THIS'LL MAKE YOU WHISTLE (Wilcox-United Artists, 1935) Produced and directed by Herbert Wilcox; based on the Jack Buchanan musical show with book by Guy Bolton and Fred Thompson; screenplay by Bolton and Thompson; lyrics by Sigler, Goehart and Hoffman; camera, Frederick Young; music, Jack and Harry Warren. With Jack Buchanan (Still Holding); Jean Gillie (Joan Langhurst); Eise Randolph (Robbie); David Hutcheson (Archie Codrington); William Randell (Reggie Benson); Anthony Holles (Sebastian Venables); Marjorie Brooks (Laura Buxton); Naddie Hope (Mrs Langhurst); Miki Hood (Clarice); Frederick Burbettle (Hotel manager) Jack Buchanan, producer-director-dancer, director, writer and theatre manager is best remembered for his work with the Astaire-Rogers films. His last stage success was in New York, and he was the last to succeed in a Broadway musical after the Astaire-Rogers films. He had a strong voice and fine acting ability, but his films were direct and immediate transcriptions of his latest stage hits, and because of good budgets and solid production values they date surprisingly little. "This'LL Make You Whistle" could hardly be more typical: it is virtually plotless, and full of unlikely cues for songs. About halfway through, with all of the complex but trivial plot threads established, Elsie Randolph asks him "What do you do when you run out of excuses?" I usually go into my dance" is his reply, and right away he and Randolph launch into one of their best numbers (they frequently appeared together) "I'm in a Dancing Mood". With half a dozen extremely elaborate sets and some slick montages, it is an extremely handsome production, clearly after the look and flavor of the new Astaire-Rogers musicals. The comedy content is admirably weak and flimsy, but then so was the Astaire-Rogers films, although they managed to disguise it well due to the expertise of Olsen and Norton. Our print is more than a little used, but we've been sitting on it for some 25 years waiting for a better one to come along. Initially it was missing a couple of the big numbers, which we managed to find (in a worse print!) and cut in, but it is still shy a few minutes of the original running time. Presumably there is a sequence missing in which Jack first meets Jean Gillie - now we see them for the first time in a cance - although continuity was never a strong point in films like this, and it could always have been so abrupt. And there appears to be a reaction or a line missing in a scene involving a black baboon, a censor cut from a later British release, although ethnic gags never bothered the censors too much over there. The ostro-wesleyan song is thrown away for a quick finale, although it has nothing to do with the plot anyway. Charming and very pretty Jean Gillie was invariably cast as "wholesome" heroines, playing a landgirl in the wartime "Tawny Pipit," But a very brief Hollywood career (she died just as a new career seemed to be getting under way) used her surprisingly effectively as an all-out film noir villainess in "Decoy".

------ Ten Minute Intermission -----

CHU CHIN CHOW (Gainsborough, 1934) Directed by Walter Forde; screenplay by Edward Knoblock, L. de Garde Peach and Sidney Gilliat from the stage show by Oscar Asche and Frederick Norton; produced by Michael Balcon; camera, Muts Greenbaum (Max Greene); art director, Eino Petzner; edited by Derek Twist; 102 mins.

With: George Robey (Ali Baba); Fritz Kortner (Abu Hassan); Anna May Wong (Zahrat); John Gerrard (Ali the Djin); Pearl Argyle (Marjannah); Malcolm MacSachern (Abdullar); Dennis Hoey (Rakham); Freida Le Sullivan (The Caliph); Gibb McLaughlin (Grand Vizier); Sydney Fairbrother (Mahbubah); Lawrence Harrey (Kasim Bey); Frank Cochrane (Mustapha); Thelma Rouson (Alcolum); Kyoishi Takase (Curt-entertainer) "Chu Chin Chow" was an enormous, lo g-running stage hit in London during wartime (World War I) and its name was emblazoned in advertising slogans on the old horse-drawn busses, which figure prominently in newsreel footage of Amistice Day celebrations ... and whenever Hollywood has recreated that period, the name "Chu Chin Chow" was an obvious and immediate tie to the period. The name is known here, even though the show itself is less well remembered. An odd mixture of historical extravagance and operetta, it was also made in 1933 as a "live" silent. This sound version was released here in the 30's, and reissued by an independent distributor in the 50's as "Ali Baba Nights" but with all the censors removed. It got not a single New York playdate. It's ironic that a show designed as escapism from the German bombing raids should reach the screen twenty years later as a thoroughly Germanic production in terms of camerawork and art direction and even mood. For a "light" entertainment, it is rather full of death, torture and sundry unpleasantnesses, and it is incredible that the British censor gave it a "U" certificate (the equivalent of a "G" today) while promiscuously handing out Adult certificates to Westerns and cartoons! Although George Robey was a revered stage performer, his movie value was slight, and presumably he was brought in to remind audiences of the property's stage origins, and to assure them that it is NOT a German film. Although it's very uneven, the songs are a delight, Fritz Kortner is wonderfully over-the-top as the villain, and it's always good to look at one of Walter Forde's biggest films; it also afforded early assignments for directors-to-be Sidney Gilliat and Derek Twist. Incidentially, Betty Blythe played the Anna May Wong role in the silent version. 

--- William K. Everson ---

Program End 10:50 (To discussion session tonight, and a reminder: no class next week)