There are a couple of minor changes in tonight's program -- not, of course, affecting "Love Me Tonight" in any way. The announced excerpt from "Golliwog" Sharp" we have eliminated, since the print delivered to us turned out to be in black-and-white rather than color, and while it remains a good film even in that form, we were showing it solely for its imaginative use of color.

A few years ago, color prints of this subject were quite easy to obtain; now, most of them seem to have run out of print. We have however, located one (not available for tonight unfortunately) and since there seems to be quite some interest in watching this film in its entirety, we plan to do so a little later; hopefully on the same bill with Mamoulian's "Song of Songs", which is likewise not available to us at the moment but has been promised for a future date. The second change: a surprising number of members asks us to play in "Golden Boy" complete -- and so we will do so. However, in view of the fact that it is third-rate Mamoulian, and, unlike "Love Me Tonight" and the others from his best period, doesn't lend itself to repeated viewings, we expect that many of our members will not want to see it again. So we are running it last on the program, after the intermission -- and while this may not be good showmanship, it does at least remain a certain chronology.


With: Maurice Chevalier, Jeanette MacDonald, Charles Butterworth, Charlie Ruggles, Myrna Loy, C. Aubrey Smith, Elizabeth Patterson, Ethel Griffies, Blanche Frederici, Joseph Carhart, Robert Wills, Clarence Wilson, George Davis, Edgar Norton, Cecil Cunningham, George Hayer, Tom Ricketts.

Of all the Mamoulian films, "Love Me Tonight" (which seems to be his own personal favorite) is probably both the most enjoyable, and the silkiest combination of experimental style with polished execution. Certainly it is the one film, of all his films, which seems to have pleased both critics and public unanimously (it did it again on tv last week, as witness Jack O'Brien's rave in the Journal), and is fondly remembered as both a lyrical film and as a piece of orchestral entertainment standards. Certainly it dates not one whit, and in these days when Lubitsch, Sturges, and others (to all intents and purposes) Mamoulian himself are no longer with us, it is doubly refreshing.

Whether "Love Me Tonight" was as completely new in style as is now claimed for it is purely academic. Probably it wasn't. In one guise or another, Rene Clair and Lubitsch were offering the same spirited, musical approach to comedy, throwing overboard the stagebound traditions that had started with the big "shows" in 1926. In Germany and Austria, Goza von Bolvary, Robert Stolz (and stars like Carin and Vikki Zuck) were practically mass producing the same kind of fare, of which "Ich Will Nicht Wissen Wer Du bist" is typical enough. In England, Orville Fields in films from "Looking on the Bright Side" to "Sing As We Do" was cast in much the same mould; regardless of plot-content, all of these depression era movies had a common denominator -- a determined cheerfulness, and musical numbers which transcended both the stage and life itself as everybody, caught in a spirit of camaraderie, sang happily as they marched energetically through town and country to work. (The mood is dangerously catching; the morning after screening the print I was heading for work through Central Park in a taxi. It was a fresh and wonderful morning. How easy it would have been to launch into a song which would have infected everyone from 2nd Street to 39th Street but at that moment, the driver, who could never have existed in Mamoulian's old world, grumbled, hurried us to another driver, and used some expletives which quite destroyed the happy mood!) In any event, it's really not important whether or not "Love Me Tonight" was the first of its kind; unquestionably, it was the best.

Visually, the film is enchanting. Every aspect of photographic grammar is superbly utilized: stills, pans, slow dissolves, slow motion, satiric images combined with exaggerated sound effects, elaborate dollies and dissolves, matching models with the real thing to perfection; and -- most important of all -- from its sheer virtuosity and unconcern, also really kids the editing patterns and dramatic images of the Russian classics. Mamoulian's celebrated shadow work is present, though not emphasized this time, and it is used for satirical and comic rather than dramatic effect -- as in the shots of the three sisters, a happy combination of the witches from "Hamlet" and assorted fairy cardboard from "Cinderella". Musically of course, it is a thorough delight, with such charmingly old-fashioned 19th-century melodies as "Isn't it Romantic" and the title song. Much of the music, with its overlaying locations and physical action, reminds one more than a little of the score to "Mamoulian's Girl is a Hound" -- listeners Rodgers and Hart of course.
Quite apart from the photography itself, the film is a stunner in its sets and decor. And it is quite flawlessly cast, with Chevalier the epitome of easy-going charm, and everyone else playing up beautifully -- especially Myrna Loy and Charles Butterworth, who usually is only as funny as his material, but who here seems genuinely amusing on his own. It's a pity that a part couldn't have been found for Edward Everett Horton, so much at home in this kind of fare, but with Audrey Smith, Charlie Ruggles and all the others on hand, one hardly has cause for complaint.

