"THERE HE GOES" (Mack Sennett-Pathe, 1925) Excerpt only; starring Harry Langdon.

While we dislike showing mere fragments of films, it always seems worth making an exception in the case of interesting film which may never be available in complete form. In this particular case, we came across part of the original negative of an old Sennett -- the first reel of two, but minus the titles. While obviously it was building to a whale of a second reel, and is undoubtedly the lesser of the two halves, it is still a great deal of fun, and has more subtleties in its pantomime than most of the other Harry Langdon's for Sennett. Harry is really at his most endearing in this one, with more than a little of Keaton involved in his pantomime too.

"GOLF" (Vitagraph, 1922) 2 reels. Written and directed by Larry Semon and Tom Buckingham, with Larry Semon, Oliver Hardy, Lucille Carlisle.

Larry Semon's comedies varied tremendously in quality, not only among themselves, but also in the standards of comedy to be found within a single film. They were a mixture of incredibly good and inventive slapstick, and equally incredibly crude knockabout. Their common denominators were speed, and a fondness for what one can only call "mess". "Kid Speed" in particular, contains gag after gag of people being smothered in oil, falling into enormous mud puddles, and so on. There's considerably less of this "mess" than usual in "Golf", although Oliver Hardy having an enormous (and unappetising) bowl of soup splattered all over him is a typical example of this brand of Semon gag. On the whole, the Semons -- and particularly "Kid Speed" and "The Cloud Hopper" -- had far more positive than negative factors. "Golf", which is a fine toned original print, is about average for Semon, good fun without being anywhere near his best. However, his being outwitted by a shrewd squirrel makes for a wonderful routine, and even if the film had nothing else, that alone would make it well worth seeing.

"PETER PAN" (Paramount, 1925) Excerpts only - 30 mins. approx. Directed by Herbert Brenon and photographed by James Wong Howe. Starring BETTY BRONSON with (in our excerpts) Mary Brian, Esther Ralston and Phillippe de Lacy, and (not in our excerpts) Ernest Torrence, Anna May Wong, Cyril Chadwick.

Possibly some of you may have seen this delightful adaptation of James Barrie's whimsy at Eastman House; if not, we hope you'll regard these excerpts as a sort of trailer until such time as you do see it all. The excerpts incidentally represent more or less complete sequences (at the Darlings' London house, and in Peter Pan's home in the Never-Never Land) and there is no attempt at a condensation of the complete story line. Presumably however everyone has an at least rudimentary knowledge of the tale, so, despite the absence of Captain Hook, so delightfully played by Ernest Torrence, there should be no problems about following the story-line.

In many ways, "Peter Pan" was a disappointing film. Perhaps out of too zealous a respect for the source material, it was treated very much in the stage manner, and no attempt at all was made to utilise the magic and mystery that the cinema could have provided. Even the camerawork was rather ordinary, surprisingly so from a craftsman like James Wong Howe. Presumably Brenon realised his error however, for his next Barrie adaptation, "A Kiss for Cinderella" (also with Bronson) exploited the cinema ... and the camera ...
for all it was worth. "A Kiss for Cinderella" was vastly superior to "Peter Pan" as a film, and was one of the most magical and poignant of all movie fantasies. And it achieved this without betraying one iota of the Barrie spirit. (Some of this spirit was betrayed by some blatant Americanisms in "Peter Pan" — including the transforming of the lost boys into American youngsters!) However, sadly, "A Kiss for Cinderella" lacked the popular appeal of the more familiar "Peter Pan", and was a resounding flop commercially. With all its shortcomings, "Peter Pan" was still a thorough delight, totally at variance with Disney's coarse and ugly version of a few years ago. Bronson was somewhat miffed because it was Betty Bronson who attracted all the acclaim, both from the public and the critics. A short-lived Bronson cult sprang up overnight; her career was so mismanaged however that it is impossible to say how long it might have lasted had the proper vehicles been forthcoming. Bronson was an intensely egotistical man and it probably galled him (understandably) that his contribution should be so overlooked, and all the praise for the film's success showered on a newcomer. In fact he went on record as saying, in somewhat disgruntled fashion, that Mr. Barrie, and to a much lesser degree, Mr. Bronson, were responsible for "Peter Pan" — and not Miss Bronson. (It is perhaps irrelevant, but nevertheless quite interesting, that Bronson was not widely liked by his associates; Lillian Gish, once in line for the role of Peter, was warned by Griffith, King Vidor and others NOT to do it if Bronson was to direct). However, there is no doubt that in the case of "Peter Pan", the credit for the film's charm and success does belong predominantly with Miss Bronson, who brings just the right spirit, and just the right mixture of fun and pathos, to the role. It is a pity that so few other films were able to utilise her unique personality so well.

