CAPTAIN JANUARY (20th Century Fox, 1936) Directed by David Butler; produced by Darryl F. Zanuck; Camera: John Seitz; Screenplay by Sam Hellman, Gladys Lehman and Harry Tugend from the original story by Laura E. Richards; Dance Director, Jack Donohue; Music, Lew Pollack; Lyrics, Sidney Mitchell and Jack Yellen; 75 minutes.

With Shirley Temple, Guy Kibbee, Slim Summerville, Buddy Ebsen, June Lang, Jane Darwell, Sara Haden, Jerry Tucker, Nella Walker, George Irving, Si Jenks, James Harley.

1936/37 represented the very peak of the Shirley Temple phenoman, both in her own astonishing talent and abilities, and in the money-making capabilities of her films. In 1936 she made "Captain January", "Poor Little Rich Girl", "Dimples" and "Stowaway" - a remarkable pot-pourri of acting, dancing, singing and emoting in a wide range of vehicles. In 1937, she reduced her output to two - but they were two masterpieces, immensely influential films. "The Little Princess" (1937) directed by Ford and " Heidi" directed by Allan Dwan. Thereafter, as with Will Rogers, the Fox formula faltered somewhat - in fact formula took over, and originality and charm lessened. But, to their credit, Fox tried hard to pump new values back into her pictures, not least by the use of strong co-stars and Technicolor, and though it was a commercial failure, her "The Blue Bird" was a flawed but quite marvellous fantasy.

The Temple films were obviously ideal fare for both the Depression and the Production Code-dominated years (though wily writers sometimes sneaked in quirky little elements, as in "Poor Little Rich Girl" with its implied sex mania, to thumb their nose at the latter). Shirley's films were good escapism in that they frequently showed her surrounded by luxury - but at the same time, they frequently showed her engaging in activities which were peculiarly sympathetic to the less fortunate, and less alienating her from depressed audiences. Moreover, her films (somewhat less happier, plotwise, than the later Deanna Durbin vehicles) covered a staggering gamut of traumatic childhood problems. Shirley was frequently orphaned, or a child with a single surviving parent, or threatened with a dissenting family life. Mothers were always being run over by busses or done in by pneumonia, while fathers were too busy being executives, were away at the war, or were awaiting execution! When Shirley found refuge with kindly foster parents (as in "The Little Princess", and "The Good Soldier Sven Hedin") she was left performers waiting to whisk her away to some orphanage! In a curious way, 30's stories like these - by no means limited to the Temple films - had a kind of upbeat effect, comforting audiences with the thought that, no matter what their problems, they could be worse - and that a happy ending was just around the corner.

"Captain January" (which had also been made as a silent starring Baby Peggy) trots out all these traditional Temple ingredients, and trots them out well. Shirley is on top form as a performer, both emotionally and in the wide range of musical scenes. Temple incidentally, was not particularly popular with youngsters of her own age, since her screen image was constantly being held up as an impossible ideal. However, doting aunts and mothers loved her films, and helpless youngsters were usually dragged along to see her on the pretext of a "special treat". The truth usually lay in the second feature being one like "The Good Soldier Sven Hedin" (with Mary Boland as "Captain January" in many situations). Youngsters usually preferred the gutsier second-string vehicles of Jane Withers - and only came to appreciate the values of the Temple films, and her own extraordinary talent, much later in life.

"Captain January" (and other Temples of the period) also provides an interesting backup to that cause-célèbre lawsuit in the 50's when Graham Greene wrote of the exploitation of Temple as a child sex symbol. Greene was slapped with a $500 fine for a single newspaper column. The material suppressed from any reprinting. Fox obviously knew what they were doing, not only wanting to protect the wholesome image of their star, but also undoubtedly, to cover up the fact that Greene was, in fact, quite right. Even before she got into her Fox films, there was something of a "Lolita" quality to the way Temple was used in film, as witness her starring in an early short, "Kid in Hollywood", sartorially the Dirichlet in a costume that substituted a giant diaper for the original - tucked short skirt. Fox were well aware of the disturbing child/adult quality in such films, and frequently had her corseting seductively on her father's - or the hero's knee, even (in "Poor Little Rich Girl") singing Daddy a curious little song about how she'd like to marry him! "Captain January" shot, and then excised, an apparently too sensuous routine of Shirley dancing the hula. But there is still the scene of Shirley getting up in the morning in her underway and getting dressed rather slowly, a reversal of the usual "innocent" Lohard and Blandell lingerie stripteases of the period. "Captain January" also contains that distinctly bizarre sequence with Shirley as an adult nurse ministering to an old invalid (throughout the film is a morbid dissolve before she gets around to changing his diapers! I don't want to make too big a thing of the erotic context of the Temple movies, other than to stress that it's there, and that Graham Greene, far being out of line, was merely ahead of his time. "Captain January" is one of the best of the Temple films, traditional and predictable, but well done. Shirley carries off large masses with elan, and...
in many cases without the help if the scenes being broken up into short takes. Just when to the scenes being without experienced dance coordinator Oles Edson in the "Godfish Ball" sequence, is in the mysterious distribution of her quite evident on the film. It appears a film that has not been afforded a theatrical release and in its forays on to television was much cut. Some of the longer Temples, and especially "Wee Willie Winkie" and "Heidi", were so drastically cut to conform to a short, snappy, series-package length, that whole characters disappeared from the films. "Captain January" was cut primarily to prevent complaints from parents. The episode of Shirley being taught how to spit was an immediate casualty, as was much of the school, and since there were any elements suggesting that Shirley might be cheating a little, if ingeniously, were likewise clipped out. The print tonight is of the full uncut and uncensored version -- except course for that hula sequence which was cut before release but which, judging from stills, would have been a real delight for the Humbert-Humbert among us!

**TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION**

**PESTER PAN (Paramount, 1924)** Directed by Herbert Brenon; Camera, James Wong Howe; Screenplay by Willis Goldbeck from the play by Sir James Barrie; Special Effects by Roy Pomeroy; 100 minutes.

With Betty Bronson (Peter Pan); Ernest Torrence (Captain Hook); Mary Brian (Wendy); Esther Ralston (Mrs Darling); Cyril Chadwick (Mr. Darling); Anna May Wong (Tiger Lily); George Ali (Nana); Virginia Brown Faire (Tinker Bell); Phillip de Lacy (Michael); Jack Murphy (John)

**PIANO SCORE ARRANGED & PLAYED BY STUART OBERMAN**

The following notes are printed, slightly abridged, from our initial showing on March 3, 1924. It is the first time we've repeated a film outside of a Summer season. "Peter Pan" seems to the Christmas season, and comparison with the current theatrical version may be of interest too. In addition, audiences will have the chance to compare the work of two of its stars (Betty Bronson and Esther Ralston) with their work in two early (1929) talkies next week.

"Peter Pan", with its delicate mixture of comedy, pathos and magic, has always been difficult to film. In animated form, its charm totally eluded Disney, as a TV and stage musical it is usually strident and lacking in grace, and the many respectful stage versions have unavoidably lacked the production expertise that film could provide. (In London, while a regular Christmas tradition, it has become more and more of a star vehicle.) Not surprisingly, no film, tv or (recent stage versions have dared to emulate Barrie's Pan, in fact, it is the strangest thing to know of the film's style, and the design of the film is in the hands of Bronson's taste and reverence for the original is doubtless responsible. He should also not be held responsible for the studio turning the children into Americans and inserting patriotic titles, though these are rare. "Photoplay" was rightly incensed at this, and likened it to the British film "Tom Sawyer" and transferring it all to the Thames! Bronson must have been aware however of the film's (few) shortcomings, since his follow-up film, "Barrie's A Kiss for Cinderella", which has the advantage of the medium and was evidently and creatively cinematic throughout. It was a better and more sophisticated film than "Peter Pan", but far less popular; its failure prevented any further Bronson-Barrie-Bronson collaborations.

Barrie is admittedly not easy to take in this day and age -- or any other. As with The Marx Brothers, there are no half measures -- one either embraces him or rejects him totally. And, accepting him, it also helps to have a healthy respect for mothers, a belief in Fairies, and a willingness to put aside contemporary Women's Lib attitudes to "grandmother" roles. The charm and dashing grace of the film's sense of exhilaration and grace comes from Betty Bronson. She was endorsed by Barrie himself despite her limited movie experience (two or three minor roles in early 20's) and proved to be an entirely felicitous choice. Her charm and dancer's grace, her facile pantomime and expressive face, and her ability to switch effortlessly from mischievous and fun to abject pathos, won her a tremendous following and for a while it seemed that she might surpass the popularity of Mary Pickford, and indeed she did surpass it in her appeal to younger movie-goers. Moreover, her willingness to take whatever part was given her, without grumbling, didn't know how to handle her. Whimsy was not a commercial commodity in the 20's, and she was quickly shunted into imitation Clara Bow and Colleen Moore roles, and her career virtually sabotaged. The supporting cast is a particularly strong one, with George Ali repeating his pantomimic stage triumph as Nana the dog. The Hook/Mr. Darling role, usually played on stage by the same actor, is split here, with Ernest Torrence making sure that MOGCSY stands a chance against his grace, eyebrow rolling, scene-stealing tactics as Hook. Incidentally, it is quite surprising what real warmth and charm the Barrie dialogue retains even in title-insert form.

--- William K. Everson ---

**PROGRAM ENDS 10:45 p.m. No discussion period tonight.**