Tonight's program is perhaps a rather strange one with which to conclude a series, and a few words of clarification might be in order -- not so much for our regulars, who know our modus operandi, as for the casual attendees and newcomers.

Recently, in a post-screening discussion session, one member of the audience asked why we were showing such a bad Jolson film as "Bad Boy." Furthermore, she asked the question of whether or not it is a bad film; he also admitted readily that at a recent private screening, he rushed to see it -- and that I think partially explains why we are showing it. Because of its content, it is just never shown publicly or on tv, and probably never will be. While our New School series certainly hopes to show as many great and/or important films as it can, it also very definitely exists to provide a showcase for the obscure films which deserve at least one showing somewhere.

With a Jolson film in any case, it doesn't really matter whether it's good or bad; those who care only about the "art" of the cinema won't come, while those who care only about Jolson will be delighted, and those who consider themselves purely historians will at least be rewarded with a rarity from a curious period in the history of film. "Miss Pinkerton" is a slightly different case, it was booked sight unseen (but on a 40-year-old memory) as being the kind of film that would probably be appreciated by the same audience that found -- for whatever reason -- the Jolson film of interest.

That still applies, even though I must admit that the film does not live up to memories, although it may come to life more -- as a film so often does -- before an audience. In the 300-old films that we've shown since our series began, only three or four have been booked sight unseen, or without reappraisal, and of those "Miss Pinkerton" is the only one that we'd have had second thoughts on and found a substitute for. And yet it is an interesting film in its own way, and deserves to be brought back to life at least once in a while. These introductory comments were by way of explanation rather than apology.

Both films are quite short, and will be followed by a compilation of animation from the 30's. As these notes are being printed, the cartoons have not yet been finalised, so no listing here is possible, but they will include some early black-and-white Disneys which are very rarely, if ever, shown.

BIG BOY (Warner Brothers, 1920) Directed by Alan Crosland; screenplay by William K. Wells and Perry Vekeroff from an original by Harold Arberidge; Camera, Hal Mohr; 6 reels

With: Al Jolson, Claudia Dell, Louise Closer Hale, Lloyd Hughes, Eddie Phillips, Noah Beery, Lew Harvey, John Harron, Tom Wilson, Franklin Batie, Carl White, Colin Campbell.

It is difficult to talk about "Big Boy" without giving away the few surprises which make it work, and even give it a curious kind of charm. On the surface, it is hopelessly old-fashioned theatrical hokum, whether it is regarded as melodrama or even deliberately artificial musical melodrama. Because of its racist attitudes, it would obviously be a hot potato on tv or in a theatrical revival -- yet it is so blatantly tongue-in-cheek, and so magnificently overplayed by Noah Beery as a Simon-Legree plus, that it is doubtful that any sensible person could take it seriously enough to be offended by it. Moreover, it does have some theatrical/sociological value in its faithful record of theatrical attitudes to the Negro -- and public attitudes of the time which found nothing wrong in such stereotypes. Jolson plays the entire film in blackface, not as a minstrel but as a bona-fide Negro, and this is the one aspect that might cause the most controversy in non-specialised showings of the film today. It's very much of a vehicle for Jolson, who gets every opportunity to sing, clown and engage in theatrical patter of sometimes laboriously comic value. Alan Crosland, who directed some of the finest silent Barrymore vehicles as well as Jolson's "The Jazz Singer," doesn't get much of a chance to show what a fine director he could be, but he does keep the film moving fast.

It was the larger-than-life tongue-in-cheek approach being probably also somewhat amplified by his -- before a (probably) more prosaic original script. The climax of the film put all in a totally different perspective, adds last-minute charm, and laughs at itself quite gracefully. It arrives too late to change or improve the film, but it does somehow manage to justify it, and leave a much more pleasant taste in the mouth than the earlier portions might indicate.

TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION

Notes continued on page two.
MISS PINKERTON (Warner Brothers, 1932) Directed by Lloyd Bacon
Screenplay by Niven Busch and Lillian Hayward from the novel by Mary
Roberts Rinehart; Camera, Barney McGill; 6 reels
With Joan Blondell, George Brent, John Wray, C. Henry Gordon, Mae Madison,
Ruth Hall, Donald Dillaway, Elizabeth Patterson, Blanche Frederici, Holmes
Herbert, Lucien Littlefield, Nigel de Brulier, Eulalie Jensen, Lyle Talbot,
Stanley Blystone, Harry Strang.

