Tonight's program is the last on the current schedule. The Spring schedule will be mailed out in early January; next program is scheduled for the last Monday in January.

As attendees at the last three programs will be aware, the print of WITHOUT REGRETS is not available tonight due to the illness and inaccessibility of its owner; we'll hope to re-schedule early in the Spring.

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

December 19, 1977

HIS GREATEST GAMBLE (Rko Radio, 1934) Directed by John S. Robertson; Produced by Pandro S. Berman; Associate Producer, Hyles Connolly; Screenplay by Sidney Buchman and Harry Hervey from a story by Salisbury Field; Camera, Ted Tetzlaff; Music, Max Steiner; 72 minutes.


John S. Robertson, generally associated with the silents and most specifically with Barrymore's "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde", was actually quite prolific in the sound period, up to 1935. "His Greatest Gamble" is a rather pleasing film, with much of the larger-than-life quality of the silents, yet done with a restraint that makes its potentially rather wild material fairly believable and often quite touching. Setting up much of its story and characters before the film begins, so that it gets under way at full throttle, is quite a neat device since it gives little time to question motives or logic. The story is a sort of compression of "Hellstrobe Harry" and "Stella Dallas", and provides that rarity, a soap opera with a male protagonist. While the dramatic material is strongest in the first half, which has some genuine surprises, the second half has Dorothy Wilson as more than ample compensation. Had the film been made on Rko's talkiest, most turgid period (1930-31) it might have been a rather lethargic affair; by 1934 however, Rko's films had a slicker, faster-paced feel to them, and "His Greatest Gamble" moves along quite well. The title doesn't have a great deal to do with the plot, and suggests that Rko were hoping that exhibitors and public alike would buy it more readily as the melodrama it's title suggested it might be.

HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD (Paramount, 1936) Directed by Robert Florey; Produced by A.M. Botsford; Screenplay by Marguerite Morris from a story by Faith Thomas; Camera, Karl Strauss; Music, Boris Morros; 70 minutes.


Note: Louise Brooks is often credited as appearing in this film, but was never in it.

Oddly enough, at the time "Hollywood Boulevard" was dismissed as a "hoary melodrama" and an unlikely piece of hokum. Yet it anticipates the "Confidential" era, often with surprising accuracy, and in addition is a rather sour look at Hollywood in the Billy Wilder manner. Perhaps it should have been tackled as the much more ambitious project it deserved to be even then; as a programmer, it probably didn't deliver the easily digestible action and obvious melodrama that audiences expected. (Although I remember being very impressed with it in '36, and surprised it wasn't getting more attention). Apart from Robert Cummings, who is frankly absurd, it's well cast and well acted. John Halliday is as solid as always (since his screen character carries the initial of J.B. one can conjecture without too much difficulty about the inspiration of his role!), Mae Marsh has a good part, and there's the usual almost dazzling style from Robert Florey, backed up by excellent Strauss camerawork. A minor, but offset, efficient and eminently worthwhile little picture.