Since we have been announcing it and reminding you of it since the first program in this series, we assume you are all aware by now that the distributors withdrew the two films originally booked for tonight. To anyone unaware of the situation, our apologies. Unfortunately it's a situation becoming increasingly prevalent in today's 16mm market, and we are happily far less victimised by it than many other institutions.

TWO AGAINST THE WORLD (Warner Bros., 1932) Directed by Archie Mayo; screenplay by Sheridan Gibney from the play "A Dangerous Set" by Marion Dix and Jerry Horwin; Art Director, Anton Grot; Camera, Charles Rosher; 70 mins. With: Constance Bennett (Adelle Hamilton); Neil Hamilton (David Norton); Helen Vinson (Corinne Watson); Gavin Gordon (Victor Linley); Allen Vincent (Bob Hamilton); Walter Walker (Courtney Hamilton); Alan Mowbray (George Walton); Hale Hamilton (Dr. Goodrich); Oliver Arnold (Edward Miller); Karns (Legall); Clara Blankenship (Aunt Agatha); Spencer Charters (John Milligan); Sarah Padden (Mrs Polansky); Maude Trux (Mrs Van Renssler); Sheila Terry (Miss Edwards); Edward Le Saint (Judge); Wilfrid Lucas (Jury foreman); Selmer Jackson (news-reporter on radio); Virginia Sale (Gossip columnist); Luis Alberni (angry spectator); Edward Piel (ship's captain); Dennis O'Keefe (reporter); Leo White (reporter); Bill Elliott (party guest); Nick Copeland (Juryor); and Harold Entwistle, Leila Bennett, Eulalie Jensen, Louise Carter, John Davidson.

While hardly one of Constance Bennett's best films, "Two Against the World" is certainly both typical and appropriately representative in that it is, quite literally, from the zenith of her career. In a now-famous deal engineered by Myron Selznick, she was paid $150,000 for starring in this film, at that time the highest salary ever paid to any star. Her best films (e.g. What Price Hollywood?) were essentially Bennett vehicles and in later years she slipped easily into sophisticated comedy roles that might well have made her a bigger star than ever had she been lucky enough to work with Lubitsch, Sturges and other comedy specialists. Be that as it may, her popularity peak was in the early 30's in the confession-illicit love dramas, spiked with sex, murder and unwed motherhood. Whether the approach was hard-boiled and cynical, or magazine and sentimental, depended largely on whether the film was being made for Warners or Rko Radio. 'Two Against the World' (a meaningless, all-purpose title that appeared in only four of the Bennett vehicles) is a bit leisurely in getting under way, but builds up to a full head of steam by its climax. Gowns, decor and a strong cast of familiar faces more than take up the slack of the opening reels. It's a typical depression era tale in which the rich are the nominal villains merely because they are rich, and the rather abrupt courtroom climax is likewise a typical example of pre-Production Code "justice". Incidentally, at about the mid-way point there is about a minute where the footage is slightly damaged. We have repaired it as much as possible and not re-cut it in order to protect it; if there is a momentary interruption it'll be only that while we possibly have to rethread and coax and jangle the afflicted section through the projector.

-- 10 Minute Intermission --

THE BIG SHOT (Warner Brothers-First National, 1942) Directed by Lewis Seiler; Original screenplay (entitled "The World Is Ours") by Bertram Millhauser, Abe Finkel and Daniel Fuchs; Camera, Ted McCorrd, Sid Hickox; Music, Adolph Deutsch; 82 mins. With: Humphrey Bogart (Duke Berne); Irene Manning (Lorna Fleming); Richard Travis (George Anderson); Susan Peters (Ruth Carter); Stanley Hidges (Martin Fleming); Minor Watson (Warden Booth); Chick Chandler ("The Dancer"); Howard da Silva (Sandor); Joe Downing (Frenchy); John Ridgely (Tim); Roland Drew (Faye); Murray Alper (Quinto); William Edmunds (Sarto); Joseph King (Toohey); John Hartstone (Judge); Virginia Sale (Mrs Miggins); Wilson Scott (Scooter); Virginia Sale (Mrs Miggins); Creston Hale, Cliff Clark, James Flavin, Eddie Chandler, Henry Hall, Leah Baird, William Gould, Harry Strang, Clancy Cooper, Ralph Dunn, Ray Teal, Herbert Heywood, Frank Mayo, Victor Zimmerman.

Although it appears occasionally on television, "The Big Shot" never seems to turn up in theatrical revivals or retrospectives, probably due to the kind of critical snobbery that has been created over the past dozen years. True, it resembles "High Sierra" and isn't as good as that - but it's still a solid production, and if it had a name director behind it might well have been elevated to a higher echelon of critical respect. Lewis Seiler had been a reliable action director since the silent period and had been a useful workhorse at Warners. He'd made a quartet of earlier Bogart films, including the interesting "It All Came True", but the plums had always gone to other directors such as the hapless Fred Niblo. At Warner Bros. until 20th Century Fox, and a much more generous allotment of prestige properties. Oddly enough, it's about the biggest of Seiler's Warner films, and certainly one of the best.

