Monday next, Sept. 30th: Two 1931 soap operas: BOUGHT (directed by Archie Mayo) with Constance & Richard Bennett, Ben Lyon, Ray Milland; DOCTORS’ WIVES, the only print of a "lost" Frank Borsarge, with Warner Baxter, Joan Bennett.

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

September 23 1934

Pending the installation of a new screen, we’ll be either operating from a different room, or making the best of our regular room with a smaller, portable screen. Since our audiences aren’t large, there should be no major problems, and we ask you to bear with minor inconveniences for at most two programs.

LAILA – EN SAGA (Nordisk Films, Denmark, 1937) Directed by Albert Schonaa, from a story by J.A. Friis; 8 reels; With Aino Taube, Tryggve Larsson, Sirt Schonaa, Ingrid Harald, Peter Hoglund, Carl Duerell.

With English subtitles.

Until the 1940’s, when the Danish film industry began to get on its feet again – an indirect and probably the only “benefit” derived from the Nazi occupation – the Danish films, which had enjoyed such prestige in the silent period, seemed doomed to extinction. It totally lost its world market with the coming of sound, and the country was too small to produce more than a handful of films for home use. Nevertheless, the Danish – naturally – enjoyed hearing their own language on the screen, and the few films that the country did produce were very popular. Naturally they made maximum use of picturesque outdoor locations, and Albert Schonaa was one of the most successful directors of those economically-produced films designed primarily for local exhibition. "Laila" is a good example of such films. The rich excitement of the earlier stages isn’t sustained, and it soon settles down to a fairly straightforward boy-girl romance with the old Griffithian class-distinction sub-plot as the sustaining narrative. Nevertheless, the novelty and richness of the snow-country backgrounds, the documentary flavor of the customs, housing, costumes – not to mention the wolves and the reindeer – contrive to keep it interesting. Moreover, there’s a good musical score, and technically the film is surprisingly adept and polished for a country that had made so few talkie features. Aino Taube, a Swedish actress, plays the heroine somewhat along Lotte Hiepenstahl lines, and her professionalism and awareness of glamour are quite apparent. "Laila" is certainly no major re-discovery, but it’s an interesting additional to the ranks of “home-consumption” National cinema about which we don’t know as much as we should.

SUICIDE FLEET (EKO-Pathe, 1931) Directed by Albert Rogell; a Harry Joe Brown production; Scenario by Lew Lypton from a story by Commander Herbert A. Jones; Additional dialogue, F. MacGrew Wills; Camera, Sal Polito; editor, Joseph Kane; 5 reels; With William Boyd, Robert Armstrong, James Gleason, Ginger Rogers, Harry Hammett, Frank Reicher, Henry Victor, Ben Alexander, Hans Joub.

The Rogell-Brown productions for Eko-Pathe ("Carnival Boat" is a further example) always seemed bigger, faster, and certainly more virile than most of the decidedly talkative and static Eko films of the early sound period. "Suicide Fleet" is certainly surprisingly elaborate and generally well-made, and would doubtless seem even better if John Ford’s very similar and certainly superior "The Sea Beneath" hadn’t been re-introduced to us a year or two ago. Even so, "Suicide Fleet" is a very pleasant surprise once it gets away from its shore-bound opening reels. It starts with an unappetizingly cheap montage, and – a common flaw – all of the costumes, backgrounds, cars and expressions seem resolutely 1931, rather than those of the World War One period. Once away from this false start however – even though it does mean virtually abandoning Ginger Rogers – it comes to life, and adds an element of surface oomph by allowing the Germans to talk in elementary but still untranslated German. Like most of the early Ekos, which now exist only via prints from hurriedly made 16mm dupes negatives, the print and sound quality are a little rough, but it’s that or nothing. (We have quite a long backlog of interesting early Eko talkies waiting for a chance to be shown; we’re expediting them a little by putting some of these – like Tay Garnett’s ‘Bad Company’ – into the New School programs).

Wm. K. Everson