This curious musical featurette, with its frankly labored and obvious storyline, in some respects resembles those absurdly 2-real Paramount Technicolor "Musical Parades" of the 40’s. The difference however is that the Paramount series had nothing to recommend it but its color -- the plots were banal, the star talent almost non-existent, and the songs tuneless and a cultural affront even by the easy-going standards of the 40’s. "Masks and Memories" may be no earth-shaker in the script department either, but it does have other things going for it -- including several good songs belted out in fine style by Lillian Roth. The climax too, with its mildly spectacular "Sophisticated Lady" production number and rousing and thoroughly enjoyable. All in all, though it would have had more punch if, like "Paree Paree" it had been done as a 2-real, it's a pleasing and enjoyable little film.

"Rhapsody in Two Languages" (Associated Screen News, Canada, 1932); 1 reel written and produced by Gordon Sparling; photographed by Alfred Jacquemain; Music by Howard Poggi; with Carey Thompson. Print loaned through the courtesy of the Cinematheque Canadienne.

The name of Gordon Sparling may be new to many American film students, but in the field of Canadian shorts his name is as familiar to the Canadian moviegoer as our own Robert Nesbitt or Pete Smith. Recently much of his earlier work has been unearthed by Montreal's Cinematheque, and as a result he has been gaining a somewhat belated but well-deserved reputation among the film buffs up there as well.

Sparling made his shorts, under the overall heading of "Canadian Canones," for Associated Screen News, the only private producing company of real importance in the Canadian market. He made between 8 and 10 films a year between 1932 and 1942, and some more after the war, to a total of some 120. They were the only really successful theatrical shorts ever made in Canada -- successful in the sense that they had real audience following, and got back their production costs. (After Associated Screen News closed down in 1935, primarily due to tv competition, Sparling joined the National Film Board of Canada, and is still active there, though due to retire later this year). His shorts ranged from nostalgic flashbacks to the Canadian scene in the silent days, to at least one "arty" and semi-experimental film called "Arcadian Spring Song." Sparling himself considers this a lesser effort and a too pretentious, but it is thought highly of elsewhere, and was recently received with some enthusiasm at Florence. Hopefully, we will be able to show this later.

"Rhapsody in Two Languages" is generally considered one of his best films, and while admittedly this may be partially due to native pride, since it is a "city symphony" film that does Montreal proud, it is probably quite a valid judgement. We've seen so many city symphony films now -- from Buttman and Suckadorff to Sidmak and Wilder. We've seen so many people getting up, going to work, having fun, sometimes being caught beautifully unaware, too often being quite painfully self-conscious -- that the only really new thing we can honestly expect of the genre is for Andy Warhol to make an 8-hour record of the work-day of the man who puts the single cherry in the can of fruit cocktail. Sparling's film doesn't offer anything new, except perhaps more personal enthusiasm and a less coldly detached attitude than usual. Despite some quite elaborate montages, much of it is deceptively simple -- yet what, after all, does herald the dawn of a new day quite as explicitly as a cat on some steps, and the milk supply being taken in? Throughout, "Rhapsody in Two Languages" is both unpretentious and affectionate, and it has a warmth and charm that is most ingratiating. Quite incidentally, Sparling had been with Paramount in NY in the late 20's, and had worked as an extra in Busoulant's "Applause." Elements in his short suggest that Busoulant's style, menacingly comic, more than once is reminscent of both "Applause" and the opening of "Love Me Tonight." Incidentally, it is perhaps worth noting that this short was, for all its seeming spontaneity, carefully scripted first, and that there were no deviations from that script. One might also note that the excellent score by Howard Poggi was the first score specially written for any Canadian film.
"Bluebeard's Eighth Wife" (Paramount, 1937; re-released 1938) is an Ernst Lubitsch Screenplay by Billy Wilder and Charles Brackett, from the play by Alfred Savoir; camera: Leo Tover; music: Werner Heymann; starring Cary Cooper and Claire Colbert, with Edward Everett Horton, David Niven, Elizabeth Patterson, Herman Bing, Warren Hymer, Franklin Pangborn, Lawrence Grant, Tom Ricketts, Parlowe Morland, Charles Halton.

