

Next program: May 19th: Two French films made under the German occupation: **BOULE DE SUIF** (dir: Christian Jacqua) with Micheline Presle, Louis Salou; titled; and **THE DEVIL'S HAND** (dir: Maurice Tourneur), a tense and often pictorially stunning supernatural thriller, with Pierre Fresney; dubbed.

Note: the May 19th program will be our last for the Summer months. We'll resume again in mid-September, schedules to be mailed in early September.

May 5 1975

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

Two 1929 dramas with William Powell & Kay Francis

BEHIND THE MAKEUP (Paramount, 1929, rel: 1930) Directed by Robert Milton and (uncredited) Dorothy Arzner; Screenplay by Howard Estabrook and George M. Watters from an original "Red Book" story, "The Feeder", by Mildred Gram; Camera, Charles Lang; Songs, Leo Robin, Sam Coslow, Newell Chase. 7 reels
With Hal Skelly, William Powell, Fay Wray, Kay Francis, E.M. Calvert, Paul Lukas, Agostino Borgato, Jacques Vanair, Jean de Briac.

William Powell and Kay Francis, who made such a felicitous romantic team in "One Way Passage" a couple of years later, are less successfully teamed in tonight's two films. In "Behind the Makeup", their footage together is limited; and in "Street of Chance" their story is in a sense over before the film starts, their relationship merely an adjunct to the story and not its *raison d'être*. "Behind the Makeup" is a necessarily seedy, realistic little film in which Hal Skelly is, ironically, both its major asset and its key liability. He's an excellent actor and his performance here is as convincing and moving as always. But all of his roles around this time, including the lead in Griffith's "The Struggle", seemed to be none-too-subtle variations on his "The Dance of Life". He was always good, but after a while the role itself became rather a bore. Too, the show-biz milieu is not always convincing here; Skelly as the routine hooper claims to know the kind of hokum audiences want; Powell as his "artistic" partner propagates what they should be educated to like. Neither, it seems to me, comes within miles of giving a vaudeville audience their money's worth. Fay Wray's insecure non-acting seems to be just what her role calls for; its amazing how appealing her face and mannerisms and very limited acting talent could be. It's a pity in a way that she didn't get into silent films much earlier, so that - not confronted by limitations of voice and acting - directors could have moulded and used her much as Stroheim did in "The Wedding March". Why Dorothy Arzner doesn't get a co-director credit is something of a mystery - probably contractual billing reasons (either her contract, or Milton's) - but it was hardly a secret that she worked on the film, and indeed most of the reviews made a point of mentioning her collaboration. Incidentally, I have not re-screened the film since my initial viewing, but I seem to recall that Paul Lukas either has a very small role, or is not there at all despite his prominence in the cast.

STREET OF CHANGE (Paramount, 1929; rel: 1930) Directed by John Cromwell
Screenplay by Howard Estabrook and Lenore Coffee from a story by Oliver H.P. Garrett; Camera, Charles Lang; 7 reels
With William Powell, Kay Francis, Jean Arthur, Regis Toomey, Stanley Fields, Brooks Benedict, Betty Francisco, John Risso, Maurice Black, Joan Standing, Irving Bacon, Oscar Apfel.

"Street of Chance" is one of many early sound films based, officially and unofficially, on the Arnold Rothstein case, then very much in the headlines. It's also typical of many early talkies that used the underworld as a conveniently colorful background, without really exploiting it. Of its type, this is one of the best and most durable. The fascinating opening in Times Square suggests right away that it is going to be far less stagey than most, and though director Cromwell was newly arrived from the stage, he keeps his camera mobile and his plot nicely on the move. It is a film of its period, quickly overtaken by others, but it's a good film of its period. Cromwell still remembers it well, and it's one of his lesser favorites. The Burgess Meredith film of the same title was no remake, but Paramount did remake it in '37, as a creditable "B", under the title "Her Husband Lies" with Ricardo Cortez, Gail Patrick and Tom Brown.

Wm. K. Everson