The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

Sept. 30, 1974

Announcement: Today should be the last of the two sessions where we have to "rough it" with makeshift screen facilities. By our next meeting, the new large screen will have been installed and we'll be back to normal. With our small audiences, the inconvenience tonight should not be great. I'm sure a couple of unfortunate conflicts between our schedule and that of the MMA, and unfortunately there's nothing that can be done. Were they at the end of the schedule, the dates could be re-arranged and delayed; in the middle of a schedule, with the prints committed elsewhere right afterwards, they have to stay put. It's as irksome to me as to you, since I miss the MMA films too. All you can do is weigh one against the other and decide which of the two films is the more important to you, and we'll try to avoid such conflicts in future.

The Bennett's: Joan, Constance & Richard, in two 1931 romances

DOCTORS' WIVES (Fox, 1931) Directed by Frank Borzage; Screenplay by Maurice Watkins from a story by Sylva Lieberman and Henry Lieberman; Camera, Arthur Edeson; 7 reels

With Warner Baxter, Joan Bennett, Victor Varconi, Cecilia Loftus, Mimma Gombell, Marion Laxton, Ruth Warner, John St. Polis, Paul Forcasi, Holene Millard, George Chandler, Violet Dunn, Louise McIntosh, William Redfield. Warner Baxter seems to have had as prolific a career in the thirties as Melvyn Douglas; with all of the Fox-Baxter films that we've run at the Huff (and New School) over the past four years, there are still another half-dozen waiting patiently in the wings! "Doctors' Wives" is soap opera, and frankly not very effective soap opera, so tempestuous in its touch with reality. It's not even very good Borzage; even in the most disappointing Borzages (e.g., "Bad Girl"), there are usually moments of warmth and beauty that bring the film to life. "Doctors' Wives" is too brisk and too absurd to do much good. However, we offer no apologies for showing it; it's important to see all the Borzages that we can, and since no preservation has been undertaken on this film as yet, this may well be the only chance.

It's a difficult to accept stolid Warner Baxter as wildly irresistible to the ladies, and as a fantastically successful surgeon, but apparently Fox found it easy to see him in such a role, since they repeated it so often, right through such late-30's films as "Wife, Doctor and Nurse". Of far more interest here are the peculiar (and unspecified) experiments of Dr. Victor Varconi, who seems to be using the Frankenstein lab equipment (six months before the release of the classic) in search of a cure for cancer. The experiments are very noisy and spectacular, and make more sense than the medically suspect operation performed on him near the end; dying of radium poisoning, his life is prolonged for a few days by chest surgery!

BOUGHT (Warner Brothers, 1931) Directed by Archie Mayo; scenario by Raymond Griffith and Charles Kenyon from "Jackass's Story" by Harriet Henry; Art Direction, Edmeston Harley; Camera, Ray June; 7 reels

With Constance Bennett, Richard Bennett, Ben Lyon, Dorothy Peterson, Ray Milland, Natalie Darr, Clara Blandick, Doris Lloyd, Mae Madison, Arthur Stuart Hull, Eddie Nugent, Paul Forcasi. Released a few months after "Doctors' Wives", "Bought" is also very much of a rarity, apparently (for reasons unknown) never having been released to tv. (Since the print is a reverse, it's possible that it turns today's program into a Paul Forcasi Festival as well as one for the Bennett's! Incredibly, although the print was air-conditioned from Hollywood almost a week ago, it arrived in New York only a few hours before screening-time. We had a number of similar-vintaged soap opera standing by as a replacement, mainly from KBO who just about monopolized the genre!) Thus there has been no time to re-screen and re-appraise the film. My recollections from many years ago are that it is well above average of its type, well-photographed, fairly sensitive in its plot, and brisk. (Both films are virtually identical in length). In any case, its merits are academic, since virtually anything following "Doctors' Wives" will automatically seem like a masterwork. Constance Bennett's role is somewhat more logical and related to reality than Joan's too, but regardless, it's good to have all three Bennett on parade at the same time. Despite availability through films such as "If I Had a Million" and "Arrowhead", Richard Bennett's fine qualities as an actor are too often overlooked.

Wm. K. Everson