Every so often we come up with films that cry out to be shown, either for their curiosity value or their rarity, and because nobody else is going to show them, and because the times in which they were made and the times in which the audience feel compelled to see them. The solution usually is to double-bill such films. They have a habit of complementing each other and feeding off one another, and if our audience doesn't know quite what to expect, at least it knows what not to expect. Tonight's program is precisely such a program, one of the most bizarre we've ever presented, but fascinating as collectors' items if not as great works of art.

THE MERRY MONARCH (LES AVENTURES DU ROI PÂSUHOL) (France, 1932) Directed by Alexis Granowsky, from the French novel by Pierre Louys; Camera, Rudolph Mate; Music, Carol Rathaus and Clifford Gray; Design, Marcel Vertes; Asst. Director, L. Azarch; Editor, Paul Falkenberg; Tonight's print of the complete English version; an Anglo-French-German co-production filmed entirely in France by Algra Film and Sepic Film; British release by United Artists; U.S. release in 1935 by Syndicate Films, but out to 53 minutes; 8 reels.

With Emil Jannings, Sidney Fox, Josette Day, Armand Bernard, Jose Noguero, Rachel Devir, Dorothy Boyd, Iris Ashley, Jacqueline Daix, Gazia Del Rio.

Since, even after one has seen it, one doesn't quite believe it, one would like official confirmation that this film really exists - yet there seems almost to be no way to impress any kind of information on it. Despite the fact that it was an extremely costly co-production involving three countries, has a number of major names in front of and behind the camera - including author Louys, best-known for his "The Woman and the Puppet", once done by Sternberg/Dietrich as "The Devil is a Woman", and with Bunuel currently preparing a fourth film version - and was only three films behind a major Jannings triumph in "The Blue Angel", the reference books turn a blind eye to it. It turns up in none of the published lists of credits for any of the principal principals, never in the NY Times, never registered for copyright, and seemingly referred to in print only twice: somewhat enviously by Herman Weinberg in a "Sight and Sound" article, and as an entry in Charles Ford's detailed index to Jannings' work in the French Anthologie du Cinema #5.

One reason for all this is that it was virtually never shown. The US release, much cut, was by a small independent distributor. In Britain it was so unsuccessful in its London premiere that it was promptly withdrawn after only a couple of days and permanently retired. It was ready for German release at about the time that Hitler came to power - and because of all the Jewish talent and money involved, was immediately suppressed. Only in France, where Andre Berley and Edwige Feuillere (in the Jannings and Fox roles) gave it some value, did it get any kind of exhibition. Since the whole venture was a cost-b而已-damaged loan for the whole crew - interrupted at one point when Jannings went to Vienna to fulfill a theatrical engagement, and took the whole unit with him for a holiday - it ran up a budget of some two million dollars in 1932, obviously an impossible investment to recoup. The backer later committed suicide. Director Granowsky's career was brief, though he made some interesting films in England before he died in the early thirties. The brother of another off-beat director, Boris Ingster, whose "The Stranger on the Third Floor" we ran a couple of seasons back.

With critical or other reputation mon-existential, one can at least approach the film with a totally open mind. I suppose that by all filmic standards it is almost a bad film, but normal standards hardly seem to apply. It's such an exhilarating film, and everybody involved seems to be having so much fun - and to be determined that we have a good time too - that criticism seems both uncharitable and pointless. The whole film is oddly like the "story" framework of a Busby Berkeley musical number, expanded to feature length. It's stylish, exotic, undisciplined and harmless - though surprisingly un-erotic given the richness of its length. It's got a godawful hashish rather than Whisky habit, but all good dreams self-destruct at their peak moment, whereas this film tries something that dreams never have to contend with: it attempts to tidy up logically, and in so doing destroys its own charm. But until that point, even if it always seems about to get going without actually doing so, it has a lot of free-wheeling vivacity.

Despite the French production and locale, the design and details seem essentially German. Certainly the French would never countenance a monochrome with 365 wigs, and only one offspiring. At that, it seems a little hard to accept Josette Day (well before her half of the title roles in "La Belle et La Betes") as the daughter of Emil Jannings and Sidney Fox! Fox is quite captivating, showing far more vivacity than she did in most of her American films. Jannings is obviously having the time of his life, though it's a pity he isn't allowed to milk some of his scenes a little more. (Perhaps he was in the German version!) Since we first saw him asleep, there are momentary hopes that we might be treated to another real-long "awakening" scene.

