there has been a regrettable but unavoidable change in tonight’s program. The print of “Hi Nellie!”, despatched in plenty, has been delayed or delayed in transit, and is probably incarcerated in one of those 77 unladen post office trucks. The distributor has only the one print of the film in circulation, and though we tried hard, at such short notice it was impossible to find a print from another source. It’s especially unfortunate to start a series with such a mishap; annoying too in that the program was carefully constructed to illustrate the work of one director in a given period. But there’s no point in gnashing our teeth, and in fact we are probably very lucky that this is the first time in twenty film series where it has happened. Nellie is publishing a film from last in the series. (And, thus a second intermission) I have brought forward a not unrelated film that I had planned to run in 1975. As and when “Hi Nellie!” shows up, we’ll re-book it as an extra show (probably with Wunci’s first film, 1929’s “The Valiant” as its companion) at the end of this series, or before the beginning of the next. A reassurance: next week’s program is safely on hand, and most of the other films in the series are not coming from out-of-town, so hopefully there’ll be no recurrence. Again, apologies — and thanks for your forebearance.


One of the least-known and, like the upcoming “Beast of the City”, one of the toughest of the early gangster films, “Bad Company” has more in common with the underplayed and callous crime films of Rowland Brown than with the more traditional and spectacular films from Hawks, Wellman and LeRoy. Like so many pre-1932 talkies, and especially those from RKO-Pathe, it seems at first to be wholly a dialogue film, but there is an undertow to the film that holds a brawny pace, and is full of surprises — as in the remarkable foray into a German expressionistic style for the waterfront sequence. And its slam-bang action climax is all the more effective for being largely unexpected. Director Tay Garnett is a curious minor talent who has turned out some major films (“One Way Passage” is one of the more thoroughly entertaining ones of “Time Savers” and has a full quote of dogs (“Eternally Yours”, “Trade Winds”). But as a kind of lesser league Wellman he has always been worth watching, especially in the 1929-32 period. “Bad Company” is virtually unknown, but quite undeservedly so.

TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION


Rarely was a film more aptly titled: one of six major films that LeRoy directed in 1932, it seems to have been made at a breathless rate, and its speed and vitality almost leave one exhausted. The cracking pace also makes it seem much funnier and more substantial than it really is. Only after some 74 minutes of constant laughter does one realise that the film really doesn’t have much of a plot nor any really funny scenes. Yet the smooth and dynamic playing of Powell, the hilarious pantomime of George Sidney in one of his funniest roles, and the constant flurry of double entendres and genial racial gibes make it seem like a film for which the highly polished paste that it really is. Mervyn LeRoy was always too heavy a director to be totally successful in comedy; even here his camera set-ups and groupings tend to suggest heavy dramatics rather than comedy, and with a different acting style the film might well have misfired. But Powell, Sidney and a fine cast prevent that from happening, and the film is a sheer delight. Oddly enough, it was a resounding flop when it first appeared. Apart from the melodramatic “Road to Singapore”, it was Powell’s first at Warners. He was a coup for them, and a new William Powell was promised. But it seemed that the public still liked the old RKO films. Amazingly good as he is, there was an immediate negative reaction to Powell in a Pat O’Brien-Lee Tracy role. Warners took note, and, catering to public taste, put him (very effectively) back where the fans wanted him, in films like “Jewel Robbery”, “One Way Passage” and “The Kennel Murder Case”.

--Wm. K. Everson--