"They're Always Caught" (MG M, 1939) Directed by Harold S. Bucquet; 20 mins.  

 MASSACRE  (First National 1933, rev 1934) Directed by Alan Crosland; screenplay by Ralph Block and Sheridan Linton from an original story by Robert Gessner; Camera, George Barnes.  
A little known film even in its day, and never revived theatrically or by film museums (our own last showing was in 1967). "Massacre" was probably the best talkie of director Alan Crosland ("Don Juan", "The Jazz Singer") who died shortly afterwards. The story is perhaps more a little influenced by the basic structure of "I Am A Fugitive From Chain Gang", and it even seems to stress this relationship by a car chase to freedom over the same bridge that Paul Muni blew up in that earlier film. Since it deals with a very serious and worthwhile theme, the exploitation of the American Indian during the Depression years, it is a pity that, like so many Warner social protest films, it tells its story in terms of melodrama. As in "Heroes for Sale" and Lang's later "You Only Live Once", the scales are overloaded. But the incredible thing is that the film was made at all. It needs 90 minutes or more to develop subtlety in characterization and motivation, but at that length it would have been an "A" film needing a big star (Muni again, perhaps) and commercially, its theme did not lend itself to that. The compromise was to make it at 68 minutes, virtually 90 minute length. This means a kind of short-hand in type-casting, dialogue and behaviour; we know who the villains are immediately by their faces, and we then find out the extent of it. It is virtually a "typical" account of Indian Agency officials are corrupt, thieves, rapists and drug addicts! It's going a bit far, especially when the basic facts of Indian mistreatment are all so true, but it enables the film to hit hard in a short running time - and to be an entertaining melodrama for those not concerned with social protest. The typical optimistic happy ending is of course somewhat false, and there are signs that it might have been planned otherwise, but it's a small price to pay for such a powerful little film. Incidentally, the production economies include some quite inventive uses of back projection, and a very cunning fire sequence, most of which is merely suggested by flickering shadows. The dialogue is often very much to the point, and once in a while even seems to ring speeches (though short, punchy ones) direct to the audience. There is some fine camerawork, striking images, some casual race humor (a colored valet constantly makes cracks about the Indians, whom he considers his social inferiors), powerfully done mob scenes, and unusually well-chosen locations, ranging from nearby Chatsworth to that stark solitary tree in the middle of a plain that DeMille (in "The Plainsman") and other directors have used to excellent effect. Trivia note: the statuettes from the original "The Maltese Falcon" are pressed into service as props at one point. Over the recent past, I have shown the film to a number of Indian groups and to representatives of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and all have been tremendously impressed by the film (always unfamiliar to them), and a number of all saddened by how true it all still is. Perhaps the saddest thing of all is that the Chain Gang film did have some affect in bringing about reforms (and needed ones) for the treatment of convicts, whereas this film, crusading for totally innocent victims, had no effect whatsoever.  

--- Ten Minute Intermission ---  

THE EAGLE AND THE HAWK  (Paramount, 1933) Directed by Stuart Walker; Ast. Dir; Mitchell Leisen; Screenplay by Bogart Rogers and Seton Miller from a story by John Monk Saunders; Camera, Larry Pishbeck; 70 mins. With Cary Grant, Fredric March, Carole Lombard, Jack Oakie, Sir Guy Standing, Forrester Harvey, Loyland Holland, Russell Scott, Kenneth Howell, Geoffrey Kent, Adrienne d'Ambricourt, Olaf Hytten, Lane Chandler, Dennis O'Keefe, York Sherman, Paul Grenonisi.  

The World War I aviation cycle that had started with 1927's "Wings" was here in its sixth year. "The Eagle and the Hawk" was basically a programmer like many others of its ilk, cashing in on a popular cycle and cutting economical corners by lifting much spectacular aerial footage from "Wings". Nevertheless it's - like "Massacre" - a tight, compact and undeservedly ignored movie. Its story, quite out of the rut for its day, is up-to-date enough to fit into what is today termed "anti-hero" plot material. (Its original ending, softened before release, was even stronger and more cynical.) There are certain cliches in this kind of fare that would be missed were they not there; the toasting of the enemy, the tacitless batman, chattering about his "gentlemen" who have been shot down, and that wonderful old professional Englishman Sir Guy Standing underplaying everything. "Seems a pity..." he mumbles after an entire squadron of replacements has been wiped out by one bomb. But cliches or not, the film holds up well, surprisingly so considering the number of WL-2 films ("Command Decision", "Twelve O'Clock High") that explored the same situations rather more thoroughly. No time wasted in prologues, homespuns, though, and even that pleasant old device of introducing the characters pictorially in the credits is used creatively by showing the leads in pre-narrative scenes, so that when we meet them in the story proper we know all we need to about them, without recourse to explanations or flashbacks.  

--- William K. Everson ---  

Program ends approx. 10:20. 