TWENTY FOUR HOURS (Paramount, 1931) Directed by Marion Gering; screenplay by Louis Weitzenkorn from the novel by Louis Bromfield; Camera, Ernest Haller; Associate Director, Dudley Murphy; NY premiere at Times Square Paramount Theatre; 66 minutes.

With Clive Brook (Jim Towner); Kay Francis (Fanny Towner); Miriam Hopkins (Rosie Dugan); Regis Toomey (Tony Bruzzi); George Barbier (Hector Champion); Adrienne Ames (Ruby Wintringham); Charlotte Graville (Savina Jerrold); Lucille La Verne (Mrs Jackelhouse); Minor Watson (David Malbourn); Wade Boteler (Pat); Robert Kortman (Dave the Slapper); Malcolm Waite (Murphy); *** Thomas Jackson (Police Commissioner); Ethan Laidlaw (Henchman); Mary Gordon (Nurse).

One normally doesn't expect too much from Paramount's Clive Brook, Tallulah Bankhead or Ruth Chatterton starring vehicles of 1929-31; most of them tend to be talkie, ponderous and stage-bound. But "24 Hours" is very much an exception, its wonderful story of main themes pictured over miniatures of a New York skyline set the pace for the whole film and it never lets up. True, it's a leisurely film, but it's also a brief one, and while there are changes from Louis Bromfield's original novel, scenarist Weitzenkorn, himself a notable playwright ("Five Star Final" etc.) keeps it constantly on the move and with interesting shifts in the characters. It was only Marion Gering's 2nd time at bat and her "North Shore" a fine job, helped no little by Haller's superb camerawork (including the obligatory zoom shot that Paramount insisted on at the time) and generally good lead performances. Clive Brook, in the 6th of his 8 1931 releases, has a (for him) fairly standardised role but handles it well, while Kay Francis looks stunningly beautiful. Miriam Hopkins, as is often the case, is variable: her dragged-through-a-hedge-backwards coiffure, combined with a singularly raspy and unmusical singing voice, makes her status as a night club queen somewhat hard to accept, unless she was after the left-over Texas Guinan but straight acting moments with Brook she is often surprisingly touching. With her good musical ballad singing as "You Came Along" and its ultra-glossy visual look, it is a far more polished production than most pre-'32 Paramounts, and is a real surprise on all counts. And with its taken-for-granted all-around adultery and illicit drinking, to say nothing of an unpunished murder, it's also very typical of the kind of casual amorality that was soon to accelerate and bring about the imposition of the Production Code.

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Two names inadvertently left out of the cast list: Robert Homans as the Desk Sergeant, and Charles D. Brown as a detective.

-- TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION --

THE WOMAN IN RED (Warner Bros., 1935) Directed by Robert Florey; Produced by Harry Joe Brown; Screenplay by Mary McCall Jr. and Peter Milne from the novel "North Shore" by Wallace Irwin; Camera, Sol Polito; NY premiere, Roxy Theatre; 66 mins.

With: Barbara Stanwyck (Shelby Barrett); Gene Raymond (Johnny Wyatt); Genevieve Tobin (Nico); John Eldredge (Eugene Fairchild); Phillip Reed (Dan); Dorothy Tree (Olga); Russell Hicks (Clayton), defense attorney; Nella Walker (Aunt Bettina); Claude Gillingwater (Grandfather Wyatt); Doris Lloyd (Mrs Gasserly); Arthur Treacher (Major Casserly); Hale Hamilton (Furness Wyatt); Edward Brophy (Mr. Brophy); Frederick Vogeding (Captain); George Chandler (reporter); William B. Davidson (Mr. Goodman); Jack Mulhall (yacht club guest); Edward Le Saint (Judge); and Forrester Harvey, Eleanor Wasselhoef.

Commercially the most important of the five expertly-crafted Robert Florey films that Warners released in 1935 (in 1936 he'd go to Paramount until 1940), the best and most productive phase of his career, "The Woman in Red" was also the last film under Stanwyck's initial contract with Warners... eleven films over a five year period. It wasn't one of the best, but it was considered a big step up from the badly received but under-rated "Secret Bride", and generally was a good and satisfying film via which to make her exit. Of course she'd be back star in the major role in much greater prestige. Despite the Capra successes that she already had under her belt, and bigger vehicles tailored to her, the initial post-Warner years didn't transform her into a major star, and her greatest success came with her more sophisticated Paramount films from 1939 on.

The title has virtually nothing to do with the plot and is explained away only in the comic, sequence, a murder trial episode which is oddly parallel to the climax of the film, providing the obligatory "Secret Bride" explosion. The small, thoroughly moral, historical, and well-designed, composed and paced by Florey, and the script avoids most of the expected cliches and pitfalls... the gift of a race-horse doesn't suddenly provide a last-minute horse-race to acquire the much-needed money, for example. It's as easy for this kind of film to become as bland as, say, "The Lady's from Kentucky" or the George Raft film, and it never does. The high society setting allows for some amusing "Secret Bride" gags, provides a showcase for some magnificent Genevieve Tobin bitchiness, and of course the trial climax provides the obligatory Stanwyck "explosion"; what a pity she never co-starred with her male counterpart, Jean Gabby. John Eldredge is good in another of those off-beat roles that suggested that Warners might have bigger things in store. (They didn't).