CAPTAIN FLY BY NIGHT (Robertson Cole-FBO, 1922) Directed by William K. Howard; Scenario by Eve Unsell from an original story of the same name by Johnston McCully; Camera, Lucien Andriot; 60 mins.

With: Johnnie Walker (The First Stranger); Francis McDonald (The Second Stranger); Shannon Day (Cleta); Edward Gargan (Governor); E. E. Clive (Orpheus); James McElroy (Padre Michael); Bert Wheelock (Governor); Fred Kelsey (Gomes); Noble Johnson, Charlie Stevens, Kit Guard (Indians); Monte Collins (Crunk)

Written by Johnston McCully before "The Curse of Capistrano" which of course became "The Mark of Zorro", "Captain Fly By Night" seems like something of a dry run for it, with the comic villain sergeant (Eddie Oribben here, Noah Beery in the Fairbanks films) common to both. The extra-economic production values and the view from inside the prison bars or quite rare in both. The extra-economic production values and the view from inside the prison bars or quite rare in both. McCully couldn't hope to compete with the deluxe Fairbanks films, or even the modest budget limitations with players like Red La Rocque that the major companies offered. "Captain Fly By Night" however is almost a perfect example of what would have been a routine little western pulling itself up by its own bootstraps and turning into a modest yet quite satisfying little adventure. Very little money seems to have been available; the sets are skimpy, there was no camera truck available for running inserts in the chase scenes, and the cast is somewhat threadbare. The intertitles markedly encourage the audience to believe that it's not a poor-film - it's simply referred to as "conspirators", and the villain's activities - which seem limited to straightforward banditry and looting in the best Fred Kohler tradition - are said to be those of a revolutionary plotting to overthrow the government! And when the titles aren't trying to upgrade the movie's size, they're doing their best to impart a Dumas-like flavor. Just a couple of years later, FBO would be adding much more production value to their small action films. Yet somehow it all seems to work, budget limitations notwithstanding, and a good toned original print certainly helps. Director Howard, cameraman, and a cast of aspiring young stars perform capably throughout the years, managing to convey a modicum of elegance and a great deal of enthusiasm. It moves fast, is beautifully photographed, and the most is made of locations which include pleasant coastal seascapes. Even a stuntman falling on to a tarapulin instead of sand is covered-up rather neatly; would that similar quickies from Monogram and FBO during the sound era exhibited half the effort that went into this one. It's the earliest film available of William K. Howard, who of course became a notable director of high-grade melodramas especially in the late 20's and early 30's. It's an interesting and promising beginning to a major career.

THE GAUCHO (Elton Corporation-United Artists, 1927) Directed by F. Richard Jones; produced by Douglas Fairbanks; Scenario by Letta Woods from an original story by Elton Thomas (Fairbanks); Camera, Tony Gaudio; Assistant Directors, Lewis Foster, William Cowan; NY Premiere, November 1927, Liberty Theatre, 100 mins.

With Douglas Fairbanks (The Gaucio); Lupe Velez (The Mountain Girl); Eve Southern (The Girl of the Zephyr); Gustav von Seyffertitz (Ruis); Michael Vavitch (Ruis' Lieutenant); Charles Stevens (The Gaucio's disloyal aide); Nigel de Brulier (The Padre); Albert MacQuarrie (Victor of the Black Moon); Mary Pickford (Our Lady of the Shrike); Charles Stevens (in a second role as one of Ruis' soldiers).

Allegedly inspired by a Fairbanksian visit to Lourdes, "The Gaucio"...with its unusual mixture of fun, action and religion...was criticised in some quarters as being too serious a film for Fairbanks, and the word "trash" cropped up in more than one review. Yet if it's a little slower and more serious than some of the Fairbanks silents, it also has a little more depth and even guts. Too, while the Fairbanksian acrobatics (seemingly performed in some shots by Richard Talman, though both Fairbanks and Talman were too cunning to make it obvious) are only spasmodic, the sense of fun and movement is fairly constant. There are many occasions when Fairbanks only has to sidle around a building or slide down stealthily to turn a whole sequence into a kind of ballet. The idea of two girls - one peppy and modern, the other serene and ethereal (and both beautifully played; Eve Southern never had a better role) was new for Fairbanks and worked well. (One wonders whether Gene Autry had seen this, and had it in mind with the June Storey-Lupita Tovar combination in "South of the Border" in '39). An unusually handsome film, "The Gaucio" boasts magnificent sets and camerawork, and some of the best and most convincing glass shots ever filmed. Originally some scenes were in Technicolor, and the Museum of Modern Art once had a stunning 35mm nitrate print, fully tinted, that was a joy to behold. We had a choice of two prints tonight; one slightly better than the one we are running, but with a drabful rendition totally replacing the subtle color of the original. Some relief can be found by scanning the originals, as the colorums are still there. Of course, all this is just a part of the film, we decided to go with this slightly darker but fully tinted print. No 16mm print does full justice to the visual beauty of this film in 35mm, but its elegance and beauty of design will be quite apparent. If it has a major flaw, it is in the very shadowy villainy of Gustav von Seyffertitz; Fairbanks deserved a worthier foe. Incidentally, the massed riding scenes in the climax turned up later as stock footage in the talkie "A Message to Garcia". One of Fairbanks' best films, and certainly one of the best films of its much under-rated director F. Richard Jones, "The Gaucio" is a delight.

Program ends app. 10:30. Discussion/questions follow.

SUMMER SCHEDULE AVAILABLE NEXT WEEK.