Next program: Jan 27: "Prestige" (1932; d: Tay Garnett) with Ann Harding, Melvyn Douglas, Adolphe Menjou; "Condemned" (1929; d: Wesley Ruggles) with Ronald Colman, The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

January 13 1975

A GIRL'S POLLY (World Pictures, 1927) Directed by Maurice Tournier for Paragon Films; Camera, John Van Den Broek; 5 reels; With Robert Warwick, June Elvidge, Doris Kenyon, Leatrice Joy, Johnny Hines, Chester Barnett, Jane Adair.

The more one re-sees Tournier's "The Wishing Ring," the more it seems the most sophisticated film made up to 1914 - and measuring Tournier's anticipated progress by the same giant strides that Griffith and Chaplin took in those years, one tends to expect a little too much from his subsequent films. It's easy at first, to be a little disappointed in "A Girl's Polly" since much of the traditional Tournier pictorialism is absent. Perhaps because it's a story about movie-making, and thus very real and close-to-home for Tournier, he doesn't give it his usual deliberate theatricality and artifice. The asymmetrical framings and groupings are still there, but they arise naturally cut of the backgrounds, and do not contrive to look like paintings transferred to celluloid. (This is hardly a criticism of course.) But the picture is lucky caught just before the surviving print succumbed to the already-in-evidence ravages of a prior age, and Tournier is still unobtrusively meticulous about all his light sources, and even not as remarkable a film as "The Wishing Ring," it's still an unusually good one.

The characters are pleasingly grey, all possessed of weaknesses as well as likeable qualities, and there's a satisfying humanity to their motivations and actions. Obviously thought, its major interest and value is in its detailed documentation of movie-making at Fort Lee's Paragon Studios: exterior shots of workers arriving in the morning, and detail shots of interior stages and equipment; would that similar films existed on Hollywood's early days! Tournier can be glimpsed briefly.

HOT WATER (Harold Lloyd Corp. - Pathe, 1924) Directed by Fred Newmeyer and Sam Taylor; Story: Sam Taylor, Tim Wheeler, Tommy Gray, John Gray; Camera, Walter Tomlin; 5 reels.

With Harold Lloyd, Jobyna Ralston, Josephine Crowell, Charles Stevenson, Mickey McBeen.

Although almost certainly Lloyd's best feature to date, "Hot Water" was to be eclipsed very rapidly by the ever-more-elaborate features that followed, and Lloyd in later years felt it to be one of his less satisfying films. In a way, it's easy to see why as it's structured almost pervasively against formula. The first half is superbly flowing, free-wheeling sight gag material, long, elaborate, full of invention and in unfettered outdoor locations. The second half however is interior material, aspects silly with Boy. The chance and the second half seem labored in the extreme; no gag can work unless it is set up and underlined by a prior gag, and there is almost a sense of desperation in keeping it going. However, it is unfair to judge the mechanical quality of Lloyd's comedy without an audience; what seems obvious and heavy and unfunny when seen alone, can spring magnificently to life before an audience, with Lloyd's uncanny sense of timing and audience response making everything work beautifully. Whether this will happen tonight remains to be seen; even if it does not, the black comedy of the second half is at least unusual and off-beat, and nothing can diminish the laughs and thrills of the first half.

NOTES: Due to the unpredictable status of the auditorium and an ultra-cluttered projection booth, we are never sure (for the time being) what the facilities will be until we arrive. With little room to move around in, we can't be ambitious with music and will have to settle for casually appropriate rather than carefully worked out scores. Please bear with us. Also - we have just learned that the print of SPRINGTIME FOR HENRY scheduled for the last of our current shows (April 21) is not yet present available, so a substitution will be announced nearer the time and of course on the next schedule.