January 31, 1972

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

Disney animation: 3 examples, 1932-4
3 reels

Here are three charming early Disney sound cartoons that arrived too late for inclusion in our recent Disney program. MICKEY'S GALA PREVIEW (1933) has some evocative and accurate caricatures of Hollywood stars of the day; THE KLONGIKE KID (1932) is another fast-paced, maxima-ination subject that clearly owes its inspiration to "The Gold Rush," and GULLIVER MICKEY (1934) is a good spoof on the Swiftable — with a lively monster spider added — although it takes rather too long to get into the meat of the story. The titles above are the originals; our prints are the slightly (but not harmfully) edited non-theatrical editions and carry related but changed titles. Incidentally, prior to the three Mickey Mouse cartoons, we're showing one other short which we'll say a little more about immediately prior to its showing.


The American serial that will live up to the reputation of the whole silent serial genre has yet to be found, and even if "The Green Archer" should ever turn up and be as good as it's cracked up to be, all of its thunder by now will have been stolen by Feuillade. But in the meantime, this Ultra-lively episode is a good deal closer to what we have been led to expect of the silent chapter-play, although since it is an independent and Eddie Polo's last, it is presumably a long way below his best standards — and his doubles are a bit obvious at times. Gypsy polo player and Western star Polo leads a gang of bandits and Westerners before they are on the job that is still on hand as convenient villains and there's some fascinating East Coast location work, ranging from rural New Jersey to New York and Brooklyn, not always convincingly matched up, but a delight to see nonetheless.

THE CHRISTIAN (Goldwyn, 1922; rel: 1923) Directed by Maurice Tourneur; Camera: Charles Van Enger; Edited by Paul Bern (also credited with the scenario in some sources, but this is unconfirmed); 8 reels With Dixie Lee, Arleen Whelan, Omelias Haven, Gareth Hughes, Cyril Chadwick, Mahlon Hamilton, Claude Gillingwater, Joseph Dowling, Alla Pringle, John Herdman, Beryl Mercer, Robert Alden, Billie Davenport, Alice Hoppe, Harry Northrup, Eric Mayne, William Moran.

Additional credit: Art Director, Cedric Gibbons

The more of Tourneur's films that are re-discovered (not that there has been that many, unfortunately) the more definite the confirmation seems to be that his best films were all pre-1920, and his later ones increasingly disappointing. It is known that Tourneur was dissatisfied with his later Hollywood work, but had little control over his assignments and less over the way he made them. That his great pictorial virtuosity never deserted him however is proven by one of his later French films of the mid-20's, the superb "The Devil's Hand," which we hope to show shortly. "The Christian" is, certainly, a disappointment though one must make allowances for the absurd story-line. It had been filmed before by Vitaphone in 1914 — successfully — and Tourneur's version was also a critical and public success, the reviews stressing that despite its religious theme, the story was good, and that the soft-telling technique was successful. One must also make many allowances for this print; just because it wasn't a major film, the "preservation work was slighly out of the print was 'slipped' — the print wasn't cleaned, and instead of fusing over short damaged sections, they were arbitrarily clipped out, resulting in many jerky jump-cuts. The location work on the Isle of Man and in London is often quite exciting, many images beautifully framed, and one can imagine that in a good toned 35mm original, the pictorial beauty of the film may have more than offset the dramatic absurdity of what the main titles somewhere, someone had offended thanks to its overall treatment as a classic masterpiece. Certainly its story is as colorful as its morality is inexplicable, and the excess of retribution that comes to the hero at the end seems to be out from the same Victorian cloth that disposed of Stroheim at the end of "Blind Husbands". Quite incidentally, the film seems to be a blood-brother to "Splendor in the Grass" in suggesting that celibacy leads to wild-eyed madness. A reflection on the rapidity with which communications media have overtaken us is the sequence in which Dix, anxious to repudiate the "end of the world" stories attributed to him in a pre-radio and pre-television age, has to go to the race-track to find an audience — although one would assume that any London newspaper would have jumped at the chance of such a circulation-building story! Its bizarre story-line, well-handled mob scenes, extensive use of locations and an extremely interesting cast certainly make "The Christian" a fascinating film, even if a Tourneur let-down, and a less successful translation of a Sir Neil Caine novel than Hitchcock's "The Manxman".

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