THE PHANTOM OF CRESTWOOD (Rko Radio, 1932) Directed by J. Walter Ruben;
Produced by Marian C. Cooper; Story and screenplay, Bartlett Cormack and
J. Walter Ruben; Camera, Henry Gerrard; Music, Max Steiner; 70 mins.
With: Karen Morley (Jenny Wren); Ricardo Cortez (Gary Curtis); H.B. Werner
(Frinn Andes); Pauline Frederick (Faith Andes); Aileen Pringle (Mrs Walcott);
Robert McWade (Herbert Walcott); Skeets Gallagher (Eddie Mack); Mary Duncan
(Dorothy Hears); Gavin Gordon (William Jones); Anita Louise (Esther Wren);
Robert Elliott (Harry.target); Hilda Vaughn (Carter); George E. Stone
(The Cat); Sam Hardy (Petie Harris); Matty Kemp (Frank Andes) and
Tom Douglas, Clarence Wilson, Eddie Sturgis, Russell Hardie.

Although not too well received critically at the time, perhaps because of the
plenteous of murder mysteries on screen then, "Phantom of Crestwood" was a
popular and commercially successful picture, due in part to a publicity stunt
wherein NBC presented it as a radio serial. However, they didn't include the
denouement, listeners being invited to send in their own solutions. For a long
time suspected of being a lost film, it is even now rarely shown, but holds up
rather well. The story and "detective" hero are both off-beat, the film moves
well, some photographic effects are excellent, moments of near-horror make it
less prosaic than many of its genre, and the identity of the killer is fairly
obvious, the many red herrings and sub-plots keep interest alive. True, one
misses the seductive presence of Karen Morley - one of those taciturn
women who seems to deliberately invite murder from all of her acquaintances
- but she makes the most of her limited screen time. And there's compensation
to hand from Anita Louise and, in a perverse way, from Matty Kemp. Those who have
had to deal with his obstructive tactics when, later in life, he became Mary
Pickford's business manager, will especially relish his sticky end. With a
certain softness preserved, it must have been quite an impressive film visually.
Producer Cooper works his beloved planes into one scene, and some dialogue, quite unnecessarily!
--- Ten Minute Intermission ---

THE MYSTERY OF MR X (MGM, 1934) Directed by Edgar Selwyn; Screenplay by Philip
MacDonald, Howard Emmett Rogers and Monckton Hoffe. Based on the novel
by Philip MacDonald originally published in England as "X Versus Rex" under
his pseudonym of Martin Porlock, and then published in the U.S. the same
year (1933) as a Crime Club novel under the title "Mystery of the Dead
Police" and under MacDonald's name. Also republished in England in 1934 as
"The Mystery of Mr. "X". Camera: Oliver Harman 84 mins.
Note: remake in 1952 as "The Hour of 13" with Peter Lawford.

With: Robert Montgomery (Nick Revel); Elizabeth Allan (Jane Fremsham); Lewis
Stone (Connor); Ralph Forbes (Marche); Henry Stephenson (Sir Herbert Fremsham);
Forrester Harvey (Palmer); Ivan Simpson (Hutchinson); Leonard Mudie (Mr. X);
Alex Francis (Judge Malpos); Charles Irwin (Willie); Barlowe Borland (Head
Waiter); Olaf Hytten (Reporter); Claude King (Cummings) William Stack (Travers
Gordon); Montague Shaw (Doctor); Carl Harbord (Policeman).

When "The Mystery of Mr. X" originally opened at the Capitol Theatre, the stage
show was headed by Clark Gable - who made the relatively genteel,
English-style mystery that followed, somewhat anti-climactic. Fortunately, our
own stage show prior to tonight's screening is less dynamic, so the film will
have no such handicap to overcome. It's a very satisfying little mystery, with
early moments of near-horror that are later downplayed. Somewhat Hitchcockian
in structure - the hero on the trail of the killer while the police are on his
trail - it doesn't suffer the flaw in much of MacDonald's writing, that of a
somewhat nautical mystery. Also, surprisingly, MGM lists Mr. X in the cast,
which prevents suspicion from falling on anyone. However, the scene in
which Montgomery figures out where Mr. X will strike next is nicely done, and
the climax thrilling in a serial-like manner unusual for MGM. There's as much
bantering and romantic byplay as melodrama, but when put over by such a cast of
experts, one hardly minds. Incidentally, in the original Central Casting list
of all players and extras, Ray(mond) Milland is entered, near the bottom, as
Ramas - his role or scene would seem to have been edited out pre-release,
unless I was out of step with the plot that I missed. Aesthetically it is
reasonably convincing, especially in the pub scenes, although British police
procedures are a little Americanised at times. Guns are issued, and Lewis Stone
bursts in without a warrant - although the script has the grace to allow Robert
Montgomery to protest at this! While not a major neglected work, "The Mystery
of Mr. X" should delight both those who enjoy good civilised writing and
playing, and of course vintage mystery afficionados.
--- Wm. K. Everson ---

Program Ends approx 10.25
No discussion session this evening.
PLEASE NOTE: There will be a jazz concert preceding our show next week, but
the entrants should arrive by 7:30. Lawrence Gilbert, Fountain, John Gilbert;
dughter, will be on hand next week to introduce the John Gilbert-John Crawford
film "Twelve Miles Out", and will also have on hand a few copies of her
excellent new biography of Gilbert, "Dark Star". ---