PALM SPRINGS (Paramount, 1936) Produced by Walter Wanger; Directed by Aubrey Scotto; (see note below); Screenplay by Joseph Fields and Humphrey Pearson from the story "Lady Smith" by Nyles Connolly; Camera, James Van Trees; Musical Director, Boris Morros; Songs by Ralph Rainger and Leo Robin, and Maek Gordon and Harry Revel. 72 mins.


"Palm Springs" has, in a sense, been caught in an embarrassing position. It was a minor but enjoyable film I'd wanted to play for a long time but needed the right mate to go with it. It seemed to fit exactly into the right spot as a light-hearted prologue to the more serious but not unrelated "The Last of Mrs Cheyney" - but now that the lady is temporarily indisposed, "Palm Springs" has to stand on its own. It will probably do so quite nicely, but needs an understanding of its awkward situation! Although not a hit, this romantic comedy is an excellent addition to the filmography of its type - including "Hills Of Old Wyoming" and the memorable "I don't want to make history, I just want to make love!" - it is perhaps more interesting today as a classic illustration of the kind of film, played straight and with all its cliches intact, that Preston Sturges satirised so beautifully in "The Lady Eve". Quite apart from the similarity of the source-work title to Sturges' title and lead character, Frances Langford is certainly an approximation of the Stameyck heroine, while Sir Guy Standing and Smith Ballew are pretty exact blueprints for Charles Coburn and Henry Fonda. It has few surprises, but it's an engaging trifle, is nicely photographed in Palm Springs locations, and offers David Niven in a comparatively early role, yet already getting billing over the nominal hero, and gracefully sliding into the film about twenty minutes in, and totally taking over. It's also that rarity among depression-era Cinderella films, one in which Spring breaking heroines really salted, but were accepted as a quite workable substitute. Two "mysteries" surrounding the film are worth noting. In underground circles, it is rumored that Raoul Walsh directed the film. Official director Scotto had edited "Private Worlds" for Wanger the year before, been promoted by him to director of "Smart Girl", and supposedly followed up with this one. But thereafter it was back to strictly "B" product at Republic, lending credence to the theory that possibly Walsh took over and directed "Palm Springs" - certainly a slicker film for Scotto's entertainment. On the other hand, Walsh turned out three other fairly big films for Paramount in the first half of '36, and if he did do this one, he'd have had to do it in a hurry - which of course is quite possible. Secondary rumors are that the film was shot in Technicolor and released in b/w, which frankly seems unlikely, given Van Trees as cameraman and the relative unimportance of the film. However, it's additional food for thought if the lightweight film doesn't come up with enough vitamins of its own. ——— Ten Minute Interruption ———

A NOTORIous AFFAIR (First National, 1930) Directed by Lloyd Bacon; screenplay by J. Grubb Alexander from the 1929 play "Fame" by Audrey and Waverly Carter; Camera, Ernest Haller; Art Director, Anton Grot; Assistant Directors, John Devereux, L. Aubrey Kellogg. With Billie Dove, Basil Rathbone, Kay Francis, Montague Love, Kenneth Thompson, Philip Strange, Blanche Frederici, Gino Cervelli, Elinor Vandyvere, Bill Elliott.

Frankly "A Notorious Affair" is the kind of movie we would normally have slotted into an "Archive Night" - but trying to anticipate Mrs Cheyney's shunning of us some six months in advance, it seemed the best choice as a substitute: a similar stage-derived milieu, the same period of production, even one of the same stars (Rathbone) and the meadames Dove and Francis presumably making an acceptable substitute for Miss Shearer. (Oddly enough since its initial announcement as a possibility, there had been many requests for it), of course, there is no guarantee Mrs Cheyney might not also have been rather creaky in her joints too, but hopefully we will be able to confirm that in due time. "A Notorious Affair" is almost a text-book of the look and sound of the typical stage-to-screen transfer in 1929-30 when properties were not always selected on merit, but merely because they offered pre-written structure and dialogue at a time when Hollywood scenarists were still learning their new trade. What might have been called "outstanding" on stage was often still acceptable, and intercutting often a matter of carefully posed reaction shots. The idea of accompanying music is here still given the dominant importance it received from the silent film, and occasionally the excess of music adds an artificial air. But having made these generalised criticisms, the film is a lot better than many of its kind, and the absurdity of motivation is often glossed over by the interesting people involved. Billie Dove is always lovely to look at, and Rathbone is a delight in the best Stroheimesque learing to stalbemen, is poised and delightful, and Rathbone - if a trifle stiff in an unlikely role - comes through with flawless diction. Its high-society going-on seems a little hard-to-accept for Surrey in 1929, but that may well be why First National kept the location in England rather than shifting it to Connecticut; Lloyd Bacon directed this one immediately before "Nobby Dick", and a few years before really hitting his stride with "42nd Street" and the Cagney and O'Brien vehicles.

Program ends approx. 10.15, discussion follows.

--- Wm. E. Everson ---