PLEASE NOTE: tonight's is the last show on our current schedule. The Dec. 15th program has been cancelled due to a conflict with a Robert Wise retrospective in this auditorium. Spring schedules will be mailed later this month.

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

Dec. 1, 1975

Two 1937 melodramas

I PROMISE TO PAY (Columbia, 1937) Directed by D. Ross Lederman; Associate Prod., Myles Connolly; Screenplay, Harry McCall Jr., Lionel Houser; Camera, Lucien Ballard; 7 reels

Columbia made some really fine little programmers in the late 30's, films like "Let Us Live" and "Blind Alley" which, by virtue of good scripts and casts, were virtually up to "A" standards even though they had "B" running times. And of course it was those short, taut, lean running-times that were one of the major assets. The success of these films is all the more remarkable when one recalls how strictly "B" their real cheapies were. "I Promise to Pay" is a good example of these intelligent programmers, a good solid gangster film, not especially novel, but with more stress on characterization and motivation (both good guys and bad guys) than usual, and less on sheer action. It was directed briskly by D. Ross Lederman, who always kept his small thrillers nicely on the move, and made some exceptionally good "B" westerns (Tim McCoy, Dick Foran) as well. If there is any flaw in "I Promise to Pay", it is in details of scripting. Hollywood just never really knew very much about ordinary day-to-day working and living conditions. Just look at "Confidentially Connie" to get an idea of MGM's idea of making ends meet! "I Promise to Pay" goes to rather the other extreme; it is generally honest and realistic, but still shows a lack of intimate knowledge of what a dollar is really worth. Even in the 30's, it is doubtful that a whole family could enjoy a week's vacation in the country - fares, accommodation, everything - for $50; or that they could pack up, move and start fresh somewhere else on savings of $15 or less! The Grand Jury room seems to suffer from delusions of grandeur, and for all the dialogue about stifling heat and no air-conditioning, the stars still aren't allowed to show perspiration on their shirts! But these are very minor quibbles and unfair in a film that succeeds far better, within its budgetary limitations, than many far more generously endowed productions.

JUMP FOR GLORY (Criterion-United Artists, 1937) Directed by Raoul Walsh;
Produced by Marcel Hellman; screenplay by John Meehan from the novel by Gordon McConnell; Camera, Victor Arsenide; Additional dialogue, Harold French; 8 rls

Released in the US as "When Thief Meets Thief" (the original title is better if less commercial, though its appropriateness isn't apparent until the closing reel), "Jump for Glory" hasn't been seen in its complete form for some 25 years. At the last Huff showing (1964) and at the MOMA Walsh cycle we had to be content with the one-hour tv version -- "trimmed" by the simple expedient of lopping off the first third! It's good to have the full version back; it's the best of a trio of films that Fairbanks produced in England in the mid-30's, and also one of the best of Walsh's mid-30's films. The use of "best" shouldn't raise hopes too high, though I think it's justified, but it is a good, solid, enjoyable film, with Walsh bringing to it considerable Hollywood expertise and thus making it a slicker film than it would have been with most British directors. The American settings are hardly completely convincing, but it's a film that moves, has a good plot, and a trio of very pleasant and professional stars. Walsh's Hollywood career in the mid-30's -- between the free-wheeling "The Bowery" and "The Roaring 20's" -- was in the doldrums, hampered by the Production Code, and 