Since we have films tonight from Garbo's silent and sound Hollywood years, it is interesting perhaps to go back to the very beginning to show these excerpts from "Grisly" very first feature film - incidentally, her only comedy until "Ninotchka". The excerpts were not selected much later on to show Garbo (then Greta Gustafsson) in the unfamiliar guise of a batting beauty. There's certainly very little there to suggest the poise, elegance, beauty and above all, mystery, that would come so soon.

**WILD ORCHIDS** (RGG 1929) Directed by Sidney Franklin; Screenplay by Willis Goldbeck from "Heat" by John Colton; additional writing by Hans Kraly and Richard Schayer; Titles, Marion Ainslee; Camera, William Daniels; Art Direction, Cedric Gibbons; Gowns, Adrian; 104 minutes
With Greta Garbo, Nils Asther, Lewis Stone.

Even allowing for the fact that this is a late silent, when long, uneventful, deliberately "artistic" and often self-indulgent (for stars, directors, cameramen) displays of style were very much the fashion (not only in Hollywood but locally), "Wild Orchids" does seem - initially - too long and protracted, and in need of an editing job. Certainly, from a narrative point of view, one could cut it down to half it a length without too much trouble. But as one sees it more than once, one is impressed by that style and elegance, and by the skillful way that Sidney Franklin turns it into a super showcase for Garbo's magic, and somehow quite transcends the paucity of plot. Don't expect it to go anywhere; it's a film to languish in, rather than to be involved with. Although it was made when Garbo was still in nudes and would soon take over totally, Garbo still had two more silents to go before making her own rather later transition to sound in 1930. It's another of those films in which she is married to a bored and older man, though in this case he is at least sympathetic, which often wasn't the case. One wonders how these dull, passionless marriages ever occurred in the first place, and their main function seemed to be in providing a barrier, and a clash of loyalties, between the Eure (Garbo) and the Asther (William Daniels), two-wives plot. Despite the colorless, these younger heroes (Gilbert apart) were usually rather dull and colorless too, and this was undoubtedly deliberate. Conrad Nagel, Gavin Gordon, Lew Ayres, Johnny Mack Brown and Nils Asther didn't provide much excitement, and allowed Garbo to dominate her films (the roles always dominated anyway) both emotionally and intellectually. Still, one has little sympathy for a husband like this. Stone Garbo tries to arouse his interest by dressing in provocative Javanese clothes, tells her "You look silly dear - take off those things and go to bed!" Admittedly, she does look silly, because such ornamental trappings on Garbo are merely extraneous, but a bored reaction is hard to understand! However, at least Stone is Garbo's husband in this case; in their six other films together, she played his mistress, his employee, his employer, and the target of his parental antagonism.

Music for silent films arranged and played by MLaTTiR COEMAN

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**ROMANCE** (PGM, 1930) Directed by Clarence Brown; screenplay by Beatrice Herdith and Edwin Justus Mayer from the (1915) play by Edward Sheldon; Camera, William Daniels; Art Direction, Cedric Gibbons; Gowns, Adrian; 78 minutes

One year and four pictures later - major stars were really worked and exposed to the public as often as possible in those years - poor Lewis Stone is less bored, but perhaps rather more frustrated. "Romance" was only Garbo's second talkie, and considering her own fears concerning her accent, it's a remarkably assured and smooth performance, though one wonders why they gave her the handicap of playing an Italian - which she clearly was not - when the nationality of the role, other than it be foreign, was unimportant. Like "Wild Orchids", it is directed with such taste and skill that one forgets about the basic emptiness and predictability (although the "moral" at the end seems a bit confused) and is perfectly happy just to watch her technique and her beauty. She even manages to convince us that such a woman doesn't become interested in a colorless cleric like Gavin Gordon, can't resist a kind of cloddish Reverend Davidson, without his get-up-and-go. Although the film seems somewhat old-fashioned today - perhaps that, its lack of reputation and its shortcomings in terms of male boxoffice co-stars, is why it never seems to get revived these days - it works rather well on its own terms. Clarence Brown of course was Garbo's favorite director, and they worked well - and often - together. Unfortunately, he remained a sort of spectral consensus of opinion being that it represented Garbo's best work to date, a judgement that still holds good. Like the British "Brief Encounter", if it dates at all it is because its morality has dated, and because other attitudes have changed too. (Once more, as in "Come and Get It", we have the man of 50 bemoaning that "I've lived my life!"). Some of the back projection dates too, technically. Our view of Garbo's walk dominates more than it needs to, but there are visual subtleties. On the whole, a film superior to its minor reputation.

Program ends: 11.14