

Tuesday next, October 12th: "IN OLD KENTUCKY" (1935, dir: George Marshall) with Will Rogers and Dorothy Wilson; preceded by a new BBC-TV one-hour version of the macabre Somerset Maugham thriller "Lord Mountdrago" - elaborate and bizarre, and far more satisfying than the version contained in the "Three Cases of Murder" movie.

October 4 1971

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

WONDERS OF THE YELLOWSTONE (1917) Produced by
GLACIER NATIONAL PARK (1916) Burton Holmes

We've rarely - if ever - run travelogues before, but these early Burton Holmes split-reelers (each less than ten minutes, and designed to be coupled with another short) are rather charming, not least in their deliberate picture-postcard effects, heightened by the rich toning.

THE RAG DOLL (Universal, 1928) a Laemmle Novelty, directed by Jacques Rollens
Story by Sam B. Jacobsen; 1 reel

The Laemmle Novelty series often served as a sounding board for the trying out of stylistic photographic ideas, or as training grounds for new players and directors. All of them were interesting essays in making pleasing shorts out of literally nothing. This is not one of the more striking entries, and it probably owes its inspiration to Hans Andersen's "Steadfast Tin Soldier", but nonetheless it's an interesting if rather sinister little work.

THE BLUE COYOTE CHERRY CROP (Edison, 1914) Directed by Ashley Miller
Story by C.W.L. Ennis; one reel

With Carlton King, Robert Conness, Arthur Housman, Mabel Trummelle, Edward Earle, John Sturgeon, Elizabeth Miller, Marie La Manna, Elsie McLeod, Edward O'Connor, Yale Boss, Richard Neill, Harry Beaumont, Ben Turbett.

Like all Edison shorts, even the later ones, this little western drama is quite clumsily constructed and is primitive indeed compared to the Biograph, Ince and Vitagraph films of several years earlier; but it's a stunningly good print, parades a goodly portion of the Edison Stock Company (Frank McGlynn is absent, alas!) and does have a certain rather naive charm.

THE 42nd STREET SPECIAL (Warner Brothers, 1933) One reel

This extended newsreel item is obviously no more than a publicity puff for "42nd Street", and as such, the various executives and stars who appear seem curiously ill-prepared. None of the stars of the film are on hand at all, Darryl Zanuck's comments seem unworthy of a production head, and most of the stars seem very second echelon - with the exception of Bette Davis, who exudes poise and charm. Leo Carrillo's reference to FDR as "President Rosenfelder" may or may not have been a deliberate faux-pas, but it adds a welcome touch of humor.

- intermission -

"FAZIL" (Fox, 1927) Produced and directed by Howard Hawks

From the play "L'Inconnu" by Pierre Frondaie and the English adaptation, "Prince Fazil"; adaptation by Philip Klein, scenario by Seton I. Miller; Camera: L. William O'Connell; Settings, William S. Darling; edited by Ralph Dixon; Musical Score arranged by S.L. Rothafel, and directed by Erno Rapee; 7 reels Asst. Dir: James Tinling

With Charles Farrell, Greta Nissen, John Boles, Mae Busch, Tyler Brooke, John T. Murray, Vadim Uraneff, Josephine Borio, Gino Corrado, Dale Fuller, Hank Mann, Eddie Sturgis, Erville Alderson.

Dedicated auteurists will be rather pressed to find typical Hawksian ingredients of either story, characters or style in this tongue-in-Sheik romp. One of the plethora of exotic Eastern romances that followed in the wake of "The Sheik", and were renewed with the success of "Son of the Sheik", it casts Farrell not very convincingly as an Arab chieftain, and pits him rather pleasingly against Greta Nissen. The marvellously flamboyant opening unfortunately establishes the wrong note right away - one sits back prepared to enjoy its jovial lechery and general exoticism, only to have it turn serious without one being really aware of it, so that there is no preparation for the emotionalism of the climax and it just isn't as moving or as dramatic as it might be. Definitely in its favor however is its short and snappy pacing, its very handsome and luxurious production mountings, and above all its musical score - which, unlike the score for "Street Angel", avoids constant repetition of themes. All of this technique may be arguably wasted on fairly specious plot material. The whole film has the look of a Victorian pornographic novel from which all of the pornography has been removed, though the harem scenes retain a definite eroticism. Women's Lib advocates will doubtless find the film horrendous, but conversely supporters of Male Supremacy will applaud much of the modus-operandi of the barbaric East! Rediscovered masterpiece it most certainly isn't, but in any event it's good to welcome another lost sheik back to the fold. (It's also a sobering reminder that not all of the "officially" lost films can materially change recorded film history when rediscovered).

--- W.K. Everson ---