"BROADWAY BABIES" (First National, 1929) Directed by Mervyn LeRoy
Presented by Richard Bowland; produced by Robert North; screenplay by Kayne Kattner-Johnson and Franklin C. Bevan from the script; cameraman: Sol Polito; special photography, Alvin Knaehitel; Art Director, Jack Okey; Song numbers by Al Bryan, George Meyer, Grant Clarke and Harry Akst; Vitaphone Orchestra conducted by Leo Forbstein, 7 reels.
With Alice White, Charles Delaney, Sally Eilers, Fred Kohler sr., Miriam Byrom, Bodil Rosing, Maurice Black, Louis Natheaux, Jocelyn Lee, Tom Dugan, Eddie Dean.

No wonder poor Carl Laemmle got hot and bothered in 1929, and took out full page ads in the trade papers to proclaim that his "Broadway" based on the hit play, was the only genuine article, and that all those pirates who were putting the word "Broadway" into their title were just trying to cash in on his enterprise. If many of the other imitations were like "Broadway Babies" perhaps he had a point, for certainly this film is far from subtle in its "borrowing" from the original. Even the basic set-up of the two hoarders on the way up, and a powerful gangster trying to make himself the "protector" of the girl, stems from "Broadway". However, though it's less opulent and bizarre than the Universal original, this is a surprisingly snappy and well-paced picture directed with vigor, and an astrophing atmosphere rather than the previous year's "Lights of New York". If its gangster sub-plot seems a little heavy-handed and lacking in traditional action, remember that this was before the gangster cycle proper got under way, and mere menace was usually considered enough. However, there's some quite spectacular novelty value in seeing Fred Kohler sr. as a "good bad man", almost in the later Wallace Beery mould.
The musical score gets a little old-fashioned and over-emphatic in the gangster episodes, but the continuous and peppy music throughout helps it a great deal. The numbers, if hardly memorable, are certainly sprightly, and the silent version "Broadway Babies" must have suffered through the lack of them. Even in this 100% all-talke version however, there is still a great deal of reliance placed on titles. It's good to see Alice White in a major role, and the film has a lot of genuine and pleasing flavor of the period, including shots of theatre marquees playing such temptingDivision: The Letter". The film's last shot, of the curtain coming down and the audience leaving as their show - and ours - is over, is rather a nice touch too. The print is in excellent condition, having just been made up from the original negatives, and is very probably the only print there is of this subject.

"THE NARROW CORNER" (Warner Bros., 1933) Directed by Alfred E. Green; screenplay by Robert Presnell from the story by Somerset Maugham; camera: Tony Gaudio; 7 reels.

A minor classic from the early 30's, and a film that we've been trying to acquire for several years (I remembered it vividly from childhood, and it's good to see that it more than lives up to fond memories of it) "The Narrow Corner" is one of those films that is so good that one just cannot understand its obscurity. Not that it is a filmic masterpiece; Alfred E. Green has always been a good, versatile and under-rated director, and this is well up to standard; but "The Narrow Corner" scoring most on its literary merits. A powerful, gutted story to begin with, is followed Maugham's original version clearly: the script is taut and tight, with no wasted footage; the dialogue raw and pithy; the characters fascinating, marvellously drawn, and flawlessly cast - most especially Dudley Digges and Arthur Hohl. What starts as a seemingly routine melodrama of regeneration in the East Indies soon develops into something much more, with more than a dash of Joseph Conrad in its makeup too. It has action, melodrama and colorful character studies, but I deliberately want to say little about them, as so much of the power of a film like this comes in how the story begins, and that it will do all that it should in order to say that, among the top ten. Its dialogue very clearly places it in the pre-Code era! Incidentally, it was remade by Warners in 1936 under the title "Isle of Fury", rather effectively type-cast with Bogart, Margaret Lindsay, Donald Woods and Paul Graetz in the leads, but strictly a program "B" and with none of the subtlety and punch of this version.

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NOTE: Although definitely on route, the 35mm Buck Jones and Tom Milne westerns have not yet arrived, so, since I will now be away for about a month, our Sunday morning screenings of them will have to wait until August.