"The Man Who Laughs" (excerpts) Universal, 1928; directed by Paul Leni; starring Conrad Veidt, with Mary Philbin, Olga Baclanova, Brandon Hurst.

Someday we hope we will be able to show "The Man Who Laughs" in its entirety; although we had a print in our hands some two years ago, we were unable to hold it for more than a day or two, and could only screen it for the bare handful of members that we were able to round up at a moment's notice. A fascinating subject, it is one of Paul Leni's best subjects, beautifully mounted and superbly photographed. Like most of Victor Hugo's novels, it is a colorful mixture of dramatically fictionalized history, social criticism and swashbuckling adventure, with a rather more bizarre twist than usual. Veidt plays a man who, as a child, was operated upon to give him a perpetual and unchangeable smile. Before it was outlawed, the practise was quite common, the victims being used as sideshow freaks in travelling circuses. At one time the role was scheduled for Lon Chaney. Our excerpts give no more than a tantalising glimpse of the film itself, but they do convey some idea of its size, decor, and rich style. Unfortunately, Mary Philbin, who gave one of the best performances of her career as the blind girl who falls in love with the deformed hero that she cannot see, is not featured in our scenes. However, Olga Baclanova is -- most notably in a robustly sexy scene where she encourages the advances of lecherous Brandon Hurst, and then repulses him scornfully. This scene incidentally was deleted from the final version of the film.

"Crazy Like a Fox" (Hal Roach, 1926, two reels) Directed by Leo McCarey. Starring Charlie Chase, with Martha Sleeper, William V. Mong, Oliver Hardy.

As both a director and a star comedian, Charlie Chase has always been sadly under-rated. Because because he was seen so much, from the early Sennett days onwards, he became a familiar fixture and no one regarded him as seriously as Keaton, Langdon or the other top comics. Nor are we trying to suggest that he was as great or inventive a comedian as Keaton. But few comedians maintained such a generally high standard in their comedies as did Chase, and few possessed his delightful and breezy personality. Chase's best comedies were often classics; and his routine ones always seemed much better than they were because of his playing. "Crazy Like a Fox" is by no means a top-grade Chase - a single joke is milked for rather more than it is worth, and some of the titles are rather too obvious - but Charlie himself is on top form, and the film, as a result of it, is thoroughly good fun. The print is a lovely brand new one, right off the original negative.

"The Hunchback of Notre Dame" A Universal Super-Jewel, released on September 6 1923 as a Road Show attraction.


In giving the cast, we are adding in brackets the names of the stars who played the principal roles in 1939's remake for Rko by William Dieterle.
The Cast:

Quasimodo .............. LON CHANEY (Charles Laughton)
Esmerelda .............. Patsy Ruth Miller (Maureen O'Hara)
Clopin .................. Ernest Torrence (Thomas Mitchell)
Phoebus ................ Norman Kerry (Alan Marshall)
Mme. de Gondelaurier ... Kate Lester
Jehan .................. Brandon Hurst (Cedric Hardwicke, named Frollo)
Gringoire .......... Raymond Hatton (Edmond O'Brien)
Louis XI ............... Tully Marshall (Harry Davenport)
Dom Claude ............ Nigel de Bruiier (Walter Hampden)
King's Chamberlain ..... Edwin Wallack (Etienne Giradot)
Judge of the Court ..... John Cossar (George Zucco)
Monsieur Neufchatel..... Harry L. Van Meter
Godule .................. Gladys Brockwell
Marie ..................... Eulalie Jensen
Fleur de Lys ............ Winifred Bryson
Monsieur le Torturer .... Nick de Ruiz
Charmolü's assistant... W. Ray Meyers
Josephus .............. William Parke sr.

and extras and bit players (including Frank Albertson) numbering 2,800.

