THE DEVIL'S LOTTERY (Fox, 1932) Directed by Sam Taylor; Screenplay by Guy Boulton from a story by Nalbro Bartley; Camera, Ernest Palmer; 7 reels

If there seems less liaison than usual between our two films this evening, there's a reason. At the very last minute we deleted a more appropriate MGM film from the program because it turned up, more than once, on the Museum's MGM program, and "First Love" - which we had planned to run later - was rather hurriedly substituted. However, and admittedly not intentionally, there is a kind of link between the two films. Both are very typical, quite unpretentious commercial products of their day. "The Devil's Lottery" is a good representative of the "confession" genre, so popular in the early 30's, and especially so at Rko Radio and Warners, where Constance Bennett was wont to suffer frequently and profitably. Like so many pre-Production Code films, there is a great deal of moral punishment but little legal punishment, and a murderer is allowed to wander off scot-free. "First Love" of course is an thoroughly post-Production Code that no issues of morality raise their heads at all. Although hardly a major film, "The Devil's Lottery" is too good a programmer to remain totally buried, which alas is probably its fate, since, this one 16mm print apart, no preservation work has been undertaken. Apart from being an interesting little film, "The Devil's Lottery" offers two major points of interest. One, it reminds us what a warm personality Elissa Landi could be. After the sincerity and natural quality of her acting in such late British silents as "Underground", her early Hollywood career has been all but buried, and she is remembered, inappropriately, for the cold patrician roles of her later non-Fox films, especially deMille's "The Sign of the Cross" and the Donat version of "The Count of Monte Cristo". In the early period, Fox had tried to turn her into their own Dietrich and Constance Bennett rolled into one. Sometimes, as in "Passport to Hell" and "The Yellow Ticket", she was still far too much of a lady to substantiate the scarlet sins that Fox's scenarios dreamed up for her, but her performances had vitality, subtility and sometimes real passion. (She worked well here, and also in "Passport to Hell", with that likewise restrained and nearly-forgotten actor, Alexander Kirkland). But the big treat of "The Devil's Lottery" for many will be the treatment noted out to Beryl Mercer. If you, like me, winced your way through the thirties and cringed every time Beryl Mercer's whining, smothering, spineless mother roles came on the screen (even when she played Queen Victoria, one's heart went out to Prince Albert!), here's the film for you: at last she comes to a sticky end (under circumstances which make it especially delightful) and the person responsible gets away with it. If ever there was a justifiable homicide, this is it!

THAT MINUTE INTERMISSION

FIRST LOVE (Universal, 1939) Directed by Henry Koster; produced by Joe Pasternak; Screenplay by Bruce Manning, Lionel Houser; Musical director, Charles Previn; Orchestration, Frank Skinner; Camera, Joseph Valentine; 8 reels

Although perhaps a trifle formulated and lacking the genuine freshness of the very first Durbin vehicles, "First Love" is still "vintage" Durbin and one of the good early group which perhaps came to its climax with "Nice Girl". The plot is a deliberate and obvious modernisation of the Cinderella fable, and all power to it for bringing its fairy-tale qualities so clearly into the open. Even allowing for the huge earning power of Deanna Durbin films in those days, it is still an extraordinary production in terms of gloss and lavish sets; no other Durbin films were quite so opulently mounted. The big ballroom would seem to be a glistening re-vamping of the old "Phantom of the Opera" set wherein Chaney descended the stairs to parade among the revellers. The cast is full of old Universal favorites, Eugene Pallette type-cast again in his old "My Man Godfrey" role as the gruff millionaire, and Leatrice Joy inheriting Alice Brady's scatterbrain-wife role. Lovely Peggy Moran, unbilled (which was the director's double-entendre), decorated some of the earlier scenes very nicely. "First Love" made its biggest publicity pitch at the time in that it offered Deanna Durbin's first screen kiss; today it seems to have far more novelty in the fact that the bitch gets her comeuppance and there's a happy ending for all the nice people who deserve it. All in all, a most enjoyable, sentimental, carefree musical diversion.