March 23 1970

**The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society**

"FOUR FROM NOWHERE" (For-Day Productions 1922) Written, produced and directed by Francis Ford; Scenario by Peggy O'Day; Camera, Mark Thomsites; 5 rls With Francis Ford, Peggy O'Day, Phil Ford, Billie Ford, George Breen.

Arguably, since it has had some pretty healthy competition for the honor over our nearly 20-year operation, "Four From Nowhere" could be the worst film ever shown at the Huff. But in its own perverse way, it is one of the most fascinating, and for a long time we've wanted an excuse to show it. "The Count of Monte Cristo" as co-teacher's project. Yes, the excuse. A perfect spokesman for the really cheap, independent quickie. "Four From Nowhere" also has the advantage of keeping any kind of expense off the screen. Anything really interesting happens out of sight, as for example, the opening Indian massacre. Later on, Francis Ford has to make a 28-mile hike through snow and blizzard - and back again; this he manages within a 24-hour spant, and even does some shopping en route, but all we see of the event is his going out of the cabin door - and coming back in again! Snowed in for the winter, the four have only copies of "The Count of Monte Cristo" and the Bible for diversions; understandably, the vote for Dumas, this allowing for a whole reel of very stagy tableaux of highlights of the book. One just can't believe that they'll have the sheer gall to do this - but they do - and then the bulk of the film is devoted to a modern parallel of the Dumas story. It all really has to be seen not to be believed, and yet it all has a kind of hypnotic fascination. For all of its cheapness, it is at least unpredictable and moves fast; the locations are varied and pleasant, and the camerawork rather good. Paucity of money for sets often results in some quite intriguing pictorial effects; Ford, as a super-capitalist, sits in a dark, tomb-like room with but a single window - obviously just a For-Day studio stage. Yet the result is not unbalanced; the unusual use of space achieved by Griffith with his capitalist's office in "Intolerance" given a still of this scene from "Four From Nowhere," Siegfried Kreuzer could write a caption for it that would make it look like a collaboration between Freud and Fabst! Other typical economies extend to the footage-eating use of over-long titles. Francis Ford and Peggy O'Day called their production outfit For-Day Productions, a pun-like title which in itself invites derision for its probable exaggeration. His early Ince films apart, Ford seems to have collapsed as a director very early in his career, and it's rather sad that such an early and consistent film-maker should have made his greatest contribution to the film industry by the series of lovable drunk roles that he played for brother John in films such as "Steamboat Round the Bend" and "The Wagonmaster." Nevertheless, in its own way, and as a representative of its species, "Four From Nowhere" is very much a part of film history, and we need make no apology for playing it.

"THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO" (United Artists, 1934) Directed by Rowland V. Lee Produced by Edward Small; screenplay by Phillip Dumas, Den Totherog and Rowland V. Lee from the novel by Alexandre Dumas; Camera, Peverell Marley; Music, Alfred Newman; editor, Grant Whytock. ll reels


Oddly enough, we have never run this film before, and since it has had no showing outside of tv for a great many years, a revival seems long overdue. Actually it is rather a disappointing film, and all of the prints we have come across over the past few years have been rather shabby with many minor sequences missing. This however, is a new and fully complete print, and the pleasure of seeing that coast, Donat's filmic performance, and that solid if familiar old story, in such pristine condition, is a real delight. In a large degree for the shortcomings of the film. Its main defect is the typical Edward Small economy - despite the sweep of the story, it's a very cheap production, from the opening stock shots lifted from DeMille's "Yankee Clipper" to the over-use of back projection and small sets. Only in the climactic masque sequence does it ever look like a "big" production. Quite probably, as the first of a tentative new cycle of smashburners, it was something of a gamble in 1934, and the always cautious Small probably didn't want to come down to much on it. Certainly it proved to be a profitable gamble however, as it was a commercial and critical success and often too really top playing time. Oddly enough, Small's 40's "sequel," "The Son of Monte Cristo," though a routine kind of picture, did have really lavish sets and production values. "Count" is hardly a subtle picture - complete to Napoleon stoking his arm into his coat the moment he is aware that the camera is on him - but perhaps in 1934, as the first big sound version of the story, it didn't need to be. In any event, the story is still a good one, and Donat's fine performance holds it all together rather well.