ARCHIVE NIGHT

Two rare early British talkies

THE WANDERING JEW (Twickenham Productions, 1923) Directed by Maurice Elvey; Produced by Julius Hagen; Screenplay by H. Fowler Mear from the play by E. Temple Thurston; Camera, Sydney Blythe; Music, Hugo Riesenfeld; British release by Gaumont British; US release by Olympic, with a premiere at the Criterion Theatre; original length, 111 minutes; release and US length, 51 minutes.

The Cast: Phase 1: Conrad Veidt (Mathias); Marie Ney (Judith); Cicely Oates (Rachel); Basil Gill (Pontius Pilate); Phase 2: Anne Grey (Joanne); Dennis Hoey (Jesus); John Stuart (Pietro); Arnold Lucy (Andres Michelotti); Phase 3: Joan Maude (Gianella); John Stuart (Pietro); Francis L. Sullivan (Juan de Texada); Felix Aylmer (Ferara); Ivor Barnard (Castro); Abraham Sofaer (Zappartas) and Hector Abbas, Stafford Hillard, Robt. Gilbert, Conway Dixon.

Though both of tonight's films offer major actors as their stars, and have fairly solid reputations behind them, they do tend to disappoint on their own merits, and I think that bracketing them into the "Archive Night" format will tend to stress their academic and reference values rather than their entertainment qualities. "The Wandering Jew" is a film that people often ask about, and want to see, yet frequently confuse with "Jew Sus", made the same year and also starring Conrad Veidt. (Perhaps the ultimate in confusion was reached in a script I just read for a television documentary on horror films in which Rabbi Loew from "The Golem" is referred to as "The Wandering Jew of legend"!!) While the story is indeed based on legend, there are two literary sources - a novel by Eugene Sue, and the play by E. Temple Thurston, both of which have been used for movie versions. There have also been other "free" versions, even one updating the story to World War Two. The two British versions, both directed by Maurice Elvey, are certainly the most famous. Elvey's silent version, made in 1922, was substantially shorter and starred Matheson Lang, a grand actor of the old school (who also played it on Broadway), who was (probably) not as effective as Veidt. Veidt is usually incapable of his role, which is reflected in his face alone; a literarly beautiful rather than handsome face, that almost mirrors Garbo's. What a pity that they never had the chance to play together. "The Wandering Jew" was a very ambitious project for a small but reliable British independent company; when their films turned out well, they were invariably picked up by major companies who could realise their potential better. "The Wandering Jew" was bought and released in England by Gaumont British, who rather curiously released it at the same time as their own omnibus film "Friday the 13th". It is true that "The Wandering Jew" achieved better reviews. Every critic felt that "The Wandering Jew" in its form, was much better than the previous version. It was quickly edited to more manageable length, and even the British Film Institute holds the eight reel version, the one we're showing tonight - as their preservation copy, and the substantially longer original appears to have vanished. This is one time when the critics were probably right: even shortened, it is slow, though the construction is such that it improves as it proceeds, and the climatic story has considerable power, since it is the one to which most footage is devoted, and into which most of the thespian talent is concentrated - including a remarkable debut performance by Peggy Ashcroft. The editing is damagingly busy in these sequences, where the motivation for the Jew being cursed is somewhat weakened, particularly by the removal of Pontius Pilate and the failure to make Mathias' hostility seem especially strong. No complete episodes have been cut -- the trimmings are fairly self-evident, and not all of the players in the long cast necessarily appear in the final version. Its main problem (apart from Elvey's as always workmanlike but uninspired direction) is that for all of its enterprise, it is an economically budgeted independent production, and it comes over far more as a pageant than the spectacle that it should be.--- Ten Minute Intermission ---

RESERVED FOR LADIES (Paramount-British, 1932) Directed by Alexander Korda; Screenplay by Elliot Crawshay-Williams and Lejos Biro from the play and novel "Mahnmal" by Wladimir Ostrovsky and Ernst Vajda; Camera: Walter Santley (in black and white); Color by Technicolor Process; Camera Credit: Ernst Vajda; Not listed on print or in standard reference sources; 71 mins;

With: Leslie Howard (Max Tracey); Benita Hume (Countess Riccardi); George Grossmith (Mr. Westlake); Elizabeth Allan (Sylvia Robertson); Morton Selten (Mr. Robertson); Cyril Ritchard (Sir William); Ben Field (Bremeyer); Annie Essex (Duchess); Martita Hunt (Aline); Gilbert Davis (Chef).

A remake of the 1927 silent "Service for Ladies" (a title this version kept for its English release) starring Adolphe Menjou and directed by Harry D'Arrast, this was at the time considered superior to the original, perhaps because its sophisticated dialogue and delivery were still rare in late 1931 films (not forgetting 1930's magnificent "The Devil to Pay"). But it does cry out for Menjou (or Chevalier) and Lubitsch (or D'Arrast) again and Howard and Korda are a relief. It's a shame that the meticulous interior sets and costumes, even when it is ushered in through the servants' entrance rather than the front door. - - - William K. Everson ---

Program ends app. 10.22 Discussion follows.