DOCTORS' WIVES (Fox, 1931) Directed by Frank Borzage; Screenplay by Maurine Watkins from a novel by Sylva and Henry Lieferant; Camera, Arthur Edeson; 70 mins.

With: Warner Baxter (Dr. Judson Penning); Joan Bennett (Nina); Victor Varconi (Dr. Kane Fuyter); Helene Millard (Vivian Crosby); Paul Porcasi (Dr. Calucci); Cecilia Loftus (Aunt Amelia); Minna Gombell (Julia Wyndham); John St. Polis (Dr. Mark Wyndham); George Chandler (Dr. Roberts); Violet Dunn (Lou); Ruth Warren (Charlotte); Louise Mackintosh (Mrs Kent); William Maddox (Rudie) and Henry Kolker, Claude King, George Kuwa, Larry Steers, Brooks Benedict.

(Note: there seems to have been considerable last-minute resnuffling and possibly cutting, judging from the actual and contrasting "official" casts. All of the latter are left out, etc., list Nancy Gardner as playing the role actually played by Minna Gombell, warranty last one outing. The film itself is reportedly not billed at all, unless I missed her - possibly as one of the waiting-room ladies - is given high billing in the original lists of players, while Henry Kolker and Claude King, with sizeable roles, were not billed at all.)

Our "Archive Night" framework allows us to play this film in an appropriate historical context. Frankly it is the kind of film that we play occasionally because, like Everest, it is there. But while Everest is available to all, "Doctors' Wives" isn't, and though an unimportant film, a film directed (even without much interest) by Frank Borzage, and graced by such a lovely performance from Joan Bennett, warrants at least one outing. It's a very routine Borzage, totally without those magical little touches with which he sometimes turned the routine into the peculiar, knocked off between "Lillim" and "Young As You Feel", and before he really hit his stride again in 1932 with "A Farewell to Arms". Fox obviously felt Warner Baxter ideally suited to the role of dashing ladies' man and idealistic doctor, since he was to be recast in those roles endlessly throughout the 30's. More interesting here however is Victor Varconi, performing peculiar and unspecified experiments on Frankensteinian equipment some months before the release of that film. It is also never (medically) explained how a man suffering from radium poisoning can have his life saved, if only temporarily, by chest surgery! However, the film is slick, well photographed by Arthur Edeson (who coincidentally also did "Frankenstein") and enjoyable in its own ultra-soap-opera way. Certainly it is too brisk and absurd to be boring, and Joan Bennett, apart from being lovely to look at, gives a performance that almost seems out of place in such a basically silly film. Incidentally, the print is a little on the dark side, having been copied directly from the (then) old nitrate print out to nitrate print, but it still has a pictorial richness that reminds us how vivid those nitrate prints could be. Surprisingly, for such an artificial film, there's little or no music - but there is a tag-end 2-minute stretch of "playout" music after "The End" title that has today been replaced by almost a whole reel of production credits! -10 Minute Intermission-

DEVIL'S HOLIDAY (Paramount, 1930) Written and Directed by Edmund Goulding; Camera: Harry Pischbeck; Musical score and song by Goulding (the song in collaboration with Leo Robin); 75 mins.

With: Nancy Carroll (Hallie Hobart); Phillips Holmes (David Stone); James Kirkwood (Mark Stone); Hobart Bosworth (Ezra Stone); Ned Sparks (Charlie Thorne); Paul Lukas (Dr. Reynolds); Morgan Farley (Monkey McConnoll); Jed Prouty (Kent Carr); Zasu Pitts (Ethel); Morton Downey (Freddie, the tenor); Guy Oliver (Hammond); Jessie Fringle (Aunt Betty); Wade Boteler (house detective); Laura La Varnie (Madame Bernstein)

The surprising thing about "Devil's Holiday" is how well and how seriously it plays, even though its plot has been done to death endless times since, and here, in a kind of bare-bones version, would seem to be too long for the slim and familiar tale it tells. That it does play so well is due in part to some good writing from Edmund Goulding, but more especially to the quite outstanding (by Paramount's standards) in the film out to nitrate print, and doing so with overwhelming success, that she was more than just a song and dance girl. It's really a fine performance, and it sustains the whole film, even though some of the excessive old-time mugging of Hobart Bosworth (good though it always is to see him). Another surprise is that the film seems to be a play, dividing itself neatly into three acts, two of which start off in traditional stage fashion by using the device of Ned Sparks in conversation with someone else, summing up all the off-screen events for the audience's benefit. Yet, unlike Goulding, who had done stage work, intended it at one time as a play, it is a tight one - the score, the acting, the camerawork, the performances, the performances, the performances...it all works, it is a surprising (for 1930) use of music. There is a noticeable microphone shadow in one scene, and the obligatory zoom lens shot (all Paramount directors from '28 on were handed the lens and asked to use it at least once and hopefully more!) but they hardly matter in view of this luminous Carroll performance. At the time the film (and Carroll) received rave reviews, and many fan magazines rated it their picture of the month. - William K. Everson

Program finishes at 10:50. No discussion (see bottom of reverse side)