The film is full of racy dialogue and outrageous double-entendres -- yet it really doesn't need them, and many of the best of them are practically thrown away. Therein lies its basic difference from the Lubitsch frolics of the same ilk; charming as they were, films like "The Love Parade" depended for a great deal on the rather Teutonic heaviness of the sex gags. Without them, there wouldn't have been too much left. But one could take away all of the silly sex gags here (although I hope no one ever will!) and still be left with a thoroughly enchanting film.

Talking about "taking away", "Love Me Tonight" is one of those films that through the years has been consistently hacked at in one form or another. On one release, the whole wonderful opening of Paris awakening was removed. On tv last week, a number of minor cuts were made, including some of the footage where Chevalier is measuring Jeanette MacDonald, and the entire doctor's "song" as he examines Miss MacDonald. Our print, although in perfect shape, is not by any means immune. Fortunately there is only one cut, but it is rather a sad one -- Chevalier's singing of "Hymn to the Night" and the excising is so neatly done that there is hardly a jump, but of course it's a tragic omission -- although fortunately, the later reprise of the same song is there. However, "Love Me Tonight" is too good a film for any one out to spoil and it weaves the same magic spell today that it did in 1932.

INTERMISSION

"GOLDEN BOY" (Columbia, 1939) Directed by Robert Manouelian; produced by William Perlberg; from a play by Clifford Odets; screenplay by Daniel Taradash, Lewis Meltzer, Sarah Y. Mason, Victor Heerman; art director, Lionel Banks; music, Victor Young; photographed by Karl Freund and Nick Musuraca; montaged by Donald W. Starling, 10 reels.


If "Golden Boy" today seems third-rate Manouelian, it is not entirely his fault. So many of the "significant" dramas of the thirties by Odets, Maxwell Anderson and others, have dated fantastically badly. Today they seem contrived, phoney, and loaded with stock characters -- of which Lee J. Cobb's emigrant--pianist now seems especially cliche. In the same way, Lang and Santell are hardly as well-represented today by "You Only Live Once" and "Wuthering Heights". At the time it doubtlessly seemed best to approach "Golden Boy" in the straight, dramatic, non-experimental manner that was then the "fashion". One can hardly blame Manouelian; yet it's ironic that his "City streets", with its pictorial sequence that was considered out of date in 1939, remains the fresher film cinematically. Not that "Golden Boy" is a hack job; sometimes the old Manouelian slickness through in a lyrical little love scene overlooking Manhattan, or the unashamedly sentimental (and effective) sequence of the son's return home to play the violin; or in much of the dynamics of the final boxing match. But there are things that one looks for -- and finds, gratefully; they are not consistent and there is nowhere an obvious signature, an unmistakable something that says "this could have been made by Manouelian and no other". However, for all its current cliches, some of the old power remains, and Joseph Calleia's tough gauntlet dialogue is surprisingly in the Raymond Chandler vein that didn't hit the screen until the mid 1940's.

-- William K. Everson

COMING PROGRAMS:
Next Sunday, New Yorker Theatre: 3:30 pm show: TRANSCONTINENTAL LTD (Johnnie Walker, 1926); QUEEN OF THE NORTHWOODS (final ep) THE BLUE FOX (ep. one); THE CRIMSON CLUB.

Next Tuesday, Feb. 27th: Manouelian Program #3 -- THE MARK OF ZORRO -- the best of his later films, with a violent return to the old style; Tycoon Power, Basil Rathbone (1940); and THE GAY DEPSARADO (Ike Turner, Leo Carrillo, 1936).

March 13th: THE CHARIOT EXPRESS (1934) -- Von Sternberg, with Marlene Dietrich, John Lodge, Louise Dresser, Sam Harris and Abel Gance's J'ACUSE (1918 -- a 50 minute condensation)