1942 was very much of a transitional year for Bogart, who was presenting Warners with the same kind of dilemma that Cagney had in the early 30's. With "High Sierra" and "The Maltese Falcon" behind him, Bogart was now clearly a big star - but also a unique one that needed special handling, and Warners still didn't see him in a romantic light. As they had done with Cagney and Robinson, Warners marked time by presenting Bogart "straight" (as in tonight's film) and
in self-satire (as in the immediately prior film, the Runyonesque "All Through the Night" with Bogart as a patriotic gangster taking on the Nazis in the form of Conrad Veidt and Peter Lorre). "The Big Shot" was, in a sense, the last of the traditional old-style Bogart vehicles. The balance of 1942 offered "Across the Pacific" (John Huston) and "Casablanca" (Curtiz) and from that point on there was no doubt about Bogart's ability or audience appeal in romantic roles.

It's a great pity that, sandwiched between four of the definitive Bogart vehicles, "The Big Shot" should have been so lost in the shuffle. ("All Through the Night" has fared a little better, but mainly because of its "fun" aspect. And not all of the immediate post-"Casablanca" films are as accessible as they should be. "Action in the North Atlantic" for example, one of the better war films, again lacks the critical appeal of a fashionable director, and the war film as a commercially viable genre has also lost appeal. So that film too languishes largely unseen).

If "The Big Shot" is a rather formula picture, then it's a formula slammed over with tremendous gusto and style as befits a now major star. The film has several crackling action sequences, and a gool-break and a climactic car chase are imbued with far more care and production values than, and in sequences in such Bogart programmers of the thirties as "King of the Underworld", "You Can't Get Away with Murder" (both also directed by Seiler) or "San Quentin". The original screenplay (the title of which suggests that it may be influenced by a motif in the original "Scarface") seems almost to be anticipating Bogart's immediate success, and to be providing him with a spectacular apotheosis of all of his old-style gangster films as a kind of farewell. Even on its own terms, "The Big Shot" deserves a better reputation than it had; not that it had "the reputation, no just didn't remember. At all Undoubtedly it was overshadowed by its similarity to "High Sierra", and also by the fact that Warners was over-producing at that time, and many good films from that studio in a sense fell by the wayside. As an example of that over-production, another Irene Manning starring film ("Spy Ship", a "B" remake of "Fog Over Frisco", with Manning in the Bette Davis role) opened just a few days prior to "The Big Shot".

As a Warner action vehicle, full of the familiar Warner wardens, hoods, finks and stooges, "The Big Shot" is thoroughly and consistently entertaining. Yet it does have its shortcomings. Its plot is pure film noir, yet it doesn't have the visual stylistics to make it an interesting example of that school. Too, Production Code rulings limit development of certain characters. Stanley Ridges is an excellent and subtle actor, and his role is an interesting one, but he has to be presented without any redeeming features, and much of his treachery is not sufficiently motivated. Even more victimised by the Code is Irene Manning, an excellent new actress and a most appealing one who could have used the tragic heroine role as a stepping stone to major stardom. Yet as the wife of villain Stanley Ridges she has to be presented in an ambiguous way which sometimes suggests an unsympathetic slant. Likewise, since plot mechanics prevent an ultimate marriage to Bogart, her brief romantic liaison with him has to be glossed over to a point where it becomes non-existent. Still, one has to remember that Warners weren't aiming at literary or art with this film, merely cashing in on the popularity of a top star and keeping him busy in the most obvious way possible while figuring out what to do with him in the future! Under those circumstances one doesn't need to be too critical, especially as "The Big Shot" is such an entertaining vehicle on its own particular level.

Program ends approx. 10.20

--William K. Everson

Discussion session follows.

Notices

A reminder that next week's "Archive Night" program - THE WOMAN HE SCORNED (Pola Negri) and THE LOST SON (Luise Trenker) will require a little work from the audience. THE LOST SON is in unsubtitled German, but it is an easy film to follow along with the subtitles, and the whole thing is being shown in Negro. A synops is will be provided and it will be helpful if you read this before the screening.

The Spring schedule is posted at the back of the hall for your information; copies will be circulated at the next two (and final) programs of this season, and of course will be printed in the shortly available Spring bulletin.

I will be in Europe as of Monday, so the last two programs will start promptly at 7.30, without introductions. The final program, on May 12, will be a docufilm, merely cashing in on the popularity of a top star and admission to the auditorium until approx. 7.25. Hopefully there will be no undue delay, but the film program is not a long one that evening.

Enjoy the holiday season, keep tabs on the many fine films in the Museum of Modern Art's British series, and we'll see you on Feb.13th. -- Wke