WYLER AND WHALE AT UNIVERSAL

TOM BROWN OF CULVER (Universal, 1932) Directed by William Wyler; screenplay by George Green & Tom Buckingham, with additional dialogue by Clarence Marks; Camera, Charles Stumar; 80 mins.

William Wyler and James Whale were Universal's most important directors in the early 30's, and both undoubtedly did their best work at the studio — though Wyler, with his big Goldwyn films in the future ("Wuthering Heights"); The Best Years of Our Lives" which will certainly have the most profound effect. Wyler's personal, brisk, free-wheeling and un-perfectionist film making at Universal in that period - with "Counselor at Law" of 1933 as certainly the best of many good films for the studio - is certainly more exciting and livelier than the formal films like "The Letter" that came later. One of the best of the usually rather narrow and predictable Military Academy films, and with a much wider range and appeal than most of its breed, "Tom Brown of Culver" is a good example of Wyler's ability to build a lot out of little. The plot is not markedly eventful, but in his hands it is fast-paced, dramatic and surprisingly moving at times. Thanks to sharp editing, good camera compositions and frequent utilisation of a mobile camera, its story is kept constantly and interestingly on the move, and is a much better film than its 1939 remake "Spirit of Culver" which starred Jackie Cooper, Freddie Bartholomew and Tim Holt. While the remake was still a pretty good little film, it lacked the broad scope and force needed to be overtaken by Weltzheimer's "Lilac Time", where Nathaniel West worked on the screenplay, and said critics attributed the film's bitter quality solely to him, not knowing that the original film (a virtually unknown film, today) had those same qualities. The remake ran a reel longer than the original, and added a melodramatic motor-cycle chase through a storm for its climax. Its basic weakness however was in the mannered and scenery-chewing playing of Henry Hull; H.B. Warner's quieter performance in the same role here is infinitely more poignance. Warner'sớt style is much more intimate, and voice adds real power and depth to the film. Incidentally, there seems to be almost a conspiracy to keep Tyrone Power, in his first role, hidden from the camera. In the background in many scenes, he seems always to be just off-screen or behind someone's head. However, he does manage to get in one good scene - with dialogue - midway through the film.

— Ten Minute Intemrmission —

REMEMBER LAST NIGHT? (Universal, 1935) Directed by James Whale; Produced by Carl Laemmlle Jr.; Screenplay by Harry Clark, Doris Malsey and Dan Totheroh from the novel "The Hangover Murders" by Adam Hobhouse; Camera, Joseph Valentine; 80 mins.
With Edward Arnold (Denny Harrison); Robert Young (Tony Milburn); Constance Cummings (Carrollta Milburn); Sally Eilers (Betty Huling); Monroe Gaylor (Billy Arillas); Robert Armstrong (Flanagan); Reginald Denny (Jake Whittedge); George Meeker (Doc Huling); Edward Brophy (Maxie); Gregory Ratoff (Farconia); Arthur Treacher (Thelps); Jack Latue (Baptiste); Gustav von Seyffertitz (Prof.Jones); Rafaela Ottiano (Madame Boulier); Louise Henry (Penny Whittedge); E.E. Clive (Photographer) Tiny Sandford (Truck driver); and Monte Montague, Warner Richmond, Harry Woods, Alice Ardell, Kate Price, Frank Reicher, Dewey Robinson, Wade Boteler, James Flavin, Corbett Morris, James Burke, William Pawley, Ted Billings.

Far more even than "It Happened One Night", "The Thin Man" spawned more imitations and ripoffs than almost any other movie of the 30's. "Remember Last Night?" is perhaps the most original of all these spinoffs, probably owing its existence to the success of the earlier film, but otherwise - apart from Wyler's economical husband and wife detecting team, and a plethora of alcoholic sipping - being quite different in mood. The comedy content is very much of the screwball variety, with the opening reels, dominated by glossy art-deco sets, achieving an almost surreal quality. Thereafter, despite the murder among friends format, it is played relatively straight, shifting gears into typically atmospheric visuals (as with the hypnotised sequence involving Gustav von Seyffertitz), in the same manner in which the plot affords an opportunity. The plot is incredibly complicated, and at least three viewings are needed to sort out all the ramifications and loose ends, although the identity of the principal villain is fairly obvious all the way. The film is fortunate in having such likeable players as Young and Cummings in the leads, since all of the characters are a fairly self-centred, unsympathetic lot, treating murder very casually and of decidedly insincere importance to the consuming of yet more cocktails. It's a remarkably handsome production, with huge, glossy sets and smooth, glinting camerawork, backed up by Whale's recognisable directorial and editorial trademarks, and many of his favorite players in support. 1934 (with "One More River" and "A Y Candlelight") and 1935 (tonight's film and "The Bride of Frankenstein") represent Whale's peak period at Universal, with "Remember Last Night?" perhaps the least important film of the quartet, but grand fun nevertheless.

Accordingly there is a query on Universal's domestic rights to the film and its rare announced showings are frequently cancelled at the last minute, though it did make it to tv in some areas recently.

— William K. Everson

Program ends approx. 10:20

THE NEW SCHOOL
FILM SERIES 46: Program #6
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