A Program of Silent Romantic Dramas

"Blind Love" (Biograph, 1912) Directed by Wilfred Lucas; supervised by D.W. Griffith; Camera, J.C. Bitzer; 13 mins.

With Blanche Sweet (The girl); Harry Hyde (Her husband); Eddie Dillon (The Young Man); Christie Miller (his father); Kate Toncray (Minister's wife); William Butler (landlord); Joseph McDermott (Doctor); Alfred Paget (Policeman).

In all honesty, a temporary loss of memory caused the showing of this film. I was actually thinking of "Thru Darkening Vales" (in which the blindness is literal), also with Blanche Sweet, and didn't realise my mistake until pre-screening. But since it was announced, here it is — and the intended one we'll get later. It's an interesting example of the New York and New Jersey filmed dramas made by Griffith's proteges (in this case, actor-director Wilfred Lucas) under his overall supervision. There is no way the stamped work is by J.C. Bitzer (who was with Biograph only for the one year and a total of five films) and not G.W. Bitzer, who was with Griffith (on and off) from 1908 to 1930.

"The White Sin" (Palmer Photoplays-FBO, 1924) Directed by William Seiter

Scenario by Del Andrews and Julian La Mothe from a story by Harold Shumate; Camera, Max O'pont; 70 mins approx.

With Magde Bellamy (Hattie Lou); John Bowers (Grant Van Gore); Francelina Billington (Grace Van Gore); Hallam Cooley (Spencer Van Gore); James Corrigan (Peter Van Gore); Billy Bevan (Travers Dale); Norris Johnson (Grace's aunt); Ethel Wales (Cynthia); Otis Harlan (Judge Langley); Myrtle Vane (Mrs Van Gore); Arthur Millet (The Doctor); James Gordon (Yacht captain).

While this is essentially "Way Down East" minus the ice-floes, and an extremely economical production to boot — the Ince Studio, eventually to become the Selznick lot, serves very nicely as a set and eventually burns down in a miniature — it is surprising how well this rather archaic and workman-like performer holds up. A straight with outstanding strengths: a neat factor; tasteful and intelligent direction by William Seiter (a regular in this New School series over the years) is another. And a really moving performance from Magde Bellamy (even though she has seen the film twice in the last two years and now tends to feel it one of her weaker films) is a further asset. Not the least of the film's plus factors though is the excellent print from the original 35mm negative, where one can really see detail, composition and the nuances of facial expression. How wonderful it would be if all silents could have been saved in this condition. Leading man John Bowers is, incidentally, the original of the Norman Maine of "A Star is Born", although his career (and his fall) were never as spectacular as those depicted by Fredric March and James Mason.

--- Ten Minute Intermission ---

"Lazybones" (Fox, 1925) Directed by Frank Borzage; Scenario by Frances Marion

from a story by Owen Davis; Camera, Glen MacWilliams and George Schneiderman; 80 mins approx.

With Buck Jones (Lazybones); Magde Bellamy (Kit); Jane Novak (Agnes); Zasu Pitts (Ruth Fanning); Leslie Fenton (Dick Ritchie); Virginia Marshall (Kit as a child); Edythe Chapman (Mrs Tuttle); Emily Fitzroy (Mrs Fanning); William Norton Bailey (Elmer Ballister).

It is particularly fortuitous (though coincidental) that we should be playing "Lazybones" this week, just a day before another long-lost Borzage film, the original silent "Rumoresque", plays at the Museum of Modern Art. Curiously, "Lazybones" had no New York first-run back in 1925, and has also had almost no re-exposure since Alex Gordon found it (any many other lost films) in the big Fox search-and-salvage enterprise of nearly 20 years ago. Unfortunately it is almost as easy-going as its title, yet it is complex and poignant, its placid quality quite misleading as it often was with Borzage, leaving one unprepared for sudden onslaughs on, and manipulation of, audience emotions. Charles Ray tried too hard to manipulate those same emotions in his not dis-similar "The Girl I Loved" but didn't pull it off nearly as well, perhaps because his lead character didn't have the backbone of Buck Jones, who reminds us here what a good actor he could be when given a chance (though he was one of the best actors we salvaged too. Magde Bellamy, in a more ambitious film, is an excellent actress). The second-best quality of the print confirms (by comparison) just what is lost when facial nuances are blurred. (Borzage complicated matters it's true by shooting into the sun, and away from the sun, in the same sequences, creating problems for modern-day labs who never like to fuss with timing problems). The ending is somewhat ambiguous (official synopses tend to spell things out rather more) but that was probably Borzage's romanticist nature rebelling against orthodoxy and cliché. To say more about the film would remove much of the element of surprise and discovery.

PROGRAM ENDS APPROX. 10:30, followed by discussion. —— Wm. K. Everson

Postscript: Unfortunately the name of the actor playing the murderer in last week's THE EX-MRS BRADFORD was omitted from the cast list. This wasn't a ploy to confuse you — but obviously, for the sake of those who didn't see the film, it can't be rectified here! Apologies ....