Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

October 4, 1971

WONDERS OF THE YELLOWSTONE (1917) Produced by GLACIER NATIONAL PARK (1916)
Burton Holmes

We've rarely—if ever—run travelogues before, but these early Burton Holmes split-reelers (each less than ten minutes, and designed to be coupled with another short) are rather charming, not least in their deliberate picture-postcard effects, heightened by the rich toning.

THE RAG DOLL (Universal, 1928) a Leaume Novelty, directed by Jacques Bolen. Story by Sam B. Jacobsen; 1 reel

The Leaume Novelty series often served as a sounding board for the trying out of stylistic photographic ideas, or as training grounds for new players and directors. All of them were interesting essays in making pleasing shorts out of literally nothing. This is not one of the more striking entries, and it probably owes its inspiration to Hans Andersen's "Steadfast Tin Soldier", but nonetheless it's an interesting if rather sinister little work.

THE BLUE COYOTE CHERRY CROP (Edison, 1914) Directed by Ashley Miller Story by C.W.L. Emis; one reel


Like all Edison shorts, even the later ones, this little western drama is quite clumsily constructed and is primitive indeed compared to the Biograph, Ince and Vitagraph films of several years earlier; but it's a stunningly good print, preserves a goodly portion of the Edison Steak Company (Frank Scully is absent, alas) and does have a certain rather naive charm.

THE 42nd STREET SPECIAL (Warner Brothers, 1933) One reel

This extended newsreel item is obviously no more than a publicity puff for "42nd Street", and as such, the various executives and stars who appear seem curiously ill-prepared. None of the stars of the film are on hand at all, Darryl Zanuck's compliments seem worthy of a production head, and most of the stars seem very second echelon— with the exception of Bette Davis, who exudes poise and charm. Leo Carrillo's reference to FDR as "President Rosenfelder" may or may not have been a deliberate faux-pas, but it adds a welcome touch of humor.

- intermission -

"FAZIL" (Fox, 1927) Produced and directed by Howard Hawks From the play "L'Insoumise" by Pierre Fromanda and the English adaptation, "Prince Fazil"; adaptation by Philip Klein, scenario by Seton I. Miller; cameret L. William O'Connell; settings, William S. Darling; edited by Ralph Dixon; Musical Score arranged by S.Z. Rothafel, and directed by Asst. Dir: Jason Zineling

With Charles Farrell, Greta Nissen, John Boles, Mae Busch, Tyler Brooke, John T. Murray, Vadim Urenoff, Josephine Dorio, Gino Corrado, Dale Fuller, Hank Mann, Eddie Sturgis, Erville Alderson.

Dedicated autocrats will be rather pressed to find typical Hawkian ingredients of either story, characters or style in this tongue-in-cheek romp. One of the plethora of exotic Eastern romances that followed in the wake of "The Sheik", and were renewed with the success of "Son of the Sheik", it casts Farrell not very convincingly as an Arab chieftain, and pits him rather amusingly against Greta Nissen. The marvellously flashbanging unfortunately establishes the wrong note right away; one sits back prepared to enjoy its jovial louchery and campy humor only to have it turn serious without one being really aware of it, so that there is no preparation for the emotionalism of the climax and it just isn't as moving or as dramatic as it might be. Definitely in its favor however is its short and snappy pacing, its very handsome and luxurious production mountings, and above all its musical score—which, unlike the score for "Street Angel", avoids constant repetition of themes. All of this technique may be argued on fairly specious plot material. The whole film has the look of a Victorian pornographic novel from which all of the pornography has been removed, though the bawdy scenes retain a definite eroticism. Josef's Lib advocate will doubtless find the film horrendous, but conversely supporters of Fae Supremacy will applaud much of the modus-operandi of the barbaric East! Rediscovered masterpiece it most certainly isn't, but in any event it's good to welcome another lost sheik back to the fold. (It's also a sobering reminder that not all of the "officially" lost films can materially change recorded film history when rediscovered.)

-- W.K.Everton --