NIGHT AFTER NIGHT (Paramount, 1932) Directed by Archie Mayo; screenplay by Vincent Lawrence from the Louis Bromfield story "Single Night"; Camera, Ernest Haller; 70 mins; Starring: Madeleine Carroll, Joseph Calleia, With George Raft (Joe Anton); Constance Cummings (Jerry Healy); Yvonne Gibson (Tris Dawn); Mae West (Heddie Tripplet); Rococo Kars (Leo); Alizon Skipworth (Mrs Jellyman); Louis Calhern (Dick Bolton); Bradley Page (Frankie Guard); Al Hall (Blaine); Harry Wallace (Jeky); Dink Templeton (Fatsy); Marty Hartman (Valley); Tom Kennedy (Tom); Paul Forcasi (Chef); Leo White (cook); Bill Elliott (guest); Dennis O'Ree (drunk)

Tonight's two films offer a rather strange combination; "Night After Night" is a pre-Code film that pulls it punches, while "Evelyn Prentice" is a post-Code film that is stronger than many others of the era. One of a quintet of Louis Bromfield stories filmed in the early 30's, "Night After Night" (in a literary sense) has a slight resemblance to his "It All Came True", filmed with Bogart in 1939; both are underworld stories more concerned with characters than crime, and both with a poetically soft underbelly. "Night After Night" is rarely shown these days, primarily because its main attraction is clearly Mae West, whose part is small enough to disappoint those expecting a West vehicle, yet large enough (she makes her entrance at the half-way mark, though she is talked about well before that) to take over the film totally once she appears. The Times, rather surprisingly, mentions Mae only in passing, with no comment at all on the impact she is obviously making. The Times reserves all of its praise for Constance Cummings, who is certainly good, though given her role and its odd undertones, not ideally cast. Frances Dee, on the evidence of her performance in "Blood Money", might have been more appropriate, and she was right on the spot at Paramount. But with the mesdames Cummings, West, Gibson and Skipworth on hand, all doing their own particular thing, there is certainly no cause for complaint. In some ways it is a slight film, never as funny, exciting or romantic as it could have been, butsolidly satisfying nonetheless, well directed by Mayo, borrowed from Werners, glossily photographed by Ernest Haller, and with a score that makes pleasant use of most of the music from "Love Me Tonight".

--- TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION ---

EVELYN PRENTICE (MG M, 1934) Directed by William K. Howard; A Cosmopolitan Production; Screenplay by Lenore Coffee from the (1933) novel by W.E. Woodward; Camera, Charles Clarke; 75 mins. 17 prints, Capitol Theatre.
With: William Powell (John Prentice); Myrna Loy (Evelyn Prentice); Una Merkel (Amy Drexel); Rosalind Russell (Nurse Harrison); Harvey Stevens (Laurence Kerrard); Isabel Jewell (Judith Wilson); Edward Brophy (Delaney); Henry Nash (Chester); Cora Sue Collins (Dorothy Prentice); Jessie Ralph (Bess Blake); Samuel S. Hinds, Richard Tucker (party guests); Frank Conroy (Prosecuting Attorney); Stanley Andrews (Judge); Sam Flint (Dr. Lyons); Perry Ivins (2nd director); Billy Gilbert (night club owner); Larry Steers (night club guest); Jack Mulhall (Gray); Francis McDonald (Charles); Clarence Wilson (Public Defender); J.P. McGowan (McIntyre); Herman Bing (Antique Shop proprietor); James Elaine (juryman).

Note: remade in 1939 as "Stronger Than Desire", with Walter Pidgeon and Virginia Bruce in the leads, and Ann Dvorak in the Isabel Jewell role.

Director William K. Howard wasn't too well suited to his MGM contract, being given glossy star vehicles to handle when his real forte was strong gutsy thrillers with a penchant for German-style lighting and camerawork. Arguably this is his best MGM film, since while it is very much of a star vehicle, it is also a melodrama, and Howard manages to balance the two rather nicely, underplaying what might have been soap-opera excesses, and punctuating key scenes with well-lit sets. (The stairway leading down from the murder apartment, for example). Although a very popular film, "Evelyn Prentice" didn't get the reviews such an intelligent film deserved, partly because critics were conditioned to reviewing MGM films as star vehicles. Since this one didn't provide the sophisticated comedy that the previous Powell/Loy film "The Thin Man" had, then clearly it wasn't as good. Apparently there was no thought that the change of pace might have been deliberate! Although apparently much watered down from the original novel, it's still pretty strong stuff for a post-Code film, with several pregnant fadeouts leaving little doubt as to what happened afterwards, and a climax that is both a surprise and pleasing in its nudity. Incidentally, Isabel Jewell's long speech is something of a tour-de-force, done entirely in one long closeup take, and clearly with prompting cues read off camera. Like so many depressing post-Code films (The Man Who Played God) it contains all the glitz and elegance missing from most people's lives at that time, yet cunningly suggests that riches bring the problems of non-stop work and other complications, whereas the simple poor (as exemplified by Jessie Ralph) are basically much happier. The script, without underlining them, also makes interesting comment on the double-standard moralities so much reflected in novels, plays and movies of the period. An interesting dance routine initiatory of Ted Lewis and some perky byplay from Una Merkel provide the only light relief, but the serious plot doesn't need any, and unlike so many MGM directors who could and would have padded it to a ten-reel minimum, Howard delivers the whole slick, exceptionally well-packaged package in less than eight reels.

--- William K. Everson ---

Program ends approx. 10.15.

Discussion session follows.

A reminder: next week's triple bill will be preceded by a Jazz Concert, so the auditorium will not be open until app. 7.20. Program will start as soon after 7.30 as possible probably without the usual introduction. Notes will be available in the lobby as usual.