milland, Gail Russell, Ruth Hussey, Donald Crisp, Cornelia Otis Skinner.

New schedules covering December-January-February will be available at the above program, and will be mailed to non-attendees a day or two thereafter.

---

Tuesday November 15 1966

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

WARNER BROTHERS SILVER JUBILEE (1930) Directed by John G. Adolfi
Written by Sidney Mitchell, Archie Gottlieb and George Meyer; 1 reel

The idea of Warners holding a Silver anniversary as 1930 move into view tends to make one wonder if they are dating their achievements from the day they opened their first butcher shop, but actually they can just get away with it since their initial ventures as showmen go back to their tent-show projections of nickelodeon days! The film is actually but a thinly disguised plug for upcoming product, and as such probably far more entertaining to us today than it was to 1930 audiences! The really big stars - Arlas, Barrymore - wouldn't be on such a modest scale, and their absence is covered by good-will telegrams from distant locations. Surprisingly however, the Warners themselves, who never missed a chance to tub-thump, aren't on hand either, and the whole thing looks rather like an annual picnic that had to take place indoors because of rain! However, it's a delightful and nostalgic period piece, full of familiar faces. Unaccountably, Rin Tin Tin - still on the Warner payroll - isn't present. After all he had done for the company, he could have been rewarded with an under-the-table plate of hamburger, and a bark or two, but the writers probably knew that after "Squirrel Water's" contract wasn't going to be renewed. Otis Skinner makes a charming and affable "Mr. Warner Brothers", while Beryl Mercer appears as an unaccountably silent Mrs Warner Brothers. Their offspring, Miss Vitaphone, a nauseously affected brat of the idiot-board school of acting, and something of a poor man's Sybil Jason, is played by Betty Jane Graham, whose hopes that she would be on hand for the Golden Jubilee were mercifully unfulfilled. (Possibly she grew up to be Vera Ellen). The big hit of the show though, is the introduction of the Warner stable of song-writers -- Rodgers and Hart, Oscar Hammerstein, Harry Ruby and sundry others. Ill-at-ease, and looking like a collection of jockeys, prizefighters and 2nd-hand clothing salesmen, they defy one to believe that so many memorable songs, haunting lyrics and lovely melodies could come from faces like those! The naive quality of this reel rather invites the levy we have descended to in these notes, but nevertheless it's a fascinating little curio, and a real chunk of unofficial film history.


This 2-reel celebration of the Canadian film industry's 60th anniversary started out to be just that, but somehow perhaps for the sake of getting much wider distribution in Canadian theatres was sidetracked into becoming little more than a parade of the top stars and personalities (Maek Sennett, Mary Pickford, Norma Shearer etc.) who came from Canada, and made their mark in Hollywood. This tangents robs us of much fascinating old Canadian footage, some of which producer William Weintraub - a first-rate documentarian - had used earlier in his "Between The Wars" features shown at the Huff a few years back. Disappointing or not, we think "Anniversary" is worth showing, not only because the clips, if familiar, are entertaining, but also because clearance for these scenes were obtained for Canada only, and thus the film will never be shown in the U.S. Walter Pidgeon's narration is adequate, if a bit stuffy, but he tends to lose our sympathy right at the beginning when he slams an antique Edison projector out of the way, as though it has outlived its usefulness now that it has served to make a narrative point for him!

HOPALONG CASUALTY (Warner Brothers, 1960) Written and directed by Chuck Jones. Technicolor; one reel.

These further advent ureas in the never-ending battle between Road Runner and Coyote invoke some of the freshness of earlier entries in the series, and spends more time milking single gags than usual, but even so the speed and the invention never flag, and the pace and savagery are well up to standard.

--- Intermission ---

"THE WHITE HELL OF FITZ PALU" (H.R.Sokal Film, Germany, 1929) Directed by Dr. Arnold Fanck and G.W. Pabst; Script by Fanck and Ladislas Vajda; photography: Sipp Allgeier, Richard Angst, Hans Schmeieberger; Sets by Erno Metzner; US editing by Edward Gahn; US original musical score composed by Reinz Roehnold; A Universal release; 8 reels.
It is now 11 years and two weeks since "The White Hell of Pitz Palu" last had a New York showing, and that at Cinema 16. It has been out of circulation for much longer than that, and though officially still owned by Universal, has been withheld from theatrical release and tv. The few prints that have been around have usually been woefully incomplete dupes which have done no justice at all to the film's magnificent pictorial style. Tonight's print, happily, is first-rate in every respect.

