The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

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In Search of Cannats" (Britain, 1937) Produced by Julian Huxley Narration: A.L. Alexander; US release by Educational, under the title "The Private Life of the Cannats"; 1 reel

The British "documentary tradition" of the 30's tends to have been very much over-rated, and while it was far more prolific than the American school, it was consistently rather stodgy, concerned rather rigidly with stark reality, and rarely matching the poetry of such American documentaries as "The Plough that Broke the Plains". Standing apart from the general run of British documentaries however were some exceptionally good nature studies, which managed to be charming and informative without being coy. Far too few of them are available today, and "Cannats" is hardly one of the very best, but it's an enjoyable and typical short of its type.

"Redheads" (Pathé, 1930) Written and directed by Frank T. Davis; produced by E.B. Derr; Camera, Edward Snyder; Musical Director, Josiah Zuro; 2 reels With Nat Carr, Charles Kelsey, Joan Gaylord, Mona Ray, Ethel Davis, Bessie Hill, Katherine Wallace, Jean Carmen.

Anything as unpeachable as this short is somehow as wonderful as it is awful - and incredibly, it is the best of four Pathé 1930 2-reelers that we picked up in a moment of monumental misguidance. Staged on a shopping trip, using the tv device of three camera positions for long shots, medium and close shots, it is primitive and like a bad vaudevillian, determined to keep going on the off-chance that it might at least reach the heights of mediocrity. It doesn't - but the continual bad taste, poor writing, and on a slightly higher level, fascinating costumes (it all takes place in a fashion house) and plump, out-of-step chorus girls keep it somehow pervasively fascinating. At least there's little plot to worry over. The five numerical numbers take up the bulk of the footage. Grabbing most of the spotlight is the indefensibly obscene Mona Ray, prancing around like a midget refugee from a fetish magazine.

"The Night Before Christmas" (United Artists, 1933) Produced by Walt Disney; 1 reel

This charming early Disney Silly Symphony in color was aimed of course at the Christmas market, and thus is free of the marvellous Disney sadism of the period, though it does have a touch or two of robust vulgarity. The color is pleasing, and there's an absolute maximum of animation, with something going on in every corner of the frame.

"TOP HAT" (RKO Radio, 1935) Directed by Mark Sandrich; Produced by Pandro S. Berman; Camera, David Abel; Music by Irving Berlin; Musical Director, Max Steiner; Scenario: Dwight Taylor, Allan Scott; Dance staged by Hermes Pan; With Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, Edward Everett Horton, Eric Blore, Helen Broderick, Erik Rhodes, Tom Ricketts.

By now of course there cannot be anybody who hasn't seen "Top Hat" unless he has avoided it deliberately. It has constantly been available in reissue and (for comparison purposes with this print) it can currently be seen as part of the Janus reissue package, and is at the Museum of Modern Art in about two weeks. Our sole reason for reviving it today is the acquisition of this British print, with every frame of its original 105 minutes. Since its original release it has been constantly slashed and trimmed. The odd line here, or the comedy bit there (the whole scene with Eric Blore and the policeman for example) haven't basically "cut down" the film - but more harmful were the deletions of passages from the musical numbers, all of which were inexplicably shortened. Add all these little trims up, and they represent some 15 minutes of footage - although it may not seem possible until one actually starts counting all the little snips. Apart from that academic aspect, "Top Hat" is still about the most entertaining of all the Astaire-Rogers films. It shares their common fault of being rather confounding to the audience, of somehow "allowing" the audience to be entertained instead of "sharing" the joy, the way "Love Me Tonight" did. The plot is the same formula of cockroaches - just a little wit or substance in the Astaire-Rogers films could have made all the difference - but luckily this one has so much going for it. The Horton-Blore exchanges are a delight and among their best, the song and dance numbers are well-slotted, memorable and plentiful, and the lushness of it all, with those gleaming sets and stress on white decor, is a happy reminder of a Hollywood sadly gone forever.

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