HULA (Paramount, 1927) Directed by Victor Fleming; Assistant Director, Henry Hathaway; Associate Producer, B.P. Schulberg; Screenplay by Ethel Doherty and Doris Anderson from a story by Armine von Tempski; Camera, William Marshall; 6 reels.
With Clara Bow, Clive Brook, Arlette Marchal, Arnold Kent, Maude Traux, Albert Gran, Agostino Borgato.

Even though Clara Bow was one of Paramount's biggest stars in the late 20's, Paramount, following the same incredible policy that they had used for Valentino and Wallace Reid, made precious little effort to really exploit her unique qualities. "Mantrap" was one of the few Bow films that did, but for having films tailor-made for her, Victor Fleming was never a great director, but he made a great comedy out of "Bombshell" because it was written for and about Harlow; and his "Red Dust" likewise gave off sparks because it was designed for the Harlow-able combination. Paramount took the rather negative route of spotlighting Clara's vivacity by casting her opposite colorless and sexless leading men: the older Conveyor Tearle and Ernest Torrence, the emaciated Percy Marmont, the romantically dull Clive Brook. Clara's Paramount vehicles are so rare that we need make no apologies for showing a lesser one, but "Hula" is a good case in point. Its basic story could have been given to Esther Ralston and handled as a straight romantic tale. In Clara's hands it automatically becomes lively and a comedy, but through sheer force of her personality, not through scripting, is short and snappy and Clara is a delight -- but what a wow it could have been if Fleming had the same kind of material to work with that he did in "Red Dust," something of a gentle distant cousin.

Music for "Hula" arranged and played by Stuart Oderman.

TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION

"Boop Oop a-Doop" (Paramount, 1931) A Max Fleischer cartoon, directed by Dave Fleischer.

"Boop Oop a-Doop" is neither one of the best Betty Boops, nor up to the top near-surrealist standards of the best Fleischers, but it seemed the most appropriate entry for tonight's program, since it is literally build around Betty's sexuality. (This was quite pronounced in many of her earlier cartoons, and one can almost track the progress of the Production Code through the gradual disappearance of her cleavage, garters and displays of underwear, and the increasingly chaste nature of her adventures!) Here Betty is raped by the lecherous villain, something that even now isn't exactly common-place in animated cartoons.

HOOPLA (Fox, 1933) Directed by Frank Lloyd; Screenplay by Bradley King and Joseph Moncure March from "The Barker" by John Kenyon Nicholson;
Camera, Ernest Palmer; 8 reels; NY premiere, Roxy Theatre.
With Clara Bow, Preston Foster, Richard Cromwell, Herbert Mundin, James Gleason, Minna Gombell, Roger Imhof, Florence Roberts.

Although a very careful remake of the 1928 "The Barker" (directed by George Fitzmaurice, with Milton Sills, Douglas Fairbanks jr and Dorothy Mackaill), "Hoopla," like "Tiger Shark," has the kind of plot that has been re-made, officially and otherwise, a dozen times. In 1933, it was received badly by both press and public, and coming on top of Clara's equally unsuccessful (but equally entertaining, today) "Call Her Savage," and sandwiched in between a couple of nervous breakdowns, it spelled a total finale to her career. Today it's hard to see why, apart from the fact that Clara then seemed a mild anachronism, still rooted in the 20's, playing straight the roles that Mae West was kidding. Too, sappy carnival stories were fairly commonplace and lacking in novelty. But it's still a good, solid, well-mounted film, peppered with good performances and dialogue (Florence Roberts especially, but Preston Foster admittedly miscast and unconvinvingly made up) and dominated by Clara - who has her second nude dip of the evening, this time in the idyllic lake set from "Zoo In Budapest"! She acts well and looks great, if just a teeny bit chubby in her climactic non-costume. (But she had certainly regained most of the svelte figure lost in her earlier F.B.I. roles.) Certainly there's nothing here to suggest a fading talent; quite the contrary, it's sad and ironic that the final shot in the film - a shimmering full-screen closeup of a radiant happy Clara who has just achieved, in the plot, both marital happiness and stardom - should be her last film scene ever. But at that, it's a great shot to go out on! With its menage-a-trois climax, the film is morally a little odd in its solution, but no more so than many other pre-Code movies.

As I have to be away this weekend, there will be no introductory talk or post-screening discussion. However, we'll catch up with questions next week in an early pre-screening discussion session at 7:45. --- Wk