Next program: May 13th: THE WHIP, a strong 1917 Maurice Tourneur melodrama; "Drama de Luxe", a 1927 Lupino Lane comedy directed by Norman Taurog, and OPEN ALL NIGHT (1924), directed by Paul Bern, with Adolphe Menjou, Jetta Goudal, Viola Dana, Raymond Griffith and Maurice Flynn, an important example of an extremely early attempt to copy Lubitsch.

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

April 22, 1924

Added material In order to give members time to cover "The Loves of Carmen" at the NMA, we are starting our regular program about half-an-hour late tonight, and we're filling in with some extra film. First, "Focus on 1932", the title of which tells all, one of the non-theatrical Screen News Digest films made by the MVM. Though the sound effects are extremely good and though there is no screen credit, the Youngson narrative style is readily recognizable. From that we'll be going into two of the musical numbers from one of the MGM musicals of the '40's that doesn't seem to be shown any more - LADY BE GOOD (1941). Produced by Arthur Freed, directed by Norman Z. McLeod, music by the Gerahmins, Jerome Kern, Oscar Hammerstein II, Roger Edens and Arthur Freed, with Eleanor Powell, Ann Sothern, Robert Young, Lionel Barrymore, Tom Conway, John Carroll, Red Skelton, Dan Dailey, Virginia O'Brien, Reginald Owen, Rose Hobart, The Navy Brothers and Connie Russell. Not much of a picture despite that cast, but these musical excerpts are good to look at.

A ROUGH ROMANCE (Fox, 1930) Directed by A.F. Erickson; Scenario by Elliott Lester from The Girl Who Wasn't Wanted by Kenneth B. Clark; Camera, Dan Clark; 5 reels
With George O'Brien, Helen Chandler, Antonio Moreno, Noel Francis, Eddie Borden, Harry Cording, Roy Stewart, David Hartford, Frank Lanning, and John Wayne as an extra.

"A Rough Romance" is a curious picture indeed, obviously a fairly expensive and carelessly produced film, with some excellent location work, but amazingly short even allowing for the differing standards of length of the day. O'Brien was still a name to conjure with, and until 1931, John Ford's foremost star. One is also somewhat surprised to find prominent playwright Elliott Lester (Richard Lester's father) employed adapting someone else's work when it really presents no challenge - even in that early period of screenwriting for sound - that a less expensive studio writer couldn't have handled as well. Quite possibly the film was intended to be much more important, and quite possibly director A.F. Erickson just didn't come up with enough picture, or even enough footage. Erickson is a curious director about whom little is known. He had no stage or other entertainment industry background at all, trained for a business career, suddenly switched to movies, and after a period with Fox, wound up at Fox as Murnau's assistant. It was Erickson who directed the sound retakes of "City Girl" (based on a Lester play) and Fox gave him the chance to prove himself as a director via a number of "B" and programmer properties. Apparently he was not exactly overwhelming, and quickly dropped from sight. "A Rough Romance" is an odd but enjoyable film. Helen Chandler as always gives an interesting and effective performance. The footages of the film were unmatched, and her (as presumably the original story was, judging from its title) it might have been a much more unusual film. But O'Brien, always, is a pleasure to watch too, and the extensive location work seems to incorporate interior scenes as well as exteriors. John Wayne can be spotted quite easily in the salon scenes, the climax is rousing and exciting, and the snow and fir trees make a nice contrast with the sand, sea and palm trees of the companion feature.

LAST OF THE PAGANS (MGM, 1935) Directed by Richard Thorpe; produced by Phil Goldstone; Scenario and original story by John V. Farrow; Camera, Clyde de Vinna; Art Direction, Cedric Gibbons, Arnold Gillespie and Edwin B. Willis; Musical score, Nat Fisoton; 7 reels
With Mala, Lotus, Charles Trowbridge, Sam Flint, Willie Fung, Robert O. Davis.

In 1935 director Thorpe was nearly out of "B" pictures, and producer Goldstone never really did get away from them. Via lyrical camerawork, the absence of a cast list and the retention of subtitled Polynesian dialogue, "Last of the Pagans" tries very hard to prove that it is both art and important. There are echoes from the Van Dyke-de Vinna "White Shadows in the South Seas" and "Kakino", and forebodings of "The Hurricane" - but Thorpe just isn't a Van Dyke or a Ford, and despite Goldstone's stunning camerawork, the film remains mediocre, not too far removed from the serial. But given these boundaries it's a handsome film - visually superb, and certainly lively, with a rousing if old-fashioned score, and a few decidedly artificial sets nestling in with all the location realism and beauty to remind one that this is very much of a Hollywood film. This was a popular genre in the '30's, and if its documentary values seem distorted today, they were certainly taken far more at face value initially, as they were in such related films as "Igloo", "SOS Iceberg" and "Aandra".

- W.H. Everett