
The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

A Pot-Pourri

"The Mummy Strikes" (Paramount, 1942) Director: Seymour Knittel; 1 reel
The Superman cartoons of the early forties fell into roughly two camps: the anti-axis propaganda melodramas, copying the melodramatic formats of the serials; and the horror and science-fiction entries, likewise based on the content and formulas of normal Hollywood output in those genres. Even the camera movement and editing patterns were based very carefully on those used for feature films. Though not one of the best, "The Mummy Strikes" is certainly typical. In England incidentally, not all of the Superman cartoons were released, and those that were sported an "A" certificate, meaning that children could only see them when in the company of adults!

"The Road Is Open Again" (Warner Brothers, 1933) Director: Alfred E. Green; 1 reel
With Dick Powell, Charles Middleton, Samuel S. Hinds, Alan Dinehart. Another of the Warners' notoriously and famously pro-Roosevelt shorts, and incidentally one quite wide of the true facts of the NRA program. Interesting, amusing, depressingly topical today, and with three of Hollywood's better-known villains and common specialists cast as the ghosts of former Presidents!

RED CROSS APPEALS

The first is a charming one from the early 30's, with a diminutive Shirley Temple pleasing for funds for the "honest-to-goodness" trouble shown on the screen, and the second is from a decade later, with Shirley's successor, Deanna Durbin, performing much the same function.

"Music Made Easy" (MGM, 1942, dir: Roy Rowland) 1 reel; with Robert Benchley
Though not a very good print, this is one of the best Benchleys of its period.

"You John Jones" (MGM, 1943) Director: Mervyn LeRoy; narrator, Carey Wilson; 1 reel
With James Cagney, Ann Sothern, Margaret O'Brien. One of the most iniquitous and hardest-sell of all wartime propaganda shorts, this one really has to be seen to be believed. It's not only a tour-de-force for Margaret O'Brien, but also establishes quite positively that God - with a voice suspiciously like Carey Wilson's - was on OUR side, and probably Louis B. Mayer's payroll, throughout World War 2!

THE VOLUNTEER (Angle-American Dist. of a Ministry of Information film, 1943) 4 reels
Written, produced and directed by Michael Powell & Emeric Pressburger; Camera: Fred Ford; Design, Alfred Junge; Music, Allan Gray; with Ralph Richardson and Pat McGrath, and Anna Neagle, Herbert Wilcox and Laurence Olivier.

The propagandist and informational value of this very soft-sell Government film must have been slight when it was released, well into the war in early 1943. Nevertheless, audiences by them (in Britain) were inured to documentary and propaganda films, and this one, though too long, is pleasant, humorous and optimistic, and pleasanter as a time-killer than many a badly made British "B". It's professionally made, and though recruits didn't have much choice in the matter, it probably did serve as some kind of morale-booster for the reluctant inductees, especially those not particularly fitted for service life. Although its excitement level is low, and its overall approach bland, it's an enjoyable film. Ralph Richardson obviously enjoys himself too, and there are some interesting glimpses of Denham Studios.
DUCK SOUP (Pathé - 1927) A Hal Roach Production directed by Fred Guiol
Based on the sketch "Home from the Honeymoon" by Arthur Jefferson,
Stan Laurel's father. 2 reels
With Laurel and Hardy, Madeleine Hurlock, William Austin, Bob Kortman.

ANOTHER FINE MESS (Hal Roach - MGM, 1930) Directed by James Parrott; camera,
George Stevens; dialogue, R.M. Walker; 3 reels
With Laurel & Hardy, Thelma Todd, James Finlayson, Eddie Dunn, Dharles Gerrard,
Gertrude Sutton, Harry Bernard.

Although "Duck Soup" is almost certainly less funny than "Why Girls Love Sailors"
and "Hats Off", the other missing Laurel and Hardy shorts, its recovery is
important. It both establishes that in their first film together (I'm not
forgetting "Lucky Dog" or "45 Minutes from Hollywood", but the former was an
accidental crossing of paths, and in the second their paths didn't cross) they
were working together as a team, and raises the question of why such obviously
feudal team-work wasn't immediately recognised by Roach who continued to put
them into films like "Flying Elephants" where each performed as a solo
comedian. I've written a great deal about "Duck Soup" in the new book "Laurel
and Hardy" by John Kobal and Al Kilgore, so don't need to repeat those notes in
tote here, other than to generalise. The remake, "Another Fine Mess", which
follows for comparison purposes, is obviously better. It needs dialogue and
benefits from it; further, like all good vaudevillians, Laurel & Hardy had honed
and perfected it, shortening or eliminating the weaker gags, strengthening the
good ones. Hardy's unattractive, unshown physical presence in the silent
version works against the elegance and flourishness of his pantomime. Nevertheless,
the first one is not without its assets. It's shorter and snappier, less padded
than the one-reel longer remake; the plot motivation, getting the boys into the
house and keeping them there, is stronger; and the exterior scenes in a still
fairly rural-looking Hollywood are more interesting. It also shows more care
and slightly higher production values than in some of the Pathes that followed it.

When all is said and done though, its main interest today is academic, as the
all-important illustration of their first real team-work on the screen, and in
tandem with its remake (even though that was never one of their best) a concrete
example of how rapidly they developed and polished that teamwork.

The print of 'Duck Soup' does not have English titles, but is very easy to follow
even if one hasn't seen the remake before.

Wm. K. Everson

The mailing for the New Year will go out some time in mid-December. As most of
you know, our Dec.15th program is almost certainly going to have to be cancelled
because of a conflict with a Robert Wise retrospective taking place in this
auditorium that week. Since I won't be ready to get a new mailing out before
that date, and a later December date gets us dangerously close to Christmas, it's
going to be easier all around to just put that show back until January. This
information will of course be repeated on the notes for our next two programs.

In order to gain a little time, and give attendees at tonight's MOMA program
an extra ten minutes to get here, our intermission will be scheduled early,

immediately following "You John Jones".