VALENTINO & NOVELLO: TWO SILENT COMANCES

PIANO ACCOMPANIMENT ARRANGED AND PLAYED BY STUART ODERMAN

THE CONSTANCE NYPH (Michael Balcon-Gainsborough, 1928) Directed by Adrian Brunel; Produced by Basil Dean; Screenplay by Margaret Kennedy, Basil Dean and Alma Reville based on the novel and play by Margaret Kennedy; Camera: James Wilson, D.W. Oobesh, N. Kock and Sally Marmor; Assistant Director, Charles Balcon; 2 hrs approx. NY premiere, June 29 at the Little Carnegie Theatre. Print courtesy Kevin Brownlow.

With Ivor Novello (Leslie Dodd); Mabel Pouillon (Tessa Sanger); Frances Doble (Florencie); Mary Clare (Muriel Sanger); George Heinrich (Albert Sanger); Benita Hunt (Antonia Sanger); Dorothy Boyd (Pauline Sanger); Robert Garrison (Trigoria); Tony de Luno (Roberto); Peter Evan Thomas (IKE); J.H. Roberts (Dr. Quirchill); Yvonne Thomas (Katie Sanger); Clifford Heatherley (Sir Berkeley); Elsa Lancaster (party guest); Erna Strom (Susan).

Three versions of "The Constance NYPH" are extremely elusive; Basil Dean's early sound version with the late Leslie Dodd, Victoria Vopper, does exist in at least one 35mm print in this country, and the early 40's version from Verner with Fontaine and Boyer certainly exists, but has been long withheld for legal reasons. This fine original print of the first British version, owned by Kevin Brownlow who kindly loaned it for this screening, is almost certainly the only extant print of the 1928 version. Some of you may have seen it when Kevin presented it at Syracuse last March, but the print was then badly back east and was unavoidably out of focus much of the time. It has been worked on steadily in the intervening three months and should look fine on the big screen tonight in its farewell appearance before going back to England.

It's an extremely handsome production, benefitting certainly from prolonged location shooting in the Tyrol. (British producers in the late 20's loved to shoot in the Tyrol where the English and shoot films abroad on the slightest pretext, and here for once the pretext was quite genuine). It is perhaps a shade too long for its own good, and the middle sections of the film - post-Tyrol, but before the film's story building to its emotional finale - are a bit protracted and would benefit from trimming. But far be it from us to complain when a film as rare as this emerges in a fully complete, uncut state. Some scenes towards the end - particularly those involving the embarkation - seem a little ragged and/or abrupt, but the film's footage does correspond to the original 103/4 real running time, so at most a brief scene or two might be missing here. It's more likely that, realising that the film was headed for an above-average reception by eliminating a few scenes, or just not shooting them.

No version of the novel/play can rightly be called a classic. It's unduly material, with too many characters and two themes - the abstract one of artistic revolt and the more specific one of unrequited love - that don't really mesh. Two disadvantages of this version are (a) the fact that it can't take advantage of the rich prose and dialogue of the original novel, which do give it considerable emotional impact, and (b) Ivor Novello, who was a striking personality but hardly a sensitive actor, and thus commands little sympathy or real interest. Mabel Pouillon deservedly won all the acclaim for her fine performance as Tessa, though whether she had achieved the same critical response given the lack of real male performance might have achieved the same critical response given the lack of real male performance. Pouillon's career was essentially in silents, and her opportunities dwindled with sound, though she did have a good role in Michael Powell's "Crown Versus Stevens".

The rest of the cast includes some very familiar (if then much younger) faces including Elsa Lancaster in a flamboyant bit, and Robert Garrison, best remembered from Fabet's "The Joyless Street". It's an interesting coincidence that Daphne du Maurier screened tested for the role of Tessa; Joan Fontaine, who later became the definitive du Maurier heroine, of course played the role in the 40's version.

When the film opened here in June of 1929 the NY Times was quite astute in some of its criticisms, although also a trifle unfair in calling it old-fashioned (because it was a silent) and in criticising these elements of film-making that had changed with the coming of sound. Oddly enough, all of the NY publicity refers to Basil Dean as the director, with no mention of Adrian Brunel. This may be because Dean had worked over here, and was being pushed as a British director with Hollywood "expertise", overcoming exhibitor antagonism to British films at a time when there were more than enough American talkies to go around. This was obviously very unfair to Adrian Brunel, an interestingly off-beat director whose films (particularly "The Man Without Desires") were usually a little more experimental than this one.

