"DON JUAN" (Warner Brothers, 1926) One-reel condensation of a 10-reel subject; directed by Alan Crosland; scenario by Bess Meredyth; starring JOHN BARRYMORE with Mary Astor, Warner Oland, Montague Love, Myrna Loy, Estelle Taylor, Gustav von Seyffertitz.

Because it is noted as the first Warner film with a fully synchronized score, "Don Juan" is too often overlooked as a film in its own right — and what a wonderful film (in its own field) it was — rich, flamboyant, lush, full of pep, just the right amount of tongue in cheek, and with a wonderful collection of performances that were all larger than life, but never once approached lampoon. It was a superbly staged and directed production, one of the best of that much under-rated director Alan Crosland, who reached his peak in the final days of silent and early days of sound. (** This one reel version moves like lightning and contains most of the big highlights — the climactic chase, the escape from the dungeon, the famous duel (duplicated almost scene by scene in the comparatively recent Indian fantasy, "Aladdin and his Lamp"), and the fine torture scene in which Barrymore astonishingly, and without makeup, seems to take on the facial characteristics of Gustav von Seyffertitz. The film is allegedly based on the poem by Lord Byron, but more than a little of it would seem to have been suggested by John Barrymore himself, who also worked some typically bizarre Barrymore firework into the Manon Lescaut story, "When a Man Loves" (also a fine Crosland film). (**

Crosland's other top films in this period include "The Jazz Singer", "Old San Francisco", "When a Man Loves" and "Viennese Nights". Curiously, despite fine early sound films (in which he never let the microphone hamper his stylish visuals), he was soon making quickies and short subjects. Crosland will be represented in a show we're planning soon, showing the work of really great silent directors who never made it back to the big-time in sound films. James Cruze, Herbert Brenon and others will be represented by excerpts from their sound films, with one film (probably Brenon's "The House-mother") to be shown complete.

"THE THREE MUSKETEERS" (Douglas Fairbanks-United Artists, 1921) 12 reels
Directed by Fred Niblo; adapted by Edward Knoblock; photographed by Arthur Edeson; scenario editor: Lotta Woods; Art Director - Edward M. Langley; Technical Director - Frank England; Master of Costumes - Paul Burns; Master of properties - Harry Edwards; Electrician - Bert Wayne; Editor: Nellis Mason.

The Cast: D'Artagnan (DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS); Constance (Marguerite de la Motte); Lady de Winter (Barbara LaMarr); Athos (Leon Bary); Porthos (George Siegmann); Aramis (Eugene Pallette); Louis XIII (Adolphe Menjou); Anne of Austria (Mary MacLaren); Cardinal Richelieu (Nigel de Brulier); Duke of Buckingham (Thomas Holding); De Treville (Willis Hobbs); Rochefort (Boyd Irwin); Father Joseph (Lon Poff); D'Artagnan's father (Walt Whitman); Bonacieux (Sydney Franklin); Bernajoux (Charles Belcher); Planchet (Charles Stevens); Youth in tavern (Douglas Fairbanks Jr.).

After last week's "The Mollycoddle", and tonight's "Don Juan", "The Three Musketeers" is likely to seem somewhat turgescent by comparison. And, frankly, it is often a ponderous film. It contains plenty of action, and at eight reels would have been fine; at twelve, there are just two many arid stretches between the duels and chases. Furthermore, the pacing is often at fault. To follow one fine duel sequence with another, almost immediately, seems
very poor scripting. Not that "The Three Musketeers" is a bad film, or an uninteresting one. Far from it. But it does represent a complete about-face for the old Doug, and it is a pity that so many people regard Doug's best-known films - this one, "Robin Hood" and "The Thief of Bagdad" - as being his most typical, when actually they were his least typical, and generations removed from the zippy, peppy comedy-adventures like "When the Clouds Roll By" and "Knickerbocker Buckaroo". There was more pace (and fun) in any one reel of "A Modern Musketeer" (in which Doug lampooned, beautifully, the character he was later to take more seriously) than in all of "The Three Musketeers".

