An evening of comedy and melodrama with STUART CDERMAN at the piano.

NIP AND TUCK (Mack Sennett-Pathe, 1923) Directed by Del Lord; with Billy Bevan, Harry Gribbon, Kwple Morgan, Cameo the Dog, 18 mins.

One could hardly ask for a better illustration of the difference between slapstick and sight-gag comedy than tonight's films. Apart from the wonderful (and painstakingly shot and edited) performance of Cameo, the Sennett film has no plot and is all slapstick, whereas the two Hal Roach films have very solid little plot-lines and plenty of inventive sight gags. It's as well that the Sennett film is so visual and so easy to follow, since while it is an excellent print made directly from the original foreign negative, it has no subtitles at all — other than a two-frame reference titles in German and printed backwards! The only confusing element comes close to the beginning when Billy Bevan sits down to a meal with his family, and to pad the footage and save money, Sennett cuts in a flashback sequence from an earlier Bevan comedy, "A Sea Dog's Tale". Otherwise the various comic set-pieces — slapstick in a tailor's shop, a card game, pursued by the police — need no explanations to be enjoyed.

SHOULD MEN WALK HOME? (Hal Roach-Pathe, 1927) Directed by Leo McCarey; Supervising Director, F. Richard Jones; Camera, Floyd Jackman; with Mabel Normand, Creighton Hale, Oliver Hardy, Eugene Pallette, Edgar Dearing, 20 mins.

One of the big hits of last year's Silent Film Festival at Pordenone, this is one of the best of the variable comedies that Mabel made for Roach in the last years of her life. (It also refutes those "historians" who so casually claim that her career was finished after her involvement in the William Desmond Taylor murder at the beginning of the decade). Though she looks strained and ill, and wisely there aren't too many full closeups, she works hard for her laughs and usually gets them. Luckily, she doesn't have to carry the film alone. Two basic gags are highlights. One involves a fountain (a set and prop that Roach used in a Laurel and Hardy of the same period) in which Creighton Hale literally can't contain his amusement and breaks up just before the scene ends. The other is a running gag in which Normand and Hale try to prevent guests at a party from taking drinks from a punch-bowl. Oliver Hardy's frustration and bemusement in this sequence represents one of the funniest bits of comic pantomime that he ever played. Creighton Hale was one of several dramatic stars, most of them slipping a little at the time (Lionel Barrymore, Herbert Rawlinson, Priscilla Dean, Theda Bara) that Roach used at this time to add novelty and boxoffice values to his comedy shorts. Hale certainly makes a very pleasing light comic here, as opposed to the unfunny comedy-for-punctuation chores that he undertook for Griffith earlier in the decade.

MAMA BEHAVE (Hal Roach-Pathe, 1925; rel. 1926) Directed by Leo McCarey; With Charley Chase, Mildred Harris, Vivian Oakland, Syd Crossley, Rolfe Sedan, 20 mins.

"Mama Behave" may not be top-bracket Chase/Mccarey, but what matter? It's still a delight, a sophisticated mixture of pantomime, wit and bedroom farce, with Charley in a unique kind of dual role, and particularly scoring in a mock seduction scene where he assumes the aggressive characteristics of the vamp. Perhaps the only complaint he can level against the Chases is that the very normalcy of the Chase characterisation works against coming up with outstanding wrap-up gags (the one in "Mighty Like a Moose" was an exception) and the inevitable closeup of Chase looking, dumbfounded, at the audience for the fadeout gets a bit over-worked. However, it does fit in with his screen persona, so perhaps one shouldn't look for holes in such otherwise beautifully constructed little comedies.

--- TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION ---

THE GOOSE WOMAN (Universal, 1925) Directed by Clarence Brown; Scenario by Melville Brown from the story by Rex Beach; Camera, Milton Moore. 80 mins app. NY premiere, Colony Theatre, Aug.1925, with vaudeville acts and Charley Chase's "Innocent Husbands" in support.

