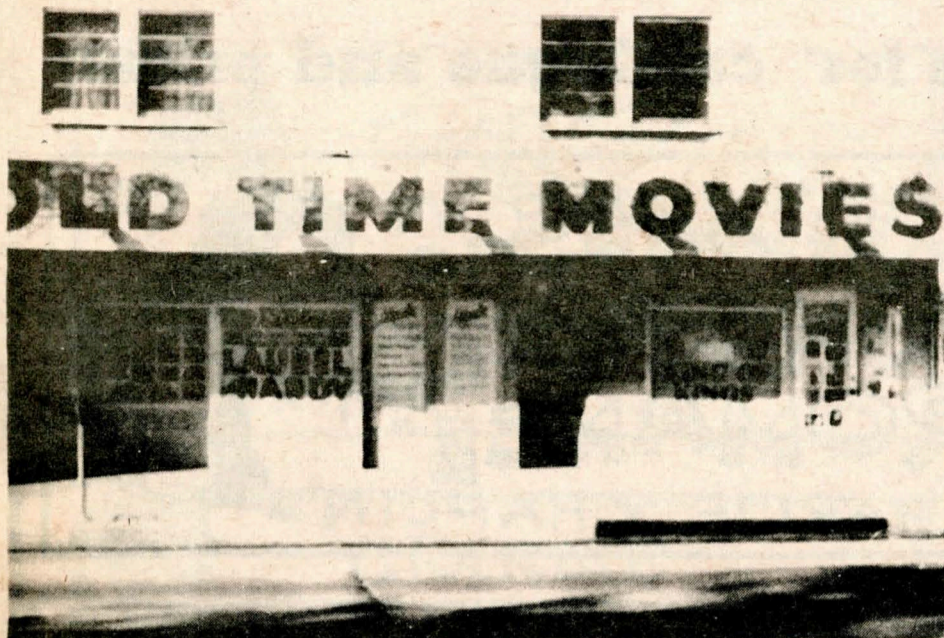


los courtesy of Jack White)



the public supports THIS

by jack white

silent movie theater

In this modern age of sending spaceships to the moon and building highrise apartments, one often wonders if any of the little things that once brought us so much pleasure could survive the pressures of his modern world. For instance could Charlie Chaplin's two reeler's still draw crowds? Would people still pay to see William S. Hart fight it out with the badman? In general would the public support "Silent Movie Theatre"?

If you presented these questions to John Hampton, of Hollywood, California, he would probably reply with a quick "Yes". John and Dorthy Hampton, have the distinction of operating the only theatre in the United States that runs nothing but silent movies six days a week, fifty-two weeks a year. Mr. Hampton's silent movie

house is not a recent innovation in the Los Angeles area either. Last February it celebrated its 25th Anniversary.

Recently I dropped by the Silent Theatre on Fairfax in Hollywood and talked to its distinguished owner, about silent films and the problems of running such a movie house.

Hampton, youngish in his mid-fifties, sat in the wooden seats of his empty, half darkened theatre and told me of how he fell in love with the silents during his Oklahoma City boyhood. His interest in film became even more intense when he and his brother bought an old projector for eight dollars in 1923. He told me of how he would go down to the film exchanges and buy old film dollar a reel and show it on Saturdays for the kids of the neighborhood.

By the early 1930's John Hampton had become experienced in the movie business. He had worked in film exchanges, managed theatres and designed theatre posters. He had even gone on the road with a traveling movie theatre. The touring theatre took John and his wife to many small towns in Oklahoma showing their silent films.

Asthma had plagued John since childhood and the doctors told him the only sure cure was to go to another climate. So the Hamptons began to search for a city that would be able to support a theatre that would run nothing but silent movies, and a climate that would not aggravate John's asthma.

After much searching a location in Hollywood, California was decided on. They bought a store front on North Fairfax Ave., and set to work converting

it to the present 250 seat theatre. They opened on February 25th, 1942, and have been going strong ever since.

John takes care of the posters, clean up operation and the projection room, while Dorthy presides at the box office, snack bar and takes care of the office and book work. The Silent Theatre runs two complete shows nightly and the admission is 90 cents for adults, children are free when accompanied by adults. Back in 1942, when the theatre first opened the admission was 11 cents for adults and 5 cents for children, but the operating costs of even a silent theatre have increased over the years.

