"BLOOD MONEY" (20th Century-United Artists, 1933) Directed by Rowland Brown; written by Brown and Hal Long; Camera, James Van Trees; Musical Director, Alfred Newman; editor, Lloyd Nosler; 6 reels

Rowland Brown, one of the more interesting new writers/directors of the early 1930's, unfortunately made the mistake of socking a producer and getting himself permanently blacklisted as a director. He reverted to some entirely on-the-ball melodrama, developing many of the tricks of extremely interesting melodramas, all of them off-beat tangents to the gangster cycle. "Hell's Highway", a very formal, stylized chain-gang film, ran some seasons back; "Quick Millions" (with Spencer Tracy) was revived at the New Yorker earlier this year, and is back in periodic circulation; and tonight's film is his third and last. While each film is quite different in mood, all have a common denominator of underplaying and understatement that was quite unique in a period when the gangster film was if anything too hard-hitting and positive in its definitions of good and evil. There was less of the physical action in Brown's films, and a seemingly deliberate attempt to slow down pace; he would often let his scenes run past their climax, to wrap up or fadeout on an inconsequential note with a piece of unresolved "business" or an intentionally nondescript line. While this may not have been good showmanship, it did give his films the untidy reality of life. "Blood Money," despite its grim title, has a rather engaging set of underworld characters who, it suggests, are no more corrupt than public officials and politicians, and a good deal more honorable within the rather different limits of their own world. It has little real suspense values, and the effect of the suspense-ending is perhaps accidentally lessened today by its extraordinary resemblance to a highlight comedy sequence in Buster Keaton's "Sherlock Junior." But it is all more than carried by the characters and the peppy dialogue. George Bancroft's he-man joviality always seemed a little artificial, and it perhaps seems more so here in a role that would normally (at that time) have been allocated to William Powell, John Barrymore or Warren William. But Frances Dee's thrill-hungry semi-nymphomaniac (a common screen role then, viz: Norma Shearer in "A Free Soul") is a delight, and reminds us what an exciting personality she was before she became typed in cold petrified roles. Apart from an appearance earlier in a short, "Blood Money" was Judith Anderson's first film.
--- INTERMISSION: 10 minutes ---

"WHAT PRICE HOLLYWOOD?" (Rko Radio, 1932) Director: George Cukor
A David O. Selznick-Foxfire S. Berman production; Scenario by Rowland Brown Gene Power and James M. Hogan, from a story by Adela Rogers St. John; Camera, Charles Rosher; Music by Max Steiner;
MONTAGE Effects, Slavko Vorkapich; 9 reels

Though filmically far less dynamic, "What Price Hollywood?" certainly ranks with "Bombshell" and "Sunset Boulevard" as one of the best and most honest movies about Hollywood. Apart from the cliché conception of the producer as played by Ratoff, it avoids most of the obvious traps and doesn't indulge in either name-dropping or "potted" film history. It is clearly a forerunner to "A Star is Born" (the second version of which was also done by Cukor) and has many parallels to it, although the real-life counterparts to the Gaynor-Nash, Garland-Mason crime (Haworth-Crane, la Rotta and John Bowers) were never as big or as important as the two versions of "Star" suggested. "What Price Hollywood?" is rather slow and measured, tasteful but careful, scoring on the sincerity of its performances (Lowell Sherman, himself a director as well as an actor, especially) but faltering a little in following the then-prevalent belief that incidental music was false & unreal. "Paradise" is used most effectively in the opening, but its use is justified only by revealing that Connie Bennett is playing the piece on a gramophone. Thereafter music is introduced only in the deliberately "unreal" transitional montages of Vorkapich - which need them less than the dramatic moments. Incidentally, in such a film it is rather poignant to find directorial and thespic has-beens like King Baggott and Bryant Washburn in unbilled bit roles. --K.Everson