Monday August 4 1969

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

"CONCEPT" (1964; produced by the Walt Disney Organisation for the Hollywood Museum); Directed by Jim Fletcher; camera: Floyd Crosby; live narration by Edward G. Robinson, and the voices of Mary Pickford, Gloria Swanson, Ed Wynn, Gregory Peck, Bette Davis and others. 5 reels

"Concept" is either hilarious or dreadful, depending on one's mood and point of view, but either way is a bad film. We are showing it because it now provides a rather sad footnote to film history, and because it isn't likely to show up again. Designed to justify the (at the time) enormous advance investments in the Hollywood Museum, and to promote both public interest and further financial support, it is both a monumental "con" job and a terrifying comment on the lucky escape that we all had. Conceived as a combination Babylon, Shangri-La and Super-Disneyland, the Hollywood Museum was monumental in its aims, almost useless culturally, and clearly designed as a sucker-trap for tourists! Planned by veterans - not working veterans, but those whom Hollywood had passed by and who were still living twenty years in the past - it was obviously absurdly over-ambitious in both its aims (to cover radio, TV, movies and electronics) and in its purely mechanical ideas. Those who know the relatively small area involved, and who recall the cause-célébre created by a veteran who refused to move off his land, defended it with a rifle, and was finally forcibly removed by distinctly Gestapo-like tactics, will realize how utterly impossible such a project would have been in that particular spot. The bad taste involved in the acquisition of the land remixes one a little of the opening of "Slave Ship". But the Church of the Holy Moum was sunk before the ship is launched, so that the ship, "launched in blood", becomes permanently jinxed. But at least the slave ship got itself launched and was efficiently manned; the Hollywood Museum sunk before it was created, despite several "ground-breaking" ceremonies, and some filmic acquisitions. Perhaps it's just as well -- film history would seem to have been in for a beating when, in this introductory film, Ed Wynn and Asp and Andy get more coverage than Griffith, and a Chaplin excerpt is shown at the usual wrong speed and with incoherent piano music. One of the meetings I attended in Hollywood had five or six "public relations" tables as opposed to one for film acquisitions, and the only Hollywood personalities interested enough to attend the much-touted screening of a "complete, reconstructed" version of "The Birth of a Nation" (actually only about three minutes longer than existing versions, and with no new scenes at all) were director Lesley Selander and star Joel McCrea. The American Film Institute has happily made all of this whoop-de-do totally obsolete, and has already done more in a year or so than the Museum did in its years of preparation. So it's as a very comment on Hollywood thinking - with Edward G. Robinson assuring us that this is all practically a reality - that the film is most interesting. The Disney work is economy-plus, and the various film-Clips are basically familiar ones -- Jolson, "The Kiss" etc -- although with some pleasant surprises in some Shirley Temple, Andy Hardy and other scenes. The big train wreck from "The Greatest Show on Earth" also livens things up a bit, and of course everybody who had a finger in the pie gets a credit at the end -- including a scenario writer very appropriately named Schmautz!

"LOVE IN: AND LEAVE 'EM" (Paramount, 1926) Directed by Frank Tuttle
From a play by John Van Alstyne Weaver and George Abbott; adapted by Townsend Martin; Camera: George Webber; editors, Ralph Block and Julian Johnson; 6 reels
With Louise Brooks, Evelyn Brent, Lawrence Gray, Osgood Perkins, Arthur Donaldson, Marcia Harris.

The following notes are reprinted from our original notes of six years ago. To bring them up to date I should add that the print of "City Gone Wild" has now deteriorated - but that in the interim "The Old Army Game" has been found. Also that Anita Page made her debut as an extra in this film - presumably in the well-populated party scenes - but that I have never been able to spot her!
Apart from "Beggars of Life" and "A Social Celebrity" (and the sound version of "The Canary Murder Case" containing the silent Brooks footage), "Love 'Em and Leave 'Em" is the only one of Louise Brooks' American silent to have survived. I discount Cruse's "City Gone Wild" since the Brooks footage in that is negligible, and in any case the condition of the one existing print is so bad that its days are obviously numbered. "Love 'Em and Leave 'Em" is, in a way, a happy choice for survival. It may not be as good a film as some of the others, but it does offer marvellous opportunities for the Brooks face, figure and personality, and for the kind of Brooks bitchery and bewitchery that otherwise seems to appear only in her European films. The semi-comic seduction scenes in real Cherie should be a positive answer (and probably a conversion-point) to all those who just can't see what all the shouting is about where Miss Brooks is concerned. Admittedly, the script is adapted on the witness of being as annoying as hell and it doesn't matter whether the objection of the adoration deserves it or not, or whether it's a personality like Brooks or a director like Hawks. One should remember that these cults are not the creation of the individuals themselves, and the engendered annoyances should be directed at the instigators of the worship, and not at the inspirations.

"Love 'Em and Leave 'Em", as you are probably aware is an earlier version of the 1929 Clara Bow film "The Saturday Night Kid". Both films run fairly parallel in plot substance, but differ greatly in emphasis and incident. There's no doubt that this silent film is by far the better, but the talkie had its odd points too. Here, Evelyn Brent is such an unattractive heroine and Lawrence Gray such a dumberheaded hero, that one's sympathy would fall to Louise even if she weren't such a charmer. In the sound version, Clara Bow and James Hall made a far more likeable hero-heroine team, and while Jean Arthur walked away with the show (because the bad sister is the best role in the film) at the same time her bitchiness was so unsuble and obvious that one was surprised rather than glad that she got away with so much. Comparison of the two films makes one realise what a marvellously exciting film it would have been had Clara and Louise been co-starred in this original version. Not only does Clara look enough like Louise to convincingly play her sister (with the right hairdo and camera angles, viz many shots in "Mantrap"), but what a powerhouse combination they would have made! One just can't blame the hero here for straying from Evelyn to Louise — but having to choose between Clara and Louise would really provide food for thought!

On the whole, "Love 'Em and Leave 'Em" aims at comedy rather less than did "The Saturday Night Kid", and plays up the dramatic elements more. This includes making of Osgood Perkins a rather more seedy and lecherous villain — introduced by a title that tells us he spent six months cursing himself of halitosis only to find he was unpopular anyway!

Throughout, there are pleasant surprises; a languorous opening, a lively Charleston for Louise, an equally lively finale in which Miss Brent regains some of her lost ground, some excellently-lit interiors (the film was made at Paramount's Long Island studio) and a pleasantly nostalgic love scene by the lake in Central Park. Like so many Paramount films of the 20's, it's slight fare and slowly paced. The lame wrap-up gag is typical of its lack of inspiration. Without Miss Brooks, it would be just another picture. But with her, it becomes something rather special — and with a director like Mal St. Clair or Honta Bell instead of heavy-handed Frank Tuttle, it might have taken on a gloss and a sophistication that could have made it quite remarkable. But while no rediscovered masterpiece, it's a slick and enjoyable little work, and a fascinating study of Louise Brooks in her best years. The print, we're happy to say, is 100% complete and a beautiful reduction print from the original 35mm negative.

— William K. Everson

Thanks in advance to Charlie Shibuk, who will be taking over the next three or four shows while I am away, and to Don Koll for his valuable assistance too.

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POST SCRIPT: Close study of still #1027-191 from "Love 'Em and Leave 'Em" suggests that, if she were then a trim brunette rather than her traditional blonde, Anita Page might well be the young lady on the extreme right of the screen (there are four people in the scene) in the presumably-off-screen scene at almost the end. You have about ten frames in which to decide — in two subsequent set-ups of the same scene, all but her nose are totally off-screen!