THE BIG SHOT (Rko Paths, 1931; rel: 1932) Directed by Ralph Murphy; a Charles Rogers Production; Assoc. Producer, Harry Joe Brown; Screenplay by Joseph Fields and Earl Baldwin from a story by George Dromgold and Hal Conklin; Camera, Arthur Miller; 65 mins.

With Eddie Quillan (Ray Smith); Maureen O'Sullivan (Doris); Mary Nolan (Fay Turner); Belle Bennett (Mrs. Thompson); Roscoe Atew (Barber); Arthur Stone (Old Timer); Louis John Hartman (Mr. Howell); Otis Harlan (Dr. Feasley); Billy Eugene (Jack Spencer); Edward McWade (Whole Ira); Harvey Clark (Mr. Hartman); A.S. Byrons (Mr. Potte); Charles Thurston (Town marshall); Hilliard Carr (Garage boy); Frank Darien (Postmaster).

"The Big Shot" was one of the first 30 films made over a 20 year period by a generally routine director, Ralph Murphy, who seldom rose above the programmer level. That, and the fact that the NY Times gave it a very apathetic review, give little cause for optimism. But, even admitting the unpredictable of audience response, I suspect that it - like last week's "Bachelor Salt" and one we hope to show soon, "The Meanest Gal in Town" - will prove to be one of those genuine surprises that dropped up at Rko when one least expected them. It has an interesting cast, but in 1931 must have been a curiously anachronistic film, since it seems exactly like one of the Charles Ray vehicles of 1916-20. However, charming as he often was, his roles usually called for Ray to display a lack of backbone until the climactic reel. In the lead, Eddie Quillan, has more life and enterprise than Ray had, and the film bowls along surprisingly briskly (especially for a '31 Rko) with quite a bit of comic action, its climax is surprisingly suspenseful and exciting, if unsubtly old-fashioned. It's a pity that, like so many commercially unimportant early Rkos, it has been "reserved" only via a lack-lustre 16mm negative, and in this print the values of Arthur Miller's undoubtedly fine photography are minimised. Otherwise however, it's quite one of the best of the early Eddie Quillan vehicles. Incidentally, the Rko 1937 film of the same title, and starring Guy Kibbee, is no remake.

Ten Minute Intermission

STOLEN HEAVEN (Paramount 1930, rel: 1931) Directed by George Abbott; adapted by George Abbott from a story by Dana Burnett; Camera, George Polasey; 70 mins.

With: Nan Marriott (Nancy); Phillips Holmes (Joe); Louis Calhern (Steve Perry); Edward Keane (Morgan); and Joan Carr, Guy Kibbee, G. Albert Smith, Dagmar Oakland, Elmer Cornell, Joseph Crehan.

Coming right after the very sophisticated "Laughter", which gave Nancy Carroll one of her best roles, "Stolen Heaven" did seem to be rather a let-down. Alas it was followed by the truly absurd and absurd "The Night Angel" (with Carroll's worst performance, though it got no help from script or direction) and by the only slightly better "Personal Maid". Luckily Lubitsch's "The Man I Killed" came along then. But somehow "Stolen Heaven" acquired the reputation of being the first of a trio of Carroll turkeys, a singularly unfair assessment. Its main problem is the restrictions imposed by being shot at the Paramount/Long Island Studio, which never had enough exterior space to creative convincing exterior sets. If their films were stylised, as in "His Woman" (the Cooper/Colbert film we ran a few seasons back) the artifice hardly mattered. But "Stolen Heaven", much of which is set in lush Florida surroundings, is directed as essentially a realistic film, and the attempt to give it a superficially primitive look, even though the direction by George Abbott (a stage veteran then moving into films, and now, in his mid-90's, still working in the theatre) is actually quite sophisticated. A major liability too is Phillips Holmes, whose popularity is hard to fathom, in a sense the Montgomery Clift of his day (quite literally, since both played the victim/hero of "An American Tragedy"), Holmes was lifeless, charmless, and a perennial whiner (who would have made a perfect movie sam for Beryl Mercer) so "Stolen Heaven" is essentially a fairy-story, which could have been played for pure charm and whimsy, or later perhaps in a gutsy, semi-comic Damon Runyon vein. But here it is almost defeated by Holmes' inadequacy, though largely redeemed by Carroll's charm. It's an ebbadoll film which will captivate some and leave others cold, but which is certainly a curio deserving of an occasional outing. Incidentally, my criticism of Holmes and his character should not be considered as a criticism of Clift. Both played similar roles and types, but Clift had sensitivity and depth, whereas Holmes was cold and unsympathetic, except, possibly, in Herbert Brenon's "The Housemaster".

UNASSIGNED AS WE ARE (MG-M/Hal Roach, 1929) Directed by Lewis Foster, from a story by Leo McCabey, 20 mins.

With Laurel and Hardy, Thelma Todd, Mae Busch, Edgar Kennedy.

For years known only (if at all) via its silent version, this is Laurel & Hardy's first talkie - hence its title. Sound reconstruction is a little crude, but it's a delightful comedy, with the two comics taking to dialogue naturally and easily, Mae Busch making a magnificently bitchy Mrs Hardy, and Thelma Todd, fetchingly clad in brief lingerie, playing the next door neighbor. It was all expanded in 1933 to provide the basic plot for the last half of their feature, "Blockheads".

Program ends approx. 10.25, followed by brief question/discussion period.

— William K. Everson