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Monday next, July 19: "THE DANCERS" (1925, dir: Janet Flynn) with George O'Brien, Alma Rubens, Hodge Bellamy; preceded by a Harry Langdon short, "The Shrimp", and an industry promotional short of the 30's, "The World Is Ours".

July 12 1971

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

"LES JEUX SONT FAITS" (Les Filmes Gides, 1947) Director: Jean Delannoy WKE
Original scenario by Jean Paul-Sartre, with dialogue by Sartre and Jacques Laurent Bost; Camera: Christian Matras; Art Direction, Pimenoff; Production Supervisor, Louis Wipf; Music: Georges Auric, 9 reels
With Micheline Presle, Marcel Pagliero, Charles Dullin, Marguerite Moreno, Colette Ripert, Fernand Fabre, Jacques Erwin, Jim Gerald, Guy Decombe, Mouloudji.

Although Sartre's defeatist existentialist philosophy influenced most of the purely dramatic and very downbeat French films of the post-World War Two period ("Les Portes de la Nuit" etc.) actual filming of his work was delayed until the later 40's. "Les Jeux Sont Faits" was his first foray into writing directly for the screen. It was not well-liked in Europe, where critics resented the fact that Sartre's ideas were mystical yet at the same time atheistic and/or anti-religious. It was not released in the U.S. until 1949, where the basic unfamiliarity with Sartre was a handicap; the film got tepid reviews and soon disappeared. It is however a beautiful production in many ways, scoring on its wry humor, its beautifully controlled performance from Micheline Presle, a surprisingly good one from Marcel Pagliero (whose dialogue had to be dubbed, since he spoke no French), and a hauntingly melancholic score from Georges Auric at his Wagnerian best. Despite the philosophic content on Sartre's dialogue, it is a film that is very easy to follow even in its unsubtitled form, particularly since it is so full of visual symbols (the repeated motif of a hand clutching at hair or fabric, signifying a desperate attempt to cling to life; the little dead end roadway between life and death, dead trees on one side, living ones on the other, emphasising the dividing line between life and death and the absence of half-measures). Thanks to the playing - and to Auric's score - the film is perhaps more persuading emotionally than it is intellectually, which is probably not what M. Sartre had in mind. It's a pessimistic film but - like a Keaton film - not a depressing one since the pessimism is taken for granted. And there are certainly moments of joyful comedy - particularly from the magnificent Marguerite Moreno, as the ante-room secretary to Sartre's particular heaven - or hell.