CENTRAL PARK (Warner Bros.-First National, 1932) Directed by John Adolphi; Screenplay by Ward Morehouse and Earl Baldwin from a story by Morehouse; Camera, Sid Hickox; NY premiere, Winter Garden theatre. 57 mins.

With: Jean Blondell (Dot); Wallace Ford (Rick); Guy Kibbee (Charley); Henry B. Walthall (Eby); Patricia Ellis (Vivian); Charles Sellon (Jake); Spencer Charters Sergeant Riley; John Wray (Smiley); Harold Huber (Nick); Holmes Herbert (Ball chief); John Jennings (Police lieutenant); William Armetta (Tony); William Robertson (Detective); Harry Holman (Police Captain); William Pawley (Hymie); Edward LeSaint (Police Commissioner); Irving Bacon (Oscar); Pat Collins (Spy); and Larry Steers, Rolfe Seden, Lee Shumway, William B. Davidson, Morgan Wallace, William Norton Bailey, Dennis O'Keefe, Wade Boteler.

Seldom have so many plot-lines been packaged into a 57-minute economy-size box, and the amazing thing is that John Adolphi - a rather slow and stately director, better attuned to the George Arliss vehicle - manages to keep it moving as though he were a Nick Grinde or a D. Ross Lederman! One wonders whether, studio logic being what it is, he was given the assignment because he had shot some location scenes in Central Park at the end of the prior year for Arliss' "The Man Who Played God."

"Nothing ever happens in Central Park" murmurs kindly old Henry B. Walthall, who has evidently seen "Grand Hotel," and from then on we have an escaped lunatic, a lion that escapes into Central Park's Casino at dinner time, young love, racial humor, sentiment, a good fight, a chase of a car chase, even a subplot about an old man going blind! His evasive and barred camera angles that remind us, if not John Adolphi necessarily, of Gance's "La Rue"! Although clearly an economical production, it has some surprisingly elaborate sets at times - possibly borrowed from other films - and a generous supply of extras. Snappy background music includes "Teddy Bears" from "Blessed Event," "You've Got That Thing" from "Fifty Million Frenchmen" and rather surprisingly a tune from the non-WB and yet released "Moonlight and Pretzels." It never slows down long enough for one to dissect all the cliches and find that not all of the scattered plot lines wind up quite as one assumes they will.

What is especially pleasing about the film today is the surprising amount of footage actually shot in Central Park. Most of the principals obviously never left Hollywood, but the use of an actual projection, good and (creditable) studio reconstructions. But there is also a great deal of authentic Central Park footage - and not just establishing shots either, but generous slices of plot and/or action as in the climactic car chase, even though the gangsters do come acropper by crashing their truck over a cliff that I can't quite place in Central Park as it is known today! Far more ambitious films set in New York and Central Park - for example, "Hallelujah I'm a Bum," "It Happened in Hollywood," "Up in Central Park" and "One More Spring" - shot far less location footage, and were less meticulous about reconstructed sets in Hollywood.

In that sense, it is a most interesting little film, and it's rather sad to look back on gentler days when cars would halt to allow sheep and shepherds to cross the road to get at the wide open spaces between Fifth Avenue and Central Park West, and when mugging was unheard of since it was more fun - and more profitable to take tommy-guns into the Casino and do it in grand style. But perhaps the real sign of the times is in Wallace Ford, with a windfall of two dollars, taking his girl for a slap-up meal, leaving a tip, and still having enough for an evening at the movies!

--- Ten Minute Intermission ---

FRIDAY THE 13th (Gainsborough-Gaumont-British, 1933) Directed by Victor Saville. Original screenplay by Sidney Gilliat and G.H. Moreawy-White, with additional dialogue by Emlyn Williams; Camera: Charles Van Enger; Art Direction, Alfred Junge and Vetchinsky; 84 mins.

