BACHELOR BAIF (Rko Radio, 1934) Directed by George Stevens; Produced by Pandro S. Berman; Screenplay by Glen Tryon from a story by Victor and Edward Halperin; Camera, David Abel; Music, Max Steiner; 75 mins.

A little-known film that didn't even get a New York first-run as a second feature, "Bachelor Baif" was the first film in George Stevens' contract with Rko, which saw him rapidly promoted from "B's to "A's ("Alice Adams", "Swing Time") and ultimately to super-specials like "Gunga Din". It is the kind of golden straw in the bush, and which Hal Roach had the film to give him. Like so many smaller Rko comedies of the early 30's, it's a film that promises nothing but surprises with unexpected quality - and qualities. That surprise element is rather important however; the second time around, the film still satisfies but doesn't have quite the sting it had initially. Of course, any film with Stuart Erwin in the lead has something of a handicap. He was excellent in just the right supporting role, but when he was starring, it was usually in a Will Rogers-type role (without Rogers' extraordinary talent) and without the budget and production talent (writers, cameramen) that enhanced his unique appeal. Here, Stuart Erwin is surrounded by good supporting players who take up a lot of the slack from his somewhat lethargic screen image. One can easily imagine this basic story being done in a zippy style over at Warners, with the omnipresence of FrankMcHugh, Allen Jenkins and Jean Blondell. It might have been funnier that way, but in Stevens' hands it has an easy-going charm that is most appealing. Rather surprisingly, the story is by horror specialists Victor Hugo Halperin and his brother Edward ("White Zombie", "Supernatural"). In the twenties however, they specialised in romantic dramas and comedies, usually setting up new companies (Romance Pictures, Welcome Pictures) for their scripts. It seems to me this was a lot of fun. Thinking that this might conceivably be a remake of one of their silents, I checked out all the stories - none match, it certainly isn't a remake, but some of these silents (like "Tea - With a Kick" and "School for Wives") sound quite intriguing. Former silent comedy star Glen Tryon did the screenplay from their story, and is presumably responsible for some of the zippy and racy one-liners delivered by or directed at Pert Kelton. (One or two seem deliberately thrown away in semi-whisper, presumably to placate the Production Code). Rochelle Hudson, who had been thrust into ten films in 1933, was by now on her way, and mostly played the ingenue instead of the vamp - films in which she's much better appealing in this one. And Anne Shirley, still Dawn O'Day until the year before, has an interesting bit prior to being thrust into stardom via "Anne of Green Gables" later that year. Max Steiner's score makes interesting use of "Paradise" at times, a piece of studio-owned music that Rko used almost as much as Paramount used "Isn't It Romantic" through the years.

--- Ten Minute Intermission ---

POLLY OF THE CIRCUS ( MGM, 1930) Directed by Alfred Santell; Screenplay by Carey Wilson based on the play by Margaret Mayo; Camera, George Barnes; Musical score by Dr. William Axt, 72 mins.
With Marion Davies, Clark Gable, C. Aubrey Smith, Raymond Hatton, David Landau, Ruth Selwyn, Maude Eburne, Ray Milland, Little Billy, Guinn Williams, Clark Marshall, Lilian Elliott, Philip Crane, Edward Le Saint, Frank McHugh, Tiny Sandford, Phil McGullock.

Clark Gable made an incredible 11 films in 1931, starting off as the villain in the Pathes western "The Painted Desert", and climaxing the year with "Passioned" and "Hell Divers". Actually, Polly of the Circus was a 1930 production too, giving Gable an 8th year for that year though it wasn't a success for that reason. It's a rather anti-climactic film after the string of dynamic films in the latter part of '31. His next film however was "Red Dust", and from that point on there was no thought of wasting this personality in a dozen films a year. Including "Polly", there were only five films in '32, and the last of those "The White Sister", was held for 1933 release.

The versatile and frequently under-rated director Alfred Santell was in a curious time-warp niche in 1932. All of his films that year - "Polly of the Circus", "Canyon热" and "Passioned" - were of the Storm Country, and more badly as the nominal villain that he seems almost like the ogre in a Fleischer cartoon. Marion Davies, she's especially good in comedy than in drama, still has some affecting moments and when photographed with care, can look quite lovely at times. It's understandable that "Polly" is almost never shown, but it's a fascinating curie. — William X. Everson

Program ends 10.17.