THE NEW SCHOOL
FILM SERIES 54: Program #10

Archive Night: Two Rarities unreleased in the U.S.

THE WOMAN HE SCORRED (Britain, 1929) Directed by Paul Czinner; a Charles
Whitaker Production for Warner Brothers (British) release; scenario by
Czinner and Whitaker; no other production credits available. 90 mins app.
(Also shown as "Hunted", "Street of Lost Souls").
With Pola Negri (Louise); Hans Rehmann (John); Warwick Ward (Maxim); Cameron
Carr (Magistrate); Margaret Rawlings (Woman)

"The Woman He Scorred" is a nearly perfect illustration of what our "Archive
Night" label is all about. It's a virtually unknown film, and quite possibly
the only extant print. It's a fascinating example of the transitional silent-to-
sound period, and of unfamiliar work by director Czinner (most of whose films
were vehicles for his wife, Elisabeth Bergner) and star Negri. It is most
certainly of somewhat specialised interest, so the Archive heading serves also
as a kind of warning, and we are particularly pleased to have a genuinely
outstanding film to play with it, so that it isn't an entirely academic evening.

There is virtually no reference to the film anywhere, certainly not under the
basic biographies and chronologies for both Czinner and Negri. Negri does
devote a few pages to it in her autobiography, but mainly in a tangential way
as a picture of her "in an island off the coast." This comment is used to build
conduction to a new love. What facts she cites about the film are generally wrong;
she gives the wrong (and more imposing) British production company, and remarks
that it was a big success in England and America (where it never played) under
the title "Seat of the Fallen," a title that was never used. It was based on a
story called "Street of Abandoned Children" and was made, according to Negri,
when a deal for her to star in Shaw's "Cassandra and Cleopatra" fell through.

With her Hollywood career behind her, Negri was here marking time in a curious
late British silent, designed to tap the European silent market before it
disappeared. (She did return to Hollywood for an early talkie, but did most of
her sound films in Germany, ultimately returning to America for two much later
films. She now lives in retirement in Hollywood). The English title seems
incredibly old-fashioned for a period, and one can only assume that the
British title is a later concoction - "Street Angel," "Illusion," "Street Girl," "Street of Sin," "Street of Sorrow" - caused the English
distributors to assume it would be confused with one of them. Made completely
silent, this (French) print has a music and effects track added, though the
singing, regrettable, is not Pola herself. The script is never very explicit
about locations - titles refer to "an island off the coast" for example - but
the opening scenes were shot on location in Marseilles. Much of it was shot in
Cornwall in the South of England, but the bulk of it on the island of Jersey.

The occurutemps between two men over Pola is so melodramatic it almost seems like an Apache dance, and although it was the
fashion for late silents to be self-indulgent, thoroughly visual and a shade too
leisurely, this one does rather overdo it. It is too long, and the climactic
scene so protracted that one expects its direction to be reversed and a surprise
finale introduced. Pola certainly is the whole show, and gives her admirers
money's worth.

The print bears the title TRAGIC meaning hunted or wanted (by the law). Though
there are a few subtitles, most of them are unnecessary. (Two are devoted to
the hero's need to get his telescope (a device to get him into
town to meet Pola) and a further two when Pola tries to return some money and
he declines. You'll have no trouble at all following the plot which is told
in entirely visual terms, and perhaps only one title needs an amplification.

Pola is a prostitute and Warwick Ward her pimp. She is attracted to John, the
lighthouse keeper, who is drawn into a fight with the pimp. Terrified that
she'll be killed by the pimp, she pleads with John to help her. He feels sorry
for her, but thinks she's exaggerating. During a storm at sea, John is washed
away, and Pola promises to save the most miserable of God's sinners in return.
There's then a dissolve to his marrying Pola; presumably to shorten the film a little, footage was excised here. We don't
really know whether she came with him in the first place, or he went back to
erg her. In a film which takes its time as this one does, such a fact would
most certainly have been spelled out. Pola has trouble settling into her new
quiet life but is making headway when suddenly the pimp, now wanted for murder,
reappears and begins to make trouble. From that point on no further explanation
is needed.

-- TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION
DER VERLORENE SOHN (THE LOST SON) (German Universal, 1934) Written and Directed by Luis Trenker; Produced by Paul Kohner; Camera, Albert Benitz, Reimar Kuntz; Music, Giuseppe Becci; editing, Andrew Martin; 80 mins.
With Luis Trenker (Tonio); Maria Andergast (Barbl); Marian Marsh (Lillian Williams); Eduard Koch (Tonio's father); Berti Schulte (Barbl's father); Franz Schroeder-Schrom (Mr. Williams); Jimmie Fox (the American friend).
We have shown many of Luis Trenker's films here in the past: "The Doomed Battalion", "The Challenge", "Der Kaiser von Kalifornien" and "The Rebel". If not his best, "The Lost Son" is certainly his most personal work and we have wanted to show it here for a long time. Coincidentally, it turned up just a couple of weeks ago at the Astoria Motion Picture Centre, but in a Friday night slot that clashed with this series. Those early programs gave us ample opportunity to talk about Trenker in the notes, to explain that as writer-director-star he was rather like a combination of John Ford and John Wayne, and that both his personal beliefs and his film-making and story-telling styles overlapped rather strongly with those of Ford. The Mountain Film was, to Germany, what the Western was to America. For fuller information on Trenker (somewhat shortened below) I can refer those interested to my article on him in the May 1984 issue of "Films in Review". Trenker, now in his 90's, is very much a folk-hero in his home town of Bolzano in the Dolomites. He's remarkably active, still climbs and hikes his beloved mountains, and is a frequent lecturer and documentarian on European tv.
Despite a good deal of German dialogue, "The Lost Son" will be easy to follow with the synopsis provided, and the middle sections, shot in Ni, are spoken in English. These offer some of the most stunning visuals I've ever seen of the Bowery in the depression and are a major contribution to social history in themselves. Trenker starts the New York sequence off by equating the New York skyline with a range of mountains near his home. One of the major assets of his films (apart from the always stunning camerawork of Albert Benitz) is the rich, almost operatic musical scoring by Becci (who also did the music for "The Blue Light" and "Ecstasy").
Even though its theme would seem to have fallen into propagandist lines approved by the Nazis - it discourages emigration and endorses a return to the homeland - the Nazis tried to suppress the film. Trenker was out of favor with them, and would become more so as his films took on an anti-Nazi tinge. In 1940 he was forbidden to direct, but allowed to continue as an actor in the works of others. Oddly enough, apart from the Nazis' - and specifically Dr. Goebbels' - dislike of Trenker personally, the main reason for the attempted suppression of the film was Goebbels' fear that it would offend the American government, because of its depiction of the depression. While World War Two was only in the early planning stages, it was naively hoped that when it came America might be an ally - or at the very least a neutral. Consequently German films under the Nazis tried to be as pro-US as possible, while the British and the French took the brunt of the Nazi propaganda machine. However, "The Lost Son" was such a success at European festivals that it would have been ridiculous to deny it a German release. U.S. distribution was prevented however.
For American audiences, the final sequence is perhaps a bit excessive. The hero makes it back to the Tyrol just in time to participate in the Raurachfest and claim his bride therein. Dramatically, this should be a wrap-up rather than another prolonged episode, but clearly one of the reasons Trenker wanted to make the film in the first place was to document the Festival, a curious and fascinating mixture of paganism and simple Christian symbolism. Ethnographically, if not dramatically, it's fascinating material. Trenker always knew what he was doing, and if the opening sequence of the happy mountainers seems a bit schmalzey, it's deliberate. Trenker is presenting an idealised rather than a realistic version of Tyrol life, important for the later contrast to the grim New York sequences.
(Hopefully, about the time that you are seeing this film, I will be with Trenker in Munich - or perhaps atop one of his mountains - collecting a print of his "Love Letters from Engadin" to show here next Fall).
Program ends approx. 10.20

William K. Everson