Next program: Monday Sept. 13th: Films by a virtually unknown British director, Adrian Brunel: A LIGHT WOMAN (1928) with Benita Hume, and three silent shorts, 1925-6, in a series satirising the movies.

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society  May 10 1976


With the Misses Day and Muir co-starring, the Byron-quotation title is certainly a misnomer! In a very loose and unintended sense, the film is something of a decade-later equivalent of "Our Dancing Daughters". The very first scenes- a black limousine delivering a gown to a fabulously artificial MGM mansion- sets a mood which is never dispelled. The family problems that MGM asks us to get involved with seem doubly trivial when one recalls what was going on elsewhere in the world in 1940, but MGM's contact with reality was tenuous at best, and to MGM of the Mayer regime, families like this one did represent the "average" family! The smaller MGM films of this type never seem to get shown, and with its gloss, its cast and its brevity, it's certainly an entertaining trifle, and perhaps too a comment on American and especially Hollywoodian isolationism at that time. Its producer, Frederick Stephani, was the director of the original "Flash Gordon", which now seems almost closer to reality than this stylish soap opera. But with Jean Muir, Laraine Day and Billie Burke on parade instead of Julie Christie, Glenda Jackson and Barbra Streisand, one still has much to be thankful for.


It's difficult to know whether this was an important film in the "Five Star Final" tradition that went wrong, or an unambitious programmer that pulled itself together and made something of itself. It is too inconsistent to quite fit into either category. It starts out in bantering, Bunyonesque fashion that doesn't really work because Armstrong's comic tough guy doesn't ring true. Then for a while it shifts gears, seeming to join the then popular gangster and newspaper cycles. Finally, in its last third, it makes it. From the trial on through the sudden, underplayed and ironic ending, it is suspenseful and often poignant. This last third is good enough to make one feel generous towards the rest of it. With a Cagney, O'Brien or Lee Tracy in the lead, it might have worked better; with some director other than Harry Joe Brown (expert at westerns, ill at ease in drama) it might have been less confused; but even as is, it is interesting, entertaining and unpredictable. That fine actor Frank Morgan gets another chance to show how touching he could be when given the chance, and it's always a pleasure to watch Constance Cummings. Edward van Sloan, just through with attempting to destroy Dracula, the Frankenstein monster and the Mummy, plays so delightfully in the same vein that one almost applauds him to draw a crucifix from his pocket to thrust into Armstrong's face!

Our next mailing will be around Sept. 8th.

Wm. K. Everson