The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

A CHILD OF THE PARIS STREETS (Triangle-Fine Arts, 1916) Directed by Lloyd Ingraham; supervised by D.W. Griffith; Scenario by Mary O'Connor; an incomplete print of an original 5-reeler.


The importance of Griffith's personal involvement in the Fine Arts releases that he supervised is demonstrated by this film which, it seems safe to hazard a guess, he probably was able to devote little time to. It is remarkable, of course, that in the year of "Intolerance" he had any time at all to devote to his share of the films under the Triangle banner, but the record shows that he did. He even wrote the story for another Marsh-Harron Lloyd Ingraham-directed release of that same year, "Hoodoo Ann", and his hand shows in the final result. "A Child of the Paris Streets" (an interesting forerunner to the much more ambitious French "Mysteries of Paris", due for showing in December) looks as though everybody was carefully emulating the Griffith formula, but didn't know quite how to bring it off. Admittedly, the print has some badly hyped sections and is clearly missing substantial footage; yet it has beginning, middle and end, its continuity makes sense, and it can presumably be considered a representative version of the original. The climaxes in particular seem sadly below the prevailing standards of Griffith excitement, and in fact doesn't represent much of an advance from 1909's "The Lonely Villa". Still, newly-discovered Triangles are rare these days, and it's always good to fill in one more gap, especially of a Mae Marsh vehicle.

The Tully Marshall-Jennie Lee relationship somewhat foreshadows the Franklinds in Griffith's later "Orphans of the Storm", and an odd "foot" scene involving Tully Marshall also calls to mind his later foot-fetish Barco Sisters in "The Merry Widow". Incidentally, W.S. Van Dyke appears to be an extra in one or two scenes.

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THE FIRST YEAR (Fox, 1925; released 1926) Directed by Frank Borzage.
Scenario by Frances Marion from the 1921 play by Frank Craven; camera, Charles Lyson; Art Dir., Bummy Dunn; 6 reels.

With Matt Moore (Tom Tucker), Katharine Fanning (Gladie Livingston); John Patrick (Dick Loring); Frank Currier (Mr. Livingston); Frank Cooley (Mr. Fairchild); J. Farrell MacDonald (Mr. Earston); Virginia Madison (Mrs. Livingston); Corolynne Snowdon (Hattie).

Coming right after Borzage's "Lazy Bones" (and probably made quickly, wholly in the studio, after the more ambitious location-shooting of that lovely film) one's expectations for "The First Year" are high — not least because the original reviews were exceptionally good, not only stressing the film's fidelity to the original play, but also the dramatic touches that Borzage inserted throughout. Alas (unless it is the kind of film that needs audience reaction to bring out its warmth) it is a little hard to find those touches; even a basically weak and disappointing Borzage like "Red Girl" does have those odd magical moments typical of him, and seemingly so absent here. If anything, "The First Year" seems almost entirely faithful to the form and content of the play, and when it "opens up" — as in the rainstorm sequence where the wife is unwittingly abandoned — it does take on a more spontaneous quality. Even the amusing running gag with the inept Negro maid seems a bit heavy-handed after a while. Too, the hero — in Matt Moore's hands — is frankly uninteresting, and quite undeserving of the devotion of the charming Kathryn Fanning. However, generalisations about films like this — and particularly Borzage films like this — are perhaps dangerous; when based on solitary viewings; music; and audience response, often bring them to the mark. In any event, it's good to have another lost Borzage back among us, if only for the record. The film was quite faithfully remade in 1932 by William K. Howard, with Janet Gaynor and Charles Farrell in the leads, and Leila Bennett rather surprisingly cast as Hattie, the maid.

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Tonight we are faced with the stiff competition of "We Are Not Alone" at the RKA and Chaney's "The Monster" at V. It's unfortunate when choices have to be made between so many riches, but our very schedule is tight and inflexible, and there is just nothing we can do — except pass the beginning program so that RKA attendees can at least arrive in time for "The First Year".

Not wanting to waste good material on a "filler" slot, we have added to the front of the show one of George Jessell's TV 3-reelers, Jessell's graceful and artificial personality is no asset, and his film history is often silly — he even gives the wrong Costello as star of "Lights Of New York" — but the clips of Gilda and Janice are interesting, and the sheer fakery and gimmickry of the presentation has some academic interest too.