"MERRY GO ROUND" (Universal,1932) 8 reels
Directed by Erich Von Stroheim and Rupert Julian; Original story and screenplay by Stroheim; revised screenplay by Rupert Julian and Harvey Gates; Photography by Ben Reynolds and William Daniels; sets by Richard Day and Stroheim.

The Cast: NORMAN KERRY (Count Franz Maxillien von Hohenegg); MARY PHILBIN (Agnes Urban); Cesare Gravina (Sylvester Urban); Edith Yorke (Oursla Urban); George H. skakthorne (Bartholomew Gruber); George Siegmann (Schani); Dale Fuller (Marzanka Huber); Lillian Sylvestre (Mrs. aurora Rossreiter); Spottiswoode Atiken (Minister of War); Dorothy Wallace (Komtesse Gisella von Steinbrueck); Al Edmundson (Nepomuck Navral); Capt. Albert Cordi (Kudi, Baron von Lelktsinn); Charles King (Nikki, Baron von Hubermut); Penwick Oliver (Prince Etel Hubermut); Sidney Gracy (Gisella's groom); Anton Vaverka (Emperor Franz Josef); Madame George (Madame Elvira); Helen Eroneau (Jane); Jane Sherman (Marie); and Betty Morrissey in a bit role.

Produced, directed and written by Sal Pizzo; assisted by Nadine Pizzo; photography by J. and Nadine Pizzo, and Tulio Pellegrini. The Cast: Roderick Usher (Sal Pizzo); his Friend (Tulio Pellegrini); Madeline Usher (Rose Pellegrini); Usher's servant (Barry Ruffner).

Making our first departure from old films, this society is presenting the first New York showing of the latest version of the Edgar Allan Poe horror classic -- and the first version in color. Although a so-called "amateur" experimental film, it has a great deal more know-how and polish than many a "professional" film. Almost everyone recognizes the name of one man - Sal Pizzo - it makes an interesting comparison with the many other versions of the same tale. One shot is borrowed from the Watson and Weber version (shown by this society last year); another seems to have been inspired by Dreyer's "Vampyr"; but the film has plenty of imagination of its own, and is a commendable piece of film-making. In any event, there is certainly no slum intended in the use of the phrase "borrowing" since, to all intents and purposes, all films borrow directly - or indirectly - from another. For example, Lubitsch borrowed from "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari" in making "Samurai" -- and Fritz Lang promptly borrowed from "Samurai" for "Siegfried"! Pizzo filmed "Usher" entirely in his San Francisco home, with the exception of one exterior set at Sutro Heights Park, and the scene of the friend entering the Usher home, which was shot in the hallway of an apartment house owned by Pellegrini. Two miniatures were built of cardboard, paper mache and plaster; some flats were made from plywood and pressboard, and drapes were used liberally. The crypt sequence was shot in Pizzo's basement, with the exception of a rented hat and cape, the costumes were made by Mrs Pizzo, who also produced the various paintings seen in the film. Pizzo himself had had some previous experience as an actor, playing the role of George in the first West Coast stage production of "Of Mice and Men". The film was photographed on Type A Kodachrome film, with a Bolex H-16 camera,
using an Elgact Wide Angle lens. All opticals - lep dissolves, fades, double exposures - were made inside the camera. A variable shutter built by Pellegrini was employed for these effects. Lighting equipment was simple, with no more than six photofloods ever employed. Gelatines were used over the lamps for special color effects, and light was sometimes blocked or goboed out by the use of home-made barn-doors. The sound was recorded on magnetic tape, and later re-recorded on to an optical track. As a result of all this ingenuity, the total production cost - including the cost of this print - came to only £600. Pizzo is now planning a more elaborate version of Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death" and in the fall the Pizzos and Pellegrini's are leaving for Italy to make films there - this time for theatrical release.

**HARRY GO ROUND**

Made after "Poor Little Wife", but before "Greed" and "The Merry Widow", "Harry Go Round" is one of the most celebrated (and typical) of Erich Von Stroheim's Viennese extravaganzas - and one of the most infrequently shown. Its last NY screening was some five years ago - also by this society. Its history is generally known; Stroheim wrote and designed the production and started its direction. He had also planned to star, but Universal turned thumbs down on the idea, probably half-afraid of what did, in fact, happen. Stroheim and studio manager Irving Thalberg came to blows over the director's "extravagance", and Stroheim was promptly sacked. Rupert Julian took over, partially rewrote the script, and completed the picture, receiving sole directorial credit. Stroheim has claimed that but little of the film is his; Julian substantiated this at the time in a statement telling just what scenes he had done, both statements boiling down to about a film of Stroheim being retained. However, it is frankly difficult to believe either director in this case; Julian's remarks were undoubtedly written by someone in the public relations department, and Stroheim's comments - always erratic and concerned more with effect than content - must too often be taken with a grain of salt. His repeated statements that he has never seen "Greed" are completely untrue, since it is a matter of record that he sat through it, albeit with grunts of disarray, at the Museum of Modern Art.

