THE NEW SCHOOL.  FILM SERIES: 44; Program #8  November 19, 1962

(Night for the record: fuller notes than the much abbreviated ones originally issued)

ARCHIVE NOTE

SUCH WOMEN ARE DANGEROUS (Fox, 1934) Directed by James Flood; Produced by Al Rockett; Screenplay by Jane Storm, Oscar M. Sheridan and Lenore Coffee from the novel "Odd Thursday" by Vera Caspary; Camera: L.W. O'Connell; Art direction: Gordon Wiles and Arnold front


Our rediscovery of possibly the most over-worked actor of the 30's, Warner Baxter, continues with a vengeance this evening — and there are enough films of this basic calibre, many of them quite unfamiliar, to keep us going for several seasons yet! "Such Women Are Dangerous" is a wild melodrama from a (presumably more sober) Vera Caspary novel that offers, among other delights, serials, moralists, and lots of madames Hudson, Ames and Barrie, and some hilariously unrestrained courtroom hammering from Irving Pichel and Frank Conroy - rate far more attention than the assembly-line script, which would have us believe that Warner Baxter is a great writer, even though he disproves it all too often by dictating some of his writing to his secretary. It's one of those films that was clearly just program fodder, considered of no major commercial or artistic importance, and yet for some unfathomable reason seems to work and be thoroughly entertaining. Perhaps it's because all the players go at it as though they believe in it, and the cameraman (O'Connell) and art director (Gordon Wiles, later to become an interesting director himself) give it all the pictorial style that they'd lavish on a film of much greater prestige. And one of its major surprises is Rochelle Hudson, both attractive and dramatically effective in an unaccustomed role that she can really sink her teeth into. One of scores of young ingenues trying to make it in Hollywood then, she presumably had an agent who believed in giving her maximum exposure, even if some of the roles were little more than bits. She appeared in nine films in 1933, and another six in 1934, including an off-beat comedy by George Stevens, "Bachelor Bait" that we'll be showing next season, and Ford's "Judge Priest". The film that was supposed to put her into the big time, the remake of "Way Down East" in which, opposite Henry Fonda, she took over the Lillian Gish role, didn't achieve its aim as far as she was concerned. But if major stardom eluded her, she stayed around - effectively - for many years in "B" movies and programmers. In some ways her role in tonight's film remains her most interesting - and one of her best performances. Possibly, in fact probably, tonight's print is the only one extant, so enjoy it while you can.

--- Ten Minute Intermission ---

SUCH MEN ARE DANGEROUS (Fox 1929, rel: 1930) Directed by Kenneth Hawks; Ass. Producer, Al Rockett; Asst. Director, Melville Burke; Screenplay by Ernest Vajda from a story by Elmer Glyn; Camera, L.W. O'Connell, George Eastman; Music, Dave Stamper; Editor, Harold Schuster; Ballet Director, Danny Dare; 81 mins.


(Note: filmed under the title "The Mask of Love").

"Such Men Are Dangerous" is the kind of film that almost sets back the cause of film preservation. It is clearly not a good film, is unlikely to have much value to future historians or scholars, certainly has no commercial value, and one vaguely wonders what other old film "died" through lack of preservation funds so that this one might live. However, film preservation isn't - or shouldn't be - based on such criteria. None of us today can envision what hidden values: (historical or sociological if not artistic) may emerge from films like this in the future (as they are now emerging from earlier, equally obscure) so while it's an impossible Utopian dream, one still subscribes to the notion that all films should be saved. The only kind of fame, and that a negative one, that the film has achieved so far is that its director Kenneth Hawks (brother of Howard, and husband of Mary Astor) was killed in a plane cash shooting the aerial footage. As it happened, these turn out to be not very important or even very interesting scenes, and for his pains Fox removed Hawks' name from the credits. Presumably if a man gives his life - literally - for a film, that film at the very least should be entitled to survive. It's the kind of story that is so wild that it might have worked far better as a flamboyant silent. (It was in fact released in a silent version, but that isn't quite the same thing.) Its story somewhat predates the more recent "Seconds", but too many things don't mesh. Catherine Dale Owen is just too unsympathetic as the heroine, and Baxter's good performance under heavy makeup isn't helped by the lethargic movement of the plot, or the unlikely medical result of facial plastic surgery also producing a very masculine voice. But Lagosi, in charge such a bonus might be expected, along with other side-effects, but in this case Lagosi plays, and very gracefully, a sympathetic scientist. However, that voice-change element is another of the realistic implausibilities that would have been hidden in a silent film with the same plot. Despite its strong plot and elaborate production, it is a less effective film today than its far less ambitious co-feature, another example of that inexplicable "inner life" that film seems to possess.