Literally thousands of short films were turned out by Hollywood, especially in the early 30's. For the most part they were designed as a program-building convenience to both distributors and exhibitors and later, especially at MGM and to a lesser degree at Warners, they were also useful as a training ground for new directors and stars. Only infrequently, as in the case of the Disney cartoons or the Laurel & Hardy comedies, did they take on major money-making capabilities. Outside of Hollywood of course, the short was less mass produced and also less economical, but also more prone to experiment.

Tonight's selection is in no way designed as a representative cross-section of all the shorts turned out in those years before rising costs literally forced them off the market. It is merely a way of wiping off our backlog at least some of the couple of hundred shorts that we have been waiting to play, and have not found enough outlets for. They are arranged more fortuitously than categorically. The "primitive" ones are spotted at the beginning, and the longest is placed immediately before the intermission. Bear in mind of course that shorts were never really meant to be played this way; basically they were intended to build and punctuate programs, and even the newsreel theatres rarely ran more than four or five shorts at one time. However, we'll see how the experiment goes. My own thought is that probably in future they will be best served up in units of four or five, replacing a second feature on occasion. With that in mind, I have downplayed comedy and musicals in this compilation, since they can be edited together into rather interesting single units. There is only one change from the program as outlined last week! I removed (temporarily) the "Crime Does Not Pay" short, "Don't Talk", for the practical reason that pressure of work was heavy this week and there was no time to retrieve it from a loan-out situation, and the aesthetic reason that we already have two "long" shorts (a 2-reeler and a 3-reeler) in the program, and a third one might tend to slow the program down a bit. It has been replaced by two one reelers, and will reappear on a future program. Everyone interested in reading more about shorts in general, and specifically, well-documented series in particular, is recommended to look for a copy of Leonard Maltin's excellent and most useful book "The Great Movie Shorts". Maltin is also the author of "The Disney Films" and (in collaboration with Richard M. Bann) "Our Gang", likewise shorts-oriented chronicles.

Films will be shown in the order listed below, interpolated with the occasional newsreel item or trailer. With so many shorts involved, space precludes extended notes, but in any case one of the great assets of the short is its surprise value so in many cases the less information given, the more effective the short.

2. "Mighty Atom" (1933) - one of the once highly popular British "Secrets of Nature" shorts produced by Myer Field. Rather rigidly "educational" for commercial shorts, and narrations are a bit coy today, but the macro-enlargement photography is still impressive.
3. "Mickey's Steamroller" (1934) - an exceptionally good black-and-white Mickey Mouse cartoon.
4. "Meet King Joe" (1948) - a Technicolor cartoon produced by the John Suthamland unit for MGM release. Louis B. Mayer must have loved its industrial/propagandist purpose and message; a curious little work, with some racial stereotyping in the animation that would hardly pass today.
5. "Escape to Blazes" (1946) - another short, but designed for non-theatrical use rather than its regular outlets, and thus but little seen through normal channels. Not as much fun as Bob Youngson's round-up of fire disaster footage ("Blaze Busters") but a curio for two reasons. First, it is directed by Gunther von Fritsch, who later feature credits include a shared credit with Robert Wise on "Curse of the Cat People"; and secondly, a curious attitude that will certainly irk the women's libbers, since it implies that many fires are caused by women who are idly engaged in playing cards by the fireplace.
6. "Naughty Cal" (1932) Directed by Aubrey Scotto at the Paramount-Astoria Studios; little production value and less plot; an excuse for Lillian Roth to belt out numbers.
8. "Macao of Mexico" (MGM, 1942, dir: Edward Cahn) Paul Gulfoyle in a pocket biography of Francisco Madero, helped out by liftages of footage from Edward Hays' "Viva Villa".
9. "The Nevery Steps" (1948) "Golly symphony" films have been a tradition all over the world since Walter Ittman made them, but never established the genre in the mid-20's with "Berlin". This is one of the least known and one of the most pleasing, a lyrical evocation of the people, the look and the life of Edinburgh. Not strictly a documentary since much of it is staged and acted, but a beautiful piece of film-making. Director: John Elderidge; a 3-reeler.

10. "Yankee Doodle Goes to Town" (MGM, 1939) Director Jacques Tourneur fashions a raucous and satirical short shot of the war of World War Two with Glenn Evans.
11. "To My Unborn Son" (MGM, 1943) Made at the height of the war, it is much heavier and now slightly self-conscious but still very worthwhile propagandist drama; directed by Leslie Kardos from a Lewis Jacobs story, and starring Steen Gerard.
12. "Lighter Than Air" (Warner Bros., 1946) Robert Youngson's excellent compilation of the rise and fall of the dirigibles; much fine newsreel footage.
13. "The 20000 Leagues" (Rko-Walt Disney, 1948) At a time when most Disneys were padded and nearly as funny as their other cartoons, this one is amazingly good. An excellent Donald Duck to round out our program, with an amusing Stepin Fetchit stereotype that would hardly be used in contemporary animation.

--- William K. Everson ---

Estimated program close, 10:40.