"TWO SECONDS" (First National, 1932) Directed by Mervyn LeRoy
Scenario by Harvey Thaw from a play by Lester Elliott; camera, Sol Polito; 7 reels

A raw little sex melodrama, told in flashback from the electric chair, "Two Seconds" runs for only a tight 68 minutes, but even so a goodly portion of the development is told in lengthy two-person conversation scenes. The linking scenes laid in street, dance hall, prison etc., provide enough variety and change of pace to prevent the film from seeming as talkative as it actually is, but don't altogether hide the theatrical origins. The one weakness of the film, and this isn't really a basis for criticism, is that it is strictly a film to be seen once only. The first time around, the shock effect of dialogue and situations, the ghoulish matter-of-factness of the warden, the zippy 30's wisecracks and nostalgic musical themes, and the overall surface power tend to grab hold of one. The second time around alas, one realises how basically filmy is its plot structure, and how pointless Robinson's final speech. And Robinson himself becomes almost a parody of his screen image in his big semi-mad scene, where he gestures, puffs at cigarettes, whirls around, stares bug-eyed at the camera, and generally behaves for all the world like a Robinson imitator. The impression one gets is of a talented and promising but not yet really good actor having the time of his life with a tour-de-force role. It is hard to see how such overdone stunt sequences follow by a year Robinson's brilliant earlier collaboration with Mervyn LeRoy in "Five Star Final". Presumably, both artists - rushed by Warners from important films to programmers and back again - just didn't care enough about "Two Seconds" to give it the time and care they felt it deserved. But, again, this attitude doesn't really come through on the first showing, when both the depth and the "fun" aspects of the film quite certainly dominate.

"I LOVED A WOMAN" (First National, 1933) Directed by Alfred E. Green
Screenplay by Sidney Sutherland & Charles Kenyon from a story by David Karsner; Camera, James Van Trees; 9 reels

We are preceding "I Loved a Woman" with its original very hard-sell trailer, thus giving you an opportunity to decide how many of its promises it actually delivers, but more importantly to see how Warners rather desperately tried to mould the Robinson image into a "woman's picture" pattern. The film is solid, careful and tasteful, a typical Alfred E. Green film, though perhaps not quite the dynamic mixture of "Citizen Kane" and "So Big" that the trailer seems to indicate! Perhaps what lets the film down most is the too-neatly contrived and over-simplified script, almost paralleling the juvenile level "history" of Flynn's "Robin Hood". It's difficult to believe in a Robinson who has such lines as "I'm half-mad with ambition" or who casually tells his secretary that he thinks he'll corner the Argentine grain market the next morning. When the bottom drops out of the canned-beef racket one expects to see an artful montage of a ruined and broken Robinson spending his last years eating canned-beef sandwiches from an unending pile of cans, rather like Stan Laurel with his 20-year accumulation of canned beans in "Blockheads". Because these thoughts do intrude rather constantly, one can never be moved by Robinson's plight as one was, for example, by Edward Arnold in "Diamond Jim" and "Sutter's Gold", not dis-similar bio films, and not markedly more accurate, but better written on their own particular level of dramatic hoke. Nevertheless, "I Loved a Woman" is a skillfully-made big star vehicle, beautifully typical of its genre, and undoubtedly more effective in its day than now, when we have had more time to witness Warren William, Edward Arnold and of course Robinson himself following the familiar path to power - and collapse.

William K. Everson