MONDAY, JUNE 23rd: a WILLIAM SEITER program: "THE LITTLE CHURCH AROUND THE CORNER" (1923) with Kenneth Harlan, Claire Windsor, Hobart Bosworth; and "APPOINTMENT FOR LOVE" (1941) with Margaret Sullivan, Charles Boyer, Reg. Deann

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JUNE 16, 1962

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society


The trio of films that Robinson made for MGM ("The Last Gangster," "Blackmail," "Unholy Partners," 1937-41) while still a major star at Warner Brothers are curious hybrids indeed. All are typical Robinson vehicles, they imitate the Warner formula and plot content slavishly, and yet they are typical MGM products too - glossy, over-produced, rather too relaxed in tempo. "Blackmail," partly because of its cast, mainly because of its plot with so many echoes of "I Am A Fugitive From A Chain Gang," has the most kinship to the Warner films. In some ways, it is even a little more honest - one of the weaknesses of "Chain Gang" was that Muni was the stock "framed" hero, and thus really outside that group of humanity on whose behalf the film was speaking out. In other ways, it is less honest: there was a real curiosity with the films, with a minimum of lush studio work; compare Muni's escape from the chain gang with Robinson's, all tricked up with arty angles and much back projection. Furthermore, Warners always seemed much more in touch with reality and the way people lived; Robinson here is appalled that his wife has to take a cheap house on "the other side of the tracks" - but the house, when we see it, is an art director's dream and if not exactly Pickfair, still a more comfortable home than most Americans could hope of owning in 1939! But these things apart, it's still an enjoyable melodrama, held together less by its melodrama than by its good performances, some excellent 2nd unit work involving oil-well fires, and the always fine photography of Clyde De Vinna ("White Shadows in the South Seas"). Bob Watson's crying jags are, as always, a bit hard to take, but Gene Lockhart's sly villainy - his best "arising" role since "Algiers" - more than makes up for it. Although not credited to him, the montages have the look of being Slavko Vorkapich work, and the versatile H.C. Potter - like William A. Seiter, a good all-around man who did his best work in comedies - keeps things moving quite nicely. As always in films of the 30's, there is full-integration in the chain-gang scenes, if nowhere else!


Considering that it was the year after "It Happened One Night," and the same year as "Puttin' on the Bounty," "China Seas" and "Call of the Wild," "After Office Hours" is something of a time-waster for Gable, and they even give Constance Bennett the preferred billing spot on the left of the screen! However, it's typical of the star-building methods employed at the time, throwing a big name into a programmer between block-busters in order to keep him constantly on screen. As a programmer, there's really nothing wrong with the film; it's a glossy mixture of romance, comedy and murder melodrama. But it talks too much, bags down in overlong dialogue exchanges between Bennett and Gable, and gets Gable off to a bad start with a brash Lee Tracy/Pat O'Brien role which was not really his forte. However, it's professional film-making with attractive stars - and from that standpoint alone, it's a refreshing change from what passes for entertainment in today's market.

Mr. K. Everoson

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