THE NEW SCHOOL

FILM SERIES 37: Program #5

July 2 1980

Two by Raoul Walsh

JUMP FOR GLORY (Marcel Hellman Productions for United Artists, 1937) Directed by Raoul Walsh; screenplay by John Meehan from a novel by Gordon McConnell; Camera, Victor Aramise; Released in the U.S. as "When Thief Meets Thief"; 80 mins.


Walsh seemed very much in the doldrums in the mid-30's, seemingly unable to operate when denied the free-wheeling freedom of the pre-Production Code days. After his prestige silents and vigorous early talkies, occluded by "The Bowery", his whole group of films for Paramount - films like "St. Louis Blues", "Spendthrift" and even "Young Mr. Lincoln" - were well received until he went to Warners at the end of the 30's to make films like "The Roaring 20's" and "High Sierra" that the old zest seemed to return. No doubt the unofficial easing of the Code at that time helped a lot too. A minor highspot of his mid-30's films were a brace made in England. "GHMS", known over here as "You're in the Army Now", was an elaborate war film, cliched but extremely popular in England, and unfortunately long unavailable. The second (tonight's) film was better and subtler, though less popular. Incidentally, its original British title is much rarer than the American one, although its secondary meaning doesn't seem to reel. The American-localized sequences aren't particularly convincing, and without doubt the film would have had a bit more zip if made in Hollywood. But it's a slick and enjoyable romantic comedy thriller, and certainly shows the benefit of Walsh's Hollywood expertise. Britain made lots of films of this type in the 30's, most of them rather dull and plodding, and few holding up as well as this one does. Certainly few were as well cast as well, and Valerie Hobson - mid-way between playing Miss Frankenstein over here and becoming Mrs. Profumo over there - is ideally cast as a socialite snob who reforms.

--- Ten Minute Intermission ---

SAILORS' LUCK (Fox, 1933) Directed by Raoul Walsh; scenario by Marguerite Roberts and Charlotte Miller; Camera, Arthur Miller; 70 mins. app.


"Sailors' Luck" is a virtually unknown film, made available for a little-used TV package some ten years ago, and as far as I know unseen in New York since our own last screening in early 1972. It's a "small" film for a director of Walsh's stature at that time, immediately preceding the much bigger and star-studded "The Bowery", but such were the vagaries of the contract director system at the studios then that it was not at all uncommon for major directors to intersperse programmers among blockbusters. In any case, the Dunn-Eilers team had a considerable boxoffice following, so the film was of more commercial consequence than might now seem to be apparent.

A warning: seldom has any so enjoyable a film started out so badly. The first ten minutes are so flat and heavy-handed that one wonders not only why it was made, but whether one should even stay to see it! Then, almost like a light-switch being turned on - and as suddenly, just as the sailors call on Esther Muir and she sings out "Who's that knocking at my door?" - the film suddenly springs to life. From that point on, it's a fast, raucous, racy Walsh comedy with pleasing contrasts of honest and simple sentiment in the romantic scenes. Although it doesn't exploit it's pre-Code freedom (as "The Bowery" most certainly did) the relaxed censorship is well in evidence. (Note too that it was written by a duo of lady screenwriters!) Boy and girl have obviously been "around", and even the last scene, overlapping into the end title, is a sex gag. Short and extremely fast-paced, once the opening drudgery is disposed of, it scores perhaps best of all on the unbridled unility of its performances. Frank Moran's intellectual rough-neck is a surprising blueprint for the similar roles and performances he was associated with for Preston Sturges in the 40's, and Victor Jory's lecherous smoothie of a landlord is a classic of comic villainy. The playing of Dunn and Eilers is sympathetic and pleasing too, but their thunder is easily stolen by Mr. Jory. Not however by Sammy Cohen, the unfunnier half of the Cohen-Ted Mackamara comedy team (at their best in Walsh's silent "What Price Glory!!") and for a while, after the death of Mackamara, promoted by Fox as a solo comedian.

William K. Everson

Program ends approx. 10.10

An apology: the last five sets of notes for these series were done rather hurriedly in a single sitting without sufficient time to re-read and correct. Please bear with us if any typos have crept in.