THE DEVIL TO PAY (United Artists, 1930) Directed by George Fitzmaurice
A Sam Goldwyn Production; Screenplay by Benjamin Glazer and Frederick Lonsdale from the play by Frederick Lonsdale; Camera, George Barnes and Greg Toland; 70 minutes
With: Ronald Colman, Loretta Young, Myrna Loy, Florence Britton, Frederick Kerr, David Torrence, Paul Crawford, Mary Forbes, Forrester Harvey.

Virtually nothing happens in "The Devil to Pay", yet it is such a civilised, elegant and charming piece of froth, and such a fine showcase for so many likeable players that one can almost of depth or dramatic incident merely makes it all the easier just to sit back and enjoy its grace. Even allowing for the huge success of 1929's "Bulldog Drummond", "The Devil to Pay" was considered Ronald Colman's best work to that date, and it's an understandable conclusion. What really surprises about the film is its total lack of dating. Except for an evening gown or two, there is nothing about it to suggest 1930. The players are all as at ease as if they'd been playing in talkies for decades; the pacing is brisk, the camerawork glossy and mobile, and the film has none of the slowness and stodginess of so many stage adaptations of those early sound years. Compare it for example with a film of a similar lays on "Rebound" (which we're showing in the Spring). "Rebound" is a valuable piece of filmed theatre and a fine showcase for Ina Claire, and on those grounds needs no apology, but filmically and directorially it is a primitive film. "The Devil To Pay" looks though it came ten years after, not a year before! Director George Fitzmaurice was basically in his element with much larger-than-life films ("Son of the Sheik", "Kata Hare") and it is surprising to find him doing so well with such frou-frou. And though he probably had a good deal of help from dialogue coach Ivan Simpson, George had a fine acting crony, who also has a small part in the film (uncredited) as the pet shop owner. The film captures the English flavor with style if not accuracy, and has wit and timing in such so much - and Frederick Kerr bumbling about in his usual delightful way - who needs a plot too?

-- Ten-Minute Intermission --

COME AND GET IT (United Artists, 1936) Directed by William Wyler and Howard Hawks; 2nd unit director, Richard Rosson; A Sam Goldwyn Production; Screenplay by Jane Murfin and Jules Furtman from the novel by Edna Ferber; AD Alfred Newman; Camera, Greg Toland and Rudolph Mate; Art Direction, Richard Day, Preston Sturges, Klam; Special Effects, Ray Binger; 99 minutes

One always has cause for justifiable alarm when an Edna Ferber adaptation begins with the title "1884" - especially when it's an Edward Arnold vehicle to boot. The combination is fraught with dire possibilities. But luckily here, Miss Ferber's cavalcading runs out of epochs fairly quickly, and Jules Furtman, a tight Hawskesian writer, may be responsible for the whittling down of the novel's time span from a generation to two. Furthermore its empire-building story-line is, for once, made a legitimate part of the narrative and isn't just a showy backdrop on which to hang sundry dynasties and lots of exciting plot. Admittedly, the early lumbering sequences - done by Hawks and Rosson - are longer than necessary, and there are a few things in the picture, generating both excitement and a real sense of period. As a child, I remember being disappointed that this aspect was dropped so quickly. Nevertheless, the rest of the film is good strong drama in the best old Goldwyn-Arnold-Ferber tradition, has a spellbinding performance (her best) from Frances Farmer, a lovely Newman score, sumptuous mounting, glistening camerawork that is a sheer pleasure to see. Even Walter Brennan, so over-sold at the time as being another Paul Muni (and admittedly, his progress from a character bit player in 1932 to top supporting roles and an Academy Award in 1935 in the four years was quite remarkable) is less irksome this time than his roles often were, and is quite touching in a role that would obviously have gone to John Qualen had John Ford directed. After having had so many characters in late 20's-early 30's movies (Annette Benson, Blanche Sweet etc.) dismissed as ageing has-beens because they had reached 30 (a curious and exclusively Hollywood-oriented attitude) it's less distracting to find Edward Arnold being dismissed here as "an old man" at 50! But it's also always good to see Arnold in such a role, even if it is Diamond Jim all over again, and the film itself, in typical Ferber fashion, seems to lose a little steam as it proceeds. Arnold compensates by stepping up the power of his performance until it reaches a truly grand and dramatic/pathetic crescendo for the fadeout. McCrea's role is surprisingly small, and the film rightly remains an Arnold-Farmer showcase, and a much better one than their subsequent "The Toast of New York". While Goldwyn talkies of 1929-31 seemed incredibly advanced technically for their period (one might mention that "The Devil to Pay" barely made it into first Ten-Best lists for 1930), his post-32 films, while always glossy, didn't remain far ahead of prevailing standards. But "Come And Get It" is one of the best, most satisfying and most durable Goldwyns of the middle thirties. Reissued briefly in the 50's under a new title to suggest an action film it is now never shown theatrically, and often badly cut on tv. Our print is good, and fully complete.

Program ends at 11:10 p.m.

--- William K. Everson ---