"It always seemed to me that the silent movie was an art form that was unique and profound," says John Hampton, in explaining why he has devoted over twenty-five years to acquainting the public with the film that lacked sound.

The Silent Theatre has a new show every Wednesday night; a typical program would consist of a serial, a one reel comedy or short and a two reel comedy with a well known star such as Chaplin, Keaton, Laurel and Hardy or the like. The short subjects run from thirty-five to forty-five minutes and are followed by a feature.

As for the music played behind the action on the screen. Mr. Hampton still uses the old 78 r.p.m., phonograph records, with two turntables. The 78's are easier to handle than long playing 33's when you have to make changes on cue which is often the case. It's pretty hard to hit the right groove on 33's under such circumstances.

The theatre is equipped with two 16 mm projectors that can be sped-up or slowed-down as the action so warrants. The screen size is eight by ten feet, and 750 watt bulbs are used in the projection machines for the required light.

The Hampton's have very carefully captured the era of the silent film and run their theatre accordingly. In the summer, when it is warm, the wide open front doors are the cooling system and during the winter it is always a good idea to dress warm. For the most part having the

pleasure of watching the old film flickering by, and the presentation, far over-shadows any discomforts of weather conditions.

Advertising is a very important part of any business these days and to movie exhibitors it has always been the life blood. Without the right kind of "paper" on the outside of the theatre you can't get the audience inside.

As most collectors know, it is as difficult to obtain posters for movies of the Silent era as it is to find the film's themselves. Over the years John Hampton, has been building quite a collection of stills, articles from old movie magazines and gathering what few posters he could find in private collections. John takes all of his acquired material and design's a new display for each attraction.

Recently he ran a Houdini serial produced in 1919, with his regular programs. Out front he had a most effective display telling about Houdini and the serial. Two Los Angeles magicians went to the theatre to see the posters and became so intrigued they returned each week to see how Houdini would get out of his next challenge.

John's training in designing and painting posters came during his youth while working in film exchange's in Oklahoma City. The big theatre's of the 20's wanted "custom" posters to advertise their shows. Today, John Hampton, applies this same technique to his own advertising. Needless to say John, is always on the lookout for new material.

The biggest problem in running a silent theatre is "product". The Hampton's have about 500 silent film's although most of them are leased from various producers and studio's. Occasionally some kind person will drop by the theatre with an arm full of old film and give it to the Hampton's. For the most part these donation's are worthless. However from time to time a real lost treasure will turn up.

A real perfectionest when it comes to quality in his movies, John, says he has taken bits and pieces from as many as

now available:

free



1968...listing of films and 16mm projector replacement parts....

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astoria, long island, new york,
u.s.a., zip-11103

eight prints to get one good quality picture.

The job of renovating old films involves bleaching and re-developing some prints to save faded portions. The old films are on a nitrocellulose, which is not only chemically unstable but is capable of spontaneous combustion. All of the films shown at the Silent Theatre are reproduced on 16mm safety film.

I asked Mr. Hampton what the biggest favorites at the box-office were. He thought for a moment and then replied, "King of Kings", people beg to see it, in fact it is run every Christmas. "Intolerance", "Birth of a Nation", "Way Down East", the film's of Charlie Chaplin, Clara Bow, Valentino, William S. Hart, Tom Mix and Pearl White are in most demand. The stars and the films that were popular in the old days seem to remain top draws today and are the ones most asked for.

There is always a demand for the films of Mary Pickford, and happily John Hampton has access to a number of her early Biograph pictures but not any of her big features. Hopefully in the near future "Dorothy Vernon", Tess of the Storm Country" and "Sparrows," will be made available to the silent theatre audiences.

A cross section of the country comes to the Silent Theatre in Hollywood, because in recent years it has been the subject of many newspaper, magazines and television news stories. On a typical evening you might see Tony Curtis' Rolls-Royce convertible parked in front of the theatre. Comic Doodles Weaver used to arrive at the theatre on a bicycle. While Gilbert Roland would quietly slip in to see the last show. Pensioners to whom the admission price is a big item, attend as well as students, and serious minded buffs from USC and UCLA.

About a year ago a writer for one of NBC's more popular "Spy" programs viewed a chapter from a serial. He enjoyed the story line and action so much that he stole the entire plot, even using the same names for the television characters. The writer up-dated the events, and the old silent story line played right into the modern television program.

