Two 1933 films directed by Roy Del Ruth

"EMPLOYEES' ENTRANCE" (Warner Brothers, 1933) Directed by Roy Del Ruth
Screenplay by Robert Presnell from a play by David Boehm;
Camera, Barney McGill; Art Director, Robert Haas; 8 reels

Through the 40's and 50's, the stodgy and mediocre films directed by Roy Del Ruth caused him to be written off as something of a hack. Then of course his earlier films had long been unavailable for reappraisal. But the rediscovery of "Taxi" and "Blonde Crazy" made one sit up a little, while "Blessed Event," "Bulldog Drummond Strikes Back" and tonight's two films cause one to re-evaluate him entirely. Even though he may to a degree have been dependent on the expert "Warner Brothers machinery of the period, he was obviously a director who knew how to handle actors well, and how to pace a film, at least during those first five years of the 30's. Like so many Warner films of the early 30's, "Employees' Entrance" is a stage derivation, but one that hides its theatrical source rather well. Against a huge department store background, it mixes elements of "Grand Hotel," "Twelve O'Clock High" and "Executive Suite," and does it with a "time warp" or "local" divagation. It's all a kind of developmental like a slick magazine short story, all surface dramatics admitted, but done with intelligence and solid characterizations so that the lack of real depth is never very apparent. Warner William, in another second-string Berrymore role, is, as always, first-class, and Loretta Young has seldom looked lovelier. "Employees' Entrance" is a film curiously parallel to that same year's "42nd Street," and if it never manages to be quite as important, it's probably only because department stores don't have quite the drama or the excitement of a Broadway revue by Busby Berkeley. But nevertheless, the film is a model of how to make a soap opera look like something far more substantial.

--- ten minute intermission ---

"LITTLE GIANT" (First National, 1933) Directed by Roy Del Ruth
Scenario: Robert Lord and Wilson Mizner; Camera, Sid Hickox; 8 reels

It's surprising how soon after "Little Caesar" Robinson was already kidding his own genre, although perhaps more surprisingly, when one takes time to consider, is how relatively few gangster roles he actually played. There are a handful at most, with the majority concentrated in the 40's and 50's, and he actually spent far more time on the side of law and order. "Little Giant" (which bears no relation to the several-times-filmed Universal property of the same title) is very much in the Samson Ruyton mould, and in fact is far more "authentic" Ruyton than many of the films officially based on Ruyton tales. The theme of the tough guy in society has never been particularly productive either for comedy or drama, too often becoming merely heavy-handed and obvious. To a degree this criticism can be applied to "Little Giant" too; it is not quite as smart as it thinks it is, yet one cannot quarrel with the end result. It always comes to roaring life before an audience and is sprightly fun throughout. Robinson delivers his lines with fine aplomb, Lary Ator is sereneely lovely, and Helen Vinson and Berton Churchill are flawlessly type-cast for their own specialities. The gangster elements are both exciting and amusing, and even quite touching in the sequence where Robinson reads company from his long-time mistress. Being a pre-Code movie, there are the usual casual cracks about racial minorities (the Greeks get quite a trouncing this time, though one of the roughest lines is usually lost in the laughter from the previous line!), homosexuals and drug addicts, with modern art added to the list of things to be kidded. There's a whole of wild party, a couple of inside jokes referring to "The Public Enemy", and the old Vitaphone Orchestra is in there sawing away at recognisable themes from "Blessed Event", "One Way Passage" and other contemporary Warner movies. It's a thoroughly typical movie of its period, snappy, loud and fast, neither a major Del Ruth nor a major Robinson, but certainly enjoyably well-above-average for both.

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