Two 1926 Silents: Piano accompaniment arranged & played by STUART UDENMAN

SPANGLES (Universal, 1926) Directed by Frank O'Connor; scenario by Leah Baird and Hugh Hoffman from a story by Nellie Revel; Camera: Andre Berlatier; 65m. With Marian Nixon ("Spangles" Delancy); Pat O'Hailey (Dick Radley); Hobart Bosworth (Big Bill Bowman); Gladys Brockwell (Mademoiselle Dazie); Jay Emmett (Vincent); James Conly (Zip); Grace Gordon (Bearded Lady); Paul Howard (armless man); Tiny Ward (giant); Charles Becker (dwarf); Nellie Lane (fat woman); Clarence Wertz (Ravilins); Harry Schultz (strong man); Herbert Shelley (skeleton). "Spangles" is the kind of film that frankly needs a reason for reviving. The last such occasion was a big Universal retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art many years ago.Toppling its Cinderella theme makes it an appropriate co-feature for the more ambitious Herbert Brenon film. Needing a "reason" to show it doesn't mean that one is apologizing for it; prints are rare, especially such a lengthy one. "Spangles" was not shown after all the simple Saturday-afternoon programmer, and needs to be shown with something of major merit lest the unwary go away with the impression that it is typical of the achievements of silent cinema in the mid-20's. It was released about six weeks before "A Kiss for Cinderella," so it is literally a contemporary work and the differences speak for themselves. Frank O'Connor was one of the most routine directors of Universal's smaller product, and "Spangles" is typical of that economical product in every way, even to a short running time. (The print is fully complete other than for missing credits, the eyer of ones of which have been replaced). Its plot has mild parallels with the later "Freaks", although its circus folk display a singular lack of traditional camaraderie, and a Lynch mob at the end is as easily swayed as any mob in a Republic "B" Western. Sometimes the cheapness shows through a little too clearly, as in the painfully obvious painted backdrops for a chariot race that was probably inspired by the current "Ben Hur". Yet at other times, the circus footage is authentic and quite fascinating, and the cast is quite respectable for a film of its size. With a little more showmanship for the climax - a nice fire for instance - "Spangles" with all the animals running around it could have become quite a strong film. But even as it is, it is a pleasant and enjoyable time-killer, which, after all, is all that it ever claimed to be.

--- TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION ---

A KISS FOR CINDERELLA (Paramount, 1926) Directed by Herbert Brenon; Scenario by Willis Goldbeck from the play by Sir James Barrie; additional writing by Townsend Martin; Camera: J. Roy Hunt; Art Director, Julian Boone Fleming; 105m. With Betty Bronson (Cinderella); Tom Moore (policeman); Esther Ralston (fairy godmother); Henry Vibart (Mr. Bodie); Dorothy Cumming (Queen); Ivan Simpson (Mr. Cutaway); Dorothy Walters (Mrs Maloney); Flora Finch (2nd customer); Juliet Brenon (third customer); Marilyn McClain (Glady's); Pattie Coakley (Marie Therese); Mary Christian (Sally); Edna Hagen (Gretchen). Paramount owned a number of James Barrie properties, and after the apparent big success of "Peter Pan", re-united star Bronson and director Brenon for this follow-up. But the initial grosses of "Peter Pan" over the Christmas season were misleading, and subsequently it proved disappointing at the box-office. "A Kiss for Cinderella", far more mature, sophisticated, and less of a whimsy, may have been more suited to the mood of the Jazz-age was not a time for whimsy, and Paramount was not a studio prone to hand-tailoring vehicles for its more unique stars and directors. After an imitation Clara Bow comedy and a western, they let Bronson go (even though her popularity was soaring). Brenon, who had made "Beau Geste", "The Great Gatsby" and other major films for them, was also "released" after one more film. Paramount continued to make the occasional Barrie film, but only those that conformed to more modern entertainment patterns. Neither "Peter Pan" or "A Kiss for Cinderella" were drop remedies as such, though there were periodic rumors of Audrey Hepburn, Mia Farrow, Michael Jackson (1) and Natalia Kinsky doing "Peter", and there was a horrendous TV version of "Kiss" in the 50's with Marie Wilson.

Despite its commercial failure, "A Kiss for Cinderella" was one of the major films of the 20's, and certainly one of the best examples of transference from stage to screen in the silent period. While remaining even more faithful to the original text than was "Peter Pan" it is far more of a film in terms of its superb art direction and occasional special effects, such as the marvellous pumpkin-to-coach transformation. Yet for all of that, it remains a Barrie film, in its storytelling style and its "acts". The final act even manages to carry out Barrie's original stage directions by conveying a sense of poignancy and sadness via Tom Moore's facial expression in the few seconds preceding the fadeout. Moore, normally just a light comedian, was never better, while Bronson - far subtler and more light sophisticated than in "Peter Pan" (where she was a pantomimic delight, but it was her first major role) - is superb. A major tragedy connected with this film is that until approx. 20 years ago a superb original 35mm print, tinted and in meticulous condition, did exist - and the archive responsible for it saw fit NOT to copy it until serious deterioration had set in. A major classic was thus lost to us, for what is left is reference rather than preservation material. Nevertheless, even blemished, it's a joy.

--- WILLIAM E. EVerson

Program ends app. 10:35. Short discussion period follows.