THE NEW SCHOOL  
FILM SERIES 22: Program #3 
July 16, 1975

HOLLYWOOD'S MUSICAL MOODS  
(Blackwood Productions, 1973) 
Produced by Christian Blackwood; 65 minutes.

Made in Hollywood and New York for German television, but as yet unreleased in this country, this documentary started out as a coverage of the use of music in silent films, and as a tribute to pianist Arthur Kleiner. It soon evolved into a music genealogy of the Hollywood musical, and informative interviews with Miklos Rozsa, David Raksin and others major composers. The excerpts from both silent and sound films are well chosen, and there is a particularly telling illustration of the importance of music in films through showing an excerpt from Hitchcock's "Spellbound," and then a re-showing of the same excerpt with Rozsa's evocative "psycho" music subtracted. Made on a slim budget, the partial sabotaging of the project was caused by the unexpectedly high fees demanded to clear the rights for such essential excerpts as "High Noon" and "Laurel." The sudden enforced curtailing of budget is the key reason that one of the finest composers of them all, Erich Korngold, isn't represented extensively, which is a shame, since the film did not set out to be totally comprehensive, and what it does, it does well.

HAUNTED SPOOKS  (Hal Roach-Pathe, 1920) Two reels 
With Harold Lloyd and Mildred Davis.

One of the best of the Lloyd shorts before he moved into features, "Haunted Spooks" admirably delivers its best and most creative gags in the first half, and settles down to fairly standardised slapstick in the second. One of the highlights of the first half is a genuinely amusing (and certainly tasteful) ethnic sight-gag involving a Jewish stereotype; the use of black stereotypes in the second half is more traditional, but as always with Lloyd, inoffensive. The black stereotypes may contribute to the humor, but they are not made the butt of the humor. One or two scenes at the beginning of the project much too fast at sound speed, for which I apologize; were I on hand I would rig up the RCA to handle this problem, but for the sake of a couple of extra minutes of screen time, it was necessary for the projectionist to use a substitute projectionist. For the most part, the film does play well enough at sound speed, and we ask your indulgence for those odd moments when it didn't.

--- Intermission ---

SPARROWS  (Mary Pickford-United Artists, 1926) Directed by William Beaudine  
Scenario by C. Gardner Sullivan from a story by Winifred Dunn; Camera, Charles Rosher, Karl Strauss; Hal Mohr; 8 reels  
With: Mary Pickford, Gustav von Seyffertitz, Roy Stewart, Mary Louise Miller, Charlotte Keanu, Spec O'Donnell, Lloyd Whitlock, Mark Hamilton, Monty O'Grady, 

For far too long, Mary Pickford vehicles have been unavailable for viewing, except at Eastman House in Rochester, and Pickford herself has been largely responsible for this. Initially she tried to suppress them (and at one time announced her intention of having her own prints destroyed on her death), mainly because she felt that her "little girl" was so much of another era that audiences would only laugh at her today. For that reason, she preferred only "Little Lord Fauntleroy" to be shown, since she also appeared in it as a mature woman. Happily, she rescinded the destruction order, poured a small fortune into preservation work, and even tried a wholesale reissue package a few years ago, which, unfortunately, was not a success - due in no small measure to poor advertising and promotion. While right now most of her films have retreated to Pickfair again, at least they do exist - and one or two isolated films, such as "Sparrrows," on which the copyrights expired, can be shown. "Sparrrows" is much too good a film to be covered in the few lines left to us, and I can recommend reference to the film's detailed appraisals in three books: "The Paradigm Gone By" (with excellent production stills of its trick work), "Classics of the Silent Screen" and "Classics of the Horror Film". Although Pickford herself is past her personal prime, and obviously a little too mature for her role, the film itself is one of her best, and reminds us that she had real guts, vitality and even horror in many of her films, as well as policyness that quite transcends pathos. (The death of the child is a beautifully and delicately handled sequence). Production values are of a high order, with three of Hollywood's top cameramen (two of them, Rosher and Strauss, also worked on Murnau's "Sunrise") responsible for its beauty and stunning trick effects. As author of her own films, Pickford did occasionally overdo the religious sentiment just a trifle; though obviously sincerely felt, there is a kind of condescension in the personal "hot line" she seems to have with God, and with the nods of approval she bestows in His direction. Too, Pickford, then making only one special per year, isn't content here to leave well enough alone, and after a marvellously tense escape from crocodiles, quicksand and the magnificent Gustav von Seyffertitz, Mary Louise Miller to tack on an additional melodramatic chase which is both unconvincing and unnecessary. . . . But these are small quibbles in a film as good as "Sparrrows," which reminds us too that William Beaudine, who . . . rounded out his career with the Bowery Boys in the 40's and 50's, was once a major talent too.

--- William K. Everson ---