Piano scores for both of tonight's films arranged and played by Stuart Oderman.

THE SWAN (Paramount, 1924; rel. 1925) Written and Directed by Daisitt Buchowetski from the play by Ferenc Molnar; Camera, Alvin Wyckoff; 6 reels
With: Frances Howard (Alexandra); Adolphe Menjou (Albert); Ricardo Cortez (Dr. Walter); Ida Waterman (Princess Beatrice); Helen Lindroth (Amphrosa); Helen Lee Worthing (Wanda van Gluck); Joseph DePew (Prince George); George Walcott (Prince Arsenie); Michael Visaroff (Father Hynacinth); Michael Vavitch (Colonel Wunderlich); Richard Kussanian (Kutzow); Arthur Donaldson (Franz); General Lodjensky (The Master of the Hunt); Clare Eames (Princess Domenica).

The first of three versions of "The Swan" (the others starred Lillian Gish and Greta Garbo), this one was produced only three years after the play's premiere in Budapest. Already there were substantial changes, both for commercial reasons and "artistic" ones, the latter fully "explained" by writer-director Buchowetski at the time. It caused no great waves of protest however, and the only criticism that the New York Times had to make was that it might not go down with the flapper audience! Far more Lubitsch and von Stroheim than Molnar (one whole sequence seems almost a spoof of a key "Foolish Wives" episode) it's a handsome and snappy production that bowls along faster than Molnar would have liked, and is dominated by Menjou's tremendous (and good-natured) performance. At the time, before Menjou had really come to specialise in such roles, it must have been a doubly impressive performance, especially in comparison with the extremely wooden acting from Ricardo Cortez and Frances Howard. Miss Howard, a beautiful but lifeless creature, made only a handful of films before retiring, marrying Sam Goldwyn, and devoting herself more to the business side of movie-making. The sets, with their strong emphasis on symmetry and balance, are both picturesque and Germanic. Incidentally, the film makes an apt comparison with the same director's earlier German version of "Othello" (starring Emil Jannings) in which he frequently changed Shakespeare into Mack Sennett while remaining faithful to the original text. Werner Krauss' Iago was played almost on Ford Sterling lines! Yet it was an interesting and thoughtful production, and one thought highly of at the time - especially by the Claim. When all is said and done, MGM's Technicolor version with Grace Kelly is probably the definitive "The Swan", although each version had its own highlights and assets. The Gish version was the least stylishly directed (Paul Stein) though it did have a dubious bonus in having Marie Dressler play the Queen like Tubby Annie in a trial.

-- Ten Minute Intermission --

CONRAD IN QUEST OF HIS YOUTH (Paramount, 1920) Directed by William de Mille
Screenplay by Olga Printzlau from the novel by Leonard Merrick; Camera, Guy Wilky; Art Director, Wilfred Buckland; 6 reels
With Thomas Meighan, Kathleen Williams, Mabel van Buren, Nayme Kelsa, Bertram Johns, Charles Ogle, Ruth Renick, Margaret Loomis, Sylvia Ashton, Eddie Sutherland.

Although not placed on a level with "Way Down East" and "The Devil's Passkey", "Conrad in Quest of His Youth" was nevertheless considered one of the better films of 1920. It was liked however more as an individual film than as an adaptation of the then-very-popular novel by Leonard Merrick. Critics were quick to point out that the adaptation popularised it, changed wit to broader humor, and removed potentially controversial elements. Having said that, they were happy with the film as an entity. William de Mille, Cecil's brother, and always a specialist in gentle, civilised, often stage-derived material, was obviously the ideal director for it, though possibly a few years later Herbert Brenon might have been an even better choice. One can see why Sir James Barrie endorsed the original novel so much, since even in the simpler form presented here, it has a Barrie-like quality to it. One of the reasons for the slightly awry screen treatment may be that it was a mistake to entrust a highly personal and sentimental male viewpoint to a highly sophisticated female scenarist. However, this may be an unfair judgement, since de Mille certainly would have had enough power to make his own changes, and moreover Printzlau had earlier done a screen treatment for Barrie's "What Every Woman Knows", although admittedly one that does take a far more feminine stance. Relatively few Thomas Meighan vehicles exist today, and this is also a good representation of his work and style. Oddly enough, while films of the 20's were full of exotic feminine stars, there were relatively few male exotics, Fairbanks, Valentino, Novarro and Gilbert always excepted. The female audience seemed to respond rather more to the steady and reliable, if somewhat dull, leading men - Lewis Stone, Thomas Meighan, Milton Sills, Conrad Nagel, Oliver Borden, Gullen Landis, Tom Moore, perhaps even the Richards Barthelmess and Dix. Tastes changed in the thirties, and Warner Baxter seemed to have a virtual monopoly in filling the roles abandoned by Meighan and his contemporaries.

William K. Everson