THE NEW SCHOOL
FILM SERIES 63: Program 3
October 27, 1960

SILENT WESTERNS: HART, MIX & FAIRBANKS

Piano score arranged and played by STUART COERMAN

THE RUSE (Bronco Motion Picture Co., 1915) Written and directed by William S. Hart;
Supervised by Thomas H. Ince; Camera, Joseph August; 22 mins.
With William S. Hart ("Hat" Peters); CLARE WILLIAMS (May Dawson); Jack Davidson (John Folson);
Fanny Midgley (Mrs Dawson); Gertrude Claire (Mother Grady); Leo Willis (Western roughneck);
Robert Fortman (Folson's henchman)

"The Ruse" is one of the first examples of one of Hart's favorite themes - the simple
westerner going East and triumphing over city slickers and gangsters. It's neat, lean, and
effective, and it's just a card game where his opponents are foolish enough to try to cheat him. After cleaning out the
crooks, Hart heads home via a subtle attack, with variations, he was to use many times again
in a like situation - "I'm going back to a country I know and understand".

THE UNTAMED (Fox, 1920) Directed by Emmett J. Flynn; Scenario by H.L. Reeler from the 1929
novel of the same title by Max Brand; Camera: Frank Good and Irving Rosenberg. 75 mins.
With: Tom Mix (Whistling Dan); Pauline Starke (Kate Cumberland); George Siegmann (Jim Silent);
Philip McCloughlin (Les Haines); James C. Barrows (Joe Cumberland); Charles K. French (Tess
Calder); Pat Chrisman (Wildfire); Sid Jordan (Hal Purvis); Major A.W. McGuire (Morgan);
Frank Clark (Sheriff Morris); Joe Connolly (Buck Daniels)

Fade near the beginning of Mix's years with Fox, "The Untamed" shows a Mix still somewhat
under the influence of Hart. The circus-like fun and stunt filled formula hadn't evolved
yet, and this is an austere, serious western, full of revenge, hate and death, qualities
that Mix would usually avoid in later years and at least downplay in films like "Riders
of the Purple Sage" where the original story contained those elements in abundance. It has
less of the lightning-pace action than most Mix films, but it moves, and the story is a
good if somewhat involved. Mix's character even has the suggestion of mystical qualities
and a killer instinct akin to that of the Hulk in the TV series. (It was remade as "Fair
Warning" in 1951, with George O'Brien starring and Alfred Werker directing). The print, though
made from an excellent 35mm original print, is of adequate and acceptable quality, but given
the source should be better. Still, any unseen Mix is an event and this is certainly one of
the most unusual of the surviving ones.

-- Ten Minute Intermission --

WILD AND WOOLLY (Douglas Fairbanks Pictures Corp.-Artcraft Pictures, 1917)
Directed by John Emerson; Scenario by Anita Loos from a story by Horace Carpenter;
Camera: Victor Fleming, Harry Thorne, Glen MacWilliams; Technical and art directors,
Erich von Stroheim and Walfried Fockland; 70 mins.
With: Douglas Fairbanks (Jeff Hillington); Eileen Percy (Nell Larrabee); Sam de Grasse (Steve
Sherby); Walter Bytell (Jollis Hillington); Joseph Singleton (Jutson); Calvin Carter (Hotel
owner); Charlotte Stevens (Pedro); Forrest Seabury (Banker); C.W. Jones (Lawyer); Tom Wilson
(train engineer); and Monte Blue, Ruth Allen, Ed Burns, J. Wharton James.

All of tonight's films were made between 1915 and 1920, and for at least four of those years
Hart and Fairbanks were working side by side, first at Triangle, and then at Artcraft. Each
liked to kid the other's stock in trade on occasion; Hart, as in "The Ruse", "Branding
Broadway" and others playing the Westerner who goes East, and Fairbanks reversing the process.
"Wild and Woolly" is quite one of the breeziest and best of these, and indeed one of the most
enjoyable of his modern, satiric comedies of his pre-slashbuckler period. Filmed in Arizona,
Burbank and at the Lazy Ranch, and with odd production incidents borrowed from both Griffith
and deMille, it was apparently meant to be a little more ambitious than the average Fairbanks
frolic, though it all seems so effortless and relaxed that the extra care is hardly noticeable
except where it counts, in the entertainment values. Its pace is quite incredible; it is still
one of the fastest-moving films ever, its editing rivalling Griffith's and even foreshadowing
Eisenstein in its rapidity; many shots run for mere five frames! The action is so light-
hearted that one can hardly take offence at the stereotyped images of the Indians; also one
tends to rejoice at some of the traditions of the Western that Doug chooses to ignore. Once,
trying to prevent his captured and helpless villain (Sam de Grasse) from running from both Griffith
and deMille, it was apparently meant to be a little more ambitious than the average Fairbanks
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would like to rejoice at some of the traditions of the Western that Doug chooses to ignore. Once,
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Program ends approx. 10:32 Question and discussion session follows.