Two rarely seen MGM melodramas

For the first time since this film series began over twenty years ago, the prints have met arrived in time to allow for appraisals and program annotating before our printing deadline on the Wednesday. Since I have not seen all of the films, and memories of the other might be a little unreliable with a half-century interim, I am merely printing cast and credits for the record, with a quote from the NY Times. Unless the prints arrive at the very last minute, I plan to pre-screen of course, and any significant points that need to be made can be taken care of in the introduction.

TURN BACK THE CLOCK (MGM, 1933) Directed by Edgar Selwyn; Screenplay and original story by Ben Hecht and Edgar Selwyn; Camera, Harold Resclos; 80 mins
With: Lee Tracy (Joe Gimlet); Mae Clarke (Mary Gimlet); Otto Kruger (Ted Wright); George Barbier (Pete Evans); Peggy Shannon (Elvina Wright); C. Henry Gordon (Holmes); Clara Biancak (Mrs Gimlet)

One of our periodic re-examinations of the work of a little remembered director (other films of his that we have shown include "Men Must Fight", "War Nurse" and "The Mystery of Mr. X"). "Turn Back the Clock" opened at the Capitol backed by a stage show that included Bob Hope, Lennie Hayton, Joan Staley, and their Harlem Ballet, and Phil Spitalny's all-girl orchestra. The NY Times review was very favorable, and said, in part: "... brings to mind Mark Twain's "A Connecticut Yankee at the Court of King Arthur" ... Edgar Selwyn and Ben Hecht have wrought a clever and jovial tale ... Lee Tracy was an inspired choice for the role of Gimlet.... many ideas are set forth with an appreciation for good comedy ... imaginative". (Merdant Hall). I have deliberately kept the quotes very brief, as the NY Times in those days gave away virtually every aspect of the plot, and this one depends a great deal on its elements of surprise and incongruity.

--- Ten Minute Intermission ---

HIDE-OUT (MGM, 1934) Directed by W.S. Van Dyke; Screenplay by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett, from a story by Mauri Grashin; Camera, Ray June and Sidney Wagner; 82 mins
With: Robert Montgomery (Lucky Wilson); Maureen O'Sullivan (Pauline); Edward Arnold (MacCarthy); Elizabeth Patterson (Mrs Miller); Whitford Kane (Mr. Miller); Mickey Rooney (Willie); C. Henry Gordon (Tony Berelli); Muriel Evans (Babe); Edward Brophy (Britt); Henry Armetta (Lewis Shuman); Herman Bing (Jake Little); Louise Henry (Millie); Harold Huber (Dr. Warner)

The prolific W.S. Van Dyke continues to be a good and reliable source of entertainment for the 30's. This film opened at the Capitol with a stage show consisting of the Michel Fokine ballet, which may have irked the action fans coming for what they thought was a gangster movie. On the other hand, the pleasures of "Hide-Out" - far from the tough film its title suggests - may have provided an enjoyable surprise for the ballet devotees. Incidentally, "Hide-Out" was remade by MGM in 1941, in fairly standardised upper grade B manner, as "The Thirty-Ninth" starring Robert Sterling and Marsha Hunt, with Virginia Weidler taking over from Mrs Miller. Quoting Montgomery again: W.S. Van Dyke, responsible for the excellent version "The Thirty-Ninth" again displays his keen sense of humor and his shadow-story telling ability. This director undoubtedly possesses a rare gift for turning out productions that have the twin virtues of being intelligent and very popular (he makes) this offering a heartily and enjoyable piece of work. The story is told with a pleasing naturalness and subtlety ... the dialogue is smartly written. Montgomery once more reveals his talent for light comedy ... Miss O'Sullivan gives her best performance ... Edward Arnold is splendid". (Again, the review is so detailed in describing plot that I have deliberately kept the quotes brief).

Program ends approx. 10.30; brief discussion period follows.

--- William K. Everson

A post-script to last week's notes on THE LADY IS WILLING: cameraman Joseph Walker in his autobiography "The Light on Her Face", comments that about half the film was directed by Lewis Milestone when Gilbert Miller became either bored or confused or both - which accounts for the film's erratic quality.

Since members of the audience last week were asking about this week's program, it would appear that many of you did not get the full, amended schedule issued at the last two December showings. One film was deleted even before the official Bulletin went to press, but there was then no way to change the copy. A LETTER FOR EVE, scheduled for April 18, was cancelled because it was (a) sadly disappointing today and (b) because we had been in error in recalling it as a Fred Zimmerman film (it's a Jussa) and therefore its pairing with the other Zimmerman, ACT OF VIOLENCE, was worthless. ACT OF VIOLENCE remains, and is now paired with a good Robert Florey-directed thriller, ROGUES' REGIMENT (1948) with Dick Powell, Marta Toren, Vincent Price, Stephen McNally. These films inter-relate rather well, and I am displaying at the back of the hall the descriptive copy issued in these Dec. schedules for the information of those who did not see them. No other changes for the rest of the series.