May 25 1920

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

LET KATIE DO IT (Triangle-Pine Arts, 1915) Directed by Sidney Franklin
Written and supervised by D.W. Griffith; 5 reels

An until-now obscure Pine Arts programmer, "Let Katie Do It" would seem to be one of the best films to come out of the Griffith-supervised Triangle program, and it certainly bears comparison with "Hoodoo Arm" and a few others of its ilk that are up to the standards of the personally-produced Griffith films. Griffith did write and personally produce this one, and Sidney Franklin - always an excellent and tasteful director, and at this period rather slavishly emulating D.W.'s methods (either out of sincere admiration, or a shrewd desire to get ahead!) - directs with sure control, a fine eye for composition, and a careful building of detail and suspense. There are so many echoes of Griffith in specific settings - ranging from his Biograph "The Birth of a Nation" - that it's obvious that his "supervision" was more than just casual. On the other hand, Franklin was the physical director, and it is to his credit that he has come up with a film that is the equal of some Griffith personal productions, and in fact quite superior to the equal dis-similar "Scarlet Days". The film is full of surprises, and after the sentimentally opening, one would never anticipate its spectacular and actionful climax, done with the traditional panoramic Griffith long shots, and splendidly out.

The camera moves, and the back-lighting is dramatic and pleasing - even in this partially hyperbolic print, there was as much just in time. And through much of the times: the Mexicans are casually referred to as "the bad Mexicans" - even though the American prospectors/heroes are invading and pillaging their land! Perhaps even more worthy of note is that this must - surely - be the only time that Tully Marshall played the romantic lead!

"THE COCKEYED WORLD" (Fox, 1929) Produced and directed by Raoul Walsh
Story by Laurence Stallings and Maxwell Anderson; dialogue by William K. Wells; Camera, Arthur Edeson; Assistant Director, Archie Buchanan; sets by Marshall Hall, Ben Carre; 11 reels

Although a disappointment today, it's easy to see why "The Cockeyed World" was such a sensation in its day, and one of the permanent boxoffice blockbusters for the Roxy Theatre. Admittedly overlong, it is nevertheless for 1929 - and especially in comparison with Walsh's very slop Edeson and lethargic "In Old Arizona" - a very slick and fast-moving production. Conscious of the fact that it was a talkie, it delivers the goods of this new toy with a vengeance: there isn't an inch of sound-track area left unexploited. When the Flag and Quiet wiscrackers taper off, there are songs, singing and hysterical women, aeroplanes, machine guns and bursting bombs. The assault on the ear-drums never ceases, and while it isn't the kind of frenetic, screaming noise that accompanies so many of the current "with-it" movies, the overall effect is rather like sitting in a restaurant trying to enjoy a good meal, and being diverted by the constant music from a juke-box. At such times, one often wishes one could put in a quarter to two minutes of silence - and so it is here. Nevertheless, the crackle and pop of the dialogue - even some of the too-measured bantering exchanges between the stars - are way above the average for '29, and have all the guts that one would expect from Stallings and Anderson, as well as the vitality and humor of William Well's, a top Broadway revue writer. Some of it is pleasantly ramshackle and vulgar (El Brendel, a paper in one hand, a blonde in the other, announcing that he has "the lay of the land"!), while a lot of the rather marionette commentary on the big business interests behind war, and the reason for American troops wearing down for foreign soil is depressingly up-to-date.

Filmmatically, the film's main weakness is that although it starts in Vladivostock and winds up (presumably) in Nicaragua (via New York) it never really gets anywhere. There is literally no plot: merely situations and running gags, one of them held over from the original "What Price Glory?". Of course, in 1929, this was all less familiar territory. Another sequel, "The Cool Breeze" followed, and by then the Flag-Quint tradition was well established. Laurence Stallings made many more unofficious for Paramount and Fox, and of course the basic idea was followed by Chester Morris & Richard Arlen and many other co-starring he-man teams. It is not the film's fault that it is now over-familiar, but it would certainly be more palatable if shorter. (And how many films in the 1928-31 period revolved around the Nicaragua invasion? I must have seen half-a-dozen - including Capra's "Flight" - this year alone!) One original touch still works well - the raucous, derivative End title! Otherwise, familiar or not, it should still be a good "audience picture".

-- Mrs. K. Everson --