JOHN G. ADOLFI

Hardly a major talent, Adolphi came to Hollywood in the late silent period, and not unfamously specialised in stage derivations and star vehicles. Warner gave him the opportunity to direct "Show of Shows," to direct, and the fact that George Arliss (who had complete control over his own films) used him on several movies indicates that he was probably a director who retained loyalties to stage technique, and could easily be "handled" by the impresario-star. Although his films showed a quite steadily improving absorbing of sound technique, he died - in early 1933 - before it could be ascertained whether he would ever become a first-class director of talkies.

"THE MAN WHO PLAYED GOD" (Warner Brothers, 1931; released 1932)

Directed by John G. Adolphi; scenario by Julian Josephson and Maude Howell, from a play by Jules Eckert Goodman and a short story by Gouverneur Morris; Camera: James Van Trees


Like "Disraeli" and "The Green Goddess," "The Man Who Played God" is a remake of an earlier silent Arliss film that in turn had been based on a successful Arliss stage vehicle. (It also saw service a few years ago as "Sincerely Yours" with Liberace!) It's a surprisingly un-stagey film considering the preponderance of dialogue, although no attempt is made to conceal the theatrical origins, and one can easily discern just where one is. It's a showcase of Arliss' best, and very much of a "vehicle", yet it also has a darned good plot on its own. Recognising this, Arliss doesn't tackle it with the same spirit of fun that he brought to "The Green Goddess." The performance is only occasionally larger than life; the bravura style is mainly limited to the earlier scenes; for the most part Arliss is subdued and immensely effective. This may disappoint those who find Arliss "a lot of fun" but not much else; it may also remind them what a first-class actor he could be when he took a role really seriously. It's a poignant and moving performance, and Arliss does full justice to it. The film also provided Bette Davis with her first major break, and in her autobiography she is obviously sincere in her appreciation of the film and her gratitude to Arliss.

TAY GARNETT

started out in the late silents with thick-ear melodramas, and continued to be at his best in talkies with such rowdy and rousing films as "Seven Sinners." He had a curious penchant for sea stories, often related in structure and incident, yet varied in mood - viz the romantic "One Way Passage", the melodramatic and adventurous "Slave Ship" and "China Seas", and the comedy-thriller "Trade Winds". It's odd that one of his best films should be the tender and decidedly non-adventurous "One Way Passage".

"ONE WAY PASSAGE" (Warner Brothers, 1932) Director: Tay Garnett Screenplay by Wilson Mizner and Joseph Jackson from a story by Robert Lord; Camera: Robert Kurkle.


Perhaps because it is so much off his beaten path, "One Way Passage" is invariably touted as Garnett's best film, just as the likewise off-beat "Peter Ibbetson" is held in some quarters to be the best of theWARNER film of another predominantly action director, Henry Hathaway. While it probably is Garnett's best film, I suspect that he brought less to it directorially than he did to, for example, "China Seas." With players like Powell and Francis, that story premise, and a tight script that makes the most of its emotion and poignancy in less than 70 minutes, how could it really miss? Without downgrading Garnett, one is inclined to wonder how much better a film it might have been with say Frank Borzage at the helm? However, perhaps this conjecture is unfair. What matters is that the film holds up so well, and what a pleasure it is to see again an honestly sentimental, uncomplicated, love story of the old school. The George Brent-Kerle Oberon remake of the 40's, "Till We Meet Again", directed by Edmund Goulding, was rather good as remakes go, but as also with "Seventh Heaven", "The Blue Veil" and "Imitation of Life", it was longer, slicker, and too larger than life to match the slightly cruder but more honest and certainly more moving original.

--------- WILLIAM K. EVERSON ---------