Confirming the disappointing (but not unexpected) news announced last week, the new LUST OF MISS CHEVY is not available, and the substitution next week will be a NOGGINOUS AFFAIR (1930) with Ray Bricus, Basil Rathbone and Billie Dove.

THE NEW SCHOOL FILM SERIES 47: PROGRAM #2 October 14, 1963

Piano Accompaniment arranged and played by STUART ODERMAN

SOLD FOR MARRIAGE (Fine Arts-Triangle, 1915; r-1; Feb.16 1916) Directed by W. Christy Cabanne; Supervised by D.W. Griffith; Story by William E. Wing; 60 min. With: Lillian Gish (Marfa); Frank Bennett (Ian); Walter Long (Col. Gregloff); A.D. Sears (Ivan, the Uncle); Pearl Elmore (Anna, the Aunt); Curt Rehelt (the grandfather, Dmitri); William Lowery (George, Ivan's brother); Fred Burns (the American policeman); Bromwell (a desperado); Olga Grey (Marfa's mother); C.M. Blue (Marfa's father); Mike Siebert (the unwanted suitor).

Today is Lillian Gish's birthday, and I'm not sure she'd altogether relish having this particular item suddenly rediscovered as a birthday present! Far from being overwhelming either as an entertainment or as art, it is academically invaluable as being the only one of her Triangle features available today, and also the first Gish feature available not directed by Griffith. It was one of the 50-odd films that Griffith "supervised" while he was diverting his main attentions to "Intolerance." While it was known that he had no personal interest in the Douglas Fairbanks films made under his banner, he did find time for personal involvement with certain projects that he cared about, and on some (like Mae Marsh's "Hoodoo Ann") he even wrote the scenarios. "Sold for Marriage," a melodrama in extreme contrast to the previous Gish release, the light-hearted "Daphne and the Pirate," would seem to be one that Griffith had no time or inclination to involve himself in personally. It looks as though it was filmed directly from the script, with no attempt to improvise or build on the bare bones of the story. With Gish convinced that she has killed Walter Long (actually she hasn't), one would expect remorse, and perhaps a couple of flashbacks to the event to reinforce her guilt, but nothing of the sort is seen. The film is weak in general, while its production value is fairly well chosen, and some of the melodramatic highlights take place during a storm, nothing is done to exploit these elements, while art direction, such as it is, does little more than suggest the different geographic venues. Even the final chase to the rescue is fairly tame, though not helped by a mis-splice towards the end that throws a couple of shots out of frame. (It is now in the negative, so it can't be corrected; be assured it's in the print, not in the projectors. Obviously one expects a lot from a remake of this type and equally obviously one shouldn't. There's even an inconsistency in the Gish performance: she is much too tough and self-reliant a lady, as she plays it, for us to have much concern for her well being. Nothing wrong with the performance, but D.W. surely would have made her more warlike (this early, it wouldn't yet have been a Griffith/Gish cliché) and vulnerable, thus increasing suspense and audience concern. Christy Cabanne, while he did some of his best work at Triangle, was never much of a director except in terms of efficiency, and probably found his true métier turning out slick "B" actions for Universal in the 40's. Nevertheless it's good to have this oddity back among us - and to be able to note that, some 65 years after it was made, Miss Gish is to be honored by the American Film Institute's Lifetime Award.

------ Ten Minute Intermission ------

DANCING MOTHERS (Paramount; released March 1st 1926) Produced and Directed by Herbert Brenon; Scenario by Forrest Halsey from the original 1924 stage play by Edmund Goulding; Camera: J. Roy Hunt; Art Director, Julian Boone Fleming; 50 mins.

With: Alice Joyce (Ethel Westcourt); Clara Bow (Kittens Westcourt); Conway Tearle (Jerry Naughton); Donald Keith (Kenneth Cobb); Norman Trevor (Hugh Westcourt); Dorothy Cumming (Mrs Masarena) Elsie Lawson (Irna); Spencer Charters (out-of-towner) and Leila Hyams, Matt McGough.

