Tonight's program is a good example of how two films, both basically unimportant but both very enjoyable, that on their own might seem somewhat trivial, as a unit gravitate together and complement one another rather nicely. Apart from both being from the same genre, and vehicles for notable feminine stars, both are also produced by B.P. Schulberg (who seemed to shuttle back and forth between Columbia and Paramount) and both are directed by Marion Gering, whose relatively brief career in the 30's included such films as "The Devil and the Deep" and "Thunder in the City" - as well as a half-dozen Sylvia Sidney vehicles.

LADY OF SECRETS (Columbia, 1936) Directed by Marion Gering; Produced by B.P. Schulberg; Screenplay by Zoe Akins and Joseph Anthony from an original story by Katherine Bush; Camera: Ted Tetzlaff; 75 mins. With Ruth Chatterton, Otto Kruger, Lionel Atwill, Marian Marsh, Lloyd Nolan, Robert Allen, Elisabeth Risdon, Jana Bryant, Esther Dale.

Classy soap-operas and "confession" movies had been enormously popular at RKO, Warners and Paramount in the early 30's and then went out of fashion. Columbia seemed to take them over in the mid-30's, shaping them into vehicles for new stars (Jean Arthur), vedettes (Ruth Chatterton) and their own resident Emil Jannings, Walter Connolly (as witness "Whom the Gods Destroy"). But these were all post-Code films, and moral stragolings of any kind had to be paid for with a plethora of suffering. Not being able to deal entirely honestly with the subjects at hand, they sometimes went overboard with sentiment or melodramatic excesses, accusations that can be leveled at "Lady of Secrets". One has to wait until the middle of the film for the "confession element to intrude, and then it is handled quite discreetly. But for a relatively restrained film, it's handsomely made, excellently photographed by Ted Tetzlaff, who would become a fine director of drivers cars in the 40's, and well served by a particularly strong cast. Not the least bit dismayed at not being cast as a mad scientist, Atwill turns his pompous father into the tyrant of all time, making even Laughton's performance in "The Barretts of Wimpole Street" seem quite benevolent by comparison. Atwill makes the most of every line and facial nuance, and is a joy to watch. Ruth Chatterton, nearing the end of her career (she made some 20-odd films between 1929 and 1933, only a half-dozen between 1934 and 1936) shows no signs of considering herself slumming after years of greater glory at Paramount and Warners, and gives her usual solid and sometimes numbed performance, faring rather better as the more mature woman in the bulk of the story, and not looking too convincing as the younger girl in the flashback sequence.

--- Ten Minute Intermission ---

PICK UP (Paramount, 1933) Directed by Marion Gering; Produced by B.P. Schulberg; Screenplay by S.K. Lauren and Agnes Brand Leaby from an original story by Vina Delmar; Camera, David Abel; 76 minutes. With Sylvia Sidney, George Raft, William Bond, George Meeker, William Harrigan, Louise Beavers, Clarence Chandler, Robert McWade, Purnell Pratt, Florence Almighty, Eddie Clayton, Al Hill, Alice Adair, Patricia Farley, Dorothy Layton, Brooks Benedict, Eleanor Lawson, Oscar Apfel, Lona Andre.

When Miss Sidney was invited to attend the screening of "Pick Up" this evening her first reaction was one of surprise: since it never seems to surface on tv, she had always thought it had been lost or (hopefully) destroyed. She added that while she had to make it, she certainly didn't have to see it. From such an opening onslaught, obviously the film has nowhere else to go but up, and I think you may be pleasantly surprised by it -- and that Miss Sidney would have been too. Admittedly it's interesting today at least partially from an academic stance, as an accidental forerunner of the quite similar "You and Me" that Sidney and Raft made for Fritz Lang some five years later. But even so, I can think of a number of Sidney vehicles that survive the years less sturdily, and any number of Paramount films of the 30's (for example) really are not worth playing, until such time as age and star names become the only criteria necessary. "Pick Up" starts off extremely well, with a powerful, low-key opening reel which has an astonishing affinity with Lang's later work. Thereafter it softens itself a little and goes in more sentimental directions than expected, though since this is very much of a pre-Code film, its sentiment with guts. A highlight, and an unexpected one, is the dynamic appearance of William Bond, always an interesting and intelligent player, but never as delightfully unlikable as here, playing a small-town hell-raiser with a penchant for bizarre wild parties. All the film really lacks is a powerful climax; the courtroom sequence that ends the film tidies everything up, but it is lacking in logic or much punch, and after the varied delights of the rest of the film, is anti-climactic. But Sidney's performance is a very good one, the more so since she hadn't been so heavily typed in this kind of role at that time, and the whole film, while admittedly not memorable, isn't just forgettable either.

--- William K. Everson

Program ends: 10,20
Followed by short discussion period.