
Remade by Universal as "Storm over the Andes" and later "Legion of Lost Flyers", and certainly of more than casual influence on Hawk's "Only Angels Have Wings". "Air Mail" is one of the most enjoyable of the aviation and adventure films that directed, followed and the Byrnes. Together with most of them, including "Air Mail", were written by Frank Wead, whose own colorful story was put on film by John Ford (and John Wayne) as "The Wings of Eagles". "Air Mail" is rugged and well done, and unlike so many later films ("Blaze of Noon" for example) keeps most of its action aloft, with stunt flying by Paul Mantz and aerial photography by Elmer Dyer. Like so many films of its type, it has its airport curiously located between mountain peaks and high tension wires, constantly menaced by hurricane, fog and snow, and if it seems that more planes crash than get through, then put it all down to lively dramatic license. In any event, all of the air films of the 30's now seem so incredibly dated in a purely technical sense that one unconsciously places them in an era far more distant than they are in fact, and thus the mortality rate is a little easier to accept. The thrill stuff is very much the real thing for the most part, backed up by skillful use of miniatures and special effects. Paul Mantz, who did so much of the stunting, was killed in 1966 while staging a crash scene for "Flight of the Phoenix". The film may be formula hokum in terms of plot, but it's put over with a real h-e-man gutsiness allied with honest sentiment, a combination typical of Ford. If some of the characters are cliche, others have a kind of raw honesty, and the pre-Production Code behaviour and wisecracking is a delight. Although Ford started at Universal, he left them in the early 20's to go to Fox, and this was his one and only picture made at Universal. Although it's not a major Ford, it's a personal and recognisable Ford; there are moments of beautiful rough poetry, as well as inspired handling of supporting players. Slim Summerville wasn't in the original script at all for example, but Ford just literally threw him into it, improvising bits of business for comic punctuation as the film progressed. We haven't shown the film since one of our earliest series, and since it never seems to surface elsewhere, this revival is long overdue. --- 10 Minute Intermission ---

KING OF THE JUNGLE (Paramount, 1933) Directed by Bruce Humston and Max Marcin; Screenplay by Max Marcin, Fred Niblo Jr and Philip Wylie from the novel "The Lion's Way" by Charles Thurlrey Stoneham; Camera, Ernest Haller; 73 mins.


"King of the Jungle" was clearly made to cash in on the enormous success of MGM's first Weissmuller Tarzan movie, and also possibly "King Kong". It and "Kong" were released almost simultaneously, but "Kong" was long in production and the contents of its finale were well-known in advance. "King of the Jungle" in 1933 (though well received) added a number of stereotypes against it. It clearly wasn't a Tarzan movie, its stunt aspect couldn't compare with Kong's, and moreover it was as much circus as jungle movie and there were quite a few circus movies in release at that time. So it seemed to be shunted into a kind of kiddie-matinee niche, never taken seriously and used reissued once, all but forgotten. Thus it's a pleasant surprise to find that it's as entertaining for Poppa as for Junior, that its combination of jungle and circus locales now makes it rather unique, and that its spectacular climax of fire and elephants running amok through city streets, to say nothing of its big cat fights, is surprisingly elaborate and expert for a film of its relatively modest ambitions. Another reason for its relatively lowprofile today is its admittedly unfortunate and condescending attitude towards the native "boys" who do all the dirty work for the white hunters, risk their lives, capture the lions, and are rewarded by being cursed as "black fools". There isn't much of it, but enough in the mindless area for it to be real and certainly unsophisticated Saturday matinee fare it may be, but it's unusually well done and extremely entertaining. Buster Crabbe, whose tragic death this year was such an unexpected shock, here has his best screen role and makes one wonder anew why Paramount so wasted him thereafter. Frances Dee is graceful and charming as always, and Warner Richmond is up to his old tricks, tormenting the animals and setting fire to the circus. Paramount (in those early days) was a host of the period is much in evidence, sometimes quite creatively. The animal fights (quite heavily censored in Europe) are extremely well staged, and the entire climax was re-used and the climax for a later Paramount "B", "Caged Fury" in which, ironically, Buster Crabbe was the villain.

--- William E. Eversen ---

Program Ends approx. 10.16.