Two comedies directed by William A. Seiter

"IN PERSON" (KDKO Radio, 1935) Directed by William Seiter; produced by Fred S. Berman; screenplay by Allan Scott from an original story by Samuel Hopkins Adams; Camera, Edward Cronjager; music director, Roy Webe; music and lyrics by Dorothy Field and Oscar Levant; dances by Hermes Pan; starring Ginger Rogers, with George Brent, Alan Bowles, Grant Mitchell, Samuel S. Hinds, Joan Breslau, Louis Jason, Spencer Charters, Lew Kelly, Bob McKenzie, William B. Davidson, Al Hall, Lee Shumway.

"In Person" probably suffers a little from coming right after "Top Hat" and thus having to be a "worthy" vehicle for Ginger Rogers; moreover, since it is based on a (similar) story by the author of "It Happened One Night", it was doubtless trying to emulate the success of that Capra film too. Accordingly, it is blown-up rather too much, given greater Andrea Seiter production values that it doesn't really need, and allowed down a bit in the process. However, it does have the usual Seiter taste and charm, a very pleasing performance from Miss Rogers, and the virtue of placing its padded sections in the first half of the film. Once it picks up steam it never falters and keeps its new stride through to the end. Since Miss Rogers plays a movie queen, much of the Hollywood flavor is quite amusing. A high-light is a nicely done sequence of a personal appearance at a hick-town theatre, and on another occasion "Lovely to Look At" is quite correctly identified as the ageless Missouri girl. Throughout the film are all publicity shots from "Top Hat". There's a very odd movie-within-a-movie sequence which comes to a curious climax that even Rko never duplicated in its highest form, and strangely enough Miss R.'s major Hollywood studio is identified as Supreme Pictures - actually the name of a Republic subsidiary that made Bob Steele westerns! The musical numbers are pleasing and quite elaborate, with Miss R.'s pleasing shape and legs well displayed in the climactic routine. If it doesn't come off quite as it should, it is only because of the unnecessary blowing-up of a trifle into a special, but it is a diverting piece of escapism none-the-less, and far less preachy than most of the 30's films in which socialites and celebrities discovered the useful (if rarely convincing) axiom that money isn't everything.

--- 10 minute Intermission ---


What impresses most about "Hot Saturday" is its relaxed sophistication. Sophistry was certainly not new or rare in 1932, especially at Paramount, the year end and the studio of "Trouble in Paradise" and "Love is Tonight", but it was in these films a conscious sophistication. In its own less ambitious way, "Hot Saturday" is a film of equal maturity, full of measured playing and it is blown-up to enhance the naturalism of the story, and yet the many pungent lines are almost lost because of their off-hand delivery. Good taste was always a keynote in Seiter's prolific silent and sound career, and it is a constant factor in "Hot Saturday". It is a pre-Code movie and makes no bones about sex in a couple of sequences, but it never strives for shock or to prove how "adult" it is by hitting us over the head with its implications. Although like many depression-era movies it has its Cinderella aspects, it's not really an "early 30's movie" in the accepted sense. The fashions, the cars, the backgrounds in some rural-town location work, the dialogue are all place it in the pre-New Deal era, but essentially it's a picture about youth and comparative innocence. It's undated by period in the sense that its characters and attitudes are still valid - not in New York, but somewhere - and that we can all of us in something of our own years of growing up. One of its charms is that it's "ordinary". People have none of the excesses of virtues and vices that Capra's stereotypes regaled us with in the 30's; the worst of its "villains" are cetulence, childishness and shrewishness. Its overall cheerfulness is enhanced by liberal pilaging of Badergers and Hart and Strauss melodies owned by Paramount, and by the satisfying playing of Cary Grant and Randolph Scott (rivals in love at the end of the 30's too in "My Favorite Wife") and most especially by the utterly winning elfin personality of lovely Nancy Carroll. We last played "Hot Saturday" at the New School in 1969; its distributors have only one print for the entire country and it appears (sadly) to remain dormant and unappreciated most of the time. Certainly this is the film's only New York exposure since our showing of it some five years ago.

--- William K. Everson ---