Columbia made some really fine little programmers in the late 30's, films like "Let Us Live" and "Blind Alley" (rough equivalents of the expert Warner programmers of the 30's) which by virtue of scripts and casts were virtually up to "A" standards despite "B" running times. And of course it was those taut, lean running times that were one of their major assets. Their success is all the more remarkable when one recalls how really economy-conscious their regular "B" output was. "I Promise to Pay" is a good example of these intelligent programmers, a good solid gangster film, not especially novel (its basic plot isn't too far removed from Wellman's "The Star Witness", shown last season) but with more stress on characterisation and "motive" than usual and less on action. Columbia, working under the direction of D. Ross Lederman, who always kept his Bs nicely on the move (especially the Tom McCoy westerns), shows here that he certainly had the sophistication to deliver the goods when an upgraded property came along. If the film has flaws, it is mainly in the details of scripting. Hollywood just never knew much about ordinary day-to-day working and living conditions. At one end of the scale, MGM's "Confidentially Connie" offers a bizarre idea of their idea, conceived in Beverly Hills, of making ends meet. Columbia here go the other extreme; it is generally honest and it's all rather a matter of intimate knowledge as to what a dollar is really worth. Even in the mid-30's films like this is doubtless that a whole family could enjoy a week's vacation in the country - fares, accommodations, everything for just $50; or that they could pack up, move and start fresh on savings of $15 or less! For all the dialogue about stifling heat and no air-conditioners, the stars still aren't allowed to show any perspiration on their shirts, and the Grand Jury room certainly seems to suffer from delusions of grandeur. (The film's art director, Stephen Goosson, designed Shangri La for "Lost Horizon" the same year.) But these are minor quibbles. The film is original in many ways (not least in the casting of Leo Carrillo in one of his few villain roles) and almost documentary in its citing of the facts of the Loan Shark racket, which had been much publicised in the years preceding the film's release. The NY Times liked the film very much, and commented that it was the best role that Chester Morris had in far too long. -- Ten Minute Intermission --


With: Douglas Fairbanks Jr (Jimmy Russell); Ann Dvorak (Sally); Frances Dee (Mary); Lee Tracy (Stanley Fiske); Lyle Talbot (Shaw); Andre Luguet (Max Boncour); Warren Hymer (Burney); William Buress (Ollie); Terrence Ray (Seeley); Dorothy Peterson (? hat check girl); Edward Kane (Captain); Cecil Cunningham (Hattie); John Marston (Curley); Mike Donlin (Red).

"Love is a Racket" is one of the many Walter Winchell inspired melodramas and satires that hit the screen in 1932. Rko's "Is My Face Red?" (with Ricardo Cortez) opened just a few blocks away on the same day, while the best of them all, "Blessed Event" showed how Leo Tracy (here cast in a secondary-role that he somehow elevates to almost lead proportions in the definitive movie Winchell. It's the lightest of the five films that Wellman made in 1932, but not as much of a comedy as I'd recalled. It starts out banteringly (how can one resist a film where one is told that the public will stand for racketeer Lyle Talbot's dope peddling, but not for his engineering the rise of the cost of milk by a cent of two?) and becomes mildly cynical, relying on strong plot situations rather than snappy dialogue - though the way that to "Night Nurse", it's one of those pre-Code films where a cold blooded murder is seen as quite justifiable, and no one goes unpunished! Surprise is such a factor in this enjoyably unpredictable film that I'll say no more about it, other than to comment on the pleasure of seeing its four stars in top form, even though, by the nature of her role, Miss Dvorak is somewhat overshadowed. But Frances Dee has never looked more luscious! (One Minute Intermission to allow those who wish to leave to do so)

JOAN CRAWFORD Interview (BBC-TV, 1966) 45 mins approx.

While of more specialised interest, this uncut interview should delight Crawford devotees. About a minute of pre-interview footage shows her looking momentarily ill at ease, but the minute the cameras are on she becomes the total star image. The length of the interview allows her to take it easy and to take her time formulating the appropriate answers to questions she doesn't really want to answer. So far so good. She talks at length about John Barrymore, George Cukor and the state of movies in 1966; impromptu, yet totally disciplined. A fascinating session.

Program ends: 10.43

William K. Everson