Tuesday next, February 18th: "THE SOCIAL SECRETARY" (1916) with Norma Talmadge, Erich von Stroheim; "DON QUICKSHOT OF THE RIO GRANDE" (1923) with Jack Hoxie.

February 11 1969

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society


Based loosely on Ruth Etting's career, with enough of Ruby Keeler thrown in to provide a lawsuit-proof composite, "Broadway Through a Keyhole" is an undeservedly ignored movie. While its basic plot has many of the standard clichés, a good script and Sherman's well-paced, brittle direction manage to steer it so clear of formula that it becomes even cynical and unpleasant at times. The sentiment is pleasingly honest, but the characters all ring true. Texas Guinan and Blossom Seeley emerge as the tough hard babes that they probably were, a far cry from the standard Betty Hutton brand of recreation. Despite the gangsterisms and the Broadway glitter, it all winds up rather refreshingly like a Damon Runyon fable in reverse, with nobody terribly sympathetic and most of the hearts-of-gold turning up in the most unlikely places. The dialogue is fast and snappy, the musical scenes quite elaborate, although they are almost deliberately down-played, as though to keep the film more in a "dramatic" than a "musical" framework.

Constance Cummings is a pleasure to watch as always, the supporting cast is quite expert (Ratoff, curiously, is given the same name that he used later in "The Great Profile"), but the biggest surprise of all is Russ Columbo; no great actor admittedly, he underplays his big scenes with real pathos and sincerity, and suggests that he might have made a real mark in movies had not tragedy struck first.

----- intermission -----


In our advance notices, I admitted not having re-seen "Thanks a Million" since 1935, but expressed the opinion that it was superior to "On the Avenue". I'll probably have no allies on this latter thought, but "On the Avenue" has always seemed to me to be a much-over-rated film, and too slick and deliberate an attempt to copy the Astaire-Rogers formula. Given its Irving Berlin score and its ultra-glossy production values, it probably is a better musical than "Thanks a Million" - yet with all its rough edges and stock characters, I still find "Thanks a Million" more enjoyable. It doesn't have the punch it had in 1935 perhaps; possibly as a six-year-old I was over-influenced by the enthusiasm of the British critics, who thought its political satire something quite new and fresh in musicals. Familiar as we are now with the much pithier political satire of Hecht & MacArthur and Preston Sturges, it now seems too genially inclined to pull its punches in this direction, although it has hardly lost its topicality since we in New York have very much of a Dick Powell mayor at the moment (with, I'm sure, a full quota of Edwin Maxwells and Paul Harveys in the background)! In any event, though a little slow in getting under way, and beset with the usual 20th Century-Fox boy love-loses-girl complications, it's a pleasant, tuneful and harmless frollo, much easier to take than Fox's ultra-formalised musicals of the later 30's and 40's, and a pleasant counterpoint to the more rugged "Broadway Through a Keyhole".

Wm. K. Eversom

Apologies to any colleagues who went to the New School last Friday for "Viva Villa", though we tried to head off as many as we could. The School seems singularly disorganised at the moment, and I was fed entirely the wrong information about the cancellation. For the record, the rest of the season there stays as is, and "Viva Villa" will be added to the end of the program - on May 2nd.

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