"The Voice of Hollywood" (Tiffany, 1929) One reel
With Bert Wheeler, Ken Maynard and Tarzan, Marge Kane, Aimee Semple McPherson, Marceline Day, Wesley Barry, Dorothy Jordan.

"The Voice of Hollywood" was a kind of second-string "Screen Snapshots" series, fairly popular in the early days of sound. As entertainment, most of them were pretty abysmal, since they seemed to operate on the theory that any film performer was a star, and it didn't really matter what he or she did as long as whatever it was could be seen and heard. Top-liners rarely seemed to be coaxed to appear in the series (other than Fairbanks and Pickford in an issue we ran a couple of months back), direction and rehearsals seemed to be nonexistent, and the overall appeal was to the extremely undiscriminating fan. However, photography and recording were surprisingly expert, and the series did unwittingly perform a valuable function in recording some of the final appearances of fading stars, as well as the early appearances of rising stars. This issue has two particularly bizarre interludes; one from Ken Maynard, confirming once again that he was the screen's first singing cowboy (although some of his movies confirmed it rather more unpleasantly; Ken's singing is easier to take when he isn't scratching away at a fiddle too!), and the other from Aimee Semple McPherson, trying to spread the gospel to picture and radio fans, saying nothing at all in the process, and emerging rather like a Louella Parsons who has gotten the call!

"Inki at the Circus" (Warner Brothers, 1946) Technicolor; one reel; director Charles M. Jones.

For a more detailed analysis of the curious and semi-surrealist "Inki and the Minnah Bird" cartoons, we refer you back to our notes of April 30 1963, when we ran "The Little Lion Hunter". This is more of the same, with the gags again deliberately anti-climactic, Inki still the Langdonish innocent, and the enigmatic Minnah Bird still a kind of pessimistic Destiny figure. Since humour is only incidental (although this one has more straight gags than others in the short series) it's still somewhat of a mystery as to why these cartoons were made, but they remain fascinating nonetheless.

"Them Thar Hills" (MGM, Hal Roach, 1934) 2 reels; directed by Charles Rogers; with Laurel & Hardy, Charlie Hall, Mae Busch, Billy Gilbert
"Tit for Tat" (MGM, 1934; relowers 1925) 2 reels; directed by Charles Rogers; with Laurel & Hardy, Charlie Hall, Mae Busch.

Laurel & Hardy frequently remade their own shorts, or reused individual gags, but here is the only case where one film was a deliberate sequel to another -- with the same cast and director on both. We've run both before, though not such good prints as tonight, but we've never shown them together. To my knowledge, no other society or theatre has ever coupled them either, and if Ray's Indian trilogy, or the Fanny-Karlus-Cesare can be linked up for monumental triple bills, then quite certainly this Laurel & Hardy duo rates it. Both films are among their better efforts, and both find the boys in superbly typical form -- starting out cheerfully and optimistically, with malice towards none, and winding up with their little world -- and that of their neighbor -- a complete shambles. The examples of controlled, disciplined mutual destruction are among the best they ever put on film. A standout moment in "Them Thar Hills" has Charlie Hall dousing Hardy in kerosene and borrowing a match from Laurel to set this human pyre aflame -- first allowing Hardy time for one of those magnificent pity-imploring stares at the audience.
concerned not so much with his own impending misfortune as he is hurt and uncomprehending at his friend’s cooperation in this indignity. "Tit for Tat" is faster, less subtle, but equally savage. Stan gets some of the best by-play, as in the lovely scene where he surveys the wreckage of a dozen watches and, fascinated, pockets a now quite useless gear-wheel. Hardy looks a trifle wan and slimmer than usual in "Tit for Tat"; presumably he was a little sick at the time. But his marvellous aplomb and gallantry are well to the fore regardless, especially in his courteous tiltings with Mae Busch.

--------------------

"EMPLOYEES' ENTRANCE" (Warner Bros., 1933) Directed by Roy Del Ruth
ScreenPlay by Robert Fresnell from a play by David Boehm; camera; Barney McGill; art director, Robert Haas, 3 reels.


Through the 40's and 50's, the stodgy and mediocre Roy Del Ruth films so outweighed the good or at least acceptable ones, that it was not unreasonable to dismiss him as pretty much of a hack. Then of course, his films of the 30's were largely unavailable for re-screening, and even those that seemed pretty good in retrospect were overshadowed by the more showy films of Wellman and LeRoy that stood the test of memory a little better.

But "Taxi" and "Blonde Crazy" made one sit up a little. Then came the marvellous "Blessed Event", and now "Employees Entrance" -- not quite up to the dynamic standards of "Blessed Event" perhaps, but still a fine piece of work. Like so very many Warner films of the early 30's, it's a stage derivation, but its pacing and its performances manage to hide that origin very neatly. (Since this comment applies to almost all of the Warner filmed plays, as opposed to Rko's filmed plays which remained plays, presumably at least some of the credit should go not solely to the individual directors, but to the well-oiled team of editors and writers who kept the Warner machines operating so efficiently).

Against a huge department store background, "Employees Entrance" mixes elements of "Grand Hotel", "Twelve O’Clock High" and "Executive Suite", but does it without any wasted time for psychological delvings. It's all done in rapid-fire development, like a slick magazine short story, all surface dramatics, but such intelligent dramatics and with sufficiently off-beat motivations and characterizations, that the lack of real depth is neither bothersome nor even very apparent. Warren William, a real Warner workhorse who switched from dramas like this to a "Gold Diggers" and thence to Perry Mason, is as powerful a performer as always, a second-string Barrowman perhaps, but an excellent actor nonetheless. (What a pleasure to watch mature actors at work again, as opposed to today's overaged juveniles (and under-aged juveniles, too) aimed solely at the teen-age market. Troy Donahue et al just wouldn't have had a chance in the 30's against Mesars, William, Warner Baxter, Edward G. Robinson etc. Never a great admirer of Loretta Young, I was here quite won over by her charm -- and perhaps largely by the fact that she has never looked lovelier. "Employees' Entrance" is a curiously parallel film to the same year's "42nd Street", and if it never manages to be quite as important, it's probably only because department stores haven't quite the drama or the excitement of a Broadway revue by Busby Berkeley!

--------------------

NEXT SUNDAY: 35mm SHOW, 9:30 a.m. at the NEW YORKER THEATRE
"20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA" (Universal, 1917 version) - and shorts.