"Exclusive" is the kind of flexible '50s material that would have been handled by different studios in different ways. One can well imagine this same plot being treated in different ways by different directors, if given to different actors (locale) a warmly human Frank Capra special at Columbia. At Paramount it's a bit of both, with the taste and restraint of director Hall keeping the melodrama lively but nicely balanced by warmth and humor, though the climactic mob scenes get a little out of hand and suggest that Hall may have been overly-impressed by Fritz Lang's "Fury" of the year before. The film was extremely well received at the time, much of the credit being given to the two writers, all former newspapermen, who were praised for avoiding so many of the distortions and cliches that had kept into the popular newspaper cycle of the period. (It's a genre that has largely disappeared, since after "All The President's Men," all other scooper-chasing seems a little anti-climactic). The film was originally intended for Carole Lombard, and then shunted to Paramount's new contractee Frances Farmer, whose "The Toast of New York" for RKO hit New York screens the same week. "Exclusive" is a solid, tough, satisfying film that succeeded, as many people remember, in being a celebration of Charlie Ruggles' drinking gone with the refrigerator, one of those seemingly inconsequential sequences, probably put in for padding, that worked far better than could have been planned and gave the film a focus that caused it to be remembered by audiences even though they forget the title of the movie it came from.

--- Ten Minute Intermission ---

FUGITIVE LOVERS (MGM, 1935; rel. 1934) Directed by Richard Boleslavsky; Screenplay by Albert Hackett, Frances Goodrich and George S. Seitz from a story by Frank Wead and Robert Montgomery (Paul Porter); Midge Evans (Betty Morris); Ted Healey (Norton Withington Jr.) Nat Pendleton (Legs Coffee); C. Henry Gordon (Dally); Ruth Selwyn (Babe Callahan) and The Three Stooges, Dewitt Jennings, Edward Fresh, Syd Saylor, Robert Homans, Dick Cranmer, Wade Boteler, Snowflake, Walter Long, Al Hill, Milt Kibbee, Walter Brennan, Edward Gargan.

To "Fugitive Lovers" falls the historic distinction of being the first of the cross-country-bus movies, beating "Cross Country Cruise" into release by a couple of weeks, and "It Happened One Night" by a month. In fact, Robert Montgomery is credited with having turned down "It Happened One Night" because he'd already done the similar thing in "Fugitive Lovers." Although production schedules don't make that entirely credible, and it's more likely he was preparing to do "Lovers" when the Capra offer came along. Similarities between the two films are too strong to be entirely coincidental, and one must suspect that the original writers of "Lovers" had read the story "Night Bus" on which "It Happened One Night" was based, and borrowed and reshaped, keeping just this side of plagiarism. Since screwball comedy as a genre hadn't been officially shaped by 1933, the film was strangely between screwball comedy (in the first half) and crime melodrama, with romance and reformation thrown in. By 1933 standards the climax seems a bit of a copout, almost as though inspiration had run out before a logical ending could be reached, 30's thinking was rather different though it is more likely that the original vein had been thoroughly mined, and action-writer-director Seitz was brought in to provide a bang-up, audience-satisfying finale - even though its mixture of sentiment and melodrama is dragged in from left field. It's a curious film all around; some magnificently obnoxious comedy from Ted Healey (in the equivalent of the Roone Karmes role in the Capra film), an odd role reversal in the Three Stooges and their leadership; some beautifully morbid humor from Nat Pendleton as a runymond gangster; beauty and charm - and a good performance - from Midge Evans - plus some interesting location work, and slam-bang action sequences which allow the writers' and director's basic economic style of Montgomery to have a rather ill-defined role. One is never too sure what crime landed him in jail; the warden clearly loathes him because he was an intellectual and "read all those books"; and though Montgomery is sympathetic, his jail-break leads to a mass slaughter which is conveniently sidestepped from the question of his pardon comes up. Director Boleslavsky and cameraman Tetzlaff pull off an interesting (and I'm sure previously untried on) technique to keep the audience under-orchaking of most of the non-dialogue scenes; this makes the film move faster physically than it normally would. It's essentially a subliminal effect, and only occasionally (as in reaction shots between faces) is one aware that the trick is being pulled... but it does result in a stepped-up pace that certainly helps the film. All in all, this is one of the most pleasant rediscoveries in years; a thoroughly entertaining movie that makes one hope for more of the same coming... out of the vaults. — Wm.K. Eversen

Program ends: 10:25