Both of tonight’s films come from a small but rather unique film collection that we’ve been trying to acquire literally for years. For reasons too complicated to go into here, it is impossible to obtain the prints ahead of time for scoring and study; the two prints are being brought down to our show tonight, and will be taken away immediately afterwards. With such rarities, we are of course grateful for any method of presentation, and we hope that others from this venue’s film group will be made available in the same way. However, with no chance for pre-screening, the following notes — based on my recollections of having seen the films some eight years ago — will be more sketchy than the films deserve, and musical “scoring” will be mainly a matter of luck. So we hope you’ll bear with us in these difficulties.

Both films came out at almost the same time in 1929; both were issued in parlable form, and as full silents. We are showing the silent versions fully titled of course (this to reassure those who are still figuring out the plot complications of “Isle of Lost Ships!” and probably superior to the sound versions).

"THE GIRL ON THE BARGE" (Universal; produced in 1929, released early 1930) Directed by Edward Sloman; written by Rupert Hughes; scenario by Charles Kenyon; Nan Soharm; edited by Edward L. Cahn; Titles and Dialogue; by Tom Reed; photographed by Jackson Rose. 7 reels.

With Jean Harlow, Sally O’Neil, Morris McIntosh, Nancy Kelly, George O’Connor

"The Girl on the Barge" is a slight but rather charming tale of life and romance on an Erie canal barge, uneventful but pleasant until the rising and extremely well-staged climax of a thunderous near-tornado storm on the Hudson. Pictorially it is most pleasing, and I recall it as being a very watchable enjoyable programmer of the kind Universal did so well in the 20’s — perhaps not quite in the same class as Vigo’s "L’Atalante" (!) but worthy of comparison with the British "Painted Boat". "Film Daily" however, in the throes of enthusiasm for the new-fangled talking, was less charitable; it liked the camerawork, but found the story "outdated, old-fashioned and depressing". It commented on the poor quality of the occasional sound, and found that Sally O’Neil was "hacked audibly" by her voice. As with so many films of this period, the sound seems to have been largely an afterthought; there was (in the talkie version) a long and seemingly endless episode where the hero teaches the illiterate heroine the alphabet. Although I recall the sequence, it certainly didn’t seem at all crassly, but presumably was trimmed for the silent release. It is interesting to note that the film is directed by Edward L. Cahn, (erratum: edited by Cahn), who was then working with Paul Revere, and who was soon to make his first and only important film as a director (the classic "Law and Order") before going on to a career of sustained mediocrity on efficient but uninspired quickies.

The print is reportedly a fine toned original.

Intermission

"BRAKEDOWN" (Universal; produced in 1928; released early 1929) Directed by William Wyler; Story by Charles A. Logue; photographed by Charles Sturmer; edited by Lloyd Mabler; Titles by Albert Du Mont. Length: Part 1— 7 reels. Part 2— 6 reels.

With James Murray, Barbara Kent, George Kotsmzroni, Wheeler Oakman, Jack Hanlon, Harry O’Brion, and with Wyler in a bit part, playing a boxing referee.

Like "The Brown of Cervos" and one or two other early Wyler talkies, "Brakedown" is a simple and unpretentious little film, a programmer pure and plain, but done with real style. The pleasant small-town settings, the performances and the camera mobility all help to cover up the bare bones of a familiar story and make it seem almost important. (Today Wyler goes to the other extreme, by taking important subject matter and making it so small it is almost invisible). "Brakedown" has the traditional coxing-formula mixture of sentiment, hussel-making-good and a strong action climax. "Film Daily" saw what a grudge against Universal star Raymond Hatton, commented that Murray’s voice was “not so hot” but this tragic man remains an interesting and often effective player and comes through rather well in this silent version. Again, the print is reportedly a good toned original.

William H. Everett