With: Katharine Cornell (Isabel), Ralph Richardson (The Schoolmaster); Donald Calthrop (Hugh Nickolls); Ivor McLean (Dance Instructor); Sonnie Hale (Alf); Cyril Smith (Fred); Muriel Aked (Miss Twigg); Eliot Makeham (Jackson); Ursula Jeans (Eileen Blake); D.A. Clarke-Smith (Max); Gibb McLaughlin (Florist); Emlyn Williams (Blake); Frank Lawton (Frank Parsons); Belle Chrystal (Mary); Max Miller (Joe); Hartley Power, Percy Parsons (Americans); Alfred Drayton (The Detective); Edmund Gwenn (Wakefield); Mary Jerrold (Flora Wakefield); Gordon Harker (Hamilton Bridge); Robertson Hare (Mr. Lightfoot); Martita Hunt (Agnes); Leonora Corbett (Dolly); Richard Halton (Johnny) and E.B. Claremont.

There have been two Friday the 13ths in 1964, and on the first one, back in January, we showed the film at the Pacific Film Archive in Berkeley - to whom many thanks. The result, somewhat of a mess, had been lying unattended in a vault for many years, and was shown without the sound track. Nothing is actually missing, but there are splices and jump cuts which are always annoying in such an enjoyable film, and especially so when they cut into the fast pacer of com Max Miller. However, the PFA people did a wonderful job in restoring it to projectable standards. Prior to these two screenings, it had not been shown in the U.S. for at least 40 years. Now there seems a very good chance that a mint 35mm print will be shown in the Museum of Modern Art's upcoming British series - but a print on the projector is worth two in transit, as here it is anyway, with all its blemishes.
The newest (and hopefully the last) of the Friday the 13th Grand Guignol splatter movies opens all over town today, so it's good to be able to counter-attack with this original "Friday the 13th", when the date was supposed to denote bad luck. Not that rape, pillage and slaughter by a maniac with a knife is not bad luck too, but there's no physical mayhem in this original at all, and only a couple of off-screen deaths.

Like tonight's co-feature, it was obviously cashing in on "Grand Hotel", and American critics tended to be a little disappointed because it wasn't wholly serious. The NY Times complained that it didn't more exactly follow the serious pattern of "The Bridge of San Luis Rey", which may well have been its literary inspiration. But it is intended (a) as a vehicle for virtually all of the Gaumont stars, though rather curiously Jack Hulbert is absent, and (b) to be a light-hearted and only moderately serious entertainment. It was the first of a long line of British talkies to use this format - "Dead of Night", "Easy Money", "Train of Events" - and it remains one of the best.

Victor Saville was Britain's #1 director when he made this film in 1933, following "The Good Companions" and "I Was A Spy", and preceding "Evergreen". "The Good Companions" had made overnight stars of Jessie Matthews and Max Miller, and both are spotlighted again in typical roles. To American audiences, Max Miller is virtually unknown, and hopefully at least one of his vintage starring features for Warners-British will be included in the MoMA cycle. He's a delight, a fast-talking British equivalent (in comedy at least) of Lee Tracy, though his patter routine and outrageous jokes had a little more freedom on the Music Hall stage.

Two things especially impress about "Friday the 13th". One, it's an incredibly fast-paced film, moving ahead - and back-and-forth between comedy and drama - at a near-breathless pace, certainly by the standards of most British films of the period. And secondly, it's remarkable what an economical film it must have been to make. The stars, all given perfect material, hold so much attention constantly that one hardly notices that there are virtually no big sets, just fragments of rooms and streets - and much footage shot from the interior of a bus - that suggests that one has seen far more than one actually has. From a production standpoint alone, it's an unusually skilled piece of work.

Since everybody is almost perfectly type-cast, it's a good guide too as to what in British films. It does seem a bit unlikely - knowing British transportation methods - that a bus would be just starting out on its route just before midnight, and with another one, according to the conductor - just behind it. Certainly such a happy state of affairs doesn't exist today, but maybe - just as one could get a slap-up meal for two for $2 in "Central Park" in 1932, so one could catch a midnight bus to Wimbledon Common in London at the same time!

----- William K. Eversen

Program concludes at 10,10.
followed by Question/Discussion session.
A reminder: No screening next weekend;
largest program of the current series on April 27