Tuesday next, December 27: "LA BOHÈME" (King Vidor, 1926) with Lillian Gish, John Gilbert, Rene Adorée, Edward Everett Horton, Roy D'ArCY; and Maek Semler's "Cursed by his Beauty" and D.W. Griffith's "The Lesser Evil".

December 20 1966

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

A Program of Horror and Melodrama

"THE WALKING DEAD" (Warner Brothers, 1936) Directed by Michael Curtiz
Camera: Hal Mohr; screenplay by Ewart Adamson, Peter Milne, Robert Adams and Dillie Hayward from an original story by Ewart Adamson and Joseph Fields; 7 reels.

An always under-rated Karloff vehicle "The Walking Dead" is far more intelligent, thoughtful and directorially stylish than its rather thick-ear title and a misleadingly gruesome trailer would lead one to expect. It is a good thriller rather than an out-and-out horror film, quite devoid of the vulgarity and cheap shocks that characterised "The Monster and the Girl", a poor Paramount horror film of the early 40's with a generally similar plot. Apart from one concession to horror tradition - a laboratory sequence in which Karloff's makeup, and Mohr's cunningly angled shots, contrive to make Karloff look suspiciously like the Frankenstein monster - the film never really tries to scare its audience. Horror would be difficult anyway, since audience sympathy is immediately with Karloff, hero, heroine, "good guys" and innocent bystanders are never in jeopardy, and the audience is automatically rooting for the successful completion of Boris' quite justifiable murders. Not having to worry about scaring his audience, the versatile Curtiz - who dashed this one off quickly and efficiently before getting down to more serious things with "Stolen Holiday" and "The Charge of the Light Brigade" - concentrates instead on pace, mood, good performances from an often quite literate script, and keeping Mohr's expert camerawork sharp, incisive and well varied. He's too good a showman not to use such reliable props as rain and thunder, but he uses them as dramatic backdrops to already taut situations, rather than as lazy devices to beef up dull scenes. In many ways one of Karloff's most interesting films, I think this will be a very pleasant surprise to those of you who do not know it.

"THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD" (Universal, 1935) Directed by Stuart Walker
Produced by Edmund Grainger; screenplay by John Balderston, Gladys Unger, Leopold Atlas and Bradley King from the unfinished novel by Charles Dickens; musical score by Edward Ward; special effects, John Fulton; 8 rls.

Although Dickens never completed this mystery novel, and apparently intended at least a sideplot to revolve around Indian mysticism, he left enough clues to leave little or no doubt as to the story's villain, or its solution. In any event, he could hardly have picked a better tidy-up scenarist than Balderston, fresh from his work on Universal's horror classics. With a little more polish, this film could have been a no-holds-barred horror film; with more restraint, merely good Dickensian story-telling. As it stands, it is far better Dickens than Walker's "Great Expectations", a far better thriller than his somewhat lethargic "Werewolf of London", and a film in many ways of comparable interest to his best picture, "The Eagle and the Hawk". An astonishingly handsome film, with some beautiful and elaborate sets - and shrewd and extensive utilisation of the crypt and church sets from "Dracula" and "Bride of Frankenstein" - a good musical score, fine casting, appropriately claustrophobic Dickensian décor, and an attention getting Freudian opium-den delirium to start things off with, this comparatively little-known film stands up well as one of the better Hollywood ventures into Dickens, and as a piece of rich old melodrama. Claude Rains is perhaps too transparently evil to convincingly evil, but Claude, a minor quibble, noticeable mainly because of the "rightness" of so much of the casting - including of course that Dickensian regular, Francis L. Sullivan. With a whole of a storm sequence and a really exciting finale, "The Mystery of Edwin Drood" proceeds at a slow and stately pace - like a Dickens novel - but it's an exciting and well-done thriller, strangely ignored for theatrical reissue.

--- WM. K. EVerson ---