PIANO SCORES FOR BOTH FILMS ARANGED AND PLAYED BY STUART ODEMAN

TIGER ROSE (Warner Brothers, 1923) Directed by Sidney Franklin; adapted by Edmund Goulding and Millard Webb from the 1917 play by Willard Mack; Camera, Charles Rosher; 80 mins.

With Lenore Ulric "Tiger Rose" Boleson; Forrest Stanley (Michael Dowlon); Theodore von Kitz (Bruce Norton); Joseph Dowling (Father Thibault); Sam de Grasse (Dr. Cuscik); Claude Gillingwater (Nector McCollin); Andre Beranger (Pierre).

Though in some ways a rather ponderous piece of melodrama, "Tiger Rose" is fascinating for a number of reasons not entirely related to its plot. For one thing, it is the original from which the operetta "Rose Marie" evolved, and the changes through the years are considerable. The promoters of "Rose Marie" made a deal with the owners of "Tiger Rose", allowing them to use its basic plot structure, and not (surprisingly) restricting the continued playing of the original. The film was opened on stage in 1923, and the film version (with Joan Crawford) was made in 1927 and released in 1928. Still a silent, it could not use the songs, and without them its very melodramatic structure betrayed its obvious debt to "Tiger Rose". The latter was also remade by Warners in late 1929, a talkie (though also released in a silent version) which followed the original plot line, but added a great deal in terms of physical action.

Lupe Velez, Monte Blue and Grant Withers starred, with Rin Tin Tin written into it for good measure. Monumental changes had been made by the time that the first of MGM's two sound musicals had been made. It's ironic that the Jeanette MacDonald-Nelson Eddy "Rose Marie" is regarded as the "definitive" version, and yet it's the one furthest from the original in the conception of the female lead, originally re-written for Grace Moore, and only slightly re-adapted to suit MacDonald. The main change that had taken place otherwise was that the Moundie, originally a secondary character, had now become the hero - although the original hero's Christian name had become the new hero's surname!

"Tiger Rose" is also an interesting example of a (fairly isolated) attempt to revive the tradition, so popular in the 1914-16 years, of putting a popular stage show on film with the original star (Ulric had starred in the original play) and with an attempt to recreate the famed balletic theatrical effects. The storm sequence (mainly achieved by lighting and shown from within the cabin) is a good example of this. It is well done on film, though by 1923 this was hardly unusual, and one does get a sense of the kind of excitement its staging must have caused in the original theatrical presentation.

Sidney Franklin, who had started as a vigorous action director under D.W. Griffith, had by now already begun to specialise in adaptations of stage plays with a marked penchant for light comedy. Ahead of him, in the sound era, were such marvellous and tasteful stage-to-screen transferences as "The Guardsman" and "Reunion in Vienna". Here, although the film is "opened up" to include some breath-taking outdoor locations and some action therein, the film remains resolutely theatrical in style. It opens with the Moundie striding in with the rescued Tiger Rose and a typical blockbuster entrance line - "I found her floating down the Leon - from God knows where". In flashback, the rescue, including a remarkable stunt leap, is then shown; but in a sense it is also being told, so the theatrical framework is retained. Many of the original lines of the play are of course also used in subtile form. In its day, the heroine's "I don't know what you say - but you damned well know!" was famous (and notorious) as Shaw's famous taxi line from "Pygmalion". Use of the word "darn" on stage could still cause some excitement; now writers have explored the possibilities of the alphabet by going a couple of letters past the Ds and came up with another four-letter word which they (over)used to such an extent that it produces neither shock nor excitement, merely boredom and annoyance - and the good old honest "darn" has been virtually banished as obsolete.

"Tiger Rose" is superbly photographed by Charles Rosher ("Sunrise", "Sparrrows", "Young Bess"), one of the best cameramen in the business. It is also an exceptionally good print, so is good to look at even when nothing too startling is happening. The print, apparently all that new survives, is a slightly edited version put out for the home-movie market in the 20's, and is shy about 10 minutes of the original footage. However, nothing much seems to be missing in terms of actual plot. The apparent gaps (the very little footage devoted to the villain, and his casual disposal) were also there in the original, and the NY Times particularly complained about that as well as (ironically, in view of its subsequent destination) saying it was too similar to the Broadway production. The Girl of the Golden West" to be novel. The footage trims seem to be a major reason for not seeing the film as a whole, and it is not clear exactly what was cut.

