HENRY KING and WILLIAM WYLER: two rarely shown films.

THE COUNTRY DOCTOR (20th Century Fox, 1936) Directed by Henry King; produced by Darryl F. Zanuck; screenplay by Sonya Levien from a story by Charles Blake; Camera, John Seitz; Daniel Clark; 94 mins. NY premiere, Radio City Music Hall; last New School showing, Oct. 1975.

With: The Dionne Quintuplets as themselves, and Jean Hersholt (Dr. Luke); June Lang (Mary Mackenzie); Slim Summerville (Commandant Kim); Michael Whalen (Tony Luke); Dorothy Peterson (Nurse Kennedy); Robert Barrat (Mackenzie); Jane Darwell (Mrs. Graham); John Qualen (Asa Wyatt); Frank Reicher (Dr. Paul Luke); Montagu Love (Sir Basil); David Torrence (Governor General); George Chandler (Greasy); Helen Jerome Eddy (Mrs Ogden); Aileen Carlyle (Mrs Wyatt); George Meeker (Dr. Wilson); J. Anthony Hughes (Mike); William Benedict (The Ganker); Dan Clark (photographer); Claude King (doctor); Harry Cording (Lumberjack); and Mary Carr, Stanley Blystone, Joseph Sawyer, Tom Kennedy, Kane Richmond, Phillips Smalley, Gwen Hugo Burg, Wilfrid Lucas.

20th Century, which already had Shirley Temple, Jane Withers and Buck the dog under contract, to say nothing of Jane Darwell and the Jones Family, scored something of a coup here by making a deal for the headline phenomena of the day, the Dionne quintuplets. (Had not Will Rogers died the year before, he would undoubtedly have been the titular doctor!) In its advertising, the film concentrated solely on the Dionnes and billed itself as "the first star picture." Mothers of the nation must have felt rather irked at having to wait until the end of the film for the tots even to be referred to, though admittedly they are given very generous footage when they do arrive. Conversely, devotees of Henry King's Americana films (strictly speaking of course this is Canadiana) may have been put off by the advertising. Later Dionne films supplied the goods strictly as advertised, but they were routine formula pictures. "The Country Doctor" looks like an old "E" script, hurriedly dusted off and blown up for the occasion, but King rises to it well. Action, sentiment, a feeling for people and places are all well done, and occasional moments (the death of a child, with the mother watching through the window) have real poignancy, reminding us what a master King could be. Both the original Dr. Zafco and the quints' very aggressive parents, and the exploiting Canadian government have been thoroughly whitewashed and sentimentalised (even renditions) in this. All in all, the Fox had come up well with an "Ace in the Hole" type script and a director like Wilder, they probably wouldn't have gotten the Dionnes under contract either. It's an interesting filmic comment on a 30's nine-day wonder (which ultimately petered out, years later, into tragedy) that was strong enough to build the film into a major boxoffice attraction with a Radio City opening, and rave reviews from critics who succumbed quite readily to its sentiment. NY Times critic Frank Nugent who certainly should have known better, refers to the young romantic team of Michael Whalen and Jane Darwell Technical note: there is a certain amount of surface noise on the sound track which occasionally causes static and sound problems on our #2 projector. We'll be test running some of its first (after these notes are written) and if the problem is there, we'll run the film solely on our #2 projector (which does not have those problems) but will involve a slight between-reels delay of about a minute as the 2nd reel is threaded.

-- Ten Minute Intermission --

COUNSELLOR AT LAW (Universal, 1933) Directed by William Wyler; screenplay by Elmer Rice from his own original play: Art Direction, Charles D. Hall; Camera, Norbert Brodine; 80 mins. NY premiere; Radio City Music Hall, Dec. 1933; last New School showing, Feb. 1973.

With: George Simon; Bebe Daniels (George Simon); Osa Massen (Edna); Isabel Jewell (Bessie Green); Melvyn Douglas (Roy Darvin); Thelma Todd (Iillian LaRee); Mayo Methot (Zedora Chapman); Harvin Kline (H.H. Weinberg); John Qualen (Breitstein); Conway Washburn (Arthur Sandler); Bobby Gordon (Herschel Susskind); John H. Dailey (McFadden); Carla Langner (Lena Simon); T.H. Manning (Peter Malone); Elmer Brown (Francis Baird); Richard Quine (Richard); Victor Adams (David Simon); Frederic Burton (Grayfield); Vincent Sherman (Harry Becker).

To the interesting number of theatre personalities and film-personalities-to-be (Vincent Sherman, Richard Quine) who appeared in the film, one might add - tangentially - Vincente Minnelli who was an assistant director of the stage musical show that accompanied "Counsellor at Law" at the Music Hall. Though ethically slightly toned down (by Rice himself) from the original stage play that starred Paul Muni, this "Counsellor at Law" is still a dynamic piece of work. Despite some mildly irritating characters and bits of stage "business" (irritating mainly because it has been done so many times since), this is a near-perfect example of stage to screen transformation with brilliant art direction and incredible editing and pacing really keeping the film on the move constantly. Although done at a low point in Barrmore's career, when his MGM contract had ended and he was having trouble remembering lines, quite fortuitously his personal problems and tensions were exactly right for the role, creating a performance that both by accident and intent was one of his very best. Extreme pressure of time at the moment (four programs, four sets of notes, having to be prepared before I leave for Europe) prevents re-use of the long program note issued for our 1973 showing, Facts about the play (John Garfield was one of the cast members) and the difficult shooting methods are quite fascinating, and I'll be glad to xerox copies of the original notes and send to anyone interested. Just leave a note for me at the New School in time for me to collect when I return for program #6.

-- William K. Everson

Program ends approx. 10:35