The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

"UNDER 18" (Warner Brothers, 1931; reissue 1932) Directed by Archie Mayo

Screenplay by Charles Kenyon & Maude Fulton from their original story "Skylife"; Camera: Sid Hickox; editor, George Marks. 8 reels


Not quite a serious social comment, yet several notches above being just a soap opera, "UNDER 18" is a most curious little picture, and above all, an unpredictable one. At times showing a casual kinship to Roy Del Ruth's 1933 "Employees' Entrance," it manages to be at the same time a relatively serious and honest work, and a "fun" picture very typical of the 30's. These two opposite elements are somehow stressed by the sets too - first-class and thoroughly realistic reconstructions of tenement-area streets, and stylish (yet hardly convincing) impressions of life among the millionaires, with penthouses and rooftop swimming pools which seem luxurious indeed, if a trifle foolhardy. Even the casting refuses to fall into convenient little niches; Warren William, billed third, has relatively little to do until the closing sequences of the film, although he's a tower of strength as always, and Anita Page is quite a surprise with the sincerity and depth of her performance. Another surprise is provided by two extremely long dialogue sequences, shot for the most part in single takes, without cutaways. Marian Marsh, hardly a major dramatic actress, does amazingly well in one of these sequences, memorizing pages of dialogue (complex, because it requires specific timing as well as good reading) and all, apparently, without recourse to any off-camera prompting. "UNDER 18" is hardly a major work from that erratic but often extremely interesting director Archie Mayo, but it is a well-above-average programmer, intelligently written and played for all of its lack of "importance".

- Intermission -

"WINNER TAKE ALL" (Warner Brothers, 1932) Directed by Roy Del Ruth

Screenplay by Wilson Mizner and Robert Lord from "133 at Three" by Gerald Beaumont; Camera: Robert Kurrle; editor, Thomas Pratt. 7 reels

With James Cagney, Marian Nixon, Virginia Bruce, Guy Kibbee, Clarence Muse, Alan Howbray, Dickie Moore, Allan Lane, John Boche, Naij Haroldo, Clarence Wilson, Charles Coleman, Esther Howard, Renee Whitney, Harvey Perry, Julian Rivero, Selma Jackson, George Hayes, Arthur Houseman, Albert Conti, and George Raft and Texas Guinan in out-in-stock footage from "Queen of the Nightclubs".

"Winner Take All" has always been the most elusive of the old Cagney vehicles, the only one ever to turn up in New Yorker schedules or (until now) at the Huff. Inevitably one expects too much from a film denied us so long - especially when others like "Jimmy the Gent" and "Picture Snatcher" have had so much verve and vitality - but even allowing for that, one must admit that "Winner Take All" is probably the weakest of all the early Cagney starring films. Cagney himself is unappealing, and his dialogue delivery sometimes almost unintelligible, and although it's an unpretentious formula picture, somehow that formula doesn't really work this time. It's uneven in its construction, and this is stressed early on by the sudden flashback to a rowdy night-club scene, as though someone was aware that it was taking too long for the Cagney "image" to establish itself, and hurriedly shoved in that scene - backed by some footage from "Queen of the Nightclubs" - to assure dubious fans that the expected Cagney rough stuff was on the way. Not that any film from this stable and this year could be without its delights however - there are some good lines and situations, Virginia Bruce displays incredibl cleavage quite in contrast to her more lady-like later screen self, Marian Nixon is as charming as always, and there's even a blatant plagiarism (or an inside joke?) from Lubitsch's "Monte Carlo" where racing locomotive wheels are out in rhythm to "Beyond the Blue Horizon"! Expect very little from "Winner Take All," and you may be very pleasantly surprised; in any event, it's good to cross off this last remaining Cagney from our lists. Now we can concentrate on the missing Bogartsi!

William K. Everson