However, it's pointless to take a sure-foire property like "The Constant NYPH" to task for not being a little more daring; it's literally like contrasted with the second Cinematica "The Sound of Music" with its lesser "The Constant NYPH" back for this one showing, probably the last in New York until Kevin's loan runs out to my grand-daughter for a summer repeat in Film Series #168.

-- TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION --

CAMILLE (Metro, 1921) A Nazimova Production, directed by Ray C. Smallwood; scenario by June Mathis from the novel and play by Alexandre Dumas Jr.; Camera: Rudolph Requies; Production: Carl Laemmle; 60 mins. Last New School showing: February 1975

With Nazimova (Camille), Marguerite Gautier; Rudolph Valentino (Armand Duval); Arthur Hoyt (Comte de Varrville); Patsy Ruth Miller (Richette); Zeliffa Tilyur (Prudence); Rex Cherrymann (Gaston); Edward Connelly (Duke); Consuela Flowerston (Glimpe); Mars Oliver (Manole); William Orlond (Consieur Duval)

Perhaps the two biggest surprises of this unusual if static version of "Camille" are that the major contribution is made by the often maligned Natasha Rambova, whose bizarre sets are both eye-popping and dramatic, and that Metro would allow Valentino to be used in such a
subsidiary manner after his fantastic success in "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse". Nominaly, he does have the male lead - but Nee. Nazimova contrives to keep him off the screen a great deal, and in their big scenes together it is mainly a matter of many (much filtered and gaused) closeups of her, and a stress on two and three-shots for Valentino, with a paucity of closeups. No wonder that he was so dissatisfied at Meiro that he quickly transported himself to Paramount, to appear in poorer pictures but better vehicles. Although a "modern" adaptation of Dumas, it is set in such a wild, jazz-age Never-Never Land that it now seems an authentic if rather strange period piece. (The movie is new 71 years old; when it was made, the novel was 73 years old, so today it serves as a mid-way link). This Armand and Camille are a strangely cold and passionless pair of lovers, who seem to come to life only when they transport themselves into a strange vision of the parallel "Anon Lescaut" story. There is no real acting to speak of - certainly nothing to match Henry Daniell's magnificently malevolent de Warrville in the Garbo version - it is all a matter of stolid tableaux posing against those incredible sets. But visually the film more than holds attention with its interesting echoes of German expressionism (clearly Rambova and Nazimova had seen "Caligari") and prophetic forebearings of the art-deco form that would be launched officially in 1925. The florid subtitles are a delight, and the camerawork interestingly inconsistent as it supplies Nazimova with endless filters and then yanks them away ruthlessly when anyone else comes into camera range. Nazimova and Rambova may have been self-indulgent in their desire to put art on the screen, but they were also conscious of economy. Unlike Fairbanks, who, with a more assured audience, could confidently let his films run to 14 reels, theirs were more realistically limited to six or seven reels. (These notes abbreviated from longer ones initially issued on Feb.14 1975, and partially updated).

----- William K. Everson

Program ends approx. 10.55. No discussion session tonight; next week's shorter program will allow for one then.

For your reference — a listing of the remaining programs in this series. Fuller descriptive comment can be found in the New School Summer bulletin available in the lobby.

Program 3: June 19
Two early 30's melodramas: 1) WOMEN (1932) with Irene Dunne, Ricardo Cortez, Myrna Loy; A VILLAGE TALE (1935) with Randolph Scott, Kay Johnson.

Program 4: June 26
Two comedies, rascous and sophisticated.
GOING TO TOWN (1935) with Mae West, Paul Cavanagh, Fred Kohler
NO TIME FOR LOVE (1943) with Claudette Colbert, Fred MacMurray

Program 5: July 3
Two powerful early 30's pro-Code thrillers
NIGHT WORLD (1932): Lew Ayres, Mae Clarke, Boris Karloff, George Raft
OK AMERICA (1932): Lew Ayres, Maureen O'Sullivan, Edward Arnold

Program 6: July 10
3 lively crime "B" movies, offering differing studio styles
LESION OF TERROR (1936) with Bruce Cabot, Ward Bond, Marguerite Churchill
BULLETS FOR O'HARA (1941) with Roger Pryor, Joan Perry, Anthony Quinn
ILLEGAL TRAFFIC (1938) with Robert Preston, Mary Carlisle, J. Carrol Naish

Program 7: July 17
Two British films:
ACTION FOR SLANDER (1937) with Clive Brook, Margaratta Scott
NO PLACE FOR JENNIFER (1949) with Janette Scott, Rosamund John, Leo Genn