THE NEW SCHOOL
FILM SERIES 68: Program #4

June 26, 1991

Two Comedies: Raunchy and Sophisticated

GOING TO TOWN (Paramount, 1935) Directed by Alexander Hall; produced by William Leaven; Screenplay by Mae West from an original story by Marien Mangel and George Dewall; Camera, Karl Strauss; Music and lyrics, Sam Paine, Irving Kahal; NY premiere, Paramount Theatre, May 1935; 74 mins.

With: Mae West (Cleo Berden); Paul Cavanagh (Edward Harrington); Ivan Lