June 7, 1921

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

"Reggae Mixes In" (Fine Arts-Triangle, 1916) Directed by Christy Cabanne; supervised by D.W. Griffith; story by Roy Somerville; 5 reels.

The sixth, and one of the least-known, of Fairbanks' 13 films for Triangle, "Reggae Mixes In" falls just a little below the overall standards of the series. It is far from being one of the weakest, yet it doesn't compare with such films as "Manhattan Madness" and "American Aristocracy" which were the equal of some of the best of his later Paramount features. The main trouble is the lack of John Emerson and Anita Loos on the script, and of a good director like Emerson or Dean. "Reggae" follows the basic formula of the group, but the balance and spirit are somewhat wrong. It is all taken much too seriously, and even Doug appears worried and concerned at times, instead of bouncing through anything with his customary zip. The plot is vaguely in the mold of Chaplin's "Easy Street", and indeed it emerges rather as "Easy Street" might itself have emerged had Chaplin suddenly decided to play the same script straight. Nevertheless, it has plenty of action, a good fight (again played a shade too seriously), and a charming performance from Bebe Love. The continuity is a bit choppy, due to this print having been copied from a rather tattered 28mm print. Not much is actually missing, mainly a matter of real-end transitions; but the triangles were well acted, and, brief scenes missing from a short, light picture can often inflict more structural damage that much greater amounts of footage missing from longer pictures.

"The First Born" (Gainborough, 1928) Directed by Miles Mander; scenario, in collaboration with Alma Reville, from the novel "Casie" and play "Those Common People", both by Miles Mander; presented by C.M. Woolf and Michael Balcon; Art Director, C.W. Arnold; Camera, Walter Blakely; Asst. Director, Lionel Rich; Titles, Ian Dalrymple; editor, Arthur Tavares; 7 reels.

The Cast: Hugo Boyd (James Mander); Madeleine Carroll (Madeleine Carroll); Lord Harborough (John Loder); Nina de Lande (Eliza Asherton); Sylvia Finlay (Margot Armand); Derek Finlay (Ivo Dawson); Phoebe Shavers (Harriet Roach); Dickie (John St. John);Dot (Naomi Jacobs); Butler (Bernard Vaughan); Mr. Impert (Walter Winchelow); Maid (Beryl Egerton); Stephen, the first-born (Theodore Mander)

Although the N.Y. Times ran a rave review (from London) for this film, acclaiming it as one of the best British films of the period and a notable directorial debut for Miles Mander, I can find no trace of it ever having been released here. Considering its strong story-values, and the supremely unimportant British silents that were imported to the U.S. in the late silent period, it's hard indeed that this one should have been lost in the shuffle—unless it has escaped me through a title change. Here at the Huff we've seen one of Mander's later directorial efforts from Australia; in our next quarter we'll be seeing the sound remake of "The Lodger", which he co-scripted with Paul Rotha, but this is the film that, it was thought, would establish him as a major director. While it didn't, it's an interesting essay in Wellesian writing-directing, and it was certainly well remembered by other British directors. When Mander died a few years ago, the tributes paid to his fellow actors and other film associates invariably recalled this film.

For the period, it rather surprisingly rejects all of the Germanic lighting and set design techniques which so dominated the British industry. While naturally, considering its origins, a little theatrical, Mander obviously is aware of the need to make it as visual as possible; a two-way conversation is interestingly broken up into a series of closeups dissolving into one another, while a phone conversation sequence likewise is interestingly designed. When he has a chance to use the full language of the cinema, Mander really uses it, as in the dynamic sequence of the fall down the elevator shaft. The fact that story seems a trifle stodgy at first, but is involved and requires close attention. The last-minute payoff is worthy of a Tod Browning-Lon Chaney twist, and is much less artificial or predictable. Thanks to constant subjective shots and moving camerawork, the film keeps physically on the move even when not too much appears to be happening. Madeleine Carroll and Miles Mander both play very well, with Mander in his most prolific period— he was shutting back and forth between London and Hollywood and Berlin in his fluent German making him a much-in-demand star in the days of early talkies and foreign versions—is likewise quite effective in a non-demanding role. The print, a toned original, is brittle and quite old; we hope you'll bear with us during the occasional continuity jumps, due to about three obviously missing scenes. The very last scene—the girl deciding to phone her rejected suitor—is missing, but the story has been fully wrapped up and the solution made perfectly clear. —— Wm. K. Everson ——