"Stolen Heaven" is one of those awkward oddities that we sit on for years, waiting for the right co-feature to set it off and give it a context. Since both the 1930's and the mid-50's spawned both many musicals that try hard to be different and are, in a sense, contemporary fairy-tales, we hope that the combination works. Although the basic premise of "Stolen Heaven" may have been suggested by the much earlier Nancy Carroll-Phillips Holmes movie of the same title, it is in no way any kind of a remake. Andrew Stone, from "The Girl Said No" (a Gilbert and Sullivan mosaic) to the much more recent "Song of Norway," has constantly sought to bring either serious or at least different music to the screen, although usually his excellent intentions have been sabotaged by his indifferent and less-than-white-washed directors. "Stolen Heaven," provided he writes its sentiment and its conventions, is however a rather pleasing film, made at a time when Grace Moore, Deanna Durbin and MacDonald-Eddy were all doing their best to popularise classical music on screen.

Essentially, "Stolen Heaven" is a melodrama, and in the earlier sections a well-done car chase and the omnipresence of Glenda Farrell tend to make it seem more like a Warner film. But it's a peak Production Code restrictions blunted much of the film's bite; it's rather like Lubitsch's "Trouble in Paradise" re-done with moral regeneration and legal punishment. In the end, however, it's still an interesting job, with back projection and split-screens used well to amplify the European locations, and there's some adroit musical/picture editing, probably inspired by the "Beyond the Blue Horizon" sequence from Lubitsch's "Monte Carlo." The peasants are pure Viertz Marcellina, and while there's a generous helping of Wagner, Liszt, Strauss, Grieg and Chopin (along with some modern songs too), Stone is shrewd enough not to over-educate his audience, and keeps them happy with melodies that are universally known! It's an easy film to be sarcastic about, yet somehow it has both dignity and charm. More of the same, maybe, but whatever else it is, "Stolen Heaven" is graceful and pleasing, and even Gene Raymond's artificiality doesn't seem too out-of-place when everything else is so make-believe.

-- TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION --

THE GAY DESERADO (United Artists, 1936) A Pickford-Lasky production, directed by Robert Mamoulian; screenplay by Wallace Smith from a story by Leo Birinsky; camera, Lucien Andriot; 85 mins. With: Nino Martini (Chico); Ida Lupino (Jane); Leo Carrillo (Pablo Efricana); Harold Huber (Juan Campo); James Blythe (Bill Shay); Stanley Field (Butch); Maurice Marsac (Vicente); Frank Puglia (Lopez); Chris Pin Martin (Manuel); Michael Visaroff (Theatre Manager); Harry Semels (Pancho); Adrian Rosley (Radio station manager)

Once a much celebrated film, "The Gay Deserado" has now become so overlooked that the American Film Institute did not even include it in their recently printed listing of Roben Mamoulian's films! It's easy to see why it was such a big hit in its day, since it was a musical where, for once, the plot came first, and it had an easy-going charm as opposed to the mechanical formulae of so many of the bigger studio musicals. It tended to be over-rated by the Mamoulian aficionados who sought to elevate it to almost equal status with his earlier classic musical "Love Me Tonight." Perhaps now, one can enjoy it on its own level and not in comparison with other Mamoulian musicals, which include the last two which were released the same year: "Stardust," "Saratoga," and "Doorway to Hell"; it's an amusing satire of Mexican banditas trying to emulate American movie gangsters to up their image and their modus operandi. It's a little heavy-handed at first, but once it makes its point it relaxes. Though his budget isn't large, Mamoulian makes the most of his Tucson locations, and reverts to the pictorial compositions and shadow-play of his earlier films. "The World is Mine Tonight" is Martini's big song, but there are others, all pleasant and romantically flavorex. (Martini's screen career was not very prolific - a man of wide musical talent, but barely able, with his usual songs, to make the British "One Night With You" probably ranking as his best). In late 1936, when the film opened at the Radio City Music Hall, its satiric bite (including Cagney and Raft takeoffs in bit roles) was probably aligned with nostalgia for the pre-Code gangster films. Today it's neither great satire nor outstanding musical; but it's good Mamoulian (which should be enough for anyone) and a very pleasant and relaxing hour and a half, with Ida Lupino as a bonus!

PROGRAM ENDS 10.40. No discussion.

A brief last-minute reminder of the distributor's withdrawal of the films originally announced for this week, and the substitution of TWO AGAINST THE WORLD ("32, Constance Bennett and the BIG SHOT ("42, Humphrey Bogart")