"I COVER THE WATERFRONT" (United Artists-Rellance, 1933)
Directed by James Cruze; produced by Edward Small; screenplay by Wells Root from the book of the same title by Max Miller;
Camera: Ray June; Asst. Director, Vernon Keesys.
With: Ben Lyon, Claudette Colbert, Ernest Torrence, Hobart Cavanagh, Maurice Black, Furnell Pratt, Harry Berry, Yosemite, George Humbert, Bosita Marsini, Claudia Colin, Al Hill, Wifrid Lucas.

James Cruze, at one time the highest-paid director in Hollywood, and a success with both critics and the boxoffice via such 20's films as "The Covered Wagon", today seems very much of an enigma. Boxoffice and historic landmarks or not, his silent films seem stodgy and uncinematic, while his best films lie almost obscured among his many but little noted talkies. "I Cover the Waterfront" - incidentally, also the last film of that fine character actor Ernest Torrence, who died right after it was released - is not only one of Cruze's best films, it shows how basically more suited he was to the sound medium. It's a lively melodrama, one of that offshoot of the gangster cycle that, although dealing with the accepted rackets (bootlegging, gambling, dope, smuggling) managed to avoid uniformity and still retain the punch and pace so typical of the period. What impresses most about it, and especially in view of the deliberate sensationalism of such current films as "The Detective", is its effective and casual use of underplayed shock. It's biting, cynical, pre-Code with a vengeance in its attitudes to sex, crime and groups, yet with goals of quiet, subdued, peppered, peppered-peacoiled dialogue, and narrative terseness or unduly explicit in detail. The only obvious concession made is that an obvious bordello is referred to as a) a boarding house, and b) a speakeasy! A new print from the original negative, it is fully complete, though minor sound-track damage through the years gives an occasional harshness to some of the dialogue. A rough and ready and thoroughly enjoyable film, it also boasts a lovely musical score, and three excellent leading performances. The charm and realism of Claudette Colbert's performance is especially notable; despite her more elaborate vehicles at Paramount, this is really one of the best things she ever did.

"PARAMOUNT ON PARADE" (1929; Excerpt)
For the Ruth Chatterton devotees, the curious Chatterton-Fredric March sketch from Paramount's contribution to the big all-star musical revue cycle of 1929/30.

"FRISCO JENNY" (First National, 1933) Directed by William Wellman
Screenplay by Wilson Mizner and Robert Lord from a story by Gerald Beaumont, Lillie Hayward and John Francis Larkin; Camera: Sid Hickox

"Frisco Jenny" starts out like an old-fashioned melodrama in the "Old San Francisco" tradition. However, the expected earthquake comes early in the picture, and a well done sequence of minor spectacle it is too, with one marvelous shot of the bottom - literally - dropping out of a street. There is some stock footage from the but silent "Old San Francisco" including that startling modern shot of a building being demolished, but most of it is new. From there on in however, it becomes apparent that we're in for another variation on "Madame X", and one as close to it as possible without becoming outright plagiarism. It's theatrical and predictable, but it moves, both in terms of film style and in the actual ground that it covers, for it winds up in the gangster and prohibition era. Considering how pat the script is, it is often quite surprisingly moving, thanks mainly to one of Ruth Chatterton's most sensitive performances. It is it only briefly, and Donald Cook is again the self-righteous do-gooder, and, as in "The Public Enemy", he seems rather a prig today. The children playing Cook in various stages of growing up are all singularly obnoxious, and this does tend to work against the emotional appeal a little. Highlight sequence is a delightful business meeting of the various Madames working for Miss Chatterton, a model of how to be explicit without being offensive! As in "Safe in Hell" (shown here two seasons back) Wellman uses some rather curious camera angles at times - the elbow of a violinist for example used to open and close one scene - but on the whole the approach works mano-like rather than arty, appropriately full-blooded rather than subtle. It's one of the better lesser-known Wellmans. --Whe