THE DARK MAN (Independent Artists-Hank, 1950) Written and Directed by Jeffrey Dell; produced by Julian Wintle; Camera, Eric Cross; 80 mins (app.). With Natasha Parry (Holly Lester); Edward Underdown (Insp. Viner); Maxwell Reed (The Dark Stranger); William Hertnell (Supt.); Barbara Murray (Carol Burns); Cyril Smith (Sam Denny); Leonard White (Det. Evans); John Singer (Adjutant); Geoffrey Sumner (Major), Sam Kydd, Geoffrey Bond, Gerald Anderson.

Jeffrey Dell, a spasmodic independent film-maker best-known for genteel rural comedies ("Don't Take It To Heart") here invades Hitchcockian territory with a simple, lean double-pronged murder tale: the police must catch a killer before he catches up with the girl who is the only witness to his crime. There are one or two glaring plot weaknesses, but its straightforwardness and its interesting use of Southern England's land and scenery more than make up for it. It's less ambitious (and skilled) than Hitchcock's "Young and Innocent" but it's an enjoyable thriller much in that same mood, with Maxwell Reed, the notorious first husband of Joan Collins, at his slickest!

-- TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION --

THE MAN WHO LAUGHS (Universal, 1928) Directed by Paul Leni; production supervisor, Paul Kohner; Scenario by J. Grubb Alexander, assisted by Dr. Bela Sekely, Charles Whittaker, Marion Ward and Ray McLean from the novel by Victor Hugo; Art Director, Charles B. Hall; Camera, Gilbert Waterton; Asst. Directors, Louis Friedlander (Law Landers), Jay Marchant, John Voshell; silent film with original musical score. 110 mins.

With Conrad Veidt (Gwynplaine); Mary Philbin (Dea); Olga Baclanova (Duchess Josiana); Josephine Crowell (Queen Anne); George Siegman (Dr. Hardquannone); Brandon Hurst (Barkilphedro); Sam de Grasse (King James); Stuart Holmes (Lord Dirry-Noire); Oesar Gravina (Ursus); Nick de Ruiz (Wagetake); Edgar Norton (Chancellor); Torben Meyer (The Spy); Julius Molnar Jr. (Gwynplaine as a child); Charles Puffy (Tinkeeper); Frank Puglia, Jack Goodrich (Ghosts); Carmen Costello (Dea's Mother); Zimbo the Dog (Homo); and Lon Poff.

With Leroux's "Phantom of the Opera" and Hugo's "Les Figerables" firmly established as smash theatrical musicals, can "The Man Who Laughs" be far behind? (At least we were spared a proposed remake to star Kirk Douglas in the 1960's!) Made between Leni's "The Cat and the Canary" and "The Last Warning", "The Man Who Laughs" was a product of Hollywood's (and especially Universal's) most German-influenced period. It was an obvious attempt (and a far more costly and ambitious one) to duplicate the success of Universal's earlier Hugo adaptation "The Hunchback of Notre Dame". As a film, it was far superior to it, but it lacked its popular appeal and it especially lacked the humanity and magnetism of Lon Chaney, and all the showmanship that surrounded him. In an attempt to popularise the rather morbid Hugo story, there were several deviation from the original, including a happy ending and a reel of Dumas-Inspired action leading up to it. A Movietone score was also added to enhance its boxoffice values. Sometimes the score works very well indeed, sometimes it is a bit lazy (a constant repetition of "British Grenadiers" in an effort to reinforce the idea that all of those Germanic sets, some very reminiscent of "Noeseratu", are supposed to represent 17th Century England!) and sometimes derivative (wholesale use of themes from Hurnau's "Sunrise"). And once it is disastrous. While one can accept, if reluctantly, the idea of a vocal as a romantic wrap-up at the end, the intrusion of Enzo Rapis's "When Love Comes Stealing" into an early and very fragile love scene is a deplorable lack of taste.

Though long, slow and heavy, it is always a good film to look at: a marvellously designed prologue, borrowings from Griffith as well as the Germans throughout, and an unsurpassed mixture of sensuality and animal passion in the remarkable scene of Baclanova's attempted seduction of Veidt.

--- William K. Everson

Program Ends approx. 10.50

(Note: last New School showing of "The Man Who Laughs" was in early 1973)