Certainly much of the film reeks of Stroheim - of his tremendous virtuosity and talent, as well as his unbridled extravagance and tasteless exploitation of sex and vulgarity. It's not difficult to associate Stroheim with the scenes of palace splendor, the brutal Schani's pursuit of the helpless heroine, the seductive cigar-smoking lady in jackboots, and above all the whole of a sequence depicting a "Merry Widow" party. Incidentally, this sequence is something of a collector's item since it was not in the release print of the film.

Conversely, at times the film becomes impossibly flat and contrived. It would be only too easy - and unfair - to exclaim "Ahah! Rupert Julian!" - and so we won't. Stroheim himself can be flat and contrived at times, and his "The Merry Widow" is one of the most monumental bores of all time. His scripts are often quite outlandish, but fortunately Stroheim the director is so much superior to Stroheim the playwright, that plot insanities never seem to matter. (His book "Harrika" is both nauseous and boring - but what a tremendous film he could make it, if given a reasonably free hand!)

Yet Rupert Julian's work has always seemed singularly dull. "The Phantom of the Opera", after all, scored on its star, its story, its sets - not on its direction - and it is worth recalling that on both of his really interesting films ("Jury of 11" and "Walking Back") he was merely one of two directors. Contrast these films with "Harry Go Round", "Munkees Clipper" in which he was the sole director - an enjoyable but quite mediocre film in which, incidentally, Julian's ineptitude was such that the film's original budget was more than doubled before it was completed.

Of course, little can be proven either way in the case of "Harry Go Round" - but we do have two directors, great scenes and bad scenes - and we leave it to our members to determine who did what.

Certainly all of the really great scenes appear in the first half of the film; as the rest of the film unravels, it remains big, interesting and well-photographed, but somehow the spark has gone. And yet, despite the re-writing by Lesure, Julian and Gates, the plot is not basically altered. Perhaps this contributes once again the basic inferiority of Stroheim's writing - except when Stroheim is able, personally, to breathe life into it when translating it on to film.
Our print is a joy to behold, a fine original print with all the tints. The stupendous sets of Vienna, of the Prater with its huge ferris-wheel, the magnificence of the palaces, the big war scenes — all come through strikingly in crystal-clear amber and blue tints. It is very rarely that prints remain in such fine condition through the years. With the exception of the wild party sequence, mentioned on the previous page, this version corresponds to the release print in 1922, and cuts are those made by Universal's editors prior to release. As an example of this latter: very little remains of the illicit love affair between the Countess and her groom — certainly none of the seduction in the stables! However, this is not to say that the film has been watered-down in any way — it is still rugged fare in the best Stroheim tradition, strong heat until the final reel or so when all that seems to matter is to collect all the loose ends and wind it up as quickly as possible. For such a powerful subject — even after being tampered with — it is unfortunate that the closing scenes are so poorly directed. Nevertheless, this is quite a picture — possibly better than "Foolish Wives" (so far as one can judge from the really hacked prints that exist on that earlier Stroheim film for Universal) — and certainly better than "The Merry Widow".

We'd like at this point to say a word of thanks to Mr. Charles Shibuk, who provided a monumental set of program notes on this film. Unfortunately, although we had hoped to use them up until the last, it was not possible to use them. Pressure of work made it impossible to issue more than these rather sketched notes (written, you will notice, at different times on different typewriters) and Mr. Shibuk's manuscript somewhat res. blazed, in length and detail, Stroheim's original script for "Queen Kelly"! So, to Mr. Shibuk — apologies and thanks — an assurance that his excellent notes on "The Phantom of the Opera" will be utilized when we play that film later this year — and the hope that, even belatedly, we will print his "Merry Go Round" material for the benefit of our members. One of his comments however, does rate repeating now rather than later, and we append it below:

"This writer must take issue with Mr. Eversen's opinion concerning "The Merry Widow". Although its name will not be found on any list of the greatest films ever made, it certainly is not (in my opinion) "one of the most monumental bores of all time".

Charles Shibuk

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OUR NEXT PROGRAM: Day 15th: HENRY B. WALTHALL

A unique program tracing the career of one of the greatest actors of them all from 1909 through to 1936, the year of his death. "SHUSSE" will be shown complete, together with rare extracts from some of his best silent and sound films, and outstanding early Biograph-Griffith shorts.

We are hoping to have Mr. Wallace Walthall, Henry's brother, to introduce this program for us. There will be a further announcement about this on the notes circulated in advance of the showing.