FRIENDS OF MR. SWEENEY (Warner Brothers, 1934) Directed by Edward Ludwig Screenplay by Warren Duff; Sidney Sutherland, F. Hugh Herbert and Erwin Gelsey from a novel by Elmer Davis; Camera, Ira Morgan; 70 mins; NY premiere, Mayfair Theatre.

With Charles Ruggles (Asaph); Ann Dworak (Heleah); Eugene Pallette (Rixeys); David Torrence (Mulle); Charles Winninger (Olga); Benita Hume (Churchill); Sidney Sutherland; Harry Tyler (Mike); Harry Beresford (Clare); William B. Davidson (Prime); Robert Sarrett (The Russian); Clay Clement (Kruget); Arthur Aylesworth (elevator operator); Fern Emmett (secretary); Maurice Black (waiter); Jane Darwell (gambler); Edward Gargan (policeman); Spec O'Donnell (office boy); Irving Bacon (clerk at attendant); and Robert Ellis, Pat Hardigan.

Even though Warners apparently didn’t think enough of this film to open it in one of their own theatres, it garnered some excellent reviews and was considered one of the real surprises of the season. Today its novelty has worn off to a degree due to later repetitions - one can well imagine this as an Eddie Bracken vehicle for Preston Sturges, and indeed Sturges’ “Mad Wednesday” with Harold Lloyd has a casually similar theme. But if it’s no longer novel, the charm remains and Charley - though in the “formulant”, w.m. slightly evolved, as son, he could really shine when given a lead role mixing comedy with pathos. The film loses steam towards the end, but one suspects that this may have been because it was turning out to run too long for what was essentially a programmer. Carefully constructed throughout, its narrative begins to hop, skip and jump in the closing reel, and continuity becomes a big ragged. But it’s too late to inflict any major damage, and the film remains a thoroughly enjoyable diversion, with a fine cast of old favorites.

- TEN MINUTE INTERRUPTION -

IT STARTED WITH EVE (Universal, 1941) Directed by Henry Koster; Produced by Joe Pasternak; Screenplay by Norman Krasna and Leo Towsend from an original story by Hans Kraly; Camera, Rudolph Mate; 90 mins; NY premiere, City Theater.

With: Deanna Durbin (Anne Terry); Charles Laughton (Jonathan Reynolds); Robert Cummings (J. Reynolds Jr.); Guy Kibbee (Bishop); Margaret Tallichet (Gloria Pennington); Catherine Doucet (Mrs Pennington); Walter Catlett (Doctor Harvey); Charles Coleman (Roberts); Leonard Elliott (Rev. Stebbins); Gus Schilling (Raven); Wade Boteler (Newspaper editor); Dorothy Kent (Jackie); Clara Blandick (Nurse); and Irving Bacon, Alexander Granach, Chick Chandler, Tim Ryan, Rosalind Ivan, Mary Gordon, Paul Porcasi, Larry Steers, John Hamilton, Walter Moreland, Sig Arno, Robert Homans, John Eldridge, Selmer Jackson, S-Ta Fadden, Leon Belasco, Charles Davis, Sess Flowers, Jack Mulhall.

"It Started With Eve", which was a major hit in 1941, was the tenth of Deanna Durbin's twenty-one features for Universal, and the last one done by the Pasternak-Koster team before they moved to M.G.M. Not only was it one of her best for some time (though up until then they had all maintained a high standard) but it also revived the sagging career of Charles Laughton: got him some excellent reviews, and paved the way for a later teaming with Durbin. And as the climax of the Pasternak period, it should have pointed the way for the Durbins to come. She had become an excellent actress, and the film itself was mature, sophisticated and tastefully risque in the European manner. There should have been no trouble in reshaping the Durbin image to adult roles, but Universal desperately tried to find a new “formula” to replace the old, and with some good individual Durbin vehicles still lay ahead, the unbroken line of Pasternak-Granach films violently evolved as soon spontaneous and invisible - was never to be successfully repeated. "It Started With Eve" has taste and unusual elegance in setting and photography, though it's slightly slower paced than the preceding Durbins and with less emphasis on music, this doubtless to give its story (which could have bordered on the morbid or the tasteless in less expert hands) more of an appropriate sense of dignity. Apart from Sidnay’s later "Christmas Holiday", it was the last of the Durbins to retain a sense of European acuity; an aspect underlined by the use of some of Pasternak’s and Granach’s exoticism (Crapah, Arno, etc.) in good bits. It was probably also the first Hollywood film to display an influence from "Citizen Kane". Although both films were released almost simultaneously, Welles' film had been going through review and preview stages for months and had been accessible for study. The whole opening sequence seems almost a parody of Kane style and content, though it would surely at the time have been almost a private joke between Koster and his superb camerapher Maté. And the sets of Laughton's large, lonely mansion are too similar to those where Kane and Susan Alexander spent so many boring hours for it to be mere coincidence. The minor sense does Hollywood something for variation intrude; Robert Cummings' fiancée, played by the lovely Margaret Tallichet, starts out by being likeable and reasonable, but since she has to be shunted aside for Durbin, the script continues to transform her into a fortune-hunting shrew! Incidentally, the film was quite charmlessly remade in 1964 as "I'd Rather Be Rich" with Sandra Dee substituting inadequately for Deanna, and Maurice Chevalier providing a quite reasonable substitute for Laughton.

Program ends 10:30. Short discussion period follows.