DADDIES (Warner Brothers, 1924) Directed by William Seiter, assisted by Lewis Milestone; scenario by Julian Josephson from the play by John L. Hobbe as presented by David Belasco; Camera, Charles Stumar; Original length, 60 reels; all surviving print edited to reels, or approx. 55 mins.
With: Mae Marsh (Ruth Atkins); Harry Myers (Robert Audrey); Claude Gillingwater (James Crockett); Crawford Kent (William Rivers); Claire Adams (Sabella); Willard Louis (Henry Allen); Boyce Combe (Nicholson Walters); Georgia Woodthorpe (Mrs Audrey); Otto Hoffman (Farkar); Priscilla Moran (Alice); The DeBrise Twins and King Evers (triplets); Milla Davenport (Katie); Murial Frances Dana (Lorrie).

Looking at this pleasing but predictable trifle today, it's hard to believe that it originally saw the light of day as a highly successful David Belasco stage vehicle for Jeanne Eagels. It doesn't seem to have the showmanship built into it that one normally associates with Belasco, and furthermore it was drastically reshuffled in its transfer to the screen. Originally, Monte Blue was to have the lead, but Harry Myers was moved up into his spot, so that virtually all of the supporting players (Willard Louis et al) were likewise promoted into roles one size larger! Mae Marsh, though not given starring billing, still gets the biggest billing, and is yet little more than a cameo performer. She doesn't make her appearance until the second reel, and thereafter appears only spasmodically.

Critics at the time were very much up in arms about this. Were this an independent film it would be easy to understand, since it was a common practice for small films to hire and pay a "name" player for perhaps a single morning's work, shoot half a dozen scenes, and intersperse them throughout the film. But Warners would hardly have used those tactics, and in any case after Griffith's "The White Rose" or St. John's "The Magnificent Major" was again a name of some importance. Furthermore, she is either unsympathetically directed (unlikely, with William Seiter at the helm) or for reasons of her own was just walking through the role. What is needed, the opportunities for pathos and whimsy, usually her strongpoint, just aren't fully realised. But even though a disappointing film, "Daddies" has the usual Seiter taste, and Stumar's photography shows up well in this fine original print. Its plot is in the same vein as MGM's "Three Wise Fools", filmed as both a silent and a talkie. Claude Gillingwater could do this kind of thing in his sleep of course, and continued to do so right through the 30's. That odd and often ill-used actor Harry Myers, so often illogically teamed with young beauties (Laura LaPlante in "The Bells"
that's a bit too charmed and the millionaire-drunk in "City Lights", is here a none-too-convincing romantic lead in a role that clearly would have been better served by Monte Blue. But Mae Marsh's prolonged absence from the screen undoubtedly made it hard for him to bring much conviction to such a shadowy romance.

— Ten Minute Intermission —

STELLA MARIS (Paramount/Artcraft, 1917) Directed by Marshall Neilan; Scenario by Frances Marion from the (1912) novel by William J. Locke; Camera, Walter Stieglitz; A. Director, Wilfred Buckland; 80 mins approx.
With Mary Pickford (Stella), Henry B. Walthall (Tyrone), Marcia Manon (Louisa Risa), Josephine Crowell (Aunt Gladys); Herbert Standing (Sir Oliver); Ida Waterman (Lady Blount); Gustav von Seyffertitz (Surgeon); Teddy William Locke (who also wrote last season's "The Monals of Marcus") is an author who seems quite outdated today, and "Stella Maris" is a curious work, part romance, part parable, part fantasy — though a rather gutsy one.Basically it's an equal mixture, being both Dieckstein and Griffithian - and deMille's art director, Wilfred Buckland in addition often gives it the visual look of a deMille film. Finally, its stress on black, dark rooms with pools of light give it a surprisingly modern, film noir look! But basically of course, it is as a Mary Pickford vehicle that it is most important, stressing once again how determined she was to vary the content and style of her film, and also what an under-rated actress she was. Given the widely-contrasted dual role here is a bravura part, still many consider that this represents the high point of her acting, although Marcia Manon's performance as the wife is quite exceptional too. The film was remade in 1925 with Mary Philbin - and Gladys Smockwell, of course, as the wife. It followed this original remarkably closely, save for a different romantic solution). It's such a good film that I wish the print were the equal of "Daddies", but alas that isn't the way of the filmed world. The print is adequate, but the lighting and camerawork are so fine that one would love to see it. As it stands, the private version even the Pickford preservation prints are a bit on the harsh side. Teddy the Magician, playing this title as frisky as usual, and some of the all-engaging subtitles are decidedly odd and presumably Frances Marion's "improvements" on the original. The film, well-made and sensitively directed certainly, whets one's appetite for more of the early missing Marshall Neillans, and makes one wonder anew why his career went so steadily downhill from the early 20's on. By the way, the running time is only approximate. Even though the camera speed is fairly constant, the shots are sometimes cut extremely short by the editor, necessitating a compromise projection speed which may cause the film to run a little longer than indicated.

Program Ends approx. 9:55

William K. Sveren