Hollywood and Collegiate Life (pre and post Graduation) in the 30's

AGE OF CONSENT (Rko Radio, 1932) Directed by Gregory LaCava; Executive Producer, David O. Selznick; Associate Producer, Jandro G. Berman; Screenplay by Sarah Mason and Francis Crockrell from the play "Crossroads" by Martin Flavin; Camera, Roy Hunt; 65 mins.

With Dorothy Wilson, Richard Cromwell, Arline Judge, John Halliday, Aileen Pringle, Reginald Barlow.

Gregory LaCava's reputation rests mainly in the field of wacky comedy, and very specifically on "My Man Godfrey", but actually straight and often quite distinguished dramatic material (6-7) "Private Worlds" takes up a substantial proportion of his credit-chronology, and in his early-sound Rko period he was both prolific and versatile. "Age of Consent" is both a sympathetically handled and intelligently written little picture. Its main flaw is that its relative commercial unimportance and its correspondingly brief running time doesn't allow it the time to examine and solve its plot problems on a consistently realistic level, and elements of contrivance and melodrama creep in. But if it delivers somewhat less than it might, it also delivers a good deal more than one has a right to expect from this kind of picture. It's never pat or predictable, and even seems to be advocating college drop-out at one point! It is certainly well served by both literate and snappy dialogue - a restaurant scene close to the beginning is a beauty - and by some excellent performances. Both old-timers (John Halliday and Aileen Pringle) and newcomers (Richard Cromwell and Arline Judge) are first-rate, and there's a really sensitive performance in the lead from Dorothy Wilson, a warm, beautiful and intelligent actress whose career never took off as it should, and who never achieved more than leads in "B" pictures and supports in "A"s - like "The Last Days of Pompeii". To see what she could do with even a stereotyped role, one has only to look at the feeling and sincerity she brought to her heroine role in a George O'Brien western, "When A Man's a Man".

-- Ten Minute Intermission --

GENTLEMEN ARE BORN (Warner Brothers-First National, 1934) Directed by Alfred E. Green; Screenplay by Logan Solow and Robert Lee Johnson, from an original story by Johnson; photographed by James Van Trees; 72 mins.

With Franchot Tone, Jean Huir, Margaret Lindsay, Ann Dvorak, Ross Alexander, Charles Starrett, Dick Foran, Russell Hicks, Robert Light, Arthur Aylesworth, Henry O'Neill, Addison Richards, Marjorie Gateson, Bradley Page.

"Gentlemen Are Born", an exact male equivalent of the mid-60's "The Group" (though running less than half the length of that monumental bore), was a film that excited the Russians a great deal and it received wide showings in that country, undoubtedly for the propagandist indictments of America that it could incite. It is a curiously formula film on a non-formula plot, with echoes of both the gangster and Cinderella themes of the depression years, as well as suggesting somewhat the "Four Daughters" essays in stylish soap opera that were to emerge as the depression entered an upswing period. Most of all, it seems to suggest a reshuffling of William Dieterle's earlier "The Last Flight", one of the best movies about the "lost generation" of the 20's. Unlike "The Last Flight" however, it frequently indulges in contrived plot twists which couldn't have made the film that much more popular with a mass audience, but prevents it from being as dramatically effective as it might have been. Too, like so many Hollywood films of the 30's and 40's, it often betrays a lack of touch with reality through details (though Warners were much less guilty of this in the long run than were MGM). It's hard to believe in Franchot Tone as a near-penniless reporter when he seems to wear a new and expensive suit in every other scene. Having him say that he'll have to walk home if he pays for the dinner doesn't quite add up when one looks at the ritzy restaurants to which he takes his girl! However, with "Age of Consent", it is unfair to be picky. These films were designed as dramatics only, and rather than harp on their Hollywood conventions as weaknesses, we should regard their many good qualities as bonus factors. It's good to see that excellent actress Jean Huir again, to say nothing of Ann Dvorak and Margaret Lindsay in the same film. Of the other "graduates", Dick Foran and Charles Starrett both became major Western stars within a couple of years, and the very proclaming and personable actor Ross Alexander came to a tragic end by committing suicide.

William K. Everson

A reminder of a program change: "The Unholy Garden" (1931, dir: George Fitzmaurice, a Hecht and MacArthur script) with Ronald Colman, Fay Way and Estelle Taylor, has been substituted for "Cynara" on July 12th. -- -- --