

"THREE CORNERED MOON" (Paramount, 1933) Directed by Elliott Nugent
Screenplay by S.K. Lauren and Ray Harris from a play by Gertrude
Tokonogy; Camera: Leon Shamroy; a B.P. Schulberg production; 8 rls.
With Claudette Colbert, Richard Arlen, Mary Boland, Wallace Ford, Tom
Brown, Lyda Roberti, William Bakewell, Hardie Albright, Joan Marsh, Sam
Hardy, Clara Blandick, Joe Sawyer, Leonid Kinskey, Elliott Nugent, Ed Garga:

"Three Cornered Moon" is one of those ill-fated films like "Laughter" 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; what is missing, and through no fault of its own, is that all-important 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 straits. It is three years ahead of "My Man Godfrey", four ahead of "Call it a Day", five ahead of "Merrily We Live" and "You Can't Take it With You". And too, those later films could call upon the expertise of Capra and LaCava, Powell and Lombard, to disguise their 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 the elegance 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 predominate, opportunities for 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!

"THREE ON A MATCH" (First National, 1932) Directed by Mervyn LeRoy
Screenplay by Lucien Hubbard from an original story by Kubec
Glasmon and John Bright; Camera: Sol Polito; 6 reels
With: Warren William, Joan Blondell, Ann Dvorak, Bette Davis, Lyle
Talbot, Humphrey Bogart, Edward Arnold, Jack LaRue, Allen Jenkins,
Grant Mitchell, Sheila Terry, Glenda Farrell, Clara Blandick, Frankie
Darro, Dawn O'Day (Ann Shirley), Virginia Davis, Buster Phelps, Betty
Carrs, Brooks Benedict, Blanche Frederici, Herman Bing, Hardie
Albright, Spencer Charters, Frank Moran, Stanley Price.

One of six movies that LeRoy directed for First National in 1933, "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 newsreels and overlaying songs of the period. Thereafter, like Wellman's "Night Nurse", it occasionally strays into unpleasant and nasty byways (Warners had a fondness for casual sub-plots involving drug addicts and mistreated 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 inverted 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 "42nd Street" inspired optimism, so did films like "Three on a Match" suggest that things couldn't be so tough after all; just look at all the current problems that you've avoided! Splendidly 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 lingerie and bathing suit shots which were standard star-building exercises for the Misses Blondell, Stanwyck and other young ladies on the lot.

William K. Everson