THE NEW SCHOOL FILM SERIES 37: Program #4  
July 9 1980


"The Last Flight" is a curious little minor classic that apart from a one-day showing at the New Yorker in the sixties, our own New School showing in early 1970, and a triumphant "rediscovery" by the Lincoln Centre Festival fairly recently, has never had much exposure nor received the reputation it deserves. On first viewing, and especially if one knows nothing about the film, it has a stunning impact — almost overpowering. It is a going concern by David Manners, the hero inquest material, and a major film. It certainly translates into filmic terms the Hemingway-Fitzgerald fever and tragedy of the "lost generation" far more poignantly than any of the "official" attempts to do so, such as the much later adaptation of "The Sun Also Rises" with which it has striking parallels. Possibly it is not enhanced by repeated viewings: the staccato dialogue and the authentic flippancies of the 20's tend to pall, while the plot's deliberately forced gaiety comes to seem doubly forced in time. But this is hardly a criticism of the film: many films gain immeasurably from repeat viewings, while others, like "The Last Flight", make their greatest impact on the basis of first impressions. Considering that it starts out with so much spectacular war footage (culled from "The Dawn Patrol", "The Patent Leather Kid", "Lilac Time" and "Chances") the film maintains a surprisingly dynamic pace even when telling most of the subsequent story via dialogue. And for a relatively early talkie, some quite complex material is handled rather deftly; there is considerable subtlety and intelligence involved. That the hero is important, without having to spell it out. Richard Barthelmess' quiet sensitivity is a marvelously deployed, and Helen Chandler does a fine job as the rather weird heroine, but the biggest surprise of all is David Manners, usually just affable and ineffectual as Universal's stock romantic lead in horror films, who brings real depth and sensitivity to his role here, and particularly to a beautifully played death scene. "The Last Flight" also represents the directorial debut on an English-language film of William Dieterle. A former actor and handsome leading-man in German silent films, he had somewhat similar experience in America and then in Hollywood and sound, and his version of early talkies. He played the John Barrymore role in the German version of "Moby Dick" for example. Apart from being an extremely well directed film, "The Last Flight" also indicates how quickly Dieterle had acquired an understanding of American mores of the 20's; far more certainly than Leos Benepek. We should have seen many more Dieterle films from his best period — up to 1934 — and it's good to be able to see some of his remarkable first film.

Ten Minute Intermission —


With: George Brent, Josephine Hutchinson, Guy Kibbee, Mona Barrie, Robert Barratt, Margaret Hamilton, Robert McWade, Fuzzy Knight, Edward Pawley, Elisabeth Risdon, Marcia Mae Jones, Granville Bates, Russell Simpson, Sibyl Harris, Guy Wilkerson.

From its "B" western title to its stark climax, "Mountain Justice" is a curious picture indeed, with something for everybody, or at least so the Warner Brothers probably hoped. With a reputation for social consciousness to live up to, the studio attacks prejudice in various guises, EKX mob tyranny, and preaches social reform. At the other end of the scale, it offers a helping of Ladies Home Journal soap opera. No one element really dominates, and the alllur ingredients disappear be fore a vivid climax. It's not entirely different today, the archives and the museums still tend to look a little askance at films like this, and TV shunts it off to the wee hours of the morning - if at all. It's the kind of worthwhile (even in a minor sense) film that this series largely exists for and we're happy to bring it back. Ernest Haller's fine camerawork is a major asset, and the cast runs the full gamut of Warners' stock company of hillbillies and hoodlums. Robert Barratt is in fine fettle, and once more Ed Pawley is a long-suffering fool; and the barefoot mountain girl George Brent and Josephine Hutchinson (though it's always good to see this talented and under-used actress) in their unlikely roles and with their novelettish dialogue, don't stand much of a chance against these veterans.

Program ends approx. 10.25

— Wm. K. Eversen —

An apology: the last five sets of notes for this 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.