An evening of Silent Melodrama

Piano Score arranged and played by STUART ODERMAN

SCARS OF JEALOUSY (Thomas H. Ince Corp.- Associated First National, 1923)
Directed by Lambert Hillyer; Scenario by Hallyer from a story by Anthony H. Rudden; Camera, J.O. Taylor; supervised by Thomas Ince; 66 mins.
With: Frank Keenan (Col. Newland); Lloyd Hughes (Cody Jacques); Edward Burns (Jeff Newland); Marguerite de la Motte (Helen Meanix); James Neill (Colonel Meaney); James Mason (Col. Jacques); Mattie Peters (Mandy); George Reed (Mose); Bob Kortman (Revenue officer); Max Davidson (French peasant).
NY premiere: Strand Theatre, March 1923.

The Museum of Modern Art has recently been presenting a retrospective of producer Thomas Ince's work, concentrating on the period of his greatest creativity and productivity from 1912 to 1917. By the early 20's, after his brief Paramount contract had expired and he no longer had big names like William S. Hart to fall back on, he was producing fewer but ostensibly bigger films like "Lorna Doone" and "Barbara Frietchie" and releasing independently. I use the word "ostensibly" deliberately, since while the films were longer, often bigger in theme and provided good fodder for advertising, they were essentially economic films that relied on 2nd rate (though still viable) star names, and on astute directors who could stretch a dollar to make it look like two on the screen. "Scars of Jealousy" was, relatively speaking, one of the last Ince productions before his mysterious death on the Hearst yacht the following year. It's also typical of Ince's ability to make the routine seem more important. The prologue in pre-Revolutionary France really has very little to do with the plot, but it allows Ince to emulate Griffith and detest the mixing of the old and the new and suggesting some significance thereby. It also creates an illusion of size, partly achieved by cramping a great many extras into small sets, by reusing a big scene from "Lorna Doone" (the courtroom scene) as an establishing shot, but so that details of costuming from a different country and period are not obvious) and also by re-using one of the still-standing sets from that film. Once in the United States, the story takes on more familiar grounds: Southern honor, redemption, a last-minute rescue. But it keeps on the move, disposing of the smaller action (a runaway horse, a fight) early, and keeps the bigger action (a lynch mob, a forest fire) for the end, so that even while they aren't especially spectacular, they seem so by comparison. Locations are exceptionally well chosen too, and discourage suspicion that the film was shot wholly in the Hollywood area. It's a taut, not overlong picture, typical of the era, and director Lambert Hillyer, Bill Hart's favorite director, and later a reliable sound era director too, with "Dracula's Daughter", "The Invisible Ray" and scores of westerns (and some serials) to his credit. Another of Ince's oft-used economies is also on view: the front of his new studio (later used by David O. Selznick who used the studio front as his trademark) was patterned on Washington's house at Mount Vernon, and Ince used it quite extensively (especially in "Barbara Frietchie") as a Southern mansion set. The print, though a little fragile, is a fine toned original. Frank Keenan, an Ince perennial, was the father of Ed Aleman, Jesus Aleman, and Robert Keenan. Eileen Keenan, Ince's wife, was in a sense the original Mrs Norman Maine of "A Star is Born", though her career was hardly as meteoric or as spectacular as that of Bennett, Gaynor, Garland and Streisand in the four movie versions.

-- TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION --

THE DEVIL'S CIRCUS (MM, 1926) Written and Directed by Benjamin Christensen; Camera, Ben Reynolds; NY premiere, Capitol Theatre, March 1926. 80 mins.
With: Norma Shearer (Mary); Charles Emmett Mack (Carlstop); Carmel Myers (Yonna); John Miljan (Lieberkind); Claire McDowell (Mrs Peterson); Joyce Goad (Anita).

In the American Film Institute's catalogue, it is so overwhelmed by the film's many melodramatic ingredients - Cripples, Lion Tamers, Beggars, Circus and Rape - that in its cross-indexing, it may overlooks Prostitution and World War One! Obviously this is a "fun" film; while it is exciting it is not distinguished, but its melodrama is far too uninhibited for it to be taken too seriously. It was the first American film for Danish director Christensen, who came here in the mid-20's along with Sjostrom, Stillier and Gade, Scandinavians all. His American career was brief, with "Seven Footprints to Satan" arguably his best. He is best known of course for "Witchcraft Through the Ages", though his very best film ("The Mysterious X") was in 1913, certainly his most interesting period. John Miljan, seducer and rotter supreme, has one of his best roles, and in the Hitchcock / "Psycho" era it comes from the "The Student Prince" (1927). The ill-fated hero, Charles Emmett Mack, a former Griffith star was only a couple of years away from his tragic death. Wild and sometimes almost incoherent, "The Devil's Circus" is nevertheless quite fascinating, and offers some splendid photography, both in closeups of Miss Shearer and in ingenious trick effects in the circus scenes.

Program Ends approx. 10.15.

Questions/Discussion session follows.

-- WM. K. EVERSON --