"HE NELLY!" (Warner Brothers, 1934) Directed by Mervyn LeRoy; Screenplay by Abe Finkel and Sidney Sutherland from a story by Roy Chanslor; Camera, Sol Polito; 75 minutes

With Paul Muni, Glenda Farrell, Ned Sparks, Robert Barrat, Kathryn Sorgeva, Douglas Dumbrille, Robert Cavanagh, Berton Churchill, Edward Ellis, Paul Kaye, Donald Meek, Dorothy DeBor, George Meeker, Marjorie Gateson, Harold Huber, Allen Vincent, Pat Wing, Frank Reicher, George Chandler, George Humbert, Sid Miller, John Quinlan, Harold Miller, Howard Hickman.

After last season's non-delivery of this film, occasioned by a WFS strike, one hopes that expectations haven't been raised too high, since it is not one of the most durable of the Warner Brothers films of this period. Its main problem is that it was made just about a year too late; by this time, Mervyn LeRoy, always rather a heavy director, was established as a major name, and he seems determined to make this a reasonably important — and serious — film. Thus it never really lets its hair down to become the kind of loose, unpretentious film it might have been 18 months or so earlier, or still might have been with a Lloyd Bacon or a William Dieterle at the helm. Similarly, Muni, well on the way to becoming a major acting name, tries hard to prove his versatility by throwing himself too aggressively into his role. Compare his newspaperman role here with similar roles but dissimilar performances in the same period with Lee Tracy, Pat O'Brien, Frederic March, and even George Brent and Frank McHugh. If it isn't Muni's worst screen performance, it is certainly his most outrageously overacted one. But, given the shortcomings (in this instance) of the star and the film as a whole, not to mention the clunky dialogue and the little by Ned Sparks (in particular) and the strong cast of Warner contractees, Warners were not opposed to the most blatant kind of "borrowing" and "Hi Nelly!" is clearly influenced by Nathaniel West's "Miss Lonely Hearts". In fact, the first screen version of that (the enjoyable but surprisingly unambitious "Advice to the Lovelorn" with Lee Tracy) beat "Hi Nelly!" to the screen by only a few weeks! "Hi Nelly!", like most Warner properties, was remade by them more than once, the most enjoyable remix being the quite unpretentious and much more functional You Can't Escape Forever! with George Brent, newly updated to a World War Two milieu.

TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION

Since tonight's short supplements "The Match King" rather nicely; we have placed it right after the intermission.

THE MATCH KING (Warner Brothers, 1932) Directed by Howard Bretherton and William Keighley; Screenplay by Sidney Sutherland and Houston Branch from the novel by Elmer Thorwaldson; Camera, Robert Kurrle; 70 minutes


Like "Hi Nelly!", "The Match King" is a flawed but fascinating film, and is also one of several that Warner's made in the 30's that (in a rather different way from their "social-expose" films) took their basic stories from current scandals. Showmanship if you like, but also opportunism, and in the case of a film suggested by the Prince of Wales-Mrs Simpson escapade, a blatant lack of good taste. One of the best of such films was Warners' version of the Stavisky affair, which we'll be showing in our Summer series. "The Match King" is "based" on the career of Ivar Kreuger, but incredibly hoked up — to the extent that it both invites lawsuits, and at the same time squashes them by being far enough away from the truth. It looks as though it was planned as a routine and unambitious film. The basic director, Howard Bretherton, was an essentially a picture man; his associate, William Keighley, was here working on his first film as an essential part of the film before going on to much bigger properties. The script is not well constructed; episodic in the extreme, it dispenses with most of the ladies — Glenda Farrell, Claire Dodd etc. — in very cavalier fashion, and then, as if to atone, spends proportionately too much time with Jodi Damita just at the time when the film content draws our attention elsewhere. The final disposition of Miss Damita is one of the most unwittingly uproarious plot twists ever devised. Yet the basic fascination of the story, and the dynamic quality of Warren William's playing, lift the film up by its own bootstraps. It also offers a more rare and effective pre-credit sequence, and a marvellously Hollywood fadeout. Wthal, it's one of the most interesting of the "Robber Baron" stories that usually fell to Edward Arnold, but it's a pity that much more wasn't made of it, especially the Harry Bersonford (the Inventor) sequence.

We're sorry we can't duplicate the film's original supporting program at NY's Strand — Fatty Arbuckle on stage, and his latest comedy short, "Hey Pop!" — William K. Everson