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INTERMISSION

"THE LOCKED DOOR" (U.A.—Joseph Schenck, 1929) 7 reels; Directed by George Fitzmaurice; screenplay by C. Gardner Sullivan from the play "The Sign on the Door" by Channing Pollock; Assistant Dramatic Director — Earle Browne; Sets by William Cameron Menzies; Photographed by Ray June; Assistant Director: Cullen Tate; Edited by Hal C. Kern.

The Cast: Frank Devereaux (R.C.D. LA ROCQUE); Ann Carter (BARBARA STANWYCK); Helen Reagan (BETTY BRONSCOW); Lawrence Reagan (WILLIAM BOYD); Butler (George Bunny); Waite (Harry Stubbs); District Attorney (Harry Mestayer); Hotel Proprietor (Mack Swain); Telephone Girl (Zasu Pitts); Police Chief (Purnell Pratt).

"The Locked Door", which had been made as a silent by Schenck in 1922, with Herbert Brenon directing (under the title "The Sign on the Door") is not a remarkable film in any way — except perhaps when seen in the context of its period. It is, for 1929, a well-above average film of its type. With certain honorable exceptions like "Hallelujah", the early talkies of that period really talked, and in fact tried hard to do nothing else but. Films like "The Racketeer" with Carole Lombard and Robert Armstrong, kept all cinematic technique hidden, all physical action off-screen, and deliberately concentrated on long, static takes in which incredibly dull conversations meandered on just so that there were WORDS on the sound track. "The Locked Door", facing the additional obstacle of being adapted from a stage play, comes through rather well, all things considered. No attempt is made to hide the stage origins, and the places where the curtain fell are handled in like manner, with a slow fade substituting. Yet George Fitzmaurice ("Son of the Sheik", "Night of Love", "Mata Hari") gives it a lot of his old style. There is no talk for the sake of talk; long passages
are played silent; the camera keeps on the move to offset the limitations of locale. The film opens up with a bang -- a good prohibition raid, which looks as though it is at least partially stock from the 1922 version. There is also one rather obvious censor cut in this sequence, as Rod la Rocque forces his attentions on Barbara Stanwyck. Thereafter the film is on rather slower-paced ground, the familiar (in the late 20's and early '30s) mixture of morals and melodrama which Gloria Swanson (in "The Loves of Sunya", "The Trespasser" and to a lighter degree in "Indiscreet") and later Joan Crawford were to make very much their own. A musical score would have helped it a lot, and strengthened some of the plodding moments, but nevertheless, it's still quite a neatly done film of its type. The climax is really quite moving, and there the austerity is a decided asset. Music might have made this a more emotional ending, but in its present, slightly unpolished form, it has a certain punch to it.

Barbara Stanwyck suffers with her usual competence, and Betty Bronson is as charming as ever, but far less effective when forced to speak. Her voice is certainly adequate, but the personality seems more routine because of it. As with John Gilbert, it wasn't a case of a poor voice cutting short a career, but rather a case of ANY voice being a liability to a star whose style was so essentially visual and so little in need of the added dimension of sound.

It's a little sad to realize that this film comes only four years after "Peter Pan", and already presents the overnight star of that film on the decline, overcome by a new regime represented - in the same film - by Barbara Stanwyck. Incidentally, the valet (George Bunny) is John Bunny's brother.

Most incredible of all, perhaps, is how such an atrocious actor as Rod la Rocque managed to keep going in relative prominence in both silent and sound films. If you think his performances were bad in "The Fighting Eagle" and "Gigolo" -- not to mention "Bachelor Brides" and "Braveheart" -- just wait until you see this early talkie of his!! Off-hand, the only really sound performance we can ever recall his giving was as the head of Edward Arnold's Fascist-styled police in "Meet John Doe".

"The Locked Door" is a film that requires kindness and an understanding of the period in which it was made. It's an interesting, nostalgic film, and, viewed in a not-too-critical frame of mind, we think you'll find it very entertaining.

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Next program: Tuesday August 26th. in Room 10-B
LILLIAN GISH and RONALD COLMAN in Henry King's "THE WHITE SISTER" (1923)

Program Notes & Enquiries: Bill Everson, Manhattan Towers Hotel, 2166 Broadway, NYC 24
Committee of the Society: Edward S. Gorey, Charles Shribuk, Dorothy Lovell.