"WAITER’S BALL" (Mack Sennett-Triangle-1916) Directed by Roscoe Arbuckle Asst. Director, Ferries Hartman; Camera: Elgin Lessley; 2 reels
With Patty Arbuckle, Al St. John, Kate Price, Corinne Marquet, Allee Lake, Joe Bordeaux.

Since the great bulk of the surviving Sennett-Arbuckles are from the earlier 1914-15 years, and little more than very crude off-the-cuff knockabout, it's good that at least two of the later ones directed by Arbuckle himself are still available. "Walter's Ball", while it doesn't have the sensitivity or imagination of "Fatty & Rebel Adrift", is still an extremely good comedy, the required Sennett slapstick modified, organised, slowed down and given a certain grace. There's a genial kind of cameraderie even to the madness and the violence between Arbuckle and St. John, while the (reduced) pratfalls have both skill and a reason for being.

"LEAP YEAR" (Paramount, 1921; UNRELEASED) Directed by James Cruze Camera: Karl Brown; Scenario by Walter Woods from the story by Sarah Y. Mason; Working title: "Skirt Shy"; 5 reels

Our appetites whetted by some of the post-Sennett Arbuckle-Keshton 2-reelers, it has always been a source of regret that none of his tremendously popular feature comedies for Paramount seem to have survived. Paramount themselves have only "The Roundup" in their vaults - oddly enough a fairly straight western, with Arbuckle in a secondary (and semi-dramatic) role as an outlaw who shows up on the scene after Arbuckle from the screen at the height of his popularity, has just been re-discovered and rescued, and while it's not the hilarious tour-de-force one might hope for, it does both confirm the grace and good humor of Fatty at his peak, as well as commenting on the idiocy of studio policies of the time. Slapstick comedy was still looked on as something of a poor relation that had no business in "respectable" full-length features, even though it might be great in shorts. Keaton and Lloyd had not yet made the transition to feature comedies; Fairbanks (never a slapstick comedian anyway) had abandoned comedy for swashbucklers, and Chaplin, then making the transition, was playing safe with large doses of drama and pathos to balance the gags, as in "The Kid". One has the impression all through "Leap Year" of Arbuckle held relentlessly in check, and told to let the situations provide the laughs instead. Yet when he does occasionally take over - as in the series of "fits", where he makes each fall and grimace a little different - he is quite marvellous. Quietly amusing throughout if rarely hilarious, it's interesting as the earliest Cruze available to us, and finds some lovely nostalgic footage on Catalina Island - then obviously an elite and fashionable place to go, and not the haven for weekend teenagers that it has become today. When this film was shot, the huge rock fronting the Casino had not been blasted away, and the lovely ocean-side walk was still in the process of construction. Incidentally, Cruze himself - centre-screen, and wearing his familiar white cap - can be seen among the disembarking passengers from the ferry boat. The subtitles have an interesting use of movie lingo - "about, dissolve, pan etc. and one wonders whether it was the intention to use those titles in release prints, or if they were just done in a hurry - to formally complete the film - when it became apparent that, for the time being at least, it would not be released. Another delight: the lovely Harriet Hammond, seen all too rarely these days.

"BUZZIN' AROUND" (Vitagraph, 1933) Directed by Alf Goulding Story: Jack Henley, Glen Lambert; Camera: Edwin DuParr; 2 reels
With Patty Arbuckle, Al St. John. After directing under pseudonyms during the 20's (rather disappointingly it must be admitted), Arbuckle got back into movies as a star of 2-reelers with a series for Vitagraph in the early 30's. Most of them were weak, but "Buzzin' Around" - his last - had some grand stuff in it. Uneven perhaps, its good gags more than make up for it, and it is one of the few good comedies directed by Alf Goulding, who made as many bad comedies as Dei Lord did good ones. The shorts were made at the Warner Studios in Brooklyn (adjacent to the Avenue H subway station) and "Buzzing Around" is full of readily recognisable Brooklyn street exterior locations.

--- William K. Everson ---