The Hampton's and their Silent Movie Theatre go along quietly enough year in and year out. The only time they made trade headlines was when Paramount sought to restrain them from showing its "Covered Wagon", the print of which had been obtained from Eastman. After a five-year court battle it was ruled they could show the film, but only for charity. The Hampton's did just that and raised over five-hundred dollars, which they donated to a school for blind children.

As I looked down at my wrist watch and found I had been talking for two and a half hours with John Hampton, who so generously took time out of a busy day to fill me in on the details of a Silent Theatre owner's life; A life filled with the enjoyment of entertaining other people with movies of the silent era.

copyright warning on illegal home use of features

by daniel n. aumont

Users of 16mm films may be unknowingly breaking the law by purchasing and using misappropriated feature films. Almost every feature made after 1950, and certain features of older vintage are carefully protected by copyright laws.

I receive lists of used 16mm films from many places around the country, and nearly every list offers features along with the usual selection of short subjects. I was under the mistaken impression that all of these features were legally licensed for home and non-theatrical use, and that I could buy them with no problems.

When I did a little research into this matter, I discovered some important facts about 16mm prints of features. You can't purchase a feature print in outright sale, if the film is still under copyright. Title

to a print, that is, the usage regulations, remains with the copyright owner.

The copyright proprietor leases out 16mm prints to film libraries for a specific period of time, be it 7 years, or the life of the actual print. The proprietor legally dictates where it can be shown and when it can be shown. Note: Disney's 16 films can't be shown on Saturdays! Under no circumstances can copyrighted films be owned outright and be shown indiscriminately.

I discovered that copyrighted features offered for sale by so-called "private collectors" are in most cases misappropriated from the mails, from Armed Forces Theaters, from film labs, or even from film warehouses.

But the true collector shouldn't be overly discouraged by these facts, for there are many good safe buys in features on which the copyright protections have expired.

To be on the safe side, remember these few tips. When

buying films, deal only with well-known established firms. If in doubt, remember that the fly-by-night characters generally operate from a post office box. Whether company or private party, always take precautions to check the copyright status of a feature by checking the big copyright books in the public library. Copyrights are effective for 28 years, with the option to re-knew from another 28 years of protection.

Stay away from features in CinemaScope or in color. These films are almost always copyrighted and protected. A good rule of thumb to follow is to avoid all features released after 1950 of any sort—color and black and white included. Avoid the well-known releases made before that time. In any case, check carefully on the copyright status to avoid trouble. Remember, possession of such copyrighted films is a federal offense carrying a maximum sentence of five thousand dollars (\$5,000) for each violation.

CINECON 4
(Continued from page 1).

CINECON 4 appears to be headed toward a niche in the CINEPHILE'S immortality files. And, let it be revealed once again, you can only attend if you are a member of the CINEPHILES. Information as to how to join appears on Page 64.

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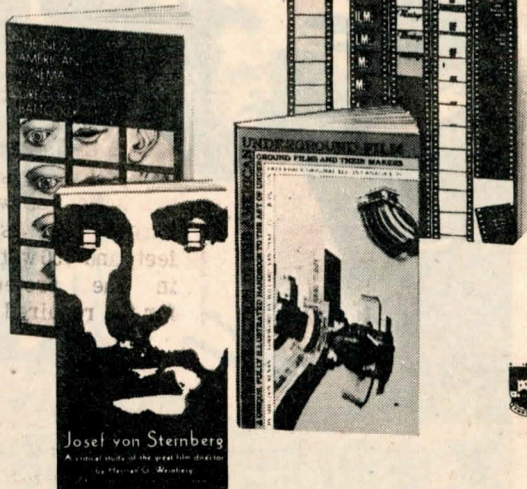
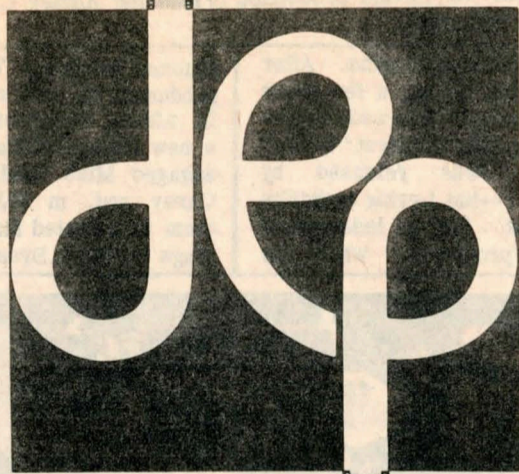
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