Peculiar to German film-makers in the 20's was the cult of idealised mountain films, which were both brilliant documentaries and first-rate melodramas, with very definite if embryonic symbolic propaganda content. They were the inspiration and largely the monopoly of Dr. Arnold Fanck, a former geologist who translated his great passion for the mountains into film. Initially at least his films carried an added punch in that he took his cameras into the mountains. Compared to his German contemporaries who largely concentrated on murky and heavy fantasies and psychological dramas made almost entirely behind studio walls, "The White Hell of Pitz Palu" was the last of the great silent German mountain films, and one of the best and most successful. Personally, I can't help preferring some of the others - "The Sacred Mountain", for its greater pictorial beauty, Leni Riefenstahl's later "The Blue Light" for its more interesting story-line and romantic mysticism - but there can't be much arguing over the fact that "The White Hell of Pitz Palu" is really the "definitive" film of the whole group.

There is very little studio work in the film; what sets there are (the work of Erno Netzer, who earlier had made the remarkable "Oberfall") are remarkably smoothly integrated with location footage, and are usually recognisable as sets only because of camera movements which would be impossible under conditions of actuality. Most of the film was shot, under freezing conditions and other hardships, during a five-months location trip to the 12,000 foot high Pitz Palu, in the Pennine group in the Alps. It was Pabst's 9th film immediately preceding "Die Dreigroschenoper", "L'Atlantide" and "Kameradschaft". However, mountaineering and aerial footage dominates the film that one must assume that the bulk of the directorial credit belongs to Fanck. Commenting on this strange collaboration between two directors, one noted for his realism and the other for his romanticism, Siegfried Kracauer had this to say: "Fanck made this cinematically fascinating film with the aid of G.W. Pabst, who probably did his best to cut down emotional exuberance. However, sentimentality was inseparable from that variety of idealism". Universal imported the film in this country in a silent and two sound versions; one of the latter, employing a melodramatic narration, was so disliked by critics that it soon disappeared. Tonight's print has merely a musical score and effects. The score perhaps lacks the Wagnerian majesty that it needs (the kind of score that still helps Nazism seem logical in "Triumph of the Will") but on the whole is very good, losing impact today only because its various themes were later deployed by Universal in horror films and serials (especially "Bride of Frankenstein", "The Mummy" and "Flash Gordon") so that it thus occasionally seems like a "canned" score today.

The film's great popularity induced Carl Laemmle to instigate several co-productions for German mountain films, all of them revolving around the individual or united talents of Leni Riefenstahl and Luis Trenker (player-director who soon took over from Fanck), Fanck and Ernst Udset. "S.O.S. Iceberg", "The Rebel" and "The Doomed Battllion" were the three best of the post-"White Hell" mountain films, a genre which incidentally enjoyed a whole new vogue in Germany right after World War Two. "The White Hell of Pitz Palu" however has remained the best known and most influential of them all; its night searches by torchlight were duplicated with remarkable fidelity in the British "The Glass Mountain" and the American "High Conquest", while actual footage from it has been used frequently through the years -- from "Lost Horizon" down to "Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe" and "Lost City of the Jungle". In bulk of course it was also reused in the poor 1951 Italo-German remake with Hans Albers.

Pabst's later - and postwar - career is well-known. Leni Riefenstahl is now sporadically active again. Vajda, for so long associated with Pabst and Lubitsch, turned to directing in England and died fairly recently. Erno Netzer and Gustav Diesel, both died in the early 1950's; US editor and later director Edward Cahn also died a couple of years ago; and World War One aviation ace Ernst Udset committed suicide in Ww 2 when he was unable to reconcile his military career with Nazi ideology. His story formed the basis of the Karl Zuckmayer play (and film) "The Devil's General".

Inadvertently, the small cast was eliminated from the credits on the previous page. Here it is: Dr. Johannes Krafft (Gustav Diesel); Maria (Leni Riefenstahl); Ernst Udset (himself); Hans (Ernst Petersen); The Guide (S. Spring).

Dramatically a bit shaky and unsound, but pictorially magnificent, this is a real thriller - and a real film. 

--- Wm. K. Swerass ---