IMPORTANT NOTICE: Through a printing error, the silent Western program actually intended for March 17 was listed in the advance program listings as being on March 10. Although it would seem that the easiest solution would be to switch it to March 10, for various reasons this isn't possible, not the least of which reasons being the unavailability of pianist Stuart Oderman. So please note that the correct date is March 17. Subscribers to this series will probably have been notified by mail; for the others, we will continue to print (shorter) reminders in these notes until the event.

THE NEW SCHOOL

FILM SERIES 61: Program #1

February 10 1955

THE MAN WHO BROKE THE BANK AT MONTE CARLO (20th Century Fox, 1935)

Directed by Stephen Roberts; Produced by Runnally Johnson; Screenplay by Johnson and Howard Smith from a play by Illa Surgetchoff and Frederick Chaffee; Photography: Ernest Torrence; Camera, Ernest Palmer; NY premiere, Radio City Music Hall; 64 mins.

With: Ronald Colman (Paul Gallard); Joan Bennett (Helen Berkeley); Colin Clive (Bertrand Berkeley); Nigel Bruce (Ivan); Montague Love (Casino director) Frank Reicher (2nd asst. director); Lionel Fae (3rd asst. director); Croupier (Charles Fallon); Harold Waldridge (gambler); Gino Corrado (receptionist); Ferdinand Munier (Maître D'Hotel); Maurice Cass (his assistant); Lyn Bari (waitress); Little Anglo (dwarf); George Davis (taxi driver); Ferdinand Ochsehl (Gaunt officer); John Piccoli (hotel manager); Christian Rub (guide); Cyril Ring (gambler) and Charles Coleman, Andre Cheron, Vladimir Bykoff, Torben Meyer, Leonard Snegoff, Sam Ash.

One of the delights of so many films of the 30's is that they had no delusions of grandeur. Both of tonight's films have top directors and top stars and were intended for the top of the bill and both ran full-run minutes as the first film even opening at the Radio City Music Hall! In later days they'd have been re-shot and padded; then, if the story was told well in six reels, then so be it. Exhibitors had enough product to choose from to balance the program with a longer co-feature or plenty of shorts. Although only a trifle, 'Man....' probably was intended to run somewhat longer, but it plays so well in its brief running time, avoiding the time-consuming cliches and with the explanations that would have turned it into a 10 reeler had it been made at MGM as a Robert Montgomery starrer.

Even though his performance is debonair andashing as always, Colman looks a little tired and worn, even a little thinner than usual. There appears to have been no medical reason for this. He was paying feversish court to Benita Hume (as Bennett) while pretending that he had no intention of marrying again, and this may have contributed to his occasionally harried appearance. (Of course he did in fact marry Miss Hume shortly thereafter.) Also the film was sandwiched in between two far more serious films - "Clive of India" and "A Tale of Two Cities" - so his mind may not have been totally on the film at hand. Nevertheless, if his appearance is a trifle below par, his performance and diction certainly aren't - though it's a little hard to accept him and Nigel Bruce as Russian noblemen in a situation that somewhat foreshadows the plot of "Tovarich".

Short or not, "The Man Who Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo" packs a lot of production value and good writing into its six reels. There's a nice element of mystery in the opening scenes, although it's not too hard to guess who is responsible for the ultimate solution will be. Colin Clive is perhaps a trifle less disagreeable than one might expect from the lush opening with its well-done glass shots, it's an opulent production all the way, and with the exception of a couple of exterior establishing shots, Paris and Monte Carlo and points in between are all created in the Hollywood studio, and there's one particularly intriguing shot where Colman and Bennett ride horseback from a background of snowy Alps into Fox's backlot hills at Malibu in one shot. It's also a cunningly contrived Depression era picture, showing the joys of wealth and at the same time the relative importance of the nobility. The smile is all in a fairy-tale Europe to remove it from the reality and experience of hard-pressed Americans, who could thus enjoy it all without envy or frustration.

-- Ten Minute Intermission --

SECRET BRIDE (Warner Bros. 1934, rel: 1935) Directed by William Dieterle; Screenplay by F. Hugh Herbert, Tom Buckingham and Mary McClag Jr. from an original story by Leonard Idr; 64 mins; NY premiere, Roxy Theatre.

