DON'T BET ON BLONDES (Warner Bros., 1935) Directed by Robert Florey; supervised by Sam Hachtel; Screenplay by Isabel Dawn and Bayes DeGraw from their own original story, Camera, William Rees; 62 mins.

With Warren William ("Oddes" Owen); Claire Dodd (Marilyn); Guy Kibbee (Col.Temmbled); William Gargan ("Numbers"); Vincent Barnett ("Brains"); Robert Cavanaugh (Philip Stemple); Clay Colton (Mayor); Errol Flynn (David Van Dusen); Spencer Charters (Doc); Walter Byrons (Deirt Bensel); Jack Mabley (The Slade); Mary Treece (switch-board operator); Maude Eburne (Mila Purdy); Herman Bing (Professor Gruber); Joseph Crehan (doctor); Andre Beranger (dress designer); Constantine Remanoff; Jack Pennick; Frank Moran; Marc Lawrence (toughs); Paul Fix; Selmer Jackson (gamblers); Milt Kibbee (teller); Lee White (Floorwalker); Francis X. Bushman jr. (male model); George Chandler (passer-by); Brooks Benedict (doctor's assistant) and Armand and Lita.

Gradually we're chipping away at the missing Robert Florey films. This is the 12th of the 13 highly efficient thrillers, romances and comedies he churned out for Warners between 1933 and 1935, before moving on to his best period at Paramount. Warren William, in a role that could have been played (almost as well by Ricardo Cortez or Fat O'Brien, other Florey stars of this period, holds the whole light, fast-paced comedy together with his breezy style. However, by now the production code had taken its toll, and it's all harmless fun (not that anything to complain about in that!) without the bite of, for example, the not dis-similar 1932 Warren William-Guy Kibbee outing, "The Dark Horse". It's an elaborate production, with handsome sets, unstinted use of extras, and the usual Florey photographic tricks to distract attention from a fairly mild plot — a split-screen usage at one point, and a shoe-shine photographed from below through glass. If a lesser Florey because the material isn't there, it's still slick; highly enjoyable way to while away an hour. Presumably it was a longer film originally and then substantially cut; otherwise there's no way of explaining away Herman Bing's mere presence in one shot without so much as a stammer or a lip roll! But if Bing is shortchanged, Errol Flynn certainly makes up for it in a brief role in which his potential star quality is very apparent.

--- TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION ---

THE COCKEYED WORLD (Fox, 1929) Written and directed by Raoul Walsh, based on the unpublished play "Tropical Twins" by Laurence Stallings and Maxwell Anderson; additional dialogue, William X. Wells; Camera, Arthur Edess; Art Direction, Ben Carré; 116 mins. With Victor McLaglen (Top Sergeant Flag); Edmund Lowe (Sgt. Girt); Idi Darmita (Klinita); Lella Karmelly (Olga); El Brendel (Oisen); Bob Burns (Cannors); Jeanette Dagna (Katinka); Joe Brown (Brownie); Stuart Erwin (Backley); Ivan Iñów (Canovich); Jean Mary (Fanny); Soledad Jiminez (Inkeeper); Albert Dresden (O'Sullivan); Joe Rechay (Jabees); Raoul Walsh (officer); Eddie Boland, Warren HYMER.

It's now some 20 years since "The Cockeyed World" resurfaced in the big Fox preservation drive, yet in all that time it has had barely two or three showings in New York, and these immediately following its rediscovery. Its stress on dialogue and relatively slow pacing will be readily apparent following the peppy 62 minutes of its speedy co-feature, yet it's easy to see why "The Cockeyed World" was such a sensation in its day and one of the permanent boxoffice blockbusters for the Roxy Theatre. Admittedly overlong, it is nevertheless — for 1929 — and especially in comparison with the really slow "In Old Arizona", a very slick production. The fact that it is a talkie, it delivers the goods of this new toy with a vengeance. There is not a lot of the sound—talkie sound in these clips. With the Flag/Girt wisecracks taper off, there are songs galore, screaming and hysterical women, aeroplanes, machine guns and bursting bombs. The assault on the ear-drums never ceases, and the overall effect is rather like sitting in a cheap restaurant, trying to enjoy a good meal, and being diverted by the constant music from a juke box. At such times, one often wishes one could put in 20¢ to buy a short period of silence — and so it is here. Nevertheless, the crackle and pop of the dialogue, even some of the too measured exchanges between the stars, are way above the average standards of 1929 and have all the pre-Code guts that one expects from Stallings and Anderson, as well as the vitality and humor of William Wells, a top Broadway writer. Some of it is pleasingly raunchy (El Brendel, a paper in one hand, a blurb in the other, announcing that he has "the lay of the land") while a lot of the rather sardonic commentary on the big business interests behind war, and the reason for American troops taking off for foreign soil, was distressingly up-to-date when the film first re-appeared 20 years ago, and seems even more apophas today. The film's main weakness is that although it starts in Messicia and winds up in Nicaragua (after a stopover in New York) it never really gets anywhere. There is literally no plot, merely situations and running gags, one of them repeated from the original "What Price Glory?". Of course, in 1929 it was all less familiar than another sequel. What Peppers, McLaglen and by then the Flag/Girt tradition was well established, Lowe and McLaglen made several official and unofficial follow-ups, and teams like Chester Morris and Richard Arlen tried the same paths later on. It is not the film's fault that it is now ever-familiar, but a shorter running time would help.

Just how many films in the 1928-31 period revolved around the Nicaraguan invasion? There must have been half-a-dozen at least, including Frank Capra's "Flight", also 1929. One original touch still works well — the raucous, derivative End title. Otherwise, familiar or not, it's an important landmark film and — given patience and understanding — a good "audience picture" as well.

--- William K. Everson

Program ends approx. 10:40.
No discussion/question session tonight, but next week's program is shorter and will allow us more time so hold questions until then.