"THREE FACES EAST" (Warner Brothers, 1930) Directed by Roy Del Ruth
Scenario by Oliver H.P. Garrett and Arthur Caesar from the play by
Anthony Paul Kelly; Camera, Barney McGill; 7 reels
With Erich von Stroheim, Constance Bennett, Anthony Bushell, 'William Holden,
William Courtenay, Charlotte Velker, Crawford Kent, 'William von Brincken,
Ulrich Haupt, Paul Panzer.

"Three Faces East" is an admittedly old-fashioned movie, but in these days of so many ambiguous and shadowy movies, it's a real pleasure to find one that starts off with a title telling you exactly what is going on, when,
and where! It was first made as a 1925 silent by Rupert Julian (with Jette
Goudal and Clive Brook), and done for a third time in 'World War 2 as "British
Intelligence" with Boris Karloff and Margaret Lindsay. This middle version
is the most entertaining of them all. That a joy to see Stroheim in the lead
of such a film, and not shunted aside into odd scenes, stealing every scene
with his usual unscripted bits of business (smiling leeriously as he un
pecks Miss Bennett's lingerie) and making the most of the stormy lines of
dialogue - with one priceless one where he talks wistfully of a honeymoon in the Black Forest! Miss Bennett is charming, and Anthony
Bushell the traditional (Hollywood) boyish British officer who lives in a
Windsor Castle-like home and calls his parents "Water" and "Guv'nor". Via a
stroke of unparalleled originality, his mother is not played by Mary Forbes,
and his father (the first Sea Lord of the admiralty) goes by the superb name
of Sir Winston Chamberlain! It's one of those standard spy stories about
"the crisis of the war and the master stroke of espionage that can lead to
victory", but Stroheim is over-stocked with characters who unquestioningly accept
the most irrational explanations, and the double-double-agency can be
tracked back so far that it must have had its roots with Awhile the Hun. The
film makes no pretense of hiding its theatrical origins, but in its own way,
and thanks mainly to Stroheim and Bennett, it's good theatre. Roy del Ruth
doesn't yet have the orecking directorial pace that he was to develop in a
year or two, but the film doesn't really call for it - any more than you
expect to find Ian Fleming sex and shock when you curl up in an easy chair
with Agatha Christie.

-- TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION --

"KERRY: GO ROUND" (Universal, 1928) Directed by Erich von Stroheim and
Rupert Julian; original story and screenplay by Stroheim; settings by
Richard Day and Stroheim; Camera, 'William Daniels and Ben Reynolds; 10 hrs
With Norman Kerry (Count Franz Maximilian von Rohenege); Mary Philbin
(Agnes Urban); Cesare Gravina (Sylvester Urban); Edith Yorke (Ursula Urban);
George Hackathorne (Bartholomew Gruber); George Siegmann (Schani Huber);
Dale Fuller (Marlanka Huber); William Sylvester (Aurora Rossreiter);
Spottiswoode Aitken (Minister of War); Dorothy Wallace (Komtessa Cissella
von Steinbrueck); Al Edmondson (Menomuch Navratil); Albert Conti (Rudy,
Baron von Leitzchten); Charles King (Nicki, Baron von Uebersaut); Fenwick
Oliver (Prince Eitel Hochgemut); Sidney Breese (Cissella's groom); Anton
Vaverka (Emperor Franz Joseph); Fauste George (Nedame Elvira); Helen Bronaeu
(Jane); Jane Sherman (Dorey Heric); and Betty Morrissey.

KERRY: GO ROUND was the first of von Stroheim's loosely-related Austrian
trilogy, its successors being THE KERRY 'IDOW (RGW) and THE WEDDING LARCH
(Panamount). It was the first film on which he encountered serious front
office opposition to the extent that Irving Thalberg fired him and replaced
him with Rupert Julian. It marked the beginning of Stroheim's commercial,
if not his artistic, downfall. Stroheim himself repudiated the released
version of "Kerry Go Round" and claimed that he had actually directed but a
fraction of it. However, it should be remembered that Stroheim regarded any
taken charge; and his understanding of the cinema often exceeded
the bounds of logic and reason. He was always one of the least reliable
witnesses to his own work, and his particular disciples tended to echo his
own claims blindly. One historian for some 40 years claimed that the cut
and edited release version of "Hello Sister" contained "not a frame" shot
by Stroheim (incidentally, without having seen it) - and a recent
re-discovery of the film, and careful checking with the cameramen and sub
directors involved confirms that actually about 80% of that film was
released as Stroheim's though mistakenly and unrepresentatively presented
and interpreted! It's enough to point to a powerful scene in
"Kerry Go Round" and exclaim "Ahn - von Stroheim"; just as easy (if unfair)
to single out a dull scene and blame Rupert Julian. Julian was much like
Stroheim in temperament - arrogant and an extrovert - but considerably
unlike him in talent. Most of his silent and sound films - even the biggest
commercial hit of them all, the Lion Chaney "Phantom of the Opera"
revealed a very commonplace directorial talent. Just as Stroheim was quick
to reject "Kerry Go Round", so was Julian eager to accept the credit for
most of it. Their stories fit together, and yet ... Perhaps it's only
academic anyway. Certainly the concept was Stroheim's, the story overlapping
not only into his other films, but also into his later novel "Paprika", and the sumptuous sets and overall production design were his. Anything that Julian did must automatically have been influenced by Stroheim's ground work. If less exotic, "Kerry Go Round" is still a better picture than the disappointing "The Merry Widow", and it can also now be seen to have been something of a dry-run for the later "The Wedding March". Perhaps in a way we can even be grateful to Thalberg for his cavalier treatment of Stroheim. Had he been given the freedom to make (and star in) "Kerry Go Round" as he wanted, he'd have had no reason to want to make "The Wedding March". And that film of half-a-decade later is probably the finest and most sophisticated of all Stroheim films, "Cree" notwithstanding.

Much of "Kerry Go Round", with its Cinderellas and Prince Charms, is hard to take seriously - least of all the successive disasters befalling Cesare Cremona. After a couple of apparent death scenes, his final real one is the least convincing of all. The footage with the ape (a plot element repeated in the novel "Paprika") is a bit wild, and many of the character names suggest screenplay-salivation for W.C. Fields. But "Kerry Go Round" is a most handsome production, with some extremely touching moments and some extremely powerful dramatic and melodramatic ones. The print is copied from an original toned 16mm print (hence the slightly soft quality), but is more complete than the only other known existing prints (from France) and is also a little longer than the actual release version of 1922. Although quite decorous by today's standards, the bordello orgy scene runs considerably longer here than in the theatrical prints.

MUSIC SCORE ARRANGED AND PLAYED BY
STUART GOERIAN

Next week's program: TARZAN AND HIS HATE (1934) - Second and easily the best of the Johnny Weismuller-Taureen O'Sullivan Tarzans; preceded by "KING OF THE JUNGLE" (1933, with Larry "Buster" Crabbe), a spectacular and off-beat adventure - more big city than jungle - that is by no means the juvenile fare that one might assume, but a really enjoyable and well-done film.