"Miss Pinkerton" is short, atmospheric, beautifully lit and photographed,
and well-cast. Unfortunately it is also lacking certain finesses that it
badly needs. Joan Blondell is badly made up and thus photographs rather
unattractively. As in "The Mystery of the Wax Museum" too, there is not a
note of background music, and this kind of film needs it badly. The writing
is of ten careless, with key characters given no introduction, build-up or
motivation at all. Despite the many characters, there are really only two
possible suspects for the murderer - and type-casting soon tells us, and
correctly, which of them it will be. On the plus side however, there is a
cunning re-use of many of the sets from "Dr. X" and an interesting - if
over-used - loss of focus fadeout whenever characters die or faint - an
arresting visual effect, even if it does cause one to constantly change
viewpoint. "The Old Dark House" it most certainly isn't, and it suffers
by comparison with that classic of the same year - but it is fun in its own
unpretentious way. Incidentally, it was remade by Warners in the early 40's
as "The Nurse's Secret", with Julie Bishop, Regis Toomey and Lee Patrick.

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An advance look at our Summer Series. Full details will be issued shortly
in the Summer bulletin. As usual, we are repeating a popular film from an
earlier series, combining it with a related (by theme, director etc.) film
that is new to us. Program #2 is an exception to this, since both films are
new to these series. (Films will be shown in the order listed)
These are Tuesday evening screenings.

1. June 11: Frank Lloyd's "Berkeley Square" (1933) with Leslie Howard and
Heather Angel; Leo McCarey's "Love Affair" (1939) with Charles Boyer and
Irene Dunne; two well-contrasted romantic films.
2. June 18: Two Forgotten films (both 1933) from a forgotten director, Harry
Lechman: "Paddy the Next Best Thing" with Janet Gaynor, Warner Baxter;
"Face in the Sky" with Spencer Tracy, Marion Nixon, Lila Lee; a curio that
starts as a rural romance and winds up as a big-city musical.
(1932) with Clive Brook, Reginald Owen and Ernest Torrence a marvellous
Noriarty; "Bulldog Drummond Strikes Back" (1934), directed by Roy del Ruth;
Now virtually a "lost" film, one of the very best comedy-thrillers and a
model of its kind; Ronald Colman, Loretta Young, Warner Oland.
4. July 2: "Dance Girl Dance" (1940, directed by Dorothy Arzner); an
extremely interesting Erich Pommer production, given added topicality by
today's feminist movement; Maureen O'Hara, Lucille Ball, Ralph Bellamy.
Garson Kanin's "Bachelor Mother" (1939); a warm, delightful, mature and
above all very funny movie with Ginger Rogers and David Niven.
5. Number 17 (1932) A frequently-asked-for revival of Alfred Hitchcock's
last "little" picture; cheap, but very stylish, with a great chase
climax; John Stuart Leon Lea, Ann Casson, Donald Calhrop.
"Storm in a Teacup" (1937, directed by Victor Saville), a tasteful,
well-acted adaptation of the James Bridie comedy-drama; with Vivien Leigh
Rex Harrison, Cecil Parker, Sarah Allgood.
6. July 16: Four Ronald Colmans for the price of one!
"The Masqueraders" (1933, director Richard Wallace) Colman in a dual-role,
a light-weight dramatic tale that has some striking parallels with its
co-feature. "With Elissa Landi.
"The Prisoner of Zenda" (1937), directed by John Cromwell; a permanent
classic of the romanticist-swatsh buckling school, magnificently written,
played, designed, staged and photographed with an incredible array of
talent behind the camera (James Wong Howe, Alfred Newman etc.) and in
front of it (Ronald Colman in a dual role, Madeleine Carroll, Douglas
Fairbanks Jr., Mary Astor, Raymond Massey, David Niven, C. Aubrey Smith).

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Inadvertently the date for program #5 was not included. It is July 9.