Monday next, January 26th: John Ford’s "THREE BAD MEN" (1926) with George O’Brien, Olive Borden, Lou Tellegen, Tom Santschi, Frank Campeau, Phyllis Haver.

Note: since next Monday's MMA film is the rarely revived "Vigil in the Night", which runs for 90 minutes, we won't start the Ford film until at least 5.15, giving everybody who wishes ample time to see both. Our program will start at 7.30 in the normal way, but with short subjects of non-major interest. However, as a courtesy to those who are there from the beginning, we would ask that late arrivals from the MMA wait until the doors are opened for the intermission.

January 19 1970

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

A Program of (predominantly Mack Sennett) silent Comedy

"PATTY'S MAGIC PANTS" (Mack Sennett-Keystone, 1914) One reel

Made in very late 1914, "Patty's Magic PANTS" is a very typical Sennett mixture of the period, though a little above the average. There is the usual vulgarity and excess of unmotivated knockabout, but it is a little less frenetic than usual, allows time for one or two individual gags to be developed properly, and has some graceful bits of by-play from Arbuckle.

"FISH" (Biograph, 1916) One reel
Starring Bert Williams.

Biograph, in their last days, were fooundering in a sea of imitation Sennett and Griffith subjects, and the Bert Williams comedies stood out as highpoints of originality - not so much in subject matter as in being showcase vehicles for their Ziegfeld Follies star. Probably the best of them was "A NaturalBorn Gambler" (which we will be repeating before long) but "Fish" is a very enjoyable little diversion. Not much happens in it, but for a concentrated study of the pantomimic style of Williams it is quite unique. Williams was the first Negro to become a bona-fide star in movies, although they did nothing to enhance his already huge stage and vaudeville reputation. Not so curiously, considering the comedy and vaudeville traditions of the day, he purveys the standard Negro stereotype in his act, even to the use of black-face makeup. (He was very fair-skinned), Williams not only shared the bill with W.C. Fields for Ziegfeld, but played together with Fields in a number of acts considered classic at the time. Williams was also a most prolific song-writer, and this rather quiet and uneventful comedy thus hardly gives a reliable guide to his multi-faceted talents. The director is not credited, but the film may well have been made under the supervision of T. Hayes Hunter, director of last week's "The Ghoul". It is extremely well photographed, and the New Jersey locations very pleasing.

"ALL NIGHT LONG" (Pathe-Mack Sennett; 1924) Directed by Harry Edwards
With Harry Langdon, Vernon Dent, Natalie Kingston, Fanny Kelly. 2 reels

The tenth of Langdon's 23 shorts for Sennett between 1924 and early 1926, "All Night Long" is one of the more elaborate in the series, and while not among the best, certainly a most enjoyable comedy. The best sequence - a quiet, pantomimic episode at a dinner table - is unfortunately cut short to return to traditional Sennett slapstick, but that of course is a criticism that can be levelled at all but two or three films in this group. The flashback framework seems a trifle clumsy and irrelevant, almost as though it were designed to utilise old and otherwise unrelated sequences. It isn't - but possibly the short came out a little under-length, and it was more economical to pad it this way than to stage more of the relatively expensive war footage.

"THE HIGH AND THE FLIGHTY" (Warner Brothers, 1935) Directed: Robert Mc Kinnon; 1 reel
There seemed no reason to exclude this delightful Daffy Duck cartoon just because it talks and isn't a Sennett; typically savage, and rather like an animated Laurel & Hardy-Charlie Hall exchange, it's not - as the title might suggest - a spoof on the John Wayne movie.

- intermission -
"THE EXTRA GIRL" (Mack Sennett-Pathé, 1923; released 1924)

Directed by F. Richard Jones; Produced and written by Mack Sennett;
Camera: Homer Scott; Art Direction: S.D. Barna; 6 reels


Very few of the silent Sennett features have survived today; we have "Tillie's Punctured Romance" and "Mickey" from the teens, and "The Extra Girl" and "Down on the Farm" from the 20's, with the best of them all, "Small Town Idol," released only by a 2-reeler, 'Down' and 'Isolated reels. "The Extra Girl" lacks the charm and solid story construction of "Mickey", but it's an enjoyable frolic, and since it pre-dates "Ella Cinders" or "Show People", "Stage Struck" and most of the other small-town-girl-becomes-star movies of the mid and late 20's, one can forgive it for not being as good as they were.

The main trouble with "The Extra Girl" is its rather sloppy construction; with plenty of time to do everything properly, it still neglects to explain characters and motivations; the key character of the villain for example is suddenly just dumped into the movie without any establishing footage at all. Some of this slipshod quality may be due to a missing scene or two; when the original negative for this film was unearthed approximately twelve years ago, it was beginning to decompose and a relatively minor amount of footage was unprintable and had to be deleted. That may account for the unexplained scene of Ralph Graves appearing with a blanket around his coat-less shoulders. (Without the build-up to that scene, it now looks as though the scene might even be out of context since it should perhaps follow the scene where Graves subdues the lion with a water-hose, but that actually isn't the case). However, one can't attribute all of the film's careless editing to missing scenes due to hypo; its current length matches the release length by all but about 90 seconds. (Incidentally, it has never been shown at the fest before, a 16mm print not being available until now; but we did show a 35mm print at the FMA's Saturday morning series about 12 years ago, so a few veterans may have seen it on that occasion).

It does have charm, and it does have good comedy sequences, but somehow it doesn't hang together as it should — though it may work a great deal better with an audience. It's certainly neither top Normand (though personally I have never been that fond of her, and feel that Constance Talmadge was a far superior comedienne) nor top F. Richard Jones, but it's an amusing and thoroughly entertaining film. It's oddly prophetic too that the rather disorganised movie studio should be named Golden State Productions — later the source of one of American International's subsidiary production outfits.

Pathé advertised the film thus: "Just 100% of what an audience picture should comprise — pathos, art, romance, human interest, comedy, thrills, suspense — and the sweetest kind of a love story. "Film Daily" however, was a little more objective in its review: "Another picture based on studio life, with a working thrill in it. Has some first-rate comedy situations, but at times suffers from reading. Mabel Normand, always dependable, gets away with a lot of good stuff and puts her part over well .... however, there is not enough actual work for the star to do, and she is given too many closeups and unimportant bits of business .... Box office angles: you may have to figure on a recent Hollywood sensation in selling this, but you should be able to overcome this ... the film is good popular stuff". The NY Daily News rated it the Best Film of the Month and Louella Parsons reported "Funny enough to tempt Mona Lisa to break out into loud laughter". It was a big money-maker; booked into Los Angeles for a four week run, it was held over for eight, and everywhere else, top business was recorded too.

Sennett's own comments on the film in his autobiography are singularly unreliable; among other things he implies that the Harry Langdon shorts (1924 and the W.C. Fields shorts (1933) were being made simultaneously! Incidentally, among all the obvious stars (Lloyd, Chaplin, Mae Marsh) whose photographs are scattered around in dressing room scenes, it's nice to see Johnny Hines pinned up too.

— William K. Everson

NOTE: As you are probably aware, the Museum of Modern Art is converting Monday to a free, no-admission-price day; also, they are re-scheduling somewhat so that their "Archive" series will play on Mondays. This may, with long films, cause occasional conflicts with our shows, so as a matter of policy, when there is an overlap, our show will always start a little later (as next week) to allow time for those who want to see both. Such late starts will always be announced at these notes the previous week, but in all probability it won't be necessary very often.