Several of the Warner Brothers programmer of the early 30's, commercially of only nominal importance at the time and artistically ignored, have - like "The Last Flight", "Fog Over Frisco" and "The Kennel Murder Case" - achieved near-classic status for one reason or another. Others, like "Jimmy the Gent", are so zestful and full of directorial and star expertise, that they have quite transcended their original valuations and make use of them could ever have taken them so far granted. Still others remain what they were then: casual time-killing entertainments, no more and no less, no better for the passage of time, though possibly more interesting because of the subsequent careers of stars or directors. Tonight's two Warner films fall into that category: they need neither apology nor critical accolades, merely the ability to throw one's mind back 40 years - preferably to a 42nd Street environment (a far more agreeable destination than then now!) and accept and enjoy them on their own intended level.

THE MIND READER (Warner Brothers, 1933) Directed by Roy Del Ruth Screenplay by Wilson Mizner and Robert Lord from a story by Vivian Cosby; Camera, Sol Polito; 69 minutes

The whole group of Warren William vehicles at Warners (many of which we've played) is extremely varied, but most of them share the common denominator of looking like second-string John Barrymore vehicles - and of course William himself frequently patterned himself after Barrymore. The sequence here of the Mind Reader's final collapse in a shabby dive has a direct parallel with the similar sequence in Barrymore's "Swengali". However, "The Mind Reader" is a bit confused to be anything but entertaining: it starts off like a cynical black comedy, switches to heavier ground, and rings in the "End" just as it is most confused as to how it should all wind up! It's a curiosity all right, not least in how much it seems to be a forerunner of the much superior 40's film "Nightmare Alley". It is alternately work-man-like and atmospheric, though the latter is often little more than an illogically tilted camera and the use of "Chandu the Magician" type music. However, it's too short, snappy and full of interesting people but entertaining. The Mayo Methot sequence is strong stuff, and it's always a pleasure to see Constance Cummings - a graceful and talented actress who is currently garnering rave reviews for a play in New Haven. Incidentally, Roy Del Ruth directed five films in 1933, and with "The Mind Reader", we've played them all.

-- 10 minute Intermission --

IT'S TOUGH TO BE FAMOUS (Warner Brothers, 1932) Directed by Alfred E. Green Screenplay by Robert Lord from "The Gold Fish Bowl" by Mary McGill; Camera, Sol Polito; 80 minutes

At the time "It's Tough To Be Famous" was exceptionally well reviewed, hailed as one of the freshest and brightest satires in years. Of course the cheers for Lindbergh and Byrd were still of recent vintage, as were all the movies - ----- from "Submarine" and "Dirigible" to the still-to-come "SOS Iceberg". It was still possible then, as it no longer seems to be, to satirise a hero-cult without doing so maliciously and destructively. The critical acclaim at the time was genuine and probably justified; if the film doesn't live up to today it's small wonder. Not only has the topicality gone - and the individual hero become a thing of the past himself - but in the succeeding 40-odd years the movies have given us far subtler and funnier satires via, initially, William Wellman, and later on and best of all, Preston Sturges. "It's Tough To Be Famous" is a little untidy and a little lapse - qualities which mattered but little in 1932 in view of its topicality and spirit of fun. But today we are aware that while it starts out in fine fashion, it loses some of its sense of fun fairly soon and while there's a momentary resurgence of energy at the end, it isn't really enough to provide a bang-up climax. But it's quite certainly an entertaining film. Fairbanks' final big speech is very well done, and there are quite a few of those oddly ambiguous lines and situations (like Doug autographing his buddy's pajamas) which seemed to pervade Warner films in those years. There's also a maximum range made of parade footage, particularly Lindbergh, which would of course been much more readily recognisable in 1932.

--- William K. Everson ---

Program ends: 11:00 J.W.

** A possibly incomplete and puzzling sentence: the movies cited, and many others, all aviation/exploration subjects, were directly inspired by the Lindbergh and Byrd exploits. **