For many years, "Dancing Mothers" was perhaps over-familiar as being the only (if atypical) Clara Bow vehicle available. Over the past 20 years however, with more of the traditional Bow films surfacing, it has been thrust into comparative obscurity again. I believe tonight's is its first NY showing since February of 1965, so it is certainly a further outing.

Supersededly disappointing for some perhaps, in that its title combined with Bow's name suggests a wild flaming youth saga in the manner of "Our Dancing Daughters," "Dancing Mothers" is actually a generally quiet and rather thoughtful film that holds up well, and reflects the uncertain moralities of the times more accurately than most of the flapper films. As a play, it had been considered hackmeyed and rather old-fashioned, but was saved for most of the critics by its decidedly off-beat ending. As a film, it stands the test of time rather better, for in faithfully retaining the play and much of the dialogue of the play, it achieves a kind of honesty that was usually sidestepped in movies of this type. The tug of war between pre-war Victorian standards and post-war demands for sophistication and "freedom" were usually wrapped up in neat little packages.

-continued overleaf-
about the girl who pretends to be a wanton but, unbesmirched, finally settles for the old values after all. "Dancing Mothers", while admittedly not too profound, does suggest that the old values at least need a little overhauling, while the new ones warrant cautious consideration. It also suggests that maybe the Sanctity of the Home is not the be-all and end-all of existence, and that European liberalism was a kind of Utopia to which the fortunate (and well-heeled) could escape. As a kind of sociological document, carrying on in a straight line from "A Pool There Was", "True Heart Susie", "The Sheik" and "Foolish Wives", "Dancing Mothers" is a valuable record of changing morals and mores.

As a film, though perhaps of less importance and cinematic stylistics than such immediately prior Herbert Brenon films as "Peter Pan", "A Kiss for Cinderella", and "Beau Geste", it is still unobtrusively stylish. The sets, including a bizarre Greenwich Village night-club, are handsome, and the camerawork if unshowy is certainly expert. And despite a preponderance of long (subtitled) dialogue scenes, Brenon always keeps it from looking like a photographed play. There are lots of intricate entrances and exits, with characters missing one another, hiding, confronting, and so forth - yet it all seems effortless and natural, without the stage-managed chalk-line quality one might expect. Too, some of the big emotional and dramatic scenes are resolved or climaxed by long-held and well underplayed closeups, specifically of Alice Joyce and Clara Bow.

Brenon always worked well with younger players, and Clara Bow is quite fine as Kittens, although sometimes her pep and vivacity make the character a shade more likeable than it should be. No villainess certainly (Helen Hayes played the role on stage), Kittens is nevertheless shallow and selfish, yet for the most part one's sympathies tend to be with her, and it is only the reactions of others that underlie her brettish qualities. Alice Joyce gives a dignified and restrained performance, and indeed, all of the acting remains valid and undated. A remarkably "modern" film in many ways, it may well eventually become one of the "definitive" jazz-age films. It seems to grow in stature over the years, and its basic intelligence more than outweighs initial disappointment at a lack of the traditional "fun" elements of wild parties and youth on the rampage.

Oddly enough though, perhaps because of its less than spectacular stage success, Paramount sold the film primarily as a typical jazz-age comedy. A typical poster catchline: "Hey! Hey! Charleston babies! Parked Perambulators! Dancing Mothers! Jazz! Jazz! Jazz!"

By the way, those of you with good memories of the Broadway of the 20's may be interested to note the brief appearance of Fay Marbo and her brother Gilbert who, as "Fay and Gill", were Broadway topliners of the period. They appear briefly as entertainers in the "Pirate's Ship" cabaret sequence.

Incidentally, the print is approximately ten minutes short of its original running time. When releasing their movies to the non-theatrical market, Paramount trimmed them all (usually very efficiently) to an exact one hour running time. While one regrets that policy, at the same time if they hadn't released films to that market, virtually none of their films would exist today, since they didn't bother to preserve "Dancing Mothers" or "Are Parents People?", "The Grand Duchess and the Waiter" or any of the others that they so released.

--- William K. Everson ---

Program ends approx. 10.00, followed by discussion period.

** This reference of course is to Paramount's silent films, which in the 20's and 30's were issued in 16mm to non-theatrical users, schools, institutions, etc.