THE NEW SCHOOL FILM SERIES 15: Program 4
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"THE WORLD IS OURS" (1938) Directed by Basil Wrangell; narrated by Truman Bradley; 2 reels
With Samuel S. Hinds, Dorothy Peterson, Charles Grapewin, Anne Shirley.

In times of affluence (and desperation) Hollywood has been prone to put out promotional shorts, both patting itself on the back for its enormous
cultural achievements and influences, and urging movie patrons to take
advantage of the riches awaiting them at their local theatre. "The World
Is Ours" is just such an all-industry short, and admittedly in terms of
the clips of stars and current films represented, Hollywood - in a purely
escapist entertainment sense - did have plenty to crow about at that time.
The film's interest today however transcends its nostalgic recall of a year
more than 35 years in the past. Its amnesia, and its basic contempt for
audiences, is quite unwittingly revealed, and helps to explain why the
1935-1938 years in Hollywood were so barren in a creative sense.
Hollywood's conception of the "average American family" at which it was
then aiming its product is almost horrifyingly exemplified in one of the
most obnoxiously self-satisfied and intolerably dull families ever put on
the screen, quite outdoings the Hardys, the Jonesses, the Higginseys and all
the other screen families running rampant at that time. Hollywood's
condensation towards its own past is displayed by dismissing the whole
silent era as one of primitive melodrama, and even on a promotional level,
the film offers some extraordinary gaffs. Head of the family Samuel S.
Hinds visits a movie set in which Samuel S. Hinds can be seen as one of
the actors; a poster outside their local movie house advertises a film
that they later see being shot in Hollywood; major star James Stewart is
apparently shooting two top pictures back to back at different studios;
and the welcome mat laid out for this tourist-family is very odd
with Hollywood's real spirit! It really tells us more about Hollywood
than it had in mind, though it also reminds us that in the field of sheer
slick entertainment, Hollywood had no peers - and has fallen a long way.
Grapem Charlie Grapewin doesn't like the 1938 brand of movies and
complains about "all that huggin' and kissin'!"; one wonders with a shudder
what comment he might have to make if a similar promotional film were made
today!

"TOO HOT TO HANDLE" (NOW, 1938) Directed by Jack Conway; produced by
Lawrence Weingarten; Screenplay by Laurence Stallings and John Lee
Newlin from an original story by Len Hammond; Camera, Harold Rosson; 10 pts
With Clark Gable, Myrna Loy, Walter Connolly, Walter Pidgeon, Loo Carrillo,
Johnny Hines, Virginia Weidler, Betty Ross Clarke, Henry Kolker, Gregory
Gaye, Marjorie Main, Al Shean, Willie Fung, Lillie Mui, Patsy O'Connell.

The print of the film arrived too late for re-screening and re-appraisal
before these notes were written, and thus they are based on recollections
of the film from some fifteen years back - but it is the kind of purely
"fun film" that can only become more enjoyable with the passing years and
the increasing dearth of this elaborate but tongue-in-cheek adventure film
that was so typical of the late 30's. At the time it was considered
merely a run-of-the-mill star vehicle, assured of popular approval, but
unworthy of serious critical notice. It was obviously designed to cash in
on the huge success of the Gable-Loy-Spencer Tracy "Test Pilot" (a more
serious if still somewhat contrived work) and was considered a let-down.
Today however the incredible advances of aviation techniques have rendered
the basic asset of "Test Pilot" - its timeliness and informational
qualities - dated and valueless, leaving only a skeleton plot of minimal
interest. As an entertainment, "Too Hot To Handle" survives far better
and today, if not in 1938, surpasses its inspiration. Critics then felt
that we'd seen it all before - which perhaps we had, but only in the "B"
film, and never with such verve and pace. "Too Hot To Handle" is
virtually three "B" pictures rolled into one, starting off with the war
in the Far East (its detached, black-comedy style could be considered
tasteless, and parallels with Vietnam are unfortunate, but it's still very
funny), marking time for a moment in the middle with a series of
contemporary-American thrills including a blazing munitions ship, and
winds up as a prolonged jungle adventure. Despite the rich melodrama, the
black comedy - casual rather than subtle - is retained, and the off-screen
scream of a disgraced and decado witch-doctor, undergoing execution for his
medical shortcomings, is parlayed into a very funny (and underplayed)
sight/sound gag. Gable is in his element in this kind of frolic, though
Myrna Loy - perhaps still under the spell of the film's influence -
shows a spark of the thing, and her avistrix is much less
convinging than her foray into a similar role much earlier (opposite Cary
Grant in "Wings in the Dark").. Veteran Jack Conway (arguably his best film
was probably the Ronald Colman "A Tale of Two Cities"), a commercial
reliable from the silent days, was one of NOW's most versatile and "safe"
directors, not as gifted as W.S.Van Dyke, but quite as dependable. --- WKE ---