"SHOW GIRL IN HOLLYWOOD" (First National, 1930) Director: Mervyn LeRoy
Scenario: Harry Tash and James A. Starr from "Hollywood Girl" by J.P. McEvoy; Camera: Sol Polito; 80 minutes

One of the films that LeRoy directed in 1930 ("Little Caesar" being the most famous) "Show Girl in Hollywood" is an old but very satisfying film. It starts slowly, but builds steadily, and even though it never becomes a major work either as a musical or as a drama, it is a film that one remembers. Although it has no pretensions to the cynical reality of a film like "Sunset Boulevard", it is still one of the most honest pictures about day-to-day Hollywood (at least as it was then) and moreover, unlike most such films it seems "right" in all its details. It is not reconstructing Hollywood's past, but using contemporary Hollywood as a background, and since 1930 was a year of great technological change in Hollywood, it even has a mildly documentarian value in its coverage of production details such as the old "sweat-box" camera. Herman Bing, not yet a comedy specialist literally plays himself as an assistant director (he came to this country in that capacity with F.W. Murnau). And in these days when stars like Doris Day hang on like grim death to their stardom (one feels that, like Margo in "Lost Horizon", they will probably crumble and decay should they ever leave the protection of Hollywood and its strange magic formulae), it's a settling reminder that in the earlier days of the movies, a female star could be considered a has-been once she was past 30. In this role, former Griffith star Blanche Sweet gives a beautiful and touching performance, her attempted suicide scene both a dramatic highlight and a kind of homage to the purely pictorial style of film-making that had largely vanished with the coming of sound. The film has pace and zip, good musical numbers and dialogue, and is generally a remarkably "modern" film for that transitional period. The final scene, originally in Technicolor today unfortunately exists only in black-and-white. Lastly, it is worth commenting on the fact that Alice White's role here was oddly prophetic. She had limited talent but a less limited personality; she might have emulated the success of Joan Blondell had not her aggression and ego stood in the way, making her so difficult to deal with than even a director like LeRoy - who used her a great deal - finally gave up on her.

"FIVE STAR FINAL" (First National, 1931) Directed by Mervyn LeRoy
Screenplay by Byron Morgan from a play by Louis Weitzenhorn;
Camera: Sol Polito; 85 minutes
Together with "The Front Page", "Five Star Final" remains the best of the hard-hitting and loosely "social" newspaper melodramas of the early sound period. Despite a preponderance of dialogue, one hardly ever thinks of it as a filmed play. The giveaways are minor: the office boy, used for traditional comedy scenes and to plant vital information some of the faintly stagey "curtain" scenes, as in the sequence where H.B. Warner realises he has been betrayed by the bogus minister. But these moments are few; the pacing is quite dynamic, and what must have been a difficult and even tedious sequence on stage (when they change the telephone becomes both poignanL and exciting due to skilful use of a split screen. The dialogue - racy, free-wheeling, powerful - is top drawer all the way, and the performances match it. Karloff is tremendously effective (if theatrical) as a former divinity student ousted from that profession for sexual degeneracy! Marian Marsh alone is out-classed; why did Warners always insist on putting that pretty face but mild acting ability against such great talents as John Barrymore, William Powell or Robinson? Robinson's performance here is one of his best, and a vast and subtle improvement on his effective but superficial work in "Little Caesar" the year before. It's a superbly controlled performance, largely underplayed, but steadily building until it explodes in one of those rising crescendo curtain speeches that - in the hands of players like Robinson, Lee Tracy and Pat O'Brien - used to be such a vital part of the theatre and the movies.

--- Wm. K. Sversen ---