Two Late Silent Melodramas: Piano accompaniment arranged and played by STUART ODERMAN

HANGMAN'S HOUSE (Fox, 1928) Directed by John Ford; scenario by Philip Klein and Marion Orth, with titles by Malcolm Stuart Boylan, from the novel by J. W. Hearst; Camera, George Schneiderman; Assistant Director, Phil Ford; 71 m.
With: Victor McLaglen (Citizen Hogan); June Collyer (Connaught O'Brien); Larry Kent (Dermot McDermott); Earle Foxe (John Darcy); Hobart Bosworth (Justice O'Brien); Joseph Burke (Neddy Joe); Eric Mayne (Legionnaire Colonel); Belle Stoddard (Anne McDermott); and Mary Gordon, Jack Pennick, John Wayne.

Surprisingly, although Ford's first film "Four Sons" had been a huge success at the Roxy, "Hangman's House" received no New York first-run. (Although a less-than-routine Fox comedy programmer, "Why Sailors Leave Home", also 1928, did play the Roxy!) Equally surprisingly, there appears to have been no NY showings of this film since we last played it some 15 years ago, which helps to explain why it's such an uphill battle convincing the studios of the importance of film preservation. Based on a novel by Doris Haynes, this film is an equally Irish "partly of the Morning". "Hangman's House" was Ford's last silent. It's a curious collection of various styles, with more than a nod to the then-fashional Puerto Rico European realism brought to Fox by F.W. Murnau, and at the same time a partial blueprint for such later Irish/Ford films as "The Informer" and "The Quiet Man". Apart from a quick establishing shot of Ireland, it's entirely studio made, even the horse race scene being done on the Fox ranch in Malibu. Ford apparently reshaped the finished film somewhat - it differs quite substantially from the original script, and the Victor McLaglen character in the film is substantially enlarged from the novel. Ford's oft-stated claim that to him direction was merely "a job of work". No director who didn't really love his craft would have taken such pains with composition, or even included such dramatically extraneous shots as the lovely tracking shot along the studio-made river towards the end. Apart from Earle Foxe, a wonderful villain whose rather excessive mugging does stand out amongst the restraint of the other playing, and which may be explained by the fact that he was formerly a comedian, one especially notes the obvious presence of John Wayne as an extra in some eight scenes, and particularly as an ultra-enthusiastic spectator in the horse-race scenes. Ford seems so anxious to use him that he even has him in two places at once in this sequence!

--- 10 Minute Intermission ---

THE PATENT LEATHER KID (First National, 1927) Produced and Directed by Alfred Santell; Presented by Richard Rowland; Scenario, Winifred Dunn and Adela Rogers St. John from an original story by Rupert Hughes; Camera, Arthur Edeson, assisted by Ralph Hammeras and Alvin Knechtle; Art Directors, Stephen Goossen and Jack Okey; 120 mins.

With Richard Barthelmess (The Kid); Molly O'Day (Curley Boyle); Lawford Davido: (Lieut. Hugo Breen); Matthew Betz (Jake Stuke); Arthur Stone (Jimmy Kinch); Raymond Turner (Mobile Molasses); Hank Mann (Sergeant); Walter James (Officer Riley); Lucien Prival (German officer); Nigel de Brulier (French doctor).

Next to "Tallade David" (and not counting "Way Down East" and "Broken Blossoms" as Barthelmess vehicles), "The Patent Leather Kid" was quite certainly Richard Barthelmess' most successful film, and certainly too his biggest physical production. In some ways it is a little too big and too long for its own good. In attempting to inflate its novelistic scope, the film loses some of its own power, whilst retaining its best elements, including its good honest sentimental hokum. On the other hand, nobody has ever claimed that it was a great film, merely a sure-fire commercial attraction, and this one can readily believe. In sheer size, neither budget nor emotions nor sets have been stinted on, and yet the opulence of production doesn't result in artificiality. The sets of New York streets, cafes, boxing arenas etc. are superbly realistic, and look like the real thing rather than sets. Some of the exteriors are of course standing sets, and the little French village which followed years in Lillac no longer existed when the scenes were shot, with full Army of Occupation at Fort Lautia in Washington - which also turned out the troops, the equipment and the battlefield for Universal's "To Hell and Back" in the 50's. The battle scenes are huge, massive and well organised, though they can't altogether avoid the look of being a big Hollywood "show" rather than the real thing. It's interesting to note how many of the shots Arthur Edeson copied (from himself) when he photographed "All Quiet on the Western Front" just three years later.

Director Santell, who he turned in a chase action sequence of Colleen Moore's "Orchids and Ermine" to the heavy dramatics of "Winter," and in the early 30's an interesting trio of American remakes: "Daddi Long Legs", "Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm" and "Fess of the Storm Country". Molly O'Day perhaps tries a little too hard to establish herself as a major new dramatic star (in a role made to measure for Carol Dempster), but for a newcommer she does extremely well, and the film DID make a star of her.

--- William K. Everson

Program Ends: 11 p.m.

(Length of tonight's program precludes a discussion session, but next week's program is quite short and we'll catch up with questions then)