theodore huff memorial film society

February 13 1978

The Cisco Kid (Fox, 1931) Directed by Irving Cummings; written by Alfred A. Cohn, from the character created by O. Henry; Camera, Barney McGill; 6 reels
With Warner Baxter, Edmund Lowe, Conchita Montenegro, Nora Lane, Frederick Burt, William Robertson, James Bradbury Jr., Charles Stevens, Chris Pin Martin, Douglas Hale, Marilyn Knowlden, Jack Dillon.

The Cisco Kid was the follow-up (with the same two stars and director) to the enormously successful "In Old Arizona", and was (only temporarily) the last of Fox's initial foray into Cisco Kid adventures, due to litigation over their continued rights to the character. Phased not one whit, they merely renamed Cisco "The Arizona Kid" - the title of the next one, with virtually no change in characterisation or format. Considering the popularity of the original film, the sequel is surprisingly unambitious in scale and plot, but despite its brevity, it was still welcomed into the Roxy as a single-bill attraction. However, small-scale or not, it is a marked improvement over the original - it moves better, talks less, and keeps out of doors far more of the time.

Moreover, it is exceptionally well photographed, with some strikingly beautiful night exteriors, a lot of low-angle framing, unusual for Cummings, and some often unexpected camera mobility - as in the shot of the camera "pursuing" the glass of beer as it slides along the bar. While there is no plethora of action, what there is is very well staged - some excellent night-time pursuits, and a very good bank hold-up, often accompanied by stirring incidental music.
Disappointments are the extremely mild villainy and a tame climax, although this latter is obviously to pave the way for another sequel. On the whole, a better film than one might expect - or remember - and most enjoyable throughout.

Western Union (20th Century Fox, 1941) Directed by Fritz Lang; Associate Prod., Harry Joe Brown; Screenplay by Robert Carson from a story by Zane Grey; Camera, Edward Cronjager, Allen M. Davie; Art Director, Richard Day, Wliard Ihnen; Music, David Buttolph; Technicolor; 9 reels
With Randolph Scott, Robert Young, Dean Jagger, Virginia Gilmore, Barton MacLane, John Carradine, Slim Summerville, Chill Wills, Russell Hicks, Victor Kilian, Minor Watson, Addison Richards, Chief Big Tree, Chief Thundercloud, Iron Eyes Cody, George Chandler, Dick Rich, Harry Strang, Charles Middleton, Francis Ford, Irving Bacon, J.Edgar Bromberg, Hank Bell.

For westerns, on the whole, tended to be like their musicals - stodgy and predictable. Obviously they had very little interest in them, since they made none at all - other than a programmer or two, and some B's, between "The Big Trail" and "Jesse James". Their best - a couple by Henry King, odd ones by Ford, Hathaway, Dean and Delmer Daves, the two by Lang - are essentially individual works by their directors rather than representative studio Westerns.
Western Union was Lang's second Western, coming immediately after his "Return of Frank James", and was one of that initial group of epic wartime westerns spawned by "Stagecoach", and drawing on the elements of national pride and unity which the war had reintroduced. Comparatively speaking, it was still early in the chronology of Technicolor westerns, and Lang's use of color here is both picturesque and dramatically striking. In fact, it is primarily the stunning color print which prompts this showing today. The film needs its color, and for years Fox's reissue prints were in b/w, although the film has recently been made available on TV in color. It's good Lang, and also a good illustration of Hollywood's "myth" of the Western. Absolutely nothing happened in the actual laying of the Western Union lines - no fires, outlaws, indians or even bad weather, and the whole operation took less time than Lang's shooting schedule for the film "recreation"! Many Lang dramatic and visual touches are evident throughout; he had both the time and opportunity to work on the script - including, one suspects, the typical (for him) "comedy" of Summerville forever cutting his fingernails.

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