Monday next, December 1st: Two mid-30's programmers from a now-forgotten, once-majoor British director, George Pearson: "ONCE A THIEF" with John Stuart and Norah Baring, preceded by "OPEN ALL NIGHT" with Geraldine Fitzgerald, Frank Vosper.

New schedules for December-February are currently being prepared, and will be in the mail late this week.

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November 24 1969

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

"HOPE" (Edison, 1912) Director: not stated; scenario, James Oppenheim; 1 reel
With Gertrude McCoy, William West, George Lessee, Robert Brower.

This was one of Edison's annual tuberculosis dramas designed to promote the sale of Christmas seals. Dramatically it is a little naive of course, though far less so than others in this group that we have run. Directorially, it is a little out above the average Edison - the players are better handled, and the extras in the background often can be seen to be doing things, instead of just sitting around. Photographically it is often quite interesting too.

GAUMONT-BRITISH PROMOTIONAL REEL (Britain, 1935) 1 reel

When G-B established their 16mm rental library, they put together this pot-pourri of highlights to drum up trade. "Man of Aran" is familiar of course, but the other excerpts - especially a delightful-looking musical called "Aunt Sally" are most intriguing, and it's too bad that they are not in G-B's current catalogue or we'd certainly try to import that particular item.

"THE LOVE NEST" (Buster Keaton Corp. for First National, 1923) Dir: Keaton
With Buster Keaton and Joe Roberts. 2 reels.

The last of Keaton's silent shorts this one was, according to Keaton, well into production before the decision was made to abandon shorts and concentrate solely on features. Nevertheless both this and its predecessor, "Balloonia", have a strong point, a concentration on getting more out of simple gag situations as though, if only subconsciously, Keaton was preparing for a change of format and a move into films with stronger story content. "The Love Nest" is something of a dry-run for "The Navigator", and is full of underplayed black humor. It is apparently non-existent in this country, either legally, officially or otherwise, so we need no apologies for playing a print with foreign titles. One or two of them give hints as to their translation anyway, but with all of them one wonders what on earth they can be saying at such great length, since the comedy flows along beautifully and never needs any explaining. Judging from the few glimpses of coastline that we get, most of it seems to have been shot just off Catalina.

- intermission -

"THE UNKNOWN" (MGH, 1927) Director and original story: Tod Browning
Scenario: Waldemar Young; Camera, Merritt Gerstad; US premiere, June 11 1927 at the Capitol Theatre, NY. 3 reels
With Lon Chaney, Joan Crawford, Norman Kerry, Nick de Ruiz, John George, Frank Lenning, John St. Polis.

Perhaps my lack of enthusiasm for this film should be prefaced by the explanation that I am not a great admirer of Tod Browning ("Freaks" apart) nor of the Browning-Chaney films in general, although of course I have not seen "London After Midnight". Somehow the Chaney MGHs fall into an incredibly stereotyped and familiar pattern, the more so when one recalls the quality of the earlier Metro-Negrolyn entries, particularly "The Monster" and The Penalty.

The styleless and disappointing "He Who Gets Slapped" seemed to set up a formula that MGH followed slavishly: a triangle relationship between the stars, with the only variation in the degree of grotesquerie adopted to exploit Chaney. Only a few days ago I saw "Mockery" - slap, formula, cheap, dull despite being directed by Christiansen, and interesting only for Chaney's quite remarkable performance. Most of the Brownings seem to be rather warped and ugly films, without the redeeming quality of style. (The more one sees of Browning, the better and more enjoyable his least-serious film, "The Mark of the Vampire", seems to become). His conceptions were often interesting, but his execution formula-and ill-posed; a pity he couldn't have assumed "Val Lewton" role of producer, and left the direction to others. Nevertheless, "The Unknown", as typical a Chaney-Browning vehicle as one could ask for, has its moments: certainly it makes more sense that audiences would come to a circus in the hope of seeing horses rip off the strong man's arms than they would flock to see an unfunny clown being slapped by unfunny stooges in "He Who Gets Slapped".

Although copyrighted at 7 reels, "The Unknown" is a very short film; at its NY premiere, it ran for a maximum of 64 minutes (probably less, allowing for a short intermission) and the print (a 35mm original) that I saw in Europe last year ran only 52 mins. No print or negative is known to exist at MGH, and this European print, though slightly trimmed, is substantially complete and in any event the longest print available. It is another blow-up from 9.5mm, but its excellent quality almost belies that.