An evening of rare silents! Piano score arranged and played by STUART UDERMAN

The Sundown Limited (Fathe-Hal Roach, 1924) Directed by Robert McGowan; 20 mins.
With the Our Gang Kids: Joe Cobb, Mickey Daniels, Mary Worman, Jackie Condon, Andy Samuels, Allen "Farina" Hoskins, Sonny Navis.

If nothing else, "The Sundown Limited" saves the evening from being totally Biblically dominant. It was the 31st of the highly popular "Our Gang" comedies and one of the best, not least in that its fantasy-coma-true story of running one's own railroad transcends the somewhat limited appeal of most of the series, and makes it far more universal. Even if not as easy and practical as it looks, it has a realistic, of-the-cuff look to it, and the fascinating shots of still rural Los Angeles streets are done without back projection or its 20's equivalent, the cycloramas.

THE WANDERER (Paramount, 1925, rel. Feb.'26) Directed by Raoul Walsh; Screenplay by James T. O'Donohue from the 1912 play of the same name by Maurice V. Samuels, and the 1912 German play "The Lost Son" by Wilhelm August Schmidtbonn; Camera, Victor Milner; 75 mins app.
With William Collier Jr. (Jether); Oretta Misen (Tisha); Ernest Torrence (Tola); Wallace Beery (Pharis); Tyrone Power Sr. (Josse); Kathlyn Williams (Hilda); Kathryn Hill (Nomi); Georges Resgas (Gas); Holmes Herbert (The Prophet); Shitz Sheekeys (Jeweler); Pynnale Hyman (So-fun (avaricious merchant/trader)).

1925 and 1926 were both very good years for Paramount, with some of their very top pictures in release. Of their nearly seventy 1925 productions, "The Wanderer" was hardly one of their best, but it has interest today primarily as a Raoul Walsh film (and his prolific silent career is much too sparsely represented) and as an example of the more economical religious spectacle that Paramount turned to in cash in on the momentum of "The Ten Commandments", even though they had cost DeMilles. For years "The Wanderer" has been virtually unseen. It would not have survived at all had Paramount not decided to release it to the home movie market in a shortened 5-reel form. However, schools and churches were among their foremost customers and Walsh and Walchenschmidt, resembling Minsky's dialogue rather than Reagan and preserved off-limits for such a silent, and most often that material was cut. But covering all bases, Paramount issued a two-reeler titled "The Feast of Ishtar", promoted as being ideal for smokers, stag party, and similar dubious outlets. Kevin Brownlow in England came up with a good toned print of the five-reel version; I had a good tinted print of the two-reeler (without a stag party outlet at which to exhibit it); and Kevin Brownlow did a magnificent job in interpolating the two and restoring the film to almost its original form, even to duplicating the tints - although the richness of the original toned stock just cannot be duplicated today. It is an act of faith in character in a 'star both Biblical and more importantly, Walsh scholars will be richly rewarded by Brownlow's industry, but all one can really say - and this is all that was really expected - is that the abstract cause of film history has been well served, and a protection negative now exists. It was never a very good film and still isn't, but it's big and splashy, everybody seems to have had a good time making it - particularly Ernest Torrence, stealing scenes where there is virtually no competition, and Wallace Beery. The final disaster scenes have nice sets and effective though hardly outstanding trick work. Compared with "Ben Hur" or "Noah's Ark" it's tame stuff, but regard it as "The Prodigal" of its day - with Oretta Misen doing more than her share to scour the screen in the equivalent of the Iane Turner role - and you should find it great fun, not particularly uplifting in a spiritual sense.

-- TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION --

THE SKY PILOT (Cathrine Curtis Corp. Associated First National, 1921) Directed by King Vidor; Screenplay by John McDermott and Faith Green from the 1899 novel "The Sky Pilot, a Tale of the Foothills" by Ralph Comer; Camera, Gus Peterson. 70 mins app.
With: John Bowers (The Sky Pilot); Colleen Moore (Queen); David Butler (Bill Hendricks); Harry Todd (The Old Timer); James Corrigan (Ashley); Donald MacDonald (The Duke) Kathleen Kirkham (Lady Charlotte).

Set in the Canadian Northwest, but filmed in the High Sierras and around Truckee, California, "The Sky Pilot" (a slang Western phrase meaning a minister, and a phrase surprisingly unfamiliar today) is both a continuation of the church-vs-saloon theme so prominent in the earlier William S. Hart westerns, and more specifically a film in the new, prolific but brief cycle of religious melodramas spawned by the surprise success of "The Miracle Man". The novel's original tragic ending has been supplanted by a happy one to no discernible ill-effect. Though there is some traditional Western action, including some scenes from a stock car, the Western background is almost incidental to the story, although it allows for a good/bad separation that might have been more difficult in just a rural setting. Even the villainy is minimal, and merely a means to an end. The film is most interesting as an example of the early work of a major director; although it's not notably a predecessor of later more famous Vidor films, it has assurance all the way, excellent command of lighting and composition, fine location work, especially in the extended snow scenes, and good photography that gives us some lovely closeups of Colleen Moore. Second lead Butler later became an accomplished director; John Bowers was of course the inspiration for the Norman Bowers of "The Eleventh Commandment", although he neither nor his character Marguerite de la Motte, were ever as big as March and Gaynor, or their successors in those roles. Preserved from a print kept by a Danbury, Conn. collector for years, it is missing a few linking scenes, but is essentially complete, and an interesting companion to such sound semi-religious westerns as "Stranger At My Door" (Mallan Whitney) and "Stars in My Crown" (Jacques Tourneur).

PROGRAM ENDS APP.10.35. SHORT DISCUSSION -- William K. Eversen