"How To Succeed as a Gangster" (Wolper Productions, 1963) 3 reels
Narrator: Joseph Cotton

This entry, like most of Wolper's "Hollywood and the Movies" tv series, is slick but superficial and often grossly inaccurate, the narration written around easily available (Warner Brothers) footage. It's hard to admit, to take a theme and an approach on which you refuse to deviate, and then find the right footage to illustrate it. But, it can be done, and that's why NBC's Project 20 shows are always so much better than Wolper's. Back no mention at all is made of the silent gangster films, dating back to 1921. Differentiation is made between the good ones and the bad ones, scenes are taken right out of context to "prove" certain points, and often scenes are interest (e.g., "Angels With Dirty Faces" and "Two Seconds") to give the impression that they're from one film. Too, the impression is created that the gangster cycle ended for good at the end of the 30's, and it as much as says that Bogart, Cagney and Robinson never returned to the genre, quite ignoring "Key Largo", "White Heat" and many others. But it's all nostalgically tremendously enjoyable. The scenes are all well selected (presumably the fine hand of Don Miller is largely responsible), and the juxtaposition of fast-cut shots of Cagney manhandling his women, or of Pat O'Brien as the eternal kindly warden or priest, are genuinely amusing and make valid points. All of the old W.C.gang is represented, via such films as "Public Enemy", "Little Caesar", "No Way to Hell", "20,000 Years in Sing Sing" and its remake, "Castle on the Hudson" and many others. Or little value historically, it's still a wonderfully enjoyable romp.

"THE QUEEN OF SPADES" (Associated British-Fathe, 1949) Dir: Thorold Dickinson Produced by Anatole De Grunwald; Associate Producer, Jack Clayton; Screenplay by Rodney Ackland and Arthur Boys from the story by Anton Pushkin; Music: Georges Auric; Camera: Otto Heller; Art Director: William Kellner; Editor: Vladimir Wilkins; 10 reels.

Like Kurnau's "Sunrise", "The Queen of Spades" is a deliberate and conscious attempt at a "Prestige Art Film", and like "Sunrise" (and unlike most other such efforts) it pays off beautifully. True, one is aware that Wilkins is copying Russian editing here, and Cocteau there. And the sets, unlike Von Sternberg's in "The Scarlet Empress", give the impression of being sets. They are lavish and bizarre, but one always has the feeling that everything they built is right in front of the camera, and were the camera to pan a bit too far it would pick up a blank wall or the studio cafeteria. But since the whole thing is such an essay in style and technique it never seems to matter much, nor does the occasional borrowing. The early sequence where the young Countess visits the mysterious mansion to sell her soul is pure Cocteau, an impression heightened by Auric's music -- but again, it works so well, no what matter? As a wonderfully florid exercise in bizarre fantasy and stylish horror, it still ranks as one of the movies' most impressive efforts, along with "Dead of Night", Tournier's"The Devil's Hand", Dreyer's "Vampyr", and some of the best silent German films. Some little bits of symbolism -- the spider's web for example -- are just a bit too obvious perhaps, but such sins are soon forgiven in the face of such lovely camerawork (constantly mobile, often even clinging Max Ophuls!), the imaginative use of repetition of the use of the rustling gown as a motif works beautifully here, while the same repetition in Lean's "Madeleine" became merely a trick, and, a few too wearisome British accents apart, the generally first-class acting, the role of the ambitious Captain is as much of a tour-de-force as the forgermaster in "The Bells" (done on screen by Lionel Barrymore), and Anton Walbrook plays it beautifully. Perhaps the only real let-down is the falling back on a rather tiresome montage to wind up the already sufficiently dramatic climactic card-game. It seems too patently and lazily borrowed from the ending of "Dead of Night", but otherwise "The Queen of Spades" is superb, and undignified though Kurnau and Dickinson might consider such a description, it's a real dolly of a horror film!