"Bluebeard's 8th Wife" was by no means the only Wilder film omitted from the Museum of Modern Art's recent Billy Wilder cycle, but it was the only major film that should have been there, and was not selected merely because Wilder disliked it (as presumably was the case with "The Marrying Waltz") or because Wilder's script contribution was of a purely routine nature (as with Rhythm on the River and other films). Paramount's story-rights have expired, and the official story is that no prints have been preserved in this country, and that the only preservation material has been sent to Europe to the present copyright holders. Surprisingly, this kind of story is often quite true, so our print tonight may well be the only one extant in this country. Regardless of whether it is or not, the film is not available for theatrical or tv showing, so we're glad to be able to close a major gap in a cycle of films that we know most of you have been following.

"Bluebeard's 8th Wife", originally a stage vehicle for Ina Claire in 1921, and two years later screen material for Gloria Swanson under Sam Wood's direction, in 1938 saw the last of the gay and saucy comedy of the 30's: "The Hags of Paris" and "Bluebeard's 8th Wife" were the tail end of a delightful genre that had flourished between 1922 and 1934, had been given the coup de grace in 36 with "My Man Godfrey", retained its drive in 37 with "Nothing Sacred", and it's "Love in the Afternoon" and now, in 1938, was beginning to lose steam. Preston Sturges still lay ahead of course, but he was a lone oasis to make up for the diminishing comedy activities of Lubitsch, Wellman, Del Ruth, LaCava and Hawks. 1938 did have Brackett and Wilder's "Midnight" — but how it needed (and lacked) a Lubitsch. It got by very entertainingly on its script and on its marvellous cast, so that one could overlook its lack of directorial style, but what a comedy it could have been with Lubitsch at the helm! (When it was remade some years later as "Masquerade in Mexico" it had neither script nor cast to give it an assist, and became a ponderous time-wasting bore.)

In many ways, "Bluebeard's 8th Wife" is the last of the vintage Lubitsch, of breezy sex farce in Paris and Monte Carlo. It was his last film for Paramount, and while it may not have been up to the standard of "Trouble in Paradise", it was still as much better than "Angel" or "Design for Living" than it hardly represented a decline. Elegant from first scene to last, beautifully written and played, flawlessly constructed so that Hears, Pangborn, Bing et al all had their little highlights, and with a charmingly spirited score, it's the kind of tasteful froth that seemed to belong so much to the pre-war years — and that we've just never been able to recapture. If we've tried — and certainly Wilder did try, in "Love in the Afternoon" and other films — the results have always been unconvincing and heavy-handed.

We've often commented before on the degrading effect an exit from Paramount has had on many directors and players — Lubitsch and the Marx Brothers in particular. Even with his Paramount stock company, Lubitsch couldn't retain his champagne touch when he went to MGM in 36 to do "The Merry Widow". Back he came to Paramount, and his style returned. Then, after "Bluebeard", he returned to MGM, and the same thing happened with "Kinotheka" — an enjoyable but grossly over-rated film, the merits of which were the performances and the script (Brackett and Wilder again) and only lastly its now much heavier direction. Certainly, as a comedy, "Kinotheka" is a colossal step down from "Bluebeard's 8th Wife" which remains a delightful and zestful romp in every way. Indeed, it dates only in its over-obvious use of back projection, and even this now has some academic interest in that Ted Hurst once pointed out that Sacha Guitry may be seen emerging from a Vienna hotel in these process shots.

The March-May schedules will be mailed in about ten days. Hopefully the programs will include the still missing "Last of the Pagans", other films will be "Safety Last" with Lloyd, "The Primitive Lady" with Constance Talmadge, "Shifting Sands" with Gloria Swanson, "The Invisible Man" (Karloff-Jago), "Eve's新增(Jessie Matthews), a Wheeler & Wolsey program, "Fried's and Lovers" with Erich von Stroheim, Laurence Olivier, Adolphe Menjou, and sundry others, plus of course the delayed but definite "Dr. Mabuse".

— Wm. K. Eversen