Of all the film spectacles built around one period or another in France's history, two stand head and shoulders above all the rest - D.W. Griffith's "Orphans of the Storm" and Wallace Worsley's "The Hunchback of Notre Dame". Actually, Griffith should have made the Hugo film too - its whole plot, sweep and construction simply cry out for his hand, and it contains many of his favorite ingredients. The street battles, the lost-daughter motif, the interplay of unrelated characters and the last-minute rescue from execution are common to both "Hunchback" and "Orphans". But Griffith did not make "The Hunchback of Notre Dame", and despite its spectacle it emerges as a film in which the personality of the star rather than the director has the greater influence and leaves the more lasting impression. This is in no way a criticism, but merely a statement as to the basic difference between two fine and not dissimilar films.

Although the film was copyrighted at 12 reels, and our print only runs for 10, there appears to be nothing missing apart from a short scene wherein Quasimodo steals some candlesticks. In all probability, our ten reels were originally spread out over 12, in order to exact more tribute from the exhibitor, a common practise in the 20's. In any event, apart from the scene mentioned above, it appears to be quite complete, and certainly far more so than the intolerable 4½ reel versions that are available from several sources. Incidentally, this is the first NY showing of "Hunchback" since our own last showing more than three years ago. Available at the screening will be copies of the FILMS IN REVIEW containing Major George J. Mitchell's fine article on the career of Chaney.

For the statistically minded, some facts about the production: the 2,300 artistes involved worked an average of 12 hours per day on the picture, and the total personnel comprised some 4,000 people. The budget was a million and a quarter dollars. Worsley used ten assistant directors and 28 unit directors. The ten cameramen, each with his own assistant, were headed by Robert S. Newhard, a former Ince man. 550 arcs and 50 electric suns were used, and to anyone especially interested in the photographic aspect, we recommend reference to "The American Cinematographer" of February 1930, in which Earl Miller wrote a fascinating article on the differing problems involved in lighting the 1923 and 1939 versions of the story. The sets, insured by Lloyds
for half-a-million dollars, reconstructed with remarkable authenticity the Paris of 1492 - or "just ten years before Columbus discovered America" as a quite irrelevant subtitle tells us. These sets included the Court of Miracles, the Place du Parvis, Palais du Justice, the interior of the Bastille, and seven mansions, 35 statues, and eight unnamed streets, each 200 feet long. The length of the Place du Parvis - 445 feet. The actual Notre Dame set remained standing for years, putting in frequent appearances through the years in such Universal films as "The Phantom of the Opera" and "Frankenstein". In 1941's "The Wolf Man" the little Welsh village of Llanwelly suddenly found itself endowed with the cathedral. The venerable set came to an ignorable end a couple of years ago when part of it was used as the exterior of a Paris night-club in a Tony Curtis opus. Immediately afterwards, it was torn down.

Although there have been several versions (American and otherwise) of both "Orphans of the Storm" and "The Hunchback of Notre Dame", the remakes certainly haven't reached the prodigious totals of those other old reliables, "Les Misérables", "The Count of Monte Cristo" and "The Three Musketeers". And so far, no two versions of "Hunchback" have been quite alike. The latest, a somewhat stolid and unimaginative version by Jean Dellanoy, is somewhat of a throwback to William Fox's old version in which the limelight was kept on Esmerelda, as played by Theda Bara. (In the new opus, Dellanoy has a grand time in the torture chamber putting Lollobrigida through sundry ordeals). In Chaney's version, Phoebus was the hero, and Gringoire little more than comedy relief. In Dieterle's remake, Gringoire's role was enlarged to that of the hero, and Laughton was allowed to live at the end, happy in the knowledge that he had brought happiness to his beloved Esmerelda. The original ending of the book (followed, to a degree, by Dallanoy) was a tragic one: Esmerelda was indeed hanged and her body spirited away by the hunchback to disappear entirely until the skeletons of both were discovered, walled in together, many years later. "The Phantom of the Opera" had a slightly similar ending -- and a similarly changed movie ending too. In view of these disparities, it is amusing to note that Carl Laemmle, in a press release at the time, stated that Hugo's original had been followed to the letter, but that "... in the interests of continuity, which form the basis of every photoplay, I have changed a few superficialities in the story construction". At the same time Laemmle also remarked: "We have found it necessary to eliminate a great deal of gore; blood-curdling murders and massacres may be described on the cold surface of the printed page, but when reproduced photographically on the realistic screen, they are a bit gruesome". This was a strange statement indeed from the head of a studio which built its fortune on the exploitation of gore, horror and supernatural mayhem! However, it is true: despite the possibilities and temptations, "The Hunchback" is not a brutal or sadistic film. The whipping scene is handled very tastefully, without any lessening of power thereby.

