"SKIP THE MALOO" (Hal Roach-KHI, 1931) Director: James Parrott; camera: Walter Lundin; 2 reels; starring Charlie Chase, with Jacqueline Wells (Julie Bishop), Dell Henderson, Gale Henry.

"Skip the Maloo" is quite one of the best sound Charlie Chase comedies that we've come across, and the reason may well be that it's practically a scene-by-scene remake of one of Charlie's best silents. In the original version, there was a running gag in which Charlie prevents a lady from blunting out the truth about him by ringing a bell in her ear. She, being allergic to bells, goes into a trance each time. When she finally does get her story out in the very last scene, the whole comedy is capped by a title: "I'd have told you before, but there are so many damn bells around here!". It played much better than it reads, and one gets the impression almost that for this remake they were looking at the old one, shooting a copy, looking at a bit more and re-doing that, and so on. Then they suddenly arrived at that title, didn't know what to do, and fumbled off into a weak slapstick substitute! As a result, the film winds up disappointingly, but up to the final sequence it's fine stuff, with more vigorous slapstick than was usual with Chase. Incidentally, Gale Henry played the lady who was allergic to bells in both versions, and we saw her recently in "Lightly Like a Goose" too. Tall, angular and good-humored, she was to Chase what Margaret Dumont was to the Marx Brothers.

"ME AND MY PAL" (Hal Roach-KHI, 1933) Dir: Charles Rogers; camera: Art Lloyd; 2 reels; with Laurel and Hardy, James Finlayson, Charles Hall, Marion Bardell.

Although by now we have played all of the top Laurel and Hardy films, there are still, happily, quite a few of their "average" films which we haven't gotten around to, and this is one of them. Far from being great, it still has some priceless moments, and is an interesting variation on their age-old situation of prolonged frustration erupting, finally, into lost tempers, mayhem and destruction. Rarely has Hardy's pomposity been deflated as spectacularly as it is in these opening scenes. Laurel too, has some unusual bits, including a remark dragged in from left field that he considers the motion picture still to be in its infancy!

"KNIGHT WITHOUT ARMOR" (London Films-Alexander Korda-UA, 1937) Directed by Jacques Feyder; from the novel by James Hilton; adapted by Frances Marion; scenario by Lajos Biró; dialogue & scenario, Arthur Wimperis; cameras: Harry Stradling; camera operators, Jack Cardiff; Settings by Lazare Kacen; Supervising editor: William Hornbeck; edited by Francis Lyon; special effects by Ned Mann; music: Miklos Rozsa.

The players: MARLENE DIETRICH, ROBERT DONAT, John Clements, Herbert Lomas, Irene Vanburgh, Austin Trevor, Basil Gill, David Tree, Frederick Culley, Lawrence Hanray, Jat Patric, Dorice Fordroed, Franklin Kelsey, Lawrence Baskomb, Miles Malleson, Allan Jeayes, Lynn Harding, Raymond Huntley, Peter Bull.

Although played, and made, by a number of talented American, British and European artists, and backed by all the solid production values that Korda gave all his ambitious films of the mid-thirties, "KNIGHT WITHOUT ARMOR" is not a particularly good movie. Somehow all the fine ingredients don't add up to an equally fine whole. However, it seems worthy of revival today not as a Korda film, or a Feyder film, but rather as an adjunct to
the Museum of Modern Art's current Dietrich cycle, literally fitting in between last week's "Desire" and this week's "Destry Rides Again".

To a large extent, "Knight Without Armor" represents just about the last of the "old" Sterneberg-patterned Dietrich. And it has a great deal in common with the Sterneberg's too - lavishness, stunning photography (although perhaps not as starting in its big-eyed wonder as the exotic work Lee Garmes turned out for Sterneberg) -- and an overall emptiness, despite a huge canvas. In his shots of Dietrich - peering from under huge hats, wiping the soap from her face in a marvellous bath-tub scene, languishing in bed, or reflected in a series of mirrors - Feyder seems to be following in Sterneberg's footsteps. Elsewhere there are definite borrowings from Eisenstein. Of course, it is all too easy (and dangerous) to read Eisenstein "influence" into a story of the Russian revolution -- but at least one shot calls "Potemkin" to mind at once, and the wrecking and looting of the palace, and of the wine cellars, seems too similar in composition to the similar scenes in "Ten Days That Shook the World" to be completely accidental.

It hardly matters that Dietrich rarely convinces - it's enough just to sit back and watch her go through her usual paces. (Even at the time, critics were a little sarcastic about her flawless coiffure and makeup through all the inconveniences, not to say indignities, of the Russian revolution.) Robert Donat is quite fine, and it is a real pleasure to see - and hear - him again. In a supporting role towards the end of the film, John Clements is particularly good. Minor characterisations vary from excellent to awful. British small-part players usually have the happy facility of looking at home in any costumes and any period of history. In American historical or other non-American themes, the faces of Harry Cording, Dick Curtis, Ernie Adams and their ilk are usually too closely identified with the western for then to merge convincingly into other surroundings. Good British character actors like Austin Trevor and Peter Bull have a definite edge over them; but the average British bit player has but a temporary edge. As soon as he opens his mouth he is as unconvincing as was western heavy Charles King when once cast as one of the Knights of the Round Table. Sadly, there are quite a few of these inoffensive bit players in "Knight Without Armor", and their scenes jarr badly.

However, on the whole, "Knight Without Armor" is good fun and an enjoyable film. The good moments and the lovely camerawork do, for the most part, outweigh the slow pacing and occasional tedium. It has of course been shown on television, but due to its great length, usually in sadly cut form. Our print, though of TV origin, has actually been put together from three different prints, and to the best of my knowledge is now quite complete. At any rate, in terms of footage it certainly equals the original release length of 11 reels, so any scenes I may have missed in creating this one living print from the cadavers of three dead ones, are certainly quite minor.

Program Notes & Enquiries: Wm. K. Everson, Hotel Bradford, 210 W. 70th St. NYC Committee: Edward Corey, Sandra Everson, Charles Shibuk, Dorothy Lovell.

Next Program: Tuesday next May 26th, room 10-C, 7:30.

2 VAL LEWTON productions, both directed by Mark Robson - "BEDLAM" with Doris Karloff, Anna Lee, Billy House, Richard Fraser "THE GHOST SHIP" with Richard Dix, Russel Wade, Edith Barrett, Lawrence Tierney