Next program, Monday next May 8: Two charming British comedies of the 40’s: DON’T TAKE IT TO HEART with Richard Greene, Patricia Medina; and THE TAMNY PIPIT with Rosamund John, Niall MacGinnis, Bernard Miles.

This program will be our last for the season; we resume in late September, and the Fall Bulletin will be mailed around September 9th.

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

May 1 1978

WE FROM KRONSTADT (USSR, 1936) Directed E. Dzigan for Mosfilm; scenarios V. Visnevskiy; Camera N. Naumov-Straj; Music S. Kurikov; 9 reels
With V. Zaitsev (Commissar Martinov); O. Bushnov (Balashov, a sailor) and N. Izikin, O. Jakov, Raisa Esipova, P. Kirillov, E. Gunn

With subtle innocence, we unwittingly programmed this paean of praise to the USSR on May Day, just three days after scheduling (at the New School) "The Christian" for the last day of Passover! However, since "We From Kronstadt" did open on May Day, 1936, at the Cameo, perhaps some future McCarthy Committee investigating the Will be charitable enough to believe that our anniversary screening relates to filmic rather than political history. At one time, "We From Kronstadt" was fairly commonplace at art houses and museums, but now seems to have virtually disappeared. Its reputation in 1936, particularly from the lay press, was considerable. The NY Times even went so far as to call it the best Soviet sound film to date, despite its over-familiar propagandist theme. In recent years however, it has fallen into relative disrepute: serious film scholars, or at least those who are specialists in Soviet film, tend to regard director Dzigan much as orthodox British documentarians regard Humphrey Jennings, as something of a maverick. However, "We From Kronstadt" is something of a landmark in Soviet film, not only for its shifting of propagandist material into the hands of individuals from the normal groups of mass heroes, but also for its - for want of a better term - Hollywood showmanship in staging. The big battle scene at the midway point suggests a very careful scrutiny of Milestone's "All Quiet on the Western Front".

DAYS OF GLORY (RKO Radio, 1944) Directed by Jacques Tourneur; Produced and written by Casey Robinson; Original story Melchior Lengyel; Camera Tony Gaudio; Production Designer, Mordacai Gorelik; Art Directors, Albert D'Aleosto and Carroll Clark; Musical Score, Daniele Amfitheatrof; Musical Director, C. Bakaevsky; 8 reels
With Gregory Peck, Tamara Toumanova, Alan Reed, Maria Palmer, Lowell Gilmore, Glenn Vernon, Hugo Haas, Dena Penn, Igor Dolgirski, Edward Hurst, Lou Crosby, William Chaikov, Ivan Trakas, Joseph Vitale, Erford Gage, Maria Bibikov, Edgar Lichon, Gretl Duquet, Peter Halmers. (Note: credits for the film appear at the end).

"Days of Glory" was made at the height of Hollywood's romance with Soviet Russia, a romance that later proved so embarrassing that most of its filmic fruits, including this one, were conveniently forgotten. "Days of Glory," however, is interesting as more than just a representative illustration of that cycle. It was conceived, rather self-consciously but with a certain amount of courage, as a deliberately "artistic" production, and much of the talent was new. It was Gregory Peck's first film, and also the first major film for Jacques Tourneur following a trio of respectable programmers for each of MGM and RKO. We were easily led astray at the time, not only by the fashionable propaganda, but also by the emphasis on "obvious" art - low-key lighting, tragic finale, etc. It certainly isn't as notable a film as we thought in '44, but academically it remains interesting. Apart from some well-used exteriors especially at the beginning, most of the film is studio-bound, and in matters of design and art direction remains constantly interesting. Propagandistically, it harkens back to much earlier Soviet films; contemporary Soviet war propaganda films (like "In The Rear of the Enemy") were generally more realistic and more exciting due to an emphasis on non-studio, location-shooting. Incidentally, the print at first looks as though it might have been the victim of a filmic Scorched-Earth policy, but after a rough, splicey beginning, improves quite a lot.

--Wm. K. Everso