While Fred Niblo, a mediocre director, must share some of the blame, the bulk of it really belongs with Doug. For a brief period following "The Mark of Zorro", he became incredibly pretentious. Influenced to a large degree by Griffith, he felt that his films had to be "big", historically meticulous; they had to be art films, prestige films, and boxoffice films, all rolled into one. Doug was always over-fond of titles, but many of them were so funny that in earlier days the excess of text on the screen hardly mattered. In "Musketeers" the text is all serious and over-explanatory - and there is far too much of it. And Doug seems overloaded by it all; it is two reels before he makes his first appearance, and another reel before he is really involved in the film. And, significantly, in his first shot he is sitting on the floor listening to someone else talking. And the film finishes on a title, rather than on Doug. "Robin Hood" was in much the same vein, though with some really spectacular action, and "Thief of Bagdad" was slowest of all, despite its marvellous art direction and technical tricks. Presumably Doug himself caught on to the error of his ways, and ultimately - in "The Black Pirate" and "The Gaucho" - there was at least a partial return to the older style (and, importantly, to shorter running times).

So much for criticisms. While the film warrants them, it still has much in it that is wonderful. The four big duels (one of them containing Doug's famous somersault) are beautifully done, and there are enough chases - rooftop and horseback - in the last two thirds of the picture to keep it running along smoothly. When Doug is fooling around with his musketeer pals, or doing a little horse-trading, much of the old gaiety returns. If some of this gaiety had been held over for the scenes with Constance, or with the Queen, the film would have benefited immeasurably. Some of the comedy is delightful, including a gag-routine that was promptly copied in "La Bohème". Those of you who saw that a couple of months ago at the society will readily recognise it. Technically the film is quite superb, with some magnificent sets, fine camerawork by Arthur Edeson, and some of the best glass-shots seen up to 1921. And the shot of Calais harbor, as seen from the boat, is another piece of really fine trickery. Incidentally, one or two sets have a really cheap appearance - but look closely, and you'll see why. In both cases, they are of night exteriors - and were designed to exploit specific tinting effects. In black and white of course, these effects do not come off. The print generally is a good one, and though a dupe, is sharp and clear. There are occasional spots however where it gets out of frame; this is due to faulty printing, and corrects itself within a few seconds. So if the projectionist appears to be sleeping, wait a few seconds before you berate him. He'll be doing his test! The print is complete except for a couple of very brief scenes. One shows Doug looking for lodgings. The other is of an encounter with Richelieu, who asks him what he would do if he knew that he must die. Doug replies "Write the history of France". The absence of this scene is noticable only by a later reference to it.

Faithful old Charlie Stevens is well in evidence of course, and it's quite astonishing - even upsetting - to find that arch-fiend George Siegmann on the right side of the law for a change, as d'Artagnan.

Incidentally, you'll undoubtedly recognise many of the sets - some used by Doug earlier in "His Majesty the American", others used later.
When all is said and done, and despite its flaws, this "The Three Musketeers" is still one of the best of the many adaptations of the Dumas tale. Certainly it is far better than the weak Eko version, with Walter Abel hopelessly miscast, and playing D'Artagnan like a divorce-court lawyer. It goes without saying that it is better than the Hitz Brothers satire, although that was a remarkably enjoyable little film. But -- is this sacrilege? -- the MGM Technicolor version of a few years back was, perhaps, superior. Even admitting its hopeless and horrible cast (excepting Lana Turner, fine as Lady de Winter), it had pep, verve, a good script, and fine adventure hoke in the good tradition. It had the sort of pacing and spirit that this version should have had -- and had it been possible to cast it with Doug, Siegmann and other old-timers who knew what they were doing, what a magnificent swashbuckler it could have been! But Gig Young .... Keenan Wynn ... oh well!!

Program Notes and Enquiries: Wm. K. Everson, Bradford Hotel, 210 W. 70th St, NYC 23 Committee: Edward S. Gorey, Sandra Milstein, Charles Shibuk, Dorothy Lovell.

FORT COMING PROGRAMS

All being well, our delayed Chaplin program - THE KID, THE GOLD RUSH (excerpts) and RECREATION will be our first show in October. However, not wanting to duplicate our bad luck, we're not setting a date until the print is in our hands. Also scheduled for October of course is the Laurel and Hardy program.

If "The Kid" doesn't arrive (and we're sure it will) in time, we may run a German version of "The Count of Monte Cristo" ... or Reginald Denny's "What Happened to Jones" ... or Alice Brady's "Betsy Ross" ... or other items that we have on hand. In any event, you'll be advised in detail ahead of time as usual.