The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society
February 4, 1974

THE GORILLA (20th Century Fox, 1939) Directed by Allan Dwan; produced by Harry Joe Brown; screenplay by Hien James and Sid Silvers from the play by Ralph Spence; Camera, Edward Cronjager; Art Direction, Richard Day; Music, Charles Previn; 90 mins; Color;

With the Ritz Brothers, Lionel Atwill, Bala Lugosi, Anita Louise, Edward Norris, Joseph Calleia, Paul Harley, Wally Vernon, Art Miles.

In 1939/40 saw all three of those reliable old barnstormers, "The Cat and the Canary", "The Ghost Breakers" and "The Gorilla", remade to cash in on the new boom in horror films even though their basic aim was comedy-thrill. "The Gorilla" is tied up legally, has never been on television, and its last NY theatrical exposure was in 1951 at 42nd Street's old Laffmover Theatre. One always has high hopes for any remake but unfortunately "The Gorilla" only very partially fulfills them. A pity too, for it's a very handsome production, with good sets, art direction, camerawork and brisk direction by Dwan. Lugosi and Atwill, though clearly red herrings, are allowed to play it straight; the opening sequences do set exactly the right mood of spook combined with thrills, and the film in fact gets off to a very promising start. Then - entrance the Ritz Brothers, and disaster. These many comics are admittedly an acquired if not a cultivated taste, but they can be very funny indeed (as witness "The Three Musketeers", another spook done with Dwan) when given the right material. "The Gorilla" however was their last at Fox, and the studio seemed unwilling to give their final vehicle any kind of impetus from which their next studio, Universal, could benefit. As a result, they have absolutely zero material to work with - and being seasoned trouper, work twice as hard to compensate. Also, the prolonged backchat encounters and the mugging and the unfunny jokes constantly get in the way of what might have been a very enjoyable little "old house" film. Comedy of course is a very personal thing and it - and particularly audience response - is difficult to anticipate. When I first ran the film alone, I felt that probably audience reaction would bring it alive. A New York's screening at London's Goffhite Film Society proved that to be far from the case however. Even allowing for Hawaiian audiences being less sophisticated (or less demanding) and certainly less beset than the British by other woes at the moment, the reaction tonight will probably be the same. But it does have its good laughs, mainly in non-Ritz areas, the spars gorilla scenes are quite melodramatically effective, and in any event it's good to see any professional film with Lugosi, Atwill and Dwan that has not seen for so long. Oddly enough, in England in 1939 it (and "The Cat and the Canary"

As for "CARNIVAL BOAT" (Rko-Pathe, 1931; released 1932) Directed by Al Rogell; screenplay; Marion Jackson, Don Ely, James Seymour; Camera, Ted McCord; Music, Ludwig Stedman; Edited by Max Steiner; With William Boyd, Ginger Rogers, Fred Kohler, Marie Prevost, Robert Bosworth, Edgar Kennedy, Charles Seland, Harry Street, Walter Perceval, Jack Carlyle, Joe Karba, Bob Perry, Eddie Chandler, James Mason, Hal Price.

Despite its misleading title, this is a rugged actioner in the "Valley of the Giants" tradition, efficiently but probably quite cheaply put together, since some of the major action footage is stock from "The H" (Horror-Adults Only) certificate by the British censor, though probably as much to discourage Holland from following through with the new cycle as from any conviction that the films would be too grim for children. (Ironically, "The Ghost Breakers" which was and is genuinely chilling, was given a milder rating permitting children to see it accompanied by adults).