THE ROAD TO YESTERDAY (DeMille-FDC, 1925) Produced and Directed by Cecil B. deMille; adapted by Jeanie Macpherson and Beulah Marie Dix from the stage play by Dix and S.G. Atherden; Camera, Percival Marlow; Art Direction by Anton Grot, assisted by Mitchell Leisen and Paul Tribe; Assistant director, Frank Ursen; edited by Anne Rauchens. With Joseph Schildkraut (Kenneth Faulton); Jutta Goudal (Malena Faulton); William Boyd (Jack Moreland); Vera Reynolds (Beth Tyrrell); Julia Faye (Dolly Poules); Cassen Ferguson (Adrian)

--- 10 MINUTE INTERMISSION ---

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"The Road to Yesterday", deMille's first personal production after he left Paramount following dissension over "The Ten Commandments", isn't shown very much - partly because it isn't a major deMille, and mainly because only one or two 16mm prints exist. However, it certainly deserves the occasional revival, and fits well into the framework of today's stage-to-screen program.

deMille's own publicity at the time understandably pull no punches. The press book advised exhibitors that the film "...marked an epochal advance in motion picture achievement... a triumph of screen art... strongly enough these, the trade press almost duplicated these raves - although one must bear in mind that they clearly wanted to support deMille in his new independence, and garner all the advertising money he might choose to spend. The Motion Picture World reported: "DeMille exceeds his best records; in production and direction he has never done better...has every quality of greatness." Motion Picture News agreed: "Hits the mark artistically, dramatically, box-office wise; a fine picture, a great picture, a credit to deMille, and a golden thing for PDC and exhibitors who play it." Motion Picture Daily went even further: "The greatest boxoffice picture ever made (...) (everything) so much bigger and better than ever before (...). the religious dashes in the picture, while dangerous material, will not serve to lessen its popularity..." Perhaps if we were smart, we'd have published these reviews last week, and just stood back to await the crowds! However, it just isn't possible to reconcile the film with these reviews. deMille is a complex director, turning out often creative, innovative and theatrically exhilarating films up to 1918 when the commercial failure of "The Whispering Chorus" caused him to in a sense "sell out" and just cater to the apparent demands of the boxoffice. Once in a while, with the rare "small" film, he'd show that the directorial power was still there. But with "The Road to Yesterday" he was aiming at a big commercial hit - and he was playing with his own money, not Paramount's, so he was taking no chances.

It's really difficult to know how to take this story - based on what was, in 1925, already an old-fashioned, 1922-year old play by Henry Murphy - without reincarnation, with deMille's accustomed mixture of sex and religion. Then mid-way a train wreck transports all the principals back to a prior existence - and interestingly, a different Continent, since America was still too young a nation to have the kind of history deMille wanted! Literally as soon as the smoke has cleared, the mood changes to banting comedy - something of a cross between Fairbanks and "The Boys from Syracuse". Even the titles, and there are some beauties, in this section, seem to be written very much with the tongue in cheek. Then suddenly it becomes quite seriously and floridly deMille again, and finishes (as did "The Volga Boatman") with a positive orgy of sex, sadism and eroticism - but in the flamboyant, theatrical way that is fun, not particularly convincing (although the strong lighting and photography helps to prevent it from not being taken seriously) and certainly not as violent or explicit as such material would be today. Religion, completely forgotten for about seven reels, suddenly rears its forbidden head in reel 12.

The critics were unanimous in raving about the train wreck, calling it the greatest thrill ever screened. This again is hard to accept, as it has none of the realism or thrills of the wreck in 1915's "The Duggermunt" or many intervening wrecks. What makes it interesting today is that the bulk of the wreck is staged exactly as it would have been on stage - a marvellous affect. And of course, the film does have many good things. A duel between Boyd and Schildkraut is well done. The fashions and decor are always interesting, and the art direction of Anton Grot of especial (if academic) interest since one can see here at its root the striking combination of set design and lighting that later came to be regarded as a Michael Curtiz/Warner trademark, mainly because of the design that Grot contributed to so many Curtiz films. The aftermath of the train wreck is genuine and impressive, and was used many times thereafter as stock footage. Acting, on the whole, and considering the light-weight cast, is generally good. Charles West, by the way, had played his same role in the stage version. The last two reels are exciting and vigorous stuff, and a couple of the sets are really elaborate. Apparently deMille didn't mind spending money on his castle sets, as he knew he could use them again (in "The Volga Boatman", "The Coming of Ames" and others).

The glass shots too are impressive reminders of that now virtually discontinued art. deMille's publicity stunts included the usual pre-screenings for the clergy, a tie-up with newspapers, and the use of such catchphrases as "IF YOU LIVED 300 YEARS AGO WHAT EFFECT HAS YOUR PAST LIFE ON YOUR PRESENT LOVES AND HATES?" and "MERRIE ENGLAND - WHEN INtolERANCE RULED AND MAIDS WERE BURNED AT THE STAKE AS WITCHES!"

As you may have surmised by now, "THE ROAD TO YESTERDAY" is hardly a great film - but it is an interesting and unusual one. This is its second showing in New York since 1926, and the first in some 15 years, so it's not a film one can see easily or casually. The excellent print was made some 25 years ago from the original 35mm negative.

Program: Ends approx. 10:40.

William K. Everson

Opening introduction will be very brief, so that time can be diverted to a post-screening discussion.

A REMINDER: Due to unavailability of the auditorium, there is NO SHOW next week, Oct.30th.

The program originally announced for that date has been transferred to the end of the series and will be presented on Dec. 18th. (The official New School fall Bulletin reflects and lists this change; only the schedules issued at the last showing of the Summer series list the program for next week.)