MURDER BY THE CLOCK (Paramount, 1931) Directed by Edward Sloman; Screenplay by Henry Myers from an original story by Rufus King and Charles Beaum. Camera, Earl Strauss; 75 mins. NY premiere, Paramount Theatre; last New School showing, March 1973.

With: William Boyd (Lt. Valcour); Lilian Tashman (Laura Endicott); Irving Pichel (Phillip Endicott); Regis Toomey (Office Qaseidy); Sally O'Neill (Jane); Blanche Frederici (Mrs Julia Endicott); Walter McGrail (Herbert Endicott); Lester Vail (Thomas Hollander); Martha Mattox (Miss Roberts); Frank Sheridan (Police Chief); Frederick Sullivan (Medical Examiner); Millard Robertson (Police Captain); Charles D. Brown (O'Brien); John Rogers (Valet); Lenita Lane (Nurse); Harry Burgess (Coroner).

"Murder By The Clock" created quite an impact on its original release; perhaps because it drew atmosphere from the horror cycle to beef up the prosaic quality of the talkative parallel cycle of mystery and detective films. The reviews were mostly good, stressing its really spooky qualities. Those who saw it then remember it fondly still, and many who missed its previous New School outing nearly 20 years ago have asked for a repeat. Its a rarely shown film, its lack of star names and generally slow pace not endearing it to those who book for the rapidly diminishing number of revival houses, even if it were available to them. It is extremely methodically paced, though certainly picking up steam as it approaches its climax, and the lack of even a single note of musical scoring emphasizes its slowness. On the other hard, it is very much of a "fun" movie. The plot and characters are colorful and unrestrained, especially Lilian Tashman as a svelte modern Lady Macbeth clad in precarious derriere-hugging evening gowns, and going delightfully over the top in her performance. That performance prevents it from being taken very seriously, but on the other hand without her tongue-in-cheek villainy it would be a good deal less diverting. Visually it is handsome and impressive, with the crypt and cemetery sets especially effective, and Earl Strauss' camerawork as always of a high order. The romantic interludes with Toomey and Sally O'Neill could be dispensed with to the film's advantage, but they are literally editorial cutaways, and provide a novel "formal" romance that hardly gets in the way of murder, madness and macabre that parade so enjoyably in this curious old house which seems to be in the heart of the city although real estate costs for the maintenance of such a sprawling mausoleum/cemetery in such a location must be staggering!

-- Intermission, 10 minutes --

SUPERNATURAL (Paramount, 1933) Directed by Victor Halperin; produced by Victor and Edward Halperin; Screenplay by Harvey Thaw and Brian Marlow from a story by Garnett Weston; Camera, Arthur Martinelli; 65 mins. NY premiere, Paramount Theatre, last New School showing, September 1967.

With: Corole Lombard (Roma Courtney); Randolph Scott (Grant Wilson); Alan Dinehart (Paul Varian); Vivienne Osborne (Ruth Rogen); H.B. Warner (Dr. Houston); William Fernum (Robert Hammond); Beryl Mercer (NanMadourian); George Burr MacAulay, Lyman Williams.

What a difference two years made in the very early thirties! The plot of "Supernatural" is no more profound than that of "Murder by the Clock", but its brief running time, its faster pacing, and above all the interest sustained by a continuous atmospheric musical score, make it seem light-years removed from its slower co-direction. A dynamic opening, with a fancy montage (probably Workshop) and a series of dubious quotations from Confucius and others, also gets it off the ground with a nice momentum. The curious careers of Victor and Edward Halperin as independent producer/directors rates serious study by someone some day. After a prolific silent career, they seemed to hit their stride with off-beat and somewhat morbid horror films in the early thirties, declined throughout the remainder of the 30's to films like "Buried Alive" in '39, and wound up doing hack writing work on "B"s and Westerns. 1932/33 was undoubtedly their peak period, the genuinely classic if somewhat over-wrought "White Zombie" leading to "Supernatural" which would seem to have set them up rather nicely at a major studio - but didn't. Like "White Zombie" is a stress on striking, stylised and often Germanic visuals, and is decidedly morbid in its preoccupation with death. Since it has the same writer and cameraman as "White Zombie" and even some of the same bit players, it has a similar "look" to it, but is far more polished. For a film that has no real highlights, it does surprisingly well in maintaining suspense and evoking an atmosphere of the macabre. While the brief running time does keep it lively, this is one case where one would welcome more footage and the opportunity to expand interesting sequences. The best performances certainly come from the villains: Alan Dinehart, as smooth as ever, and Vivienne Osborne as the executed lady in possession. Vivienne, who made life difficult for Edward G. Robinson in last week's "Two Seconds" is quite unique in being able to suggest a soft and vulnerable side without any way pulling her punches in bitchiness or villainy. A further bonus for the growing number of anti-Beryl Mercer afficionados; while Miss Mercer doesn't whine in this one, she is otherwise as objectionable as ever and comes to an agreeably grisly end.

-- William K. Everson

Program ends approx. 10 p.m.

(Discussion sessions will resume with last screening)