February 28, 1967

"OLD MAN RHYTHM" (Radio, 1935) Director: Edward Ludwig
With Buddy Rogers, Betty Grable, Grace Bradley, Eric Blore, Erik Rhodes, Lucille Ball. EXCEPTS ONLY

"Old Man Rhythm", although surprisingly elaborate, is quite certainly both one of the worst musicals ever made, and one of the worst films Edward Ludwig ever directed, and the latter is taking in a lot of territory that even extends to some of those awful Republic "specials" of the 50's like "Flame of the Islands". The plot is abysmally dull and forced, the dance routines of Hermes Pan confused and shapeless, and the only significant distinction it has are that George Barbier, doubtless the only time in his career, has the title role in a movie, and Douglas Fowley can be seen as a "collegiate" foil for the thirties, and three of them, out of context, are entertaining enough to warrant their being shown. Grace Bradley is still quite a stunner, and Betty Grable sparkles and shines in her limited opportunities (especially in a wild toe dance) that one regrets all the more that she was never given real musical opportunities in the 30's when she was at her peak as a dancer.

ABEL GANCE (France, 1963/64) Compiled by Nelly Kaplan; 3 reels

This excellent compilation of Gance's life and works, though marred by a distracting and sometimes disinterested musical score, is a first-class job and contains not only a great deal of behind-the-camera footage, but many scenes from "J'accuse", "Napoleon" and other Gance films that don't exist in the versions known to us. Completely new to many of you may be the fascinating orgy scenes from "End of the World", and the delightful snippets of ghoulish comedy from the film that he made with Max Linder. Footage showing his use of hand-held cameras, superimposition, and his cut-out and glass-shot devices is also fascinating. The narration is a bit stiff, probably suffering from a too-literal translation from French into English, but it is mildly (and probably justifiably) somewhat, a bit pretentious and more than a bit mystical - adjectives that can certainly be applied to Gance's work at large, so one can believe in the narration as being authentic Gance. Some of the absolute peaks of his work are curiously omitted, and he has a curious penchant for stressing the "commercial success" of a work while showing scenes of nudity on the screen. On the whole though it's a good job, a fascinating post-script to those of us who already know Gance's work, and at least a worthwhile and representative introduction to those who don't.

*Intermission*

"THE WAY TO LOVE" (Paramount, 1933) Directed by Norman Taurog; Story and scenario by Gene Fowler and Benjamin Glazer, additional dialogue by Claude Binyan and Frank Butler; Camera: Charles Lang; Music and lyrics by Ralph Rainger and Leo Robin; 8 reels


After a lying opening which leads one (falsely) to expect another film with the sprightly mood of "Love Me Tonight", something goes seriously awry with "The Way to Love". As we remarked in our Bulletin, it is very much of a lesser Chevalier; better perhaps than "The Big Pond", but quite lacking the frothy sparkle of most of his films of the period. Why anybody thought it necessary to create a "new" image for Chevalier is a mystery, but it was an ill-advised inspiration. The basic problem with "The Way to Love" is that it is really "Seventh Heaven" all over again. "Seventh Heaven" worked superbly as a silent, but it was the kind of film that couldn't stand up to the realities of sound or dialogue, as Henry King's later and lamented remake proved. "Seventh Heaven" in musical form doesn't work either, and one is constantly waiting for it to take off and be over with the preliminaries. Ann Dvorak is also a rather lustless heroine for Maurice, and tends to slow down the proceedings. Originally Sylvia Sidney was slated for the role -- and for reasons of his own Edward Everett Horton still insists that Miss Sidney was the leading lady, and won't let anybody screen his the film to prove differently. Luckily no film directed by Taurog, made in '33, and with Chevalier and Horton in the leads, can be a complete waste of time, and "The Way to Love" is certainly an engaging diversion. But after "Love Me Tonight" it is a sad let-down -- though in fairness, what film wouldn't be?