THINK SMART GIRLS (Universal, 1936; rei: 1937) Directed by Henry Koster
Pro: Charles R. Rogers; Ass. Prod: Joe Pasternak; camer: Joe Valentine;
music by Adele Comandini, Austin Parker; 8 reels.
With: Deanna Durbin, Marjorie Lord, Barbara Reed, Charles Winninger, Ray Milland, John
King, Alice Brady, Ernest Cossart, Maureen Auer, Robert Savanagh, Lucille Watson,
Nella Walker, Selma Jackson, Barbara Pepper, Albert Conti, Franklyn Naglebourne,
Robt. Homans, Heinie Conklin, Joyce Compton, John Hamilton, Wade Boteler, Lane Chandler

Although not strictly a musical in the accepted sense of the word - there are
only three vocals, and one of these is dragged in by the reels - "Three Smart
Girls" is nevertheless important in being the first of the highly popular Durbin
vehicles that were, in a sense, to steal much of the limelight from the
hitherto unchallenged (and far more elaborate) Astaire-Rogers films. For all
their musical virtually and skill, the Astaire-Rogers films had a kind of
irritating conceit and condescension to them. Their plot-lines were flimsy
almost to the point of derision, as though audiences would accept anything for
the privilege of being entertained by such perfectionists. The Durbin's, in
contrast, had genuine warmth and gaiety. As in most musicals, their plots were
also flimsy, but they were pleasingly flimsy. "Smart Girls" could certainly get
by on its overall charm, mild comedy and likeable performers. "Swing Time"
on the other hand would be a disaster without its music. Needless to say, the
formula couldn't last forever. After a year or two, the charm of the Durbin
films became forced and artificial too, and the Durbin mannerisms too calculating.
But for the first few films, the Durbin films were delightful. "Smart Girls" is
both typical and still rattling good entertainment - as well as being a kind of
monument to efficient type-casting. Most of our favorites from the 20's are
there, and all doing the kind of things we remember them doing. The girls them-
selves - all looking a little older and sexier than they were probably supposed to
- are all delightful. Barbara Read especially was a real charmer at this
stage, and it's sad to recall that within a few years she was playing
tough-nosy-stalkers - and not even playing them well. Even the story has a
certain sociological interest, being from that period in the late '30's when
most movie families seemed to belong to the international set, and took night-
clubbing and cruises and homes in Switzerland as a matter of course.

CLOSE HARMONY (Paramount, 1929) Directed by John Cromwell & Edward Sutherland;
story by Elzie Janis & Gene Markey; adaptation & dialogue, Percy Heath;
dialogue interpolations by John V.A. Weaver; Assoc. Prod: Albert Kaufman;
photographed by Roy Hunt; 7 reels.
With Nancy Carroll, Charles "Buddy" Rogers, Jack Oakie, Skeets Gallagher, Harry
Green, Baby Mack, Oscar, Wade Boteler, Thomas Jefferson, & Jean Harlow as an extra.

Had "Close Harmony" been made at Fox in the mid-'30's with Alice Faye and Jack
Haley, it would hardly be worth our attention today. But what was the formula in 1936
was by no means formula in 1929, and despite its fairly familiar stage
story, "Close Harmony" is an uncommonly good little musical drama for those early
days of sound. Some of the technical problems show through a little; a few
scenes were obviously shot silent and at the old speed, and occasionally
dialogue scenes seem a trifle under-planned. But at least once - in the taxi
scene, early in the film - this results in what appears to be a little ad-libbing
and the spontaneity is rather pleasing. For the rest, the film moves and is
surprisingly well-paced - much more effectively so than, for example, "Honey",
a somewhat later film that we ran earlier this year. Buddy Rogers comes over
extremely well and it's not hard to see why he was so popular for a while, and
lovely Nancy Carroll is a treat for eyes and ears as usual - even though one
rather torrid jazzy number is not the kind of song in which she is most at home.
The late 20's flavor is nicely caught in the backstreet and speakeasy scenes
again, there is an enjoyable impromptu feeling to some of the bits of business
- the main titles are peppy and imaginative, and it's fun picking out some of the
standard Paramount set (the boarding-house hallway for example is a holdover
from "Love 'Em and Leave 'Em"). But for movie buffs, perhaps the most enjoyable
aspect of all is that these stage shows are supposed to amount to movie
houses, in conjunction with the presentation of such Paramount films as "The
Wild Party", "Chinatown Nights" etc. Paramount show commendable restraint in
down-grading their product so that the stage show seems to be the thing. Just
imagine going to the Paramount Theatre in 1929 to see Clara Bow's "The Wild
Party" on screen, and Nancy Carroll on stage .... those were REALLY the days!