-- continued overleaf --
accompounded by grunts, grimaces and much tummy-scratching, as in "The Broken Jug". Still, he's obviously enjoying himself. The English version cunningly calls for little direct closeup dialogue delivery, but it is Jennings' voice, speaking phonetically. Good or bad, "The Magnificent Monarch" is a rather lovable freak, and since many of us have fallen into that category too, it may well have found the most sympathetic audience it will ever find. Perhaps it is a sad but purely entertainment content of so many contemporary movies that a mad little trifle like this should seem so entertaining today. Anyway, for good or ill, here is the first public showing of the complete version of the film in this country. Sit back, forget that Jennings worked with Hurnau, von Sternberg and Pommer, expect little—and you may be pleasantly surprised.

--- Ten Minute Intermission ---

CHANDRA LEKHA (Gemini Productions, India, 1948) Produced and directed by S.S. Vasan; Story and scenario by the Gemini Story Department; Music by S. Rajeswara Rao and E. Shanker Sastry; Camera: K. N. Ghosh and P. Elappa; The Cast: Raj Kumari (Chandra Lekha); Radha (Veer Singh) Ranjan (Sasank); Krishnam Chari (The King); Sundari Bai (Sundari); Marayan Rao (Circus Manager); Janaki (Gypsy girl) 9 reels; English subtitles

India has long been the world's most prolific movie-producing country—partly because so much poverty means millions of moviegoers desperately needing escapist entertainment. Tonight's film is, or was, far more typical of the average Indian film than the far superior works of Satyajit Ray, whose artistic but non-escapist films find little public support at home. If you still have your October 31 copy of the New York Times Sunday Magazine, you'll find an excellent survey of the Indian cinema scene today. Films like "Chandra Lekha" seem to attract only popular audiences, but with relaxed and corrupt censorship, their fairy-tale innocence has now been updated to encompass extreme violence and virtual pornography as well.

In 1948, easily India's biggest, most expensive and most commercially successful action picture, "Chandra Lekha" was pure home-grown deMille, based on both legend and fact, but letting neither stand in the way of showmanship. It's a colorful, naive and zestful film in which the overall ingenuousness quite disarms criticism of plot absurdity or such production shortcomings as the too-obvious studio "exteriors". The only local criticism however was of its "excessive sensuality", but don't be alarmed—excitement, since that complaint was based on the then very rigid moral standards, now quite forgotten. The print we are screening tonight is of the U.S. release version which was, alas, a dismal flop, garnering few bookings. (Other imports, bought and paid for, such as the delightful swashbuckler "Aladdin's Lamp", never did get into release, while one of the best Indian frolics of all—an incredible plagiarizm of the Tarzan movies, literally crammed in every incident and character from all of them, was unfortunately quashed by MGM who had their own "Tarzan Goes to India", coming out at just that moment). The American version of "Chandra Lekha" is edited, and the footage deleted is quite remarkable—some eight reels, at a rough guess! I did see a film version some twenty years ago, and seeing the other film scene shortly thereafter, was unable to discern any of the popular Indian movies, like those from Latin America, that moved at dizzying running times and at providing something for everybody—comedy, action, romance, song. All of the action and most of the songs seem here to remain—what is gone are the lengthy periods of repose between action or musical highlights. The film is certainly tightened, perhaps given the construction of a serial feature-version, but its basic values are unimpaired. The action has gusto and size, the songs are a joy, and the music guilelessly pilfers from cultures all over the world, ranging from unexpurgated Wagner and Spanish flamenco to traditional Indian, with a snatch of the Lember & Hardy theme thrown in as the comedians appear. Possibly the film's greatest moment occurs at the very beginning when after arriving at the huge palace (a most elaborate set) with his troops, the Prince strides through the palace, upstairs, along corridors, ever followed by a smoothly tracking camera which records the sumptuous splendor of it all, until he reaches his inner sanctum—where sits down on a very moth-eaten second-hand chair and tugs off his boots! It's almost an unwitting Lubitsch touch. Incidentally, the admiring imitation of Hollywood extends even to the trademark, the plump little Gemini Twins who, on this occasion, appear after the End title. On all the Indian ads, the catchline that accompanies the trademark reads: "Wherever the bugsles blow, there is a great show"—a clear parallel to the old "If it's a Paramount Picture, it's the best show in town". With its fights, chases, music, elephants and a circus, "Chandra Lekha" was a huge popular success, the first Indian movie to be equally successful in both Tamil and then in Hindi versions. Last but not least, Busby Berkeley would surely have been delighted to see his influence extending to the climactic drum dance.

William K. Everson