ONE RAINY AFTERNOON (United Artists, 1936) Directed by Rowland V. Lee
A Mary Pickford-Jesse Lasky Production; screenplay by Stephen M. Avery and Maurice Hanline from a play by Arnold Pressburger and Rene Pujal; Musical director, Alfred Newman; lyrics by Preston Sturges, Jack Stern, Harry Tobias; Camera, Peverell Marley; 8 reels


With the major exception of "Zoo in Budapest", Rowland V. Lee — throughout a long career going back to the silents — never really created a great or particularly personal movie, but he was unusually adept at imitating the style of others. In horror films, he patterned himself after James Whale; here the mood and inspiration is that of Ernst Lubitsch. "One Rainy Afternoon" is never quite as clever as it obviously thinks it is, nor does it match the effortless charm of the earlier Lubitsch-Chevalier films that it so obviously tries to copy — due largely one feels to the rather hard and forced "charm" of Mr. Lederer. However, imitating Lubitsch was an occupational disease in Hollywood of the 30's, and this one succeeds rather more than most, and spectacularly more so that Lewis Milestone's "Paris in Spring". It is the sort of casual, "friendly" film of the period that one can still enjoy in a relaxed manner; the music is gay and catchy, the plot fast-moving, and the cast full of old friends, most of whom have now passed on or are no longer active. The great array of silent players used as extras proves hard to spot however; Jack Mulhall and Harry Myers have good bits, but the others are largely lost in the skating rink and courtroom scenes, and one can't help feeling that Mary Pickford could have done better by them. I saw "One Rainy Afternoon" as a child — on a rainy afternoon — and the combination of inclement weather, movie titles, and much footage inside a movie theatre proved to a childish mind to be the kind of movie "magical" that produced permanent and nostalgic memories. It constantly surprises one how so many of these slight pictures of the 30's, made with no intent of being anything other than a mild diversion — are remembered with affection, and do hold up well as entertainment so many years later.
-- Ten Minute Intermission --

BROADWAY THROUGH A KEYHOLE (20th Century-United Artists, 1933)
Directed by Lowell Sherman; scenario by Gene Towne and Graham Baker from a story idea by Walter Winchell; Camera, Barney McGilli; Peverell Marley; Songs, Jack Gordon, Harry Revel; Musical direction, Alfred Newman; 9 reels

An undeservedly ignored movie, "Broadway Through a Keyhole" is a loose, lawsuit-proof composite of the careers of Ruby Keeler, Ruth Etting and Legs Diamond. While containing some of the standard cliches, a good script and Sherman's smooth and well-paced direction steer it so clear of the sentiment is pleasingly honest, and the characters ring true. Guinan and Seeley emerge as the tough babes they probably were, a far cry from Betty Hutton's glamorous and starstruck bob-pie recreations. Despite the gangsterism, it all winds up rather like a Damey Runyon fable in reverse, with nobody very sympathetic and the few hearts of gold turning up in unexpected quarters. The dialogue is snappy, and the musical numbers elaborate, although they seem deliberately downplayed as though to keep the film more in a mood... dramatic than a musical framework. The biggest surprise of all is Russ Colombo; no great actor admittedly, he underplays his big scenes with real sincerity and suggests that he might have made a real mark in movies, possibly rivalling Crosby, had not tragedy struck first.