December 20, 1971

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

a Raoul Walsh program

"WHEN THIEF MEETS THIEF" ("JUMP FOR GLORY") (United Artists, 1937)
Directed by Raoul Walsh; produced by Marcel Hellman; screenplay by John Keehan from the novel by Gordon McConnell; Camera, Victor Arrowsme; editor, Conrad Von Foil; Original length, 8 reels; this edited print, 6 reels

It is nearly eight years since we last ran this enjoyable melodrama, and then the turnout was slight due to a major conflict with a Lincoln Centre show, so it well deserves a repeat exposure. Walsh was very much in the doldrums in the mid-'30's. After his prestigious and vigorous early talkies, his whole series for Paramount - "Big Brown Eyes," "St. Louis Blues," "The Black Cat," "Enchanted," etc. - seemed tired and bored efforts, and it wasn't until he went to Warner's in '39 that the old spirit and zest returned. Highlighting this mid-'30's film however were a duo that he made in England. "O.H.K.Y." was an elaborate if formula war film, a pop darling in England, while the second film (it's British title of "Jump for Glory" is both better and subtler, though its secondary meaning isn't apparent until the closing reel) was less of a commercial hit, but did well enough and certainly holds up nicely today. For years (prior to our last showing, and subsequent to it) we have been looking for a complete print of it, but all that seems to have survived (in 16mm at least) is this heavily edited version. Since the film was hardly a classic to begin with, it cannot justifiably be called "out of the blue," but, it has been quite sensibly cut, with most of the excised footage coming from the slower opening episodes. Only once is there an obvious cut and on the whole it plays quite smoothly. It was always a well-paced romantic melodrama, well above average of its kind. Certainly not a major Walsh film, it is nevertheless one of his best from this generally disappointing period, and is well served by its three stars. Fairbanks is as pleasant as he always was in the '30's, Hale is a fine villain, and Valerie Hobson is ideally cast as a socialite whoop who reforms.

--- intermission ---

"THE MAN WHO CAME BACK" (Fox, 1930; released, 1931) Directed by Raoul Walsh
Scenario by Edwin Burke from a play by Jules Eckert Goodman and John Fleming

It was too early in the sound careers of Gaynor and Farrell for Fox to be deliberately trying to sabotage them in order to be in a position not to renew their contracts, or to renegotiate them at a lesser figure. Had it come a little later, one might have suspected such motivation in putting them into a picture like this. As it is, one must just blame - or credit - some genius at Fox who had tired of the simplicity and purity of the studio's classic young lovers, and decided to mix some raw meat in with the light pastry. Certainly it must have been quite a jolt to the fans to see Charles Farrell drunk for most of the picture, and Janet Gaynor as a dope addict who even does a kimono to strut around in a Shanghai bordello! Drugs and drink become convenient barriers in the path to reform and social acceptance, and the rather facile cues aren't so easy to take in this day and age. However, as a piece of old-fashioned theatrical hokum it is vastly entertaining and not always predictable. Janet Gaynor does surprisingly well in the for-her unfamiliar kind of role, and is both touching and dramatic - if a little too healthy-looking for a drug addict. Charles Farrell's character is as weak and lack-lustre as always, but the change of a little better than usual it is too much for Leslie Fenton's voice was dubbed in for his throughout. Incidentally for those of you who, like me, know they haven't seen it before (or the silent version with George O'Brien) but still find one high highlight (Gaynor's big renunciation scene) very familiar, it's probably because this scene was used for Alice Faye's introduction early in "Hollywood Cavalcade". She plays quite a lengthy excerpt (with Don Ameche "discovering" her in the audience) and looked an even healthier and plumper drug addict in Technicolor than Miss Gaynor!

--- W.R. Everson ---