"Three Cornered Moon" is one of those ill-fated films like "Laughton" which has no great artistic or boxoffice reputation, but which is remembered with enthusiasm by a handful of discerning people who saw it when it was new and have never forgotten its impact. Yet today it is no longer quite the same film; the production is still polished, the dialogue still good, the performances effective; but there is a feeling that time has taken its toll, and that the film is no longer of its own initial impact. Fresh at the time, it has since become a genre -- and a genre that veered more and more to crazy comedy as time went by. But if at times it tends to seem stagey today, and lacking in the expected wit, pause to consider by how many years it precedes all those depression era comedies about wacky families suddenly caught in financial straights. It is three years ahead of "My Man Godfrey", four ahead of "Call it a Day", five ahead of "Herrily We Live" and "You Can't Take it With You", and too; those later films could call upon the expertise of Capra, Hawks, Hawks, Powell; for basic dishonesties beneath a neatly wrapped entertainment package. What does survive, and remarkably well, is its basic honesty, and this in a period when the general trend in comedy was to sidestep the hard facts of the depression in favor of a "Trouble in Paradise". It is a sober film with a realistic set of values about dollars and cents, and a happy but by no means hopeful ending that is a far cry from the Cinderella solution in "My Man Godfrey". While comedy does preciously big laughs seem to have been almost deliberately soft-pedalled, Mary Boland's grand lines are practically throwaways, while Lyda Roberti's comic maid is never allowed to dominate scenes as did Jean Dixon in "Godfrey". As a result, the tragi-comedy of life maintains an even keel, and the moments of high drama are all the more effective because the film doesn't have to shift gears to accommodate them. Incidentally, Joan Marsh - a second-string Mary Carlisle - is delightful as a minor vamp, and reveals some quite spectacular cleavage, a talent that was singularly unexploited in her later days as a Republic serial heroine!


One of the movies that LeRoy directed for First National in 1932, "Three on a Match" is unusually carefully-made for a mere six-reeler, starting out with a charming opening reel that covers a whole decade by intercutting old newreels and overlaying songs of the period. Thereafter, like Wellman's "Night Nurse", it occasionally strays into unpleasant "old events" (Warner's had a fondness for casual sub-plots involving drug addicts and misbehaved children), but it has a warmth and poignancy that usually comes to the rescue in time. Like so many early 30's movies, its milieu is realistically that of the depression, but it offers a kind of inviolate escapism by showing that the rich have more than their share of woes, and that real problems spring more from human weaknesses than from economic ones. Just as "22nd Street" inspired optimism, so did films like "Three on a Match" suggest that things can't be so tough after all; best look at all the current problems that you're avoiding daily cut and paced, less oppressive in its pictorial composition than was LeRoy's custom at that time, and climaxed by a real shocker, "Three on a Match" is still a vivid little picture, and a fascinating glimpse of a lot of top-liners working their way upwards. Bogart in a small role more than makes his weight felt, and Miss Davis - still a starlet in the original sense of the word - is both charming and eye-catching in the several lingering and tautening suit shots which were standard star-building exercises for the Misses Blondell, Stanwyck and other young ladies on the lot.