Monday next, April 19th: Two British Technicolor films: "LONDON TOWN" (1946, dir: Wesley Ruggles) with Sid Field, Paula Clark; preceded by "WINGS OF THE MORNING" (1936, dir: Harold Schuster) with Henry Fonda, Annabelle, Leslie Banks.

April 12 1971

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

Veterans of this society need no reminders that quality and/or historic importance is not necessarily a criterion for the inclusion of a film in our schedule; to newcomers we should stress that we often show films that are unquestionably bad if they illustrate some aspect of film history or are so perverse that they have a kind of fascination in themselves. Tonight's two films definitely fall into this category, with the added incentive that one of them was (understandably) never released here theatrically. No theatre or museum in its right mind would ever show these films, so we have a kind of duty to do so; in any event, at the Huff, where we have a membership more bizarre than any film we could ever show, we feel such films find a natural and perhaps even affectionate home. By coupling these two films on one program, we assume that only those specifically interested in off-beat musicals of this type will attend, and that nobody is really expecting another "Love Me Tonight!"

"TAKE A CHANCE" (Paramount, 1933) Directed by Laurence Schwab and Monte Brice; from the musical comedy by B.G.de Sylva, Vincent Youmans, Nacio Brown, Sid Silver, Richard Whiting and Laurence Schwab, with additional songs by Y.P. Harburg, Harold Arlen, Jay Gorney, Arthur Swanson, Roger Edens and Herman Hupfeld; Musical numbers directed by Bobby Connolly; Camera: Joseph Valentine (*see note below); edited by Robert R. Smokey; 8 reels
With James Dunn, Charles "Buddy" Rogers, June Knight, Lillian Roth, Lilian Bond, Cliff Edwards, Dorothy Lee, Charles Richman, Lona Andre, Robert Gleckler.

With those musical credits, that cast, and songs like "Paper Moon" and "Edie Was a Lady", it seems inconceivable that "Take a Chance" should be such a misfire. Yet it is, despite all the elements being there. Based on a hit Broadway musical comedy that starred Jack Haley (James Dunn in the movie) and Ethel Newman (Lillian Roth in the movie) much in the Newman manner (it seems to work on the assumption that the original ingredients are enough, and that somehow the film will direct itself. There is literally NO direction whatsoever, and the film is put together in an incredibly slipshod manner. Even a simple shot of somebody walking across a nightclub floor is a mess because nobody apparently thought of taking protection or cutaway shots, and there thus isn't just enough thought of how to cover the action. The editor, admittedly, was faced with an impossible task - yet it's significant that there seems to be no official record of an editor named Smokey so it may well be a cover-up name; in any event, whoever he was, it seems unlikely that he would have been able to erase David Lean, Robert Wise, Bob Robson and other editors who went on to bigger and better things as directors.
The print credits Joseph Valentine as the cameraman, yet it is not otherwise among his official credits, and his half-dozen films for 1933 were all done for Fox, RKO and Columbia in Hollywood. (This was a New York production). Other sources give William Steiner as the cameraman, more likely since he was working in NY at the time, with "Hotel Variety" as his other 1933 credit. (Interestingly, two former Griffith cameramen - Bixler and LePicard - worked with him on that quickie!) The film skillfully wastes great and vivacious Dorothy Lee up to the last reel, and presents as its climactic highlight some of the most skits that ever perpetrated, despite the uproarious reaction from the audience in the film. Hanley thus underdosed the film, we'll admit that there are redeeming features - namely Kiss Lee and especially the charming June Knight - but we'll leave you the fun of being surprised and entertained by the film's few unexpected plus factors.


By comparison, "The Heart of a Man" is an unqualified masterpiece; certainly it is quick, glossy and professional. Again it seems to have all the ingredients, computerised to make the film a hit. Unfortunately they were ingredients that were sure-fire twenty years earlier - a cooking up of two Wilcox movies - and as Frankie Vaughan goes into a dry-ice mist dream sequence, one can't help thinking of the Hayworth or Marlo Pratt doing exactly the same scene at Columbia two decades earlier and even then without much inspiration. However, with its songs, fantasy, melodrama and disorient sex, "Heart of a Man" is at least entertaining, though one can see why it sold directly to tv here and never otherwise released. (Even its tv exhibition was limited). There are some bright lines and good production values; Anne Heywood as always is vivacious and charming - this will bear she took her clothes off in every picture - and any Brits among us may be interested to note Peter Sinclair (well known on British radio and in music halls in the 30's and 40's) as the trump.

--- Ms. K. Everson ---