Although "The Hunchback" was one of Chaney's most successful films, it was by no means one of his most typical. Generally he tried to avoid big spectacles, which tended to minimise the contribution of the actor. "Hunchback" of course was the film which really made him, and when it went into production he was by no means the top ranking star that he was soon to become. Accordingly, it was not a star vehicle, and there are long stretches when Chaney is off the screen, and the romantic story - or the spectacle - come to the forefront of attention. Directorially, the handling of the spectacle is quite interesting. For the most part, Worsley keeps his huge sets and streets relatively empty. Then, when the huge mobs, and armies of soldiers, pour forth into the streets in the climactic reels, there is added impact and the scenes appear even bigger and more spectacular than they otherwise would. The mob and mass action scenes are really superbly done. Incidentally, it was during the shooting of these scenes that one of Hollywood's now-standard orders for mob scenes was
born -- that classic "call to arms" to extras in costume pictures, "LIGHT YOUR TORCHES, PULL UP YOUR TIGHTS AND LET'S GO!"

When we screened the film to Patsy Ruth Miller recently she volunteered the information that Chaney himself directed her in several scenes, and particularly the trial scene which she had done several times unsuccessfully. In marked contrast to today's Actor's School and Studio theories, Chaney told her: "It's not how you feel that matters; it's how you look, and how the audience feels". The scene was done, successfully, under Chaney's direction. Miss Miller went on to say that Worsley welcomed such assistance from Chaney, and didn't in any way regard it as interference: apparently he was interested primarily in the spectacle elements, and as long as he could play around with huge crowds and battles, he didn't mind too much who directed the calmer moments! Miss Miller was full of praise, naturally, for Chaney's performance, and also remarked how tremendously popular Norman Kerry was with the whole unit. "Norman knew he was no actor", she says, "and didn't pretend to be. But he always did his very best, and worked like a horse. He was cheerful and willing, and everybody liked him". Kerry died in France a little over a year ago, aged 30.

We remarked a little earlier on the similarities between "Orphans of the Storm" and "Hunchback". There were differences too. "Orphans" used the political background of its story in an allegorical fashion, and came up with some pretty strong anti-Communistic messages. "The Hunchback" on the other hand, plays it a little safer, attacking both the government of tyranny and the rebellion that tries to overthrow it! One element that both the 1923 and the 1939 versions of "Hunchback" had in common was the purely lecherous motivations of the villain. Brandon Hurst it seems was a villain with but a single thought - only a few years after he had failed to make Esmerelda his, he was on the track of Mary Philbin in the other Victor Hugo epic at Universal, "The Man Who Laughs". In Dieterle's version, Cedric Hardwicke made the villain somewhat more dignified, but no less loathsome.

We could ramble on indefinitely about the merits of the film - the great glass-shots, the use of morticians' wax by Chaney, the great spectacle scenes ... but we'll leave this for you to discover, and close with a quotation from George Mitchell's index to Chaney's work. Mitchell writes: "In recreating the character of Quasimodo, Chaney so scrupulously followed Hugo's description of the demented creature that when critics later accused him of overdoing the makeup, he could say with scorn: 'Read the book'. His makeup consisted of a breast-plate attached in front to shoulder-pads like those football players use. The hump (made of rubber weighing 70 pounds) was attached to the pads in the back. A light leather harness connected breast-plate and pads in such a way that Chaney could not stand erect. Over all this, he wore a skin-tight flesh-colored rubber suit to which animal hair was affixed. His face was mis-shapen with modelled putty and behind fang-like teeth there was a device that held his mouth open. On his head was a wig of matted, filthy hair. Every day, for almost three months, Chaney presented himself in this guise to director Wallace Worsley".

:: Program Notes by Wm.K. Everson :::::::::

Next program: July 23: LON CHANEY in THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA
And three Mack Sennett comedy shorts