STOLEN HOLIDAY (Warner Brothers-First National, 1936; released 1937)
Directed by Michael Curtiz; Produced by Hal B. Wallis; Associate Producer, Harry Joe Brown; Screenplay by Casey Robinson from a story by Warren Duff and Virginia Kellog; Camera, Sid Hickox; Art Director, Anton Grot; 84 mins

The main titles, with their gay art design and light romantic music, and of course enormous star billing for Kay Francis, assure us immediately that this is wholeheartedly a Kay Francis vehicle. The suspiciously large and prominent full-screen disclaimer that it is all purely a fiction with no relationships intended or implied is, however, one of Hollywood's more blatant evasions of the truth, and if film prints could be subjected to lie-detector tests, then this... would fail miserably. For it is blatantly and obviously the Stavisky story, so blatant that the mere changing of his name from Serge Stavisky to Stefan Orloff seems almost an impertinence, certainly not a deception. Comparison with Resnais' current "Stavisky" is obviously interesting, but only serves to remind us what a film this could have been had the Stavisky story been recorded instead of merely 'exploited', and had the versatile and stylish Curtiz been given his head. It's an astonishingly luxurious production, dripping with elegance, class, and spaciously designed sets. Unfortunately the fascinating Stavisky material is too often pushed into the background as Warmers are jerked back to the realisation that this is a Kay Francis movie and trots out some of the old concert show and romantic interludes with Ian Hunter to keep the Francis fans happy. As such it's an uneven and disjointed film, as was the not dissimilar "The Hatch King" which we ran last season. But so strong and forceful is Claude Rains' performance in the Stavisky role that his portions of the film more than dominate audience interest, and he is certainly the character about whom we care. It's good to see Rains in such a role, and it's good to see such a smooth example of peak Hollywood luxury again. It would have been better to have had a solid, undistinguished Stavisky story. But there doubtless would have been major legal problems then, when the case was still so new. And at that one must be grateful to Warmers: they could easily have dusted off an old property, or made their new Francis vehicle just a collection of formula situations. Instead they had the gall and the ghoulishness to go to recent headlines, and blandly protest that they didn't. That's Hollywood Robber-Baron chicanery of the highest order, and Stavisky would have been proud of them!

THE LAST GENTLEMAN (United Artists-20th Century, 1934) Directed by Sidney Lanfield; screenplay by Leonard Praskins from a play by Katherine Clugston; Camera, Barney McGill; 72 minutes.

With George Arliss, Edna May Oliver, Charlotte Henry, Joseph Cawthorne, Frank Albertson, Janet Beecher, Edward Ellis, Donald Meek, Ralph Morgan, Rafaela Ottiano, Harry Bradley.

Few of the many unknown films we've shown in these series took our audience quite as much by surprise as this one did; certainly no film has been more requested for a repeat run. We're glad to bring it back, and to mention in passing that another quite obscure - and very charming - Arliss, "The King's Vacation", has been included in our Fall schedule. "The Last Gentleman" was one of the last but one of Arliss's many Hollywood films, made at regular intervals for Goldwyn, Warners and UA throughout the 20's and early 30's. On its completion he left for England to make "The Iron Duke" (the first of a British series which would span the remainder of the 30's), returning to Hollywood for one more film, "Cardinal Richelieu". It's a pity that history can't be juggled to make "The Last Gentleman" his last film, for it is not only an actor's dream role, but would have afforded him a marvellous, relaxed and graceful vehicle as a farewell to the screen. It's quiet and gentle, often very funny, and wisely isn't blown up to any great dramatic heights nor expanded to undue length. It's enough that it provides a peg for a cast of talented thespians to hang their wares on, carefully under the shadow of the old maestro, who manages to monopolise the last reel with a neat twist that works far better on film than it ever could have on stage. Since so much of the film's charm depends on surprise, I'll refrain from mentioning incidents and performances that certainly deserve mention.

Wm.K.Everson ---

Since outside commitments prevent my being with you for these last 4 shows, I'd like to thank James Monaco for taking over for me. Wke