Mon. day next, May 17: Two "lost" films: King Vidor's "BIRD OF PARADISE" (1932) with Joel McCrea, Dolores del Rio; preceded by "THE SWEETHEART OF SIGMA CHI" (1936) with Buster Crabbe, Charles Starrett, Mary Carlisle, Betty Creble.

May 10 1971
An evening of Crime
The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

"LET 'EM HAVE IT" (United Artists - Edward Small - Reliance, 1935) Directed by Sam Wood; screenplay by Joseph Moncure March and Riner Harris, with additional dialogue by Al Boasberg; Asst. Director, Nate Walt; Camera, Peverall Marley and Robert Planck; 12 reels (4)


"Let 'Em Have It" was both one of the cycle of "reformed" gangster epics with the emphasis shifted to the criminals rather than the glamour of the criminal, and also one of those films reflecting in its title, the FBI's much publicized "get tough" attitude in the war on crime. Others included "Muss 'Em Up", "Don't Turn 'Em Loose", "Treat 'Em Rough" and "Show Them No Mercy". (Erratum: "Treat 'Em Rough" is a later, silent film, and shouldn't be included in this list!). It overlaps a great deal into Warners' "G-Men" of the same year, though it is rather slower-paced, perhaps stronger on story, and with a greater emphasis on what, for 1935 at least, was almost semi-documentary material. Sam Wood, never a very inspired or exciting director, gets through them with zest-vogues at MGM (he made the famous Brothers' "Night at the Opera" the same year) doesn't seem to have the zip or vigor necessary for this kind of film, but it is strong enough on plot, incident and cast to make up for his rather maddening direction, and the unnecessary semi-comedy dithersings of Alice Brady, a fine actress too often wasted in this kind of role. The opening montage makes good use of stock action scenes from "Scarface" by the way. The film is copyrighted at 12 reels, and was physically broken down into 12 35mm reels for theaters, but actually its running time was only ninety minutes - or 84 reels of maximum length. Our print is fully complete, and not the release print which was (carefully) aborn of some 20 minutes, primarily of the FBI training footage. Needless to say, the FBI men are all fine, idealistic, upstanding young fellows, while the crooks are shifty-eyed, mean and sneaky, pillaging the Warner studies of most of the finks and stooges not working that month. Like most Ed Small productions, it's commonplace, but handsomely presented with every dollar expended showing up on the screen.

"HOW I'LL TELL" (Fox, 1934) Directed and written by Edwin Burke, from the book by Mrs. Arnold Rothstein, a Winfield Sheehan production; Camera, Ernest Palmer; Musical Score, Harry Cohn; Art Directors, Anthony Berlu and David Buttolph; 8 reels


One of the most elaborately mounted and also one of the best of the (generally) not very good and often rather easily Spencer Tracy melodramas for Fox in the early 30's, "How I'll Tell" is so well directed by Edwin Burke that it is more than ever a mystery that this should have been his only film - except for the possible re-writing and re-direction of segments of Stroheim's "Walking Down Broadway". Allegedly it departs quite a bit from the true facts of the Arnold Rothstein case, but presumably it does retain the spirit of his novel. Like Irene Castle, whose biography was both sumptuous and tasteless, it shifts the emphasis to tall everything from her point of view, and it isn't always believable. (One also doesn't blame Spencer too much for his implausibility, though he seems to have had an enviable set-up all around!) It's a well-paced and exciting film, often quite moving, and particularly well acted by Tracy in one of his best performances.

The sound is at times quiet, at others distorted, but always at least adequate; anyway, it is now an ingnomious from the only surviving 35mm print, from which this copy was made. All reviews and release records give the official running time as being about nine minutes shorter than this print, therefore this may be longer than the release version, although it's more likely that the recorded release length was erroneous, as often happens. 

--- Wm. E. Evenson ---