A Program of Silent Comedy and Melodrama; Piano accompaniment arranged and played by STUART ODERMAN


Although such was not the intention in co-billing them, "Down to Earth" and "Vanity" provide a perfect illustration of the changes that the silent film underwent in the transition from the teens to the twenties. The films are exactly ten years apart. "Down to Earth" is slight, almost conversational in its desire to be friendly and entertaining and no more. In terms of actual length, it is shorter than "Vanity", but because of a different shooting and projection speed, it actually runs longer than "Vanity". It actually runs longer than "Vanity". The physical pace of the film is remarkable: shots are very short, and, influenced by Griffith, the film is edited for speed even where none is really needed. "Vanity" on the other hand, illustrates the slowing-down process that took place in the 20's, giving players more of a chance (a) to dominate, and (b) to develop characterization. It's certainly not a slow film, but it gives you ample time to admire the sets and decor, and sequences do tend to run a little longer than they need to. The attempted seduction and subsequent killing takes a whole reel; a similar scene in Griffith's "Intolerance" (1916) had taken less than a minute.

Fairbanks had entered films in late 1915, and up to the end of 1916 made no less than 13 films for Triangle. "Down to Earth" is the third of his new and more elaborate series for Paramount, and like all of his early films is a modern satiric comedy, mixing homespun philosophy with perpetually optimistic. There are no acrobatic stunts, which may disappoint some, but there's boundless energy and movement to compensate. It is, admittedly, one of the lesser Fairbanks films (which is probably why it never seems to get shown), but it is a fast-moving, well-timed outing. It gives Fairbanks a chance to play the womanizing here is also quite topical! The Fairbanks philosophy of health and positive thinking is here given full rein, and little is said of the fact that one really needs to be a millionaire to implement it. Very economically made, much of it on Catalina, the film must have returned a very handsome profit. One misses some of the usual Fairbanks faces from Charlie Stevens and Monte Blue, and particularly, the part of the policeman "a complete bore from the start". "Crichton" isn't developed to its full potential. But it was never meant to be more than an amiable time-killer, and that it most certainly is — and a good print into the bargain.

--- FIVE MINUTE INTERMISSION ---

VANITY (Oscar B. deMille Productions-PIC, 1927) Directed by Donald Crisp; Supervised by C.Gardner Sullivan; Scenario, Douglas Doty, with title by John Kraft; Camera, Arthur Miller; Art Director, Anton Crot; Gowas, Adrian; 65 mins.


Apart from the use of one sequence in a television compilation some 20 years ago, this film has not been given a public showing since its original release, and it is much too enjoyable a film to rate such obscurity. A thoroughly typical late silent — certainly larger than life, and extremely elegant in its pictorial elements — it has many bonus elements. Donald Crisp, never really too much of a director — many of his silents were quite dull, and his best films were usually those where he "directed" Fairbanks and Keaton, who of course needed direction — here shows that, on occasion, he could indeed direct well. Leatrice Joy gives a quite remarkable performance, especially given the unsympathetic nature of her role, and the extremes of fashion and coiffure which today aren't as modern and chic as they were then. Adrian designed the costumes, and the wedding "helmet" designed for the wedding scene predates some similarly bizarre Adrian creations for Garbo. Well past his prime, the former country-boy here Charles Ray is uncomfortable in a social role, but it is the dialogues that are most intriguing here, well displayed in a print from the original negative. Arthur Miller (who photographed some of Ford's best sound films, including "How Green Was My Valley") does an excellent job, and Anton Grot's art direction not only predates the use of space and lighting that he introduced into his Warner films of the 30's, but also runs rings around the use of art deco ranging from the use of the brushstroke technique to the use of "art deco" ranging from the use of "art deco" ranging from the use of"art deco" ranging from the use of the brushstroke technique to the use of the brushstroke technique to the use of the brushstroke technique to the use of the brushstroke technique! This film includes much of deMille's story-sense, and has elements repeated from two earlier deMille/Joy films, "Saturday Night" and "Manslaughter", including deMille's old beliefs on the folly of mixing social classes. Only "kind-to-kind" (his phrase) marriages worked in his world, and "Vanity" supports the view that aristocrats—commoner liaisons are dangerous, and aristocrat to aristocrat liaisons perfectly safe (but also, one suspects, very dull and stuffy after the "End" title has faded).

--- William K. Everson

Program as above finishes at approx. 0.50. Then, as many of you know, we are repeating GRAND CANARY (marred by faulty sound on a prior showing) until approx. 11.00. Prior notes/credits for GRAND CANARY will be posted for reference.