We assume that everybody present tonight is aware of the switch in programs. The majority of our active membership was present at last week's showing of "The Canary Murder Case" and was notified then; in the interim, by word of mouth, telephone etc., we've advised as many others as possible. And since those who hadn't heard were advised to check by phone, we certainly hope that nobody slipped through our dragnet and has arrived expecting "The Sea Beast". As of last Tuesday, it hadn't arrived from the lab, and the only safe thing to do was to switch shows; now, fortunately, it has arrived, so there need be no qualms about our showing it as now announced on January 30th. However, the February bulletin will go out before that, so you'll get a further confirmation later this month. Incidentally, items lined up for February include Mamoulian's LOVE ME TONIGHT and CITY STREETs, Gance's silent J'ACCUSE, and Henry Hathaway's PATER IBETSON.

World War One: Two romantic approaches from the thirties

DARK JOURNEY (Alexander Korda-United Artists, 1937) Produced and directed by Victor Saville; screenplay, Lajos Biró and Arthur Wimperis; photographed by Harry Stradling and Georges Perinal; music by Richard Aimless; sets by Andre Andrejev; special effects, Ned Kam. Supervising Editor: Wm. Hornebeck. 8 reels.

Starring Conrad Veidt and Vivien Leigh, with Anthony Bushell, Joan Gardner, Ursula Jeans, Margery Pickard, Eileen Makeham, Austin Trevor, Sam Livesey, Cecil Parker, Robert Newton, Edmund Willard, Charles Carson, Phil Ray, Henry Oscar, Lawrence Hanray, Reginald Tate, Percy Walsh, William Dewhurst, Laidman Brews, M. Martin Harvey, Anthony Hollings.

In the late 30's, when Nazi militarism was rattling the sabre, British studios embarked on a minor but distinctly curious cycle of espionage thrillers dealing with World War One, and stressing the nobility and respectability of the German enemy. It was a strange kind of propaganda (if one should label it that) and a far more convincing one than the traditional flow of bull-headed Hunz that returned to the screen when war was declared. Conrad Veidt played the idealistic German hero-villain in two of these films — "Dark Journey", the first, and "The Spy in Black" (which we showed a couple of years ago), probably the best. With war very much a reality however, he switched to playing a Dutch hero in "Contraband" ("Blackout" in the U.S.) in which he rounded up Nazis in WW2 London. It was a good rousing adventure, but the least interesting of the three films.

Although not seen in quite some years now, "Dark Journey" is a familiar film; it is to the wartime spy film what "The 39 Steps" was to peacetime espionage yarns, and for a while it was quite a favorite revival at the art houses. It holds up well; like all Korda productions of the period, it is nicely mounted, extremely well photographed by two of the best cameramen in the business, and flawlessly cast. Like all spy films today, its plot seems a little old-hat — but then the contrived machinations that spies went through to pass on vital information always seemed a little hard to accept. A postcard would have been far cheaper, and just as effective! Constance Bennett's "After Tonight" represents perhaps the zenith (or the nadir?) of this kind of tomfoolery. In any event, "Dark Journey" is a slick, good-humored and well-done film about the kind of civilized warfare that is no more, and probably never was — although with such good looking and high-minded spies as Vivien Leigh and Conrad Veidt one feels that this is certainly the way it should have been.

— INTERMISSION —

CHANCES (First National, 1931) Dir: Allan Dwan; from a story by A. Hamilton Gibbs; scenario by Waldemar Young; photography by Ernest Haller;
edited by Ray Curtiss; art director, Esdras Hartley; 3 Reels.
Starring DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS Jr., with Rose Hobart, Anthony Bushell, Mary Forbes, Holmes Herbert, Tyrrell Davis, Edmund Breon, Harry Allen, Edward Morgan, Florence Britton, Jeanne Fenwick, Jameson Thomas, Billy Bevan.

Some of the earliest Fairbanks films apart, Alan Dwan has never impressed as being either a very lively or a very cinematic director. But just as one should judge Henry King by his Americans and not by his spectacles, so perhaps should one overlook Dwan’s “biggest” films (“Robin Hood”, “The Iron Mask” etc) and look instead to his less pretentious efforts — “Hold Back the Night”, with its surprisingly rugged war scenes, “Heidi” (which on re-viewing can be seen to be one of the best, and certainly the handsomest of all Shirley Temple vehicles) and some of his programmers for Warners in 1930 and 31, one of which, “Man to Man”, we screened earlier this year.

CHANGES, a sort of World War One “Beau Geste”, isn’t a remarkable film, but it packs a good solid movie-making into its tight running time. Its story is simple and romanticised — the kind of thing that just isn’t done any more because the half-hour tv soap operas and “Playhouses” have done it to death. And, if one is to be honest about it, it’s really just a silent film with dialogue added; it’s all larger-than-life, full of big emotions, nobility, sacrifice, novelette twists of fate, and grandiloquent dialogue. And all backed up by the old Vitaphone orchestra sawing away at those lovely old sentimental themes. It’s old-style movie-making if you wish, and to try to impart more to it than that is both unnecessary and unfair. But it’s well enough done to pay off beautifully. A cynical audience, even an average Museum of Modern Art audience, would undoubtedly laugh at it and feel brilliantly superior — but it would be their loss. Taken in the right spirit, it’s not only an exciting film, but often a quite sensitive and moving one. And certainly its production mountings are impressive; Haller’s camerawork is just what one would expect, and a lot of standing sets are well utilised to give the impression of a much larger budget than the film undoubtedly had. And if the initial barrage scenes smack a little too much of the studio (especially with the mike shadow in a few scenes); then the really spectacular climax, obviously done with army participation, more than compensates. It’s a rousing and splendidly photographed sequence, helped by a few judicious liftings from “The Patent Leather Kid” — including a shot of Lucien Prival.

CHANGES (what a nondescript and unappetising title for such a film) was Douglas Fairbanks Junior’s first starring film, and those ads that didn’t try to sell the film as another “The Big Parade”, went all-out on selling Doug’s personality to the public. And he is extremely good — so much so that it’s remarkable that he didn’t catch on as an important star until so much later, with his Rupert of Hentzau in “The Prisoner of Zenda”. However, most of the really important stars of the early 30’s were either more mature (Barrymore, Warren William, Dix, Warner Baxter) or were selling a brashness and toughness (Cagney, Pat O’Brien, Lee Tracey) in keeping with the times. Boyish charm was apparently not what the public was buying at the time.

There are some nice supporting performances, especially from Anthony Bushell, who hardly seemed to be a day between this and “Dark Journey” of 1937, or “The Small Back Room” of the late 40’s. (He concentrated more on directing in later years). Incidentally, Edward Morgan, who plays Lieut. Wickham, is Marion Marsh’s brother.

Comming programs:
Next Sunday, Dec. 31st — New Yorker Theatre, 9:30 a.m. 35mm show.
THE HARDEST WAY (1920, France) with Fannie Ward; ep. 8 of QUEEN OF THE NORTHWOODS with Walter Miller; and shorts.

January 9th, Adelphi Hall, room 10-D, 7:30. Ingmar Bergman’s SKEPP TILL INDIALAND (1947); Cecil B. DeMille’s FOUR FRIGHTENED PEOPLE (1954).