With: Barbara Stanwyck (Ruth Vincent); Warren William (Robert Sheldon); Eddie Quillan (Adam Mitchell); William Davidson; Russell Halls (Holstock); Frank Darien (Justice of the Peace); Vince Barnett (drunk); Emmet Vogan (Bank teller); Bill Elliott (Governor's secretary); Spencer Charters (Western Union messenger); James Burke (lunch wagon owner); Wade Boteler (cop); Thomas Jackson (Tom Daniels); Charles Wilson (Detective inspector); Raymond Hatton (prison guard); Walter Walker (judge); Purnell Pratt (prosecutor); Wallis Clark (defense attorney); Wilfrid Lucas (court clerk);
Charles D. Brown (juror); Tom Wilson (courtroom guard); Lester Dorr
(reporter); Miles Welch (court clerk); Howard Hickman, Joseph Crehan (jurors);
and Selmer Jackson. (Cameraman Ernest Haller was omitted from our credits).

Barbara Stanwyck's 19th picture, and the last but one in her initial Warner
contract (that last one, "The Woman in Red", will be shown later in this
series) "Secret Bride" is preceded by a bad reputation that hasn't been
helped by Stanwyck's own dismissal of it and by director Dieterle's
equally downputting comments. While not claiming that all the criticisms are
mispaced, Dieterle probably tended to be overly critical since it was one of
the last of his smaller films at Warners, and knocking it drew greater
attention to the big prestige and Muni-biographical films that followed. One
can understand Stanwyck's disappointment since it isn't really a Stanwyck
vehicle, basically it's a Warner William vehicle. The location is Spain, but her
role seem more important by dint of sheer personality. Latter-day
appraisals have all tended to take the approach of it being a Stanwyck film,
and disappointing thereby. Initial reviews were fairly honest and on target
in presenting it as workmanlike, well-done and entertaining, if not much more
than that.

Oddly enough, it's one of the few pictures of its type that works better seen
privately than with an audience. It's one of those films that by dint of its
brevity, has little time for subtlety. It takes what time it can to establish
characters and plot, and by then it's half over--so it has to rush through
a series of sudden crises and emergency developments at an almost breathless
rate. I've seen at least one (recent) audience greet the last quarter of the
film with laughter, as though the contrivances and convolutions were funny
indeed. But this is a Warner William vehicle, and the picture has the
methodical, deliberate methods of the day, but funny, no. Seen alone without a
chortling audience the film can (and should) be taken quite seriously, and if its breathless
pace towards the end doesn't match the ingenious artificial speed that
Dieterle gave to "Fog Over Frisco" the year before, then it is still
interestingly created, not least in the restless mobility of the camera in
the courtroom scenes. The speed never lets up once it starts, and the finale
barely leaves time for a fadeout embrace between Stanwyck and William before
the End title is on the screen, accompanied by the music of Dick Powell's
keen singing from "Hollywood Revue". Music that incidentally is used throughout.
(As a postscript, if some of the music in "The Man Who Broke the Bank at
Monte Carlo" seems familiar, it's because it's lifted from Allan Dwan's 1932
"While Paris Sleeps".

As in so many Dieterle films, it's the supporting characters who have more
depth and are basically more interesting, and the somewhat unlikely political
melodrama plot gives a lot of stock Warner players some very good opportu-
nities. Actually, given the way the tabloids hunt for political scandal
today, maybe its plot isn't so unlikely at that. Although the plot is quite
complex, there isn't much doubt about the identity of the hidden mastermind;
Dieterle unwittingly gives the game away too soon by showing one of Warner's
most familiar players, usually typed in roles or political integrity,
posing as a rich scriptwriter, in a bit that is as thin as his scriptwriting.
After that one shot, it's more a matter of why and how rather than who!
Incidentally, the working title of the film was "Concealment"--a better and appropriate title,
though the cheaper-sounding "Secret Bride" was probably a better commercial
title. All in all, a taut, high-powered and entertaining melodrama, far better
than its reputation might suggest. --- William K. Everson

Program Ends approx. 10:00
Discussion session follows

A comment on tonight's program--and overall policy.

I am not unmindful of the fact that both of tonight's films have played
recently on cable television, and that with the Turner network methodically
working its way through a huge backlog of old Warner, MGM and RKO films, more
and more of "our" kind of product will emerge on tv. In a way, anything that
gets these films preserved and shown is good. On the other hand, not every-
body has cable tv, or the stamina to catch many of the films in the wee hours.
Too, films such as tonight's deserve to be seen on a big screen and minus
commercials. All of these considerations are in a sense academic however,
in that due to New School bulletin-printing deadlines, we have to finalise
seasons of films almost a year in advance. Trying to second guess the
exposure, or make substitutions, is futile and rather pointless. For the most
part we try to offer films that are not shown on tv, even if they are either
obscure or eclectic. But when duplications appear, as they are bound to
continue to do, we'll just stick to our announced programs and assume that
tv and/or videocassettes will only lose us part of our audience.