We assume, and hope, that everyone received in time the special mailing that went out a few days ago announcing the change in tonight's program. The print of "Sporting Youth" arrived late, and proved to be quite unrunnable - shrunken, sliced, ripped, and altogether useless. With only a day or so to find a substitute and get an announcement into the mail, we didn't have too much leeway, and settled on "A Hero for a Night" as being the closest in spirit that we could find to the film. We hope you'll like it. You already know about all the January programs, since they were listed on the same mailing -- and the New Year has started off well, with a number of interesting silents already on hand for our February shows.

"The Old Reporter" (Edison, 1912, one reel) Dir: E.J. Montague; with William West as the reporter, and Bigelow Cooper, William Deetchel, Yale Benner, Walter Edwin, Robert Brower, Charles Ogle and Augustus Phillips.

Although as straightforward and unimpressively in its direction and writing as almost all the Edisons, "The Old Reporter" is a good deal better than most. It keeps much more on the move than usual, is less starchy, and keeps a lot of its action outdoors - in recognizable New York and New Jersey locations. It's a nicely photographed and altogether quite pleasing little drama.

"His Private Life" (Educational, 1926, 2 reels) Dir: William Goodrich; camera: Byron Houch; starring Lupino Lane, with Virginia Vance, George Davis, Glen Cavender and Wallace Lupino.

Frankly, "His Private Life" is a disappointing Lane, and quite the weakest that we've played. It's a pity that we couldn't have found a really great one to show so soon after his death. (He died in England about a month ago). However, the Lanes are so few and far between that it seems unwise to pass a fresh one up just because it isn't up to the wonderful standards of "Monte of the Mounted" or "Movieland". "His Private Life" is more vintage Sennett than typical Lane; apart from a fall or two, there are none of his customary acrobatics, and it almost looks as though it were a comedy designed for some other comedian, and then handed to Lane in a hurry. Most of it is old stuff, but Lane's personality is as cheery as ever, making the most of routine material, and occasionally making a gag really pay off. And there are one or two really funny moments. Disappointing as it is, it is nevertheless slickly done with nice production values, and never descends to the mediocrity that marked nine out of ten of the independent comedy series in the 20's.

"Below Zero" (Hal Roach-MGM, 1930, 2 reels) Dir: James Parrott; story: Leo McCarey; camera, George Stevens. With LAUREL & HARDY.

One of the best of the lesser Laurel and Hardy comedies, "Below Zero" starts off almost like a film by Vigo -- L & H, more withdrawn than ever into their own private little world, valiantly playing (and singing) "In The Good Old Sumner Time" in a furious snowstorm! It isn't long before the savagery starts, the highpoint being reached perhaps as Oliver howls with laughter when Laurel throws away an old lady's pail of milk! The second half of the film is more conventional, but winds up with a typically repulsive gag. The camerawork (still George Stevens) is rather better and with more variety of angles than in most of their films of the early 30's, and the dialogue gags are less obvious than usual too.
"Speedy Gonzales" (Warner Bros., 1954) One reel, Technicolor, Dir: I. Freleng
Voices: Mel Blanc

As we've commented on several previous occasions, the color cartoons, and especially those of MGM and Warners in the late 40's and 50's, are now the only outlet for the wonderful sight gags that we used to get from Keaton, Sennett et al. Though not as clever as "Double or Kutton" and others that we've run, "Speedy Gonzales" - another entry in the perpetual war between cats and mice - is still grand fun, getting good laughs out of the voices of Mel Blanc as well as out of the purely visual fun.

--- Intermission ---

"A HERO FOR A NIGHT" (Universal, 1927) 6 reels Dir: William James Craft
Story and continuity: Harry C. Hoyt; story supervision, Joseph Poland; Titles by Albert Demond; edited by Charles Craft; photographed by George Robinson; art director, Charles B. Hall; wardrobe, Johanna Mathieson

With Glenn Tryon, Patsy Ruth Miller, Burr McIntosh, Lloyd Whitlock, Bob Milasch, Ruth Dwyer.

"A Hero for a Night" starts off with good old Carl Laemmle smiling benignly at the audience. It's a lovely toned print, and it has charming Patsy Ruth Miller wearing some-striking jazz-age creations. Those three facts alone disarm any serious criticism of what is, after all, just a programmer - but a most entertaining one. The week it was shown to the press, the critics also had the pleasure of absorbing "Sorrell and Son", "The Gaucho", "She's a Sheik" and sundry other delights - but all seemed to like "A Hero for a Night" very much, and to consider it a good comedy with a lot of original bits of business. It isn't as carefully done a production as it might have been; it definitely sags a bit in the middle; but this may be partially because it's a remake of an earlier Universal silent, and somehow Universal never worked up too much of a sweat over their remakes. However, it's a very much revamped story, designed to cash in on the Lindbergh idolatry then sweeping the country. (Charlie Chase's "Us" came out around the same time and for the same reason). The flying stuff is saved for the final reel, but it's worth waiting for, and there's a good final gag to round it off.

"A Hero for a Night" was ground out fairly quickly and fairly inexpensively, but it's a well mounted picture and never looks cheap. One wonders however if a plane was really the only way to get to New York from Long Island (in a hurry) as recently as 1927? Incidentally, although so much of the action takes place on a Long Island resort, the actual locations are quite clearly Catalina! All told, it's a pleasant and typical Universal second-stringer of the late 20's... the kind of a film you'll probably have forgotten two months hence, but will (we hope) have enjoyed a lot while watching it.

--- Wm. K. Everson ---