Next program: October 29th. NOVEMBER (1933, dir: Frank Lloyd); Clara Bow's last movie and a surprisingly good one; a remake of "The Barker", with Richard Cromwell, Preston Foster; presented by ONE MORE SCREEN (1935, dir: Henry King) one of the most oft-polluted of all the depression films, with Janet Gaynor, Warner Baxter and the definitive Stepin Fetchit role!

Oct 15, 1973

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

WHISPERING WIRES (Fox, 1926) Directed by Albert Ray
Adaptation by Andrew Bennison and Henry Leveridge, and scenario by L.G. Sigby
from a (1918) play and Saturday Evening Post story by Kate L. McLaurin;
Production supervisor, Kenneth Hawks; Camera, George Schneiderman; titles by
William Conselman; Art, Director, Horace Hough. 6 reels
With Anita Stewart, Edmund Burns, Charles Clary, Otto Matieson, Pack Swain,
Arthur Housman, Charles Conklin, Frank Capra, Mayme Kelso, Scott Welsh,
Charles Sisson, Cecille Evans.

Albert Ray was an independent producer-director whose smaller films (like Monogram's "The 13th Guest" or Allied's "A Shrink in the Night") often looked much bigger and better than the average independent quickie -- but whose films for bigger companies (like tonight's film, or the first of Universal's Johnny Mack Brown westerns, "Desperate Trails") somehow had a cheap and "independent" look to them. Fox obviously came up with a lot of help (or protection) for his here, with one of their (and John Ford's) best cameramen, an efficient supervisor in Kenneth Haws, Howard's brother, and generally good production mountings. But if it's Fox or the surface, it's still Monogram underneath, and a curiosity indeed for a major company. Made during the height of the old-house-comedy-thriller vogue, it contains elements that were popular and fresh then, but have been blunted since by too much repetition. Oddly enough, in a historical sense, the weakest element (the dumb cop comedy relief, which eats up a reel of running that slows down the enjoyably old-fashioned melodramatic plot) is the most important. Pack Swain and Arthur Housman prove to be suspicious forerunners of Laurel and Hardy in "Who Do You Think?" That film, of early 20, was the first in which Laurel and Hardy really worked as a team, and the first in which their traditional costumes appeared. Here -- in time for Laurel and Hardy and/or Roach to have seen it -- are Swain and Housman in the same kind of action and with those same costumes. It can probably never be proven whether or not Laurel and Hardy did see this film; even if they did, their own building on the two uninspired models was so extensive that they deserve all the more credit for realizing such potential in its sub-embryonic stage. But one would like to believe that when they did see it, it helped to sustain the belief that in the whole jigsaw of film history every little piece can make a contribution, sometimes one quite transcending its own limited worth.

THE WHISTLE (William S. Hart Productions for Paramount, 1921) Directed by
Lamert Hillyer; Adapted by Hillyer from a story by Roy Wilmoth and Ulm
Lyman; Cast: James August, Janet Cline, James August, J.C. Hobson; art title
paintings by Harry Barwick. 1 reel
With William S. Hart, Frank Brownlee, Myrtle Stedman, Georgie Stone, Will Jim
Hutton, Richard Hendrick, Robert Bertman.

With a plot that curiously foreshadows "Nancy Steele is Missing" (a Fox film of
the 30's) "The Whistle" is an interesting example of Hart's occasional forays
into the non-Western field. It's also a cunning example of how to make a strong,
still quite personal film, and yet retain several elements of widespread
popular appeal. There's a full of a fight scene for the action addicts, the
overall story has far more emotional appeal to the ladies than the average Hart
film, and the grim elements of the plot (especially the death of Hart's son) are
handled so deftly that children are not likely to be upset. (The son is killed
off before audience have really had a chance to build up a liking for him, so
his death serves as a dramatic motivation for the story without casting a pall
of gloom over the proceedings at the same time). Although slow-moving after
the fast-paced opening, the film has real power, a good story-telling sense, and
an atmosphere of realism that is helped along by use of unfamiliar locations
and the use of a genuine factory. Hart's own stern intensity is at its most
concentrated, and makes us regret all the more that we were denied a film in
which Hart, Lars Hanson, George Arliss and Buster Keaton appeared as members
of the same family (a Western "House of Rothschild" perhaps).

William F. Eversen

PLEASE NOTE THE CHANGE IN OUR NEXT PROGRAM. A REVISED SCHEDULE IS ON DISPLAY
TODAY FOR YOUR ADVANCE INFORMATION. THESE WILL BE IN THE MAIL TO YOU ALL
AT THE END OF THIS WEEK. IF YOU THINK YOU DO NOT HAVE A SPECIAL ADDRESSED ENVELOP
OR FILE WITH ME, PLEASE MAIL ME ONE AT 118 W, 79th St, NYC 10024 BY THE END