September 24, 1927

Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

**TWO "LOST" MUSICALS**

"BOTTOMS UP" (Fox, 1934) Directed by David Butler; produced by B.C. DeSylva;
Original story by DeSylva, Butler and Sid Silvers; Camera, Arthur Miller;
Art Director, Gordon Wiles; Dance sets and costuming, Russell Patterson;
Music and lyrics, Harold Adamson, Gus Kahn, Burton Lane, Richard Whiting;
Conductor, Harry Warren; Director, Harold Heseltine; Musical Director, Constantin Bakaleinikoff; 8 fls
With Florence Vidor, Tracy, John Boles, Pat Patterson, Herbert Mundin, Sid Silvers,
Harry Green, Thelma Todd, Robert Renner O'Connor, Della Henderson,
Susanne Kaaren, Douglas Wood.

"Bottoms Up" starts out beautifully, with brisk, snappy dialogue and that
curious mixture of warmth and cynicism that marked several depression era
movies, most notably of course "Hallelujah I'm a Bum". The charm and grace of
Pat Patterson (now largely forgotten as an actress, remembered more as the
wife of Charles Boyer) is another early bonus. But as the film progresses,
nothing happens to it - seemingly it develops into a bigger film than was
planned. It's a doleful sort of play safe by adapting itself more and more to
a standard formula. The disappearance of the early relaxed spontaneity
prevents the film from becoming the exciting rediscovery it first appears to be.
Its loss for all these years is not a major one, although of course it's always
good to have another Tracy vehicle back among us - or any musical with so much
Hollywood background. The film was considered big enough to premiere at the Radio
City Music Hall (another Tracy film, "The Show Off" was also playing in NY at
the same time) but is another one of those curious Fox films (like the recently
released "Little Girl"
) which appears to have undergone inexplicable post-production
editing. The culprit here has been Thelma Todd. She is pointedly excised from
the credits, and many of her scenes were obvious either not filmed or
not completed. There's never enough of Thelma Todd anyway, but here the shortage is
critical: she just disappears from many key scenes and attempts to cut around
her are jarring. She had a busy schedule in 1934, with a total of six films, so
possibly there was a shooting overlap, or a production delay. (She died in 1935,
and "Bottoms Up" was released in the Spring of '34, so it's not a question of
her role being incompletely because of her death, as in fact happened with "The
Bohemian Girl".) The story has been quite sprightly, though the final "big
number is rather anti-climactic, and is one of those irritating sequences
that is supposedly being shot by a camera crew as part of a movie, but emerges
on screen with all of the intercutting and elaborate optical effects already
accomplished. Even John Ford, who "edited" within the camera, was never able
to have his players disappear into thin air, or emerge from it, "Hollywood-fashion,
the way John Boles does here!

"HAPPY DAYS" (Fox 1929, rel. 1930). Directed by Benjamin Stoloff, assisted by
Walter Catlett; Story by Sidney Lanfield, dialogue by Edwin Burke; Camera,
Lucien Andrict, John Schmitz, J.C. Taylor; 8 reels
With Marjorie White, Charles Evans, Richard Keene, Stuart Erwin, Martha Lee
Sparks, Clifford Dempsey and Janet Gaynor, Charles Farrell, Victor Malaglen,
Edmund Lowe, Ed Prendel, William Collier sr., Will Rogers, Tom Patricole,
Dixie Lee, George Jessel, Nick Stuart, Bar Bell, Frank Albertson, Sharon Lynne, Jack
Smith, Lew Brice, J. Farrell MacDonald, Walter Catlett, Frank Richardson,
Brothers, "Gentleman Jim" James Corbett, George Mann, Caroline Corbett and his
lyricists, singers and extras; this extensive listing can be found on p.324 of
the American Film Institute catalogue of films from 1921-1930.

"Happy Days" was made only partially to cach in on the then-current vogue for
all-star studio reviews; more importantly it was a showcase for the wide-screen
Grandeur Film, and opened on the world's largest screen at the Roxy. Critics
generally were impressed by its size and magnified sound. (In the May issue of "Film
Connoisseur" there's a review for the same movie, editing largely unnecessary
one of the advantages (?) of CinemaScope when that process was unveiled. The
film has been missing for years, and of course in this 16mm print the Grandeur
process is hardly done full justice, although from the size of the sets, and the
concentration on numbers with massed chorines and singers and dancers, one can
imagine that it was indeed quite impressive visually at the time. However, what
is more important today is how well it survives as an entertainment. It is
sprightly, only occasionally corny and obvious, it has a semblance of a plot
to go with its entertainment function, it's all quite short for two hours, with a great deal of
tedium and padding; this one very sensibly keeps to a snappy 80 minutes. If it's not as
good as "The King of Jazz" or the best moments of "Paramount on Parade", it's
still overall - one of the better entries in that brief but prolific cycle of
all-star musicals. (Note: copyrighted at 9 reels, but in actual length not
quite eight; likewise "Bottoms Up" is an official 16-reel film that boils down to 8)