BELA LUGOSI Interview (Talking Picture Epic, 1934) Camera, William Nobles. One reel
The early 30's were full of "Screen Snapshots"-type shorts and interviews such as this, catering to the enormous fan demand to see and hear more about their favorites-thought it was very rarely that the really top stars could be persuaded into appearing. This interview with Dorothy West is clearly pre-written and prepared, but its very artificiality adds to the fun today, and it's always good to see and hear Lugosi when he was at his peak. There's unconscious irony in some of it, too, as when Bela tells the obnoxious interviewer that he likes America because people here know how to mind their own business.

SHERVIES (Columbia, 1934) Written and directed by Arthur Ripley; Camera, George Nemetz; 2 reels
With Harry Langdon, Florence Ellis, Dick Elliott.
We had originally planned to use some animation as light relief tonight, but this "Old House Spoo" seemed eminently more suitable to the occasion. Those who remember the days when Harry Langdon was a major rival to Charlie Chaplin must be as depressed by his appearances as two-rounders as they would have been had Chaplin himself been forced to make them. Langdon's unique pantomimic quality just did not translate well to the sound screen, though this early series is far superior to the cheaper, purely slapstick series he made for Columbia in the 40's. A bit slow, and not terribly funny in itself, the film is more of a curiosity for its adjunct qualities: as an example of the work of writer-director Arthur Ripley (a big influence, not necessarily for the good, on Langdon's career, a director for K.C. Fields, and later a "film noir" director of such films as "Voice in the Wind" and "The Chase") and also as an example of the still deeply-intrawed "Yellow Peril" hysteria, which results in some quite startling gags when Harry discovers that he is part-Chinese.

THE FACE AT THE WINDOW (British Lion, 1939) Produced and directed by George King; Screenplay by A.R. Hadlum and Ronald Faye from the Victorian melodrama by Brooke Warren; Camera, John Wainwright; Music, Luke Bever; 85 mins.
With Tod Slaughter (Cherlind), Charles Laughton, John Warwick (Lucien Cortier); Marjorie Taylor (Christina de Rivard), Leonard Henry (Gaston); Aubrey Mallachie (de Briers); Robert Adair (Inspector Guerra); Wallace Everett (Prof. Leblanc); Kay Lewis (Sabattie); Margaret Yarde (La Pinan); Harry Terry (The Face).
Some years back when we played Tod Slaughter's masterpiece "Cherlind at the Dark House" we devoted considerable space to a wrap-up of his career. Tonight we'll cover that material in our opening introduction. Suffice it to say here that Slaughter was an actor specializing (on stage as well as screen) in full-bloated (literally) version of authentic old Victorian melodramas, presented in such a rich fashion that they could be taken as spoofs, although there was enough mayhem for the unsophisticated to take them straight. Slaughter (actually a very good straight actor on occasion) played his roles with tremendous relish and inspired him, while his supporting casts (usually second-raters, though occasionally an up-and-coming talent like Eric Portman would put in an appearance too) played them completely straight and without subtlety. The mixture of the deadly serious and the near-farcical made them quite a unique group of films.

"The Face at the Window" is one of Tod's better films, with a slightly larger budget than usual, paying off in good sets and more care over lighting and photography. He has the time of his life with this particular plot which in addition to his customary villainy and lechery, has a Paris background, a mild element of science-fiction, a cagey dwarf and sunry other niceties, all building to a very lively and theatrical climax. The old barn-burner theme had been filmed twice before, once in 1890 with C.S. Arbour by Pathé, and again in 1932 with Raymond Massey. Incidentally, despite its obvious production and mystery devotees might care to note that Robert Adair, who plays the detective, also played the character that may well be fiction's first private eye, Hawkshaw the Detective, in an earlier Victorian melodrama of Slaughter's, "The Ticket of Leave Man".

--- Ten Minute Intermission ---

THE BLACK ROOM (Columbia, 1935) Directed by Roy William Neill; Original story by Arthur Straw, Screenplay by Straw and Henry Myers; Camera, Al Segler; Art Director, Stephen Goosson; 60 mins.
With Boris Karloff (Gregor and Anton); Marion Marsh (Thea); Robert Allum (Lieut. Albert Lussan); Thurston Hall (Col. Hassel); Katherine Deverill (Maska); John Buckler (Beran); Henry Kolker (Bart Frederic); Colin Tapley (Lieut. Hassel); Torben Meyer (Peter); Egon Brecher (Karl); John Heifer (France); Edward Van Sloan (Doctor); Fredric Vogeding (Josef); George Barr Mckenna (Major lones); Robert Middleston (Promenator); Marion Leasing (Maria)John George, Ivan Linow.
With a plot much in the Wilkie Collins "Woman in White" tradition, and a little of "The Man in the Iron Mask" thrown in, "The Black Room" is a curious-and good-one-shot horror film from Columbia. Superficially at least, it is almost as stylish a production as James Whale's films for Universal, and Columbia never again did anything quite like it. Certainly their group of Karloff films in the 40's, though interesting, didn't match the quality of the group of Karloff films in Universal. With its traditionally Victorian story of poison, sealing rooms, and a family curse, and effectively Gothic castles, church and cemetery sets, it presents the kind of (serious)melodrama that has virtually disappeared from the screen. Many of the exteriors, with their painted, brooding skies and distorted trees, are deliberately non-realistic, as in Universal's first three Frankenstein films, Karloff turns in an excellent performance, and the editing in his dual role scenes particularly neat. The musical themes throughout are first-rate, interestingly speeded-up in this climactic reel, the themes were later used as standard for music in "The Secret of Treasure of the Sierra Madre". Roy William Neill, who directed, also made all but the first of Universal's "Sherlock Holmes" films as well as such thrillers as "The Ninth Guest" and "Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man". He was stronger on pace and movement than atmospherics, but in "The Black Room" he manages both with distinction.

Program finishes approx. 10:35.

--- William K. Everson ---