"THE MAD TWENTIES" (Agora Films, France, 1965)
From "Les Annees Folles" by Leslie F HOLOFF; Film Advisor, Terry Trench; Narrated by Robert Beatty; film supplied by Gaumont and Pathé News, and (among others) La Cinematheque Francaise, Rene Clair, Marcel L'Herbier, Jean Dreville, Marcel Carne; One hour.

Although this French documentary coverage of the 20's is more than a little suspect in some of its narrative information (if it includes Fatty Arbuckle among the movie stars who came to prominence with the transition to sound, how reliable can it be in the less familiar fields of political history?) it does make an extremely welcome change from the American approach to this kind of material. It strikes a nice balance between purely political and historical landmarks, and the everyday life of the period; it's good to see people in the parks, on the beaches, riding bicycles in the country, selling flowers on the windows. Moreover, there are fascinating sections devoted to the fashions and the expressionist art of the period, and a non-hard-core approach which manages to cover wars, prohibition, Lindbergh, the KKK and Sunday other highlights without the distortion, so prevalent in similar U.S. documentaries, which seeks to depict these events, or reactions to them, as cross-sections of national thinking. Much of the footage itself is new, and even the familiar is handled in a fresh manner. There are glimpses of Isadora Duncan, Josephine Baker and other personalities rarely covered in this kind of compilation, and some of the non-identifiable sequences from French fiction films by Rene Clair and others, together with some of that fascinating footage shot of the actual making of L'Herbier's "L'Argent".

The narration tries hard to convince us that Paris is the center of sophisticated decadency, but the accompanying visuals just don't back it up. Or maybe we have all become too jaded by what has happened to New York in the past few years or so. To my knowledge, the film has had no U.S. release as yet, though it may have had a couple of trial exposures on television.

--- Ten Minute Intermission ---

PIANO SCORE BY

STUART DODMAN

"OUR DANCING DAUGHTERS" (M.G.M., 1928) Directed by Harry Beaumont; A Cosmopolitan Production; Scenario and original story: Josephine Lovett; Camera, George Bernes; Sets, Cedric Gibbons; Assistant Director, Harold S. Hoquet; 80 minutes.
The Cast: Joan Crawford (Diana Bedford); John Leech Brown (Ben Blaine); Miss Esther Howard; Anita Page (Ann); Dorothy Sebastian (Beatrice); Kathryn Williams (Ann's mother); Eddie Nugent (Freddie); Dorothy Cumming (Diana's mother); Huxley Gordon (Diana's father); Evelyn Hall (Freddie's mother); Sam De Grasse (Freddie's father).

It'sironical that some of the best films about the 20's and the so-called "lost generation" were actually made in the early 30's. Perhaps Hollywood had acquired more perspective by then, just as the best war films were those made with the longest interval between them and the war in question. (For example, "Paths of Glory" of the 50's is almost certainly the best film about "Our War".) Yet the 20's actually made contemporaneously had all the values of superficiality authenticity - the costumes, the dances, the hair-dos, the hip-flasks and rolled-stockings and the catch-phrases, all of these were recorded on film to become a somewhat one-sided documentary of their times. "Our Dancing Daughters" is hardly an unvarnished picture of those times - but it's an interesting, Hollywood-oriented point of view. Everybody lives in those uncomfortable-looking, expressionistic "modernes" mansions that Cedric Gibbons loved to design for MGM; nobody has to worry about making a living, and indeed the source of income is never mentioned. Life is a constant wheel of yacht trips and cocktail parties, and a broken heart is casually solved by a little trip around the world. Yet morality is broken down into very definite blacks and whites, though promiscuity seems to be a lesser sin for a young lady than smoking in public. Still, we can learn almost as much about a period from glossy distortions such as this as from pure documentary. The cast is an exceptionally good one, though even Joan Crawford's career is a thriller is stolen by Anita Page, an actress of real personality and talent who disappeared all too quickly in the sound era, probably because she wasn't a big enough name to meet the competition of the very similar Jean Harlow. Director Harry Beaumont, who started out as an actor with Edison, must surely hold some kind of record for prolific mediocrity. He was constantly busy during the silent period, his lack-lustre talent salvaged by periodic prestige films and big name stars: Barrymore's "Beau Brummel" and "Sou'Wester."