"THE HALF-NAKED TRUTH" (Kko Radio, 1932) Directed by Gregory LaCava
Executive Producer, David O. Selznick; Assoc. Producer, Pandro S. Berman; Screenplay by LaCava and Corey Ford from a story by Ben Markson and H.W. Shannon suggested by "PHANTOM FEMME" by Harry Reichenbeck; Camera, Bert Glennon; Musical, Max Steiner; 8 reels

Gregory La Cava, best remembered for the 1936 "My Man Godfrey," was a curiously directed, erratic, undisciplined, open in his contempt for front-office phonies. He was not well liked by the executive echelon, and yet for all of his apparently off-the-cuff methods of shooting, he did bring his films in efficiently, on time, on budget, and while they were rarely major blockbusters, they usually showed a decent profit. Tonight's double-bill affords an opportunity to see two widely different films made consecutively in his most prolific years, 1932-33. For reasons which we'll go into prior to the screening, "The Half-Naked Truth" achieved a near-notorious reputation at the time (unjustified then, almost inexcusable today) which somehow clung to it through the years. It has been shown virtually a lost film, seldom if ever even shown on television, and never revived theatrically. While a lesser satire of press-agentry than Lee Tracy's other 1932 film "Blessed Event" had been on columnists, newsmen and commercial radio, "The Half-Naked Truth" an enjoyable little frolic, LaCava's crackling pace and Tracy's rapid-fire dialogue keeping it on the move even when nothing very much is happening. As in many LaCava films, some elements are totally unexpected - as in the Lubitsch-like sequence where office noises somehow form a song - while an enjoyable bonus today is the quite extensive New York location work. Only in its climax does it disappoint a little, running out of steam and contenting itself with just tying up the loose ends instead of continuing to hit hard until the fade-out, as "Blessed Event" did. Too, it's fairly superficial as satires go, without the bite and honesty of "Nothing Sacred" - but it's still too enjoyable a comedy to have been relegated to a 40-year obscurity.

-- 10 Minute Intermission --

"GABRIEL OVER THE WHITE HOUSE" (MG M, 1933) Directed by Gregory LaCava
Scenario by Carey Wilson and Bertram Bloch from the anonymously-authored novel of the same title; Camera, Bert Glennon; 8 reels

Whatever one's individual reaction to "Gabriel Over the White House" (and it is worth re-stressing that it is not an individual outcry, but one of a small but quite powerful group of near-Fascist films of the early 30's, offshoots of the gangster cycle) the common-denominator reaction from almost all kids of audiences today is bound to be one of surprise. Surprise that such a film could have been made at all, surprise that it could have been made under the circumstances, surprise most of all perhaps that it could come from MGM, a producer and star dominated studio, concerned far more with gloss and audience appeal than crusades. When they did pick up a subject that they could get their teeth into - e.g., prohibition and a film called "The Wet Parade" - MGM usually presented both sides of the picture so thoroughly that ultimately no viewpoint at all emerged. "Gabriel Over the White House" however has all the directness and certainty of purpose of a Warner Brothers social melodrama. Louis B. Mayer made no secret of his antipathy to Roosevelt and his administration, and there are signs of Mayer's personal temperaments with the script here. Both the "party-man" President of the opening reel, and the "enlightened" President of the bulk of the film are given lines, situations and clues which suggest identification with some of the less laudatory Roosevelt traits; but basically of course no clearly defined identification is intended. The film is political melodrama in the framework of fantasy, startling in the preferred solutions (views held by many at that time) and startling too in the tenacity (40 years of many of its political and social problems. What is documentary and psychologically fascinating double-bill it would make with Capra's "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington" - in which the efficient corruption of the villains frankly seems vastly preferable to the amateur and directionless "do-gooding" of its bumbling hero!

--- William K. Everson ---