THE PASSIONATE INDUSTRY (Australian Commonwealth Film Unit, 1973) 5 rls Written, researched and directed by Joan Long; produced by Frank Bagiulli.

The Australian film industry is currently going through a major renaissance, and hopefully such new films as "Picnic at Hanging Rock" and "The Picture Show Man" will soon be on view here. All of which makes it a good time to look back at Australia's film history. This is the second installment in a three-part history, the first of which - going up to the year 1920 - we ran a few seasons back. Tonight's film covers the 20's, and again is meticulously researched, a model of how to do this kind of compilation. (Its writer-director Joan Long has since moved into features, and directed the highly-acclaimed "The Picture Show Man", which is reviewed most favorably in this week's "Variety"). The Australians have always felt somewhat bitter about American/Hollywood intervention in its industry and the attitude is understandable. On the other hand, Australian films provide their own answer: they never could really compete with Hollywood, and Australian audiences obviously wanted American films and stars. The resentment is however rather forcefully emphasised in the film's narration, and perhaps underlined by the film-maker's militantly feminist attitude. Because of its rather abrasive anti-American tone, the Australians are rather embarrassed by it, and are generally keeping it under wraps in this country. It's a fascinating film, with much extremely rare footage involving familiar if not household names like Claude Dampier and Snowy Baker, and much very interesting data on Australia's several women directors. There's also some most intriguing footage from Norman Dawn's "For The Rest Of His Natural Life". Dawn was a minor but most interesting American director; going to Australia to work on such a big film was obviously a real break for him, although the Australians regard his acquisition as a major coup for the Hollywood "Catholic Church". In the accompanying "Chang" long-survey somewhat anti-climactically does perhaps put the finger on what was always Australia's biggest filmic problem: namely, a lack of showmanship.

— Ten Minute Intermission —

CHANG (Paramount, 1927) Produced and directed by Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack; photographed by Schoedsack; titles by Achmad Abdullah. 7 reels

It is now generally known that Carl Denham, the daring devil director/cameraman hero of "King Kong", was a composite based on that film's two producers, Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, and certainly many of the remarkable closeups (particularly of tigers) in "Chang" confirm that their modus operandi was not unlike Denham's — even to finally facing the realisation that their documentaries were losing ground at the boxoffice, and turning to adventures with a "movie face" to keep the public happy. "Chang" opened at the Regal on April 25, 1927, so it's safely out of copyright. It's a two-reeler, away from being a 40th anniversary showing. I'm only sorry we can't duplicate the Rivoli's Magnascope screen which opened up for the big elephant rampage sequence. Less of a documentary than the previous Schoedsack-Cooper film "Grass", "Chang" is really more of a realistic, star-less adventure film. It isn't faked (except possibly for one or two shots, about which more in a moment) but it is certainly manipulated, staged, and heightened by editing. There is also a good deal of showmanship, and a shrewd recognition of — and exploitation of — the natural comedic tendencies of some of the animals. As a document and as an entertainment it was, and remains, the best animal footage, it was streets ahead of most of the other commonplace jungle documentaries made at that time — and since it was made for less than $60,000 it could hardly help but be profitable. An added element of interest today lies in its foreshadowing of so much of "King Kong". The title alone, and the withholding of its explanation, is typical. And there are several shots, particularly in the elephant rampage through the village, which were copied and developed further in "Kong". (The baby left alone, and rescued, for example). It is in this sequence that I think I detected some rather masterly trickery. A full-grown tusker elephant was apparently destroyed by baby elephants; a reasonable enough deception, as presumably the elephant herd properly destroyed the full-scale village too quickly to satisfy the producers. However, it has been claimed, and by reliable historians, that there is no trickery whatsoever in the film. Last Summer, when I posed this question to Mrs Cooper (Dorothy Jordaan) she was quite vehement (and quite sincere) in assuring me I was wrong. I'm not convinced, and in such circumstances it is difficult to obtain really reliable statements. If it is trickery, it's brilliant trickery, and I merely present the thought for consideration while you decide. Achmad Abdullah's titles — something of a pompous composite of Rudyard Kipling, Robert Service and James Fitzpatrick, with some Disney thrown in — leave a little to be desired today perhaps. But the giving of "dialogue" to animals in movies (Sex, Bin Tin Tin, etc.) was quite commonplace then, and certainly the titles are informative and underplayed, not sensationalised (as in so many documentaries then) to provide thrills that the films themselves should, but didn't.

Piano Score for CHANG arranged and played by STUART VERNET

( Note: The first half of CHANG will be played at sound speed, the second half at silent speed; approx. running time will be 90 minutes)