With Louise Dresser (Mary Holmes); Jack Pickford (Gerald Holmes); Constance Bennett (Hazel Woods); Spottiswoode Aitken (Jacob Rigg); Gustav von Seyffertitz (Mr. Vogel); George Nicholls (Detective Kelly); Marc MacDermott (Amos Ethridge); George Cooper (reporter) and Kate Price.

Oddly enough, despite our fondness for Clarence Brown, we have never played "The Goose Woman" before — primarily because when we last planned on it, it suddenly turned up in the Museum of Modern Art's Universal tribute. But that was about a quarter of a century ago, so this revival is well overdue.

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"The Goose Woman" was Clarence Brown's last so-called "small" film; to be exact, the last of his Universals, though that company regarded his films as major productions. When it was in release, he was already at work on Valentino's "The Eagle", to be followed by "Kiki". After that, he began a long association as a key MGM director, his only non-MGM film in that whole 1927-1952 period being the 1939 "The Rains Came" for Fox.

"The Goose Woman" is one of the best remembered of the earlier Brown silents, though perhaps mostly for Louise Dresser who made a remarkable impression both on Hollywood and on audiences with her performance. (Brown used her as Catherine of Russia in his next film, "The Eagle"). In some ways the earlier Brown Universal "Smouldering Fires" (which we have shown earlier in our series) is the better film, mainly because its slim and simple plot enables one to see what Brown is doing directorially to bring it all to life. "The Goose Woman" has a far stronger plot, but there are a lot of holes and weaknesses in that plot. However, Rotha (in "The Film Till Now") seems rather unfair when he praises the early portions of the film, but claims that in the last half both Brown and Dresser "fall to pieces". The script certainly does falter; a plot that has all the potential of an earlier "Sunset Boulevard" backs itself into a corner and finds a solution in a manner altogether too formulaised after the imaginative way in which Brown brought "Smouldering Fires" to a close. But these are primarily writing problems, and certainly there is no inconsistency in either Brown's direction or Dresser's playing. One other aspect is worth considering too: the revelation of the hero's illegitimacy must have had much greater impact in 1925 than it can possibly have today. Indeed, it terms of audience involvement it probably took precedence over the murder aspect of the story; thus a solution in which his problem is resolved was probably considered quite satisfactory.

One additional problem may well have been that that Rex Beach's story was suggested by the notorious Hall-Mills murder case earlier in the 20's, in which a New Jersey "Pig Woman" turned out to be a key witness. The murder, with decidedly unsavoury elements, was unsolved when the film went into production, so it had to exploit the situation - and the character - without running foul of the libel laws, and by coming up with its own solution. In many ways it is a very curious film, romantic and emotional about a theme that one can envision as a hard-bitten thirties' film made by Welles or Jerrold. Actually it was remade in the 30's by Rko under the title "The Past of Mary Holmes" (1933), although legal problems with the Rex Beach estate have kept it out of recent circulation. It was co-directed by Harlan Thompson and Slavko Vorkapich, and starred Helen Mackellar, Jean Arthur, Eric Linden and (presumably as the reporter) Skeets Gallagher. Trying to improve on the ending of the original, it had the Goose Woman playing detective and tracking down the killer herself.

Beautifully lit and photographed by Milton Moore (who also photographed the prior year's "He Who Gets Slapped" in which, coincidentally, Marc McDermott played an identical role, then very much his stock-in-trade), the film has much of the visual style of "Smouldering Fires", with interesting stress on detail, framing and closeups to suggest rather than to state outright via subtitle. (Oddly enough, Jim Tully once wrote a piece on Clarence Brown lauding the way he had "eliminated the closeup" from his work, and citing "The Goose Woman" as an example!) At times the film has almost the pace of a talkie, yet the cutting from closeup to closeup produces some interesting effects. Emotions always seem to be well under way in these scenes, and it almost looks as though Brown may have shot very long takes in order for the emotions to build naturally, and then used only the climactic moments.

This print was copied from an original two-toned 16mm print; the blue night scenes have a certain harshness in b/w, but the interior amber scenes reproduce perfectly. On the whole it is an extremely good print, and a good showcase for its three stars.

William K. Everson
Program ends approx. 10.35.
Discussion/Questions follow.