Tonight's program, and tomorrow night's at the New School ("Paddy the Next Best Thing" and "A Face in the Sky") provide a unique opportunity to catch up with four virtually lost films, since no negatives exist or are likely to be made, and all that survives are the rapidly deteriorating studio preservation prints, and these single 16mm prints made from them. Warner Baxter admirers are in for a special bonanza, since he stars in three of the four!

THEIR MAD MOMENT (Fox, 1931) Directed by Hamilton MacFadden and Chandler Sprague; Scenario by Leon Gordon from the novel "Basquerie" by Eleanor Mercein; Associate Producer, A. L. Rockett; Camera, Arthur Todd; 5 reels With Warner Baxter, Dorothy Mackaill, Zasu Pitts, Mano O'Neill, Lawrence Grant, Nella Walker, Mary Doria, Leon Janney, John St. Polis, Douglas Walton.

Clearly something went sadly wrong with this film. Neither the print itself, nor most of the reference sources, give a directorial credit; the film was withheld from press reviewers until two months after release, and it is obviously much shorter than any film starring Warner Baxter, a major name of that early sound period, should be. chalk it up as a casualty of that strange period in Fox's history when it was virtually leader-less and thus had no clearly defined policy. A lot of really worthwhile films got made because there was nobody to stop them, and conversely some pointless films got made too because nobody headed them off at the script stage. Misfire or not, "Their Mad Moment" is too short to be boring, anything with Dorothy Mackaill is worth looking at, and it's difficult from this distance to guess whether its climax delighted - or angered - depression-era audiences, although admittedly setting the whole film so far away from America geographically does also minimize its application to contemporary reality.

AMATEUR DADDY (Fox, 1932) Directed by John Elystone; Scenario by Doris Malloy and Frank Dolan from "Scotch Valley" by Mildred Crane; Additional dialogue by William Conselman; Camera, James Wong Howe; 7 reels With Warner Baxter, Marion Nixon, Rita LeRoy, Frankie Darro, Lucille Powers, David Landau, William Pawley, Clarence Wilson, Joan Breslan, Gail Kornfeld, Joe Hachey, Harry Demkinson, Edwin Stanley, Nora Cecil, John Elliott.

Despite its rather trivial title - deliberately designed no doubt to stress the film's affinity with the successful Baxter-Gaynor "Daddy Long Legs" of the year before - "Amateur Daddy" is a surprisingly powerful and often moving little film. Very much like a silent Mary Pickford vehicle, it mixes pathos, romance, comedy and melodrama in neatly equal doses, and is also very much of a reflective product of the depression years. There are several plot loose-ends (did Warner Baxter ever finish his engineering project?) and some surprising lapses in expertise -- a long-awaited fight between hero and villain is badly staged (surprisingly from director Elystone, an old Tom Nix director) and unconvincing, done almost entirely in extreme long shot presumably to cover the doubles for Baxter. But on the whole, it is a charming and sometimes poignant piece of romantic melodrama that works rather well, and benefits a great deal from the extensive use of outdoor and rural locations, well photographed by James Wong Howe. It's also good to see again a couple of wonderfully unwholesome villains (Landau and Pawley), mean and unpleasant just because they like it that way. (So many depression movies stress the need for good neighborliness; it's good to see these two rascals refusing to accept that as an excuse for the invasion of their privacy, or the curbing of their selfishness). There's an added bonus for the inmate sadism in all of us in the episode of Rita LeRoy finally turning on and betraying husband Landau in the climax; we know that after "The End" title she is going to have the tar walloped out of her, and since she is also a somewhat unsympathetic character we can enjoy the prospect without guilt!

-- WM.K. Ewerson --