EXCERPTS from early Humphrey Bogart films: "A Devil With Women" (1930, directed by Irving Cummings) with Victor McLaglen and Mona Maris; "A Holy Terror" (1931, also directed by Irving Cummings) with George O'Brien and Sally Eilers. Relatively unimportant programmers for Fox, "A Devil with Women" was a rather dull action-adventure, the other film (a remake of Tom Mix's silent "Train!") rather better and good fun, if lacking in action. What is surprising though is how good Bogart was in both - the romantic lead in one, the villain in the other - and how long thereafter it took for him to achieve worthwhile roles, recognition, and eventual stardom.


It's not too hard to see why "Big City Blues" has never turned up in theatrical or museum retrospectives. It's probably Mervyn LeRoy's least important film, and certainly the only "B" among his six 1932 productions (which included "Chain Gang," "Two Seconds" and "Three on a Match") nor in a normal theatrical exposure would it satisfy the Bogart devotees. It was his first assignment at Warners, and thus the beginning of an historic association, yet although he has more to do than the wasted Ned Sparks or Evalyn Knapp, makes his weight felt and has some good lines, he gets no billing whatsoever in the credits. Although just a "B," it is still a fast little picture, well cast and acted, full of surprises, slick montages, and typical period racial slurs, delivered casually and without bite. There are good uses of closeups and camera movements, but these moments apart there is little LeRoy style to it, especially for a film made after "Five Star Final." Obviously it was just an assignment that he brushed off as quickly as possible. Nevertheless, after a slow start it develops a good pace, offers an unusually touching vignette from Jobyana Howland, and enables us to knock off an almost totally unknown title from our LeRoy and Bogart lists. And these days, one can't afford to sneeze at a film that does all that in just 65 minutes!

-- 10 minute intermission --

"BULLDOG DRUMMOND" (Sam Goldwyn-United Artists, 1929) Directed by F. Richard Jones, assisted by Lesley Pearce and Paul Jones; screenplay by Sidney Howard and Wallace Smith from the 1925 play by H.C. McNeile and Gerald du Maurier; Art Direction, William Cameron Menzies; Camera, George Barnes and Andre deIED; song by Jack Yellen and Harry Akst; 10 reels With Ronald Colman, Emma Dunn, Lillian Tashman, Montague Love, Lawrence Grant, Claude Allister, Wilson Benge, Charles Seillon, Adolphe Milar, Tetsu Komai, Gertrude Short, Donald Novis.

Although George Arliss' "Disraeli" - an ALL-talkie in every sense of the word - won the boxoffice and Academy Award kudos for 1929, "Bulldog Drummond" was unanimously considered (by the critics) to be the best film of the year. Even though today such 1929 films as "Applause" and "Hallelujah" seem more important, the enthusiasm for 'Drummond' is understandable, since it was a perfect rebuttal to all those who complained (with some justification) that the talkies had stifled the artistry of the silents. Its smooth combination of slick and beautifully spoken dialogue with an impressive (and still Germanically styled) visual technique and a fast paced (especially for 1929) story-line made it seem far more modern and polished than most transitional films of that period. If we may mix our metaphors, its tongue in cheek manner does get a little heavy-handed at times, aware of its cleverness in kidding a genre that hadn't yet developed to a stage where such a spoof was really in order, but this minor flaw may be doubly apparent only because of the admirable advance of Colman's later sequel, "Bulldog Drummond Strikes Back." The joyfully led-by-a-master-criminal Grant is still one of the best things that sotor has ever done, and the pre-Code flexibility allows the "nice" villains to escape and for Drummond to calmly pull off a cold-blooded murder! Colman is utterly delightful, setting a debonair pattern for all subsequent Drummonds quite at variance with the thuggish, Mike Hammer-like Drummond of the novels, and establishing himself as a major star in a way that he had never been able to do in silents.

Incident ally, the film was unofficially partially directed by the great, handsome F. Richard Jones, a marvellous silent director of comedy and action (Fairbanks' "The Gaucho") here obviously rode a wholly successful transition to sound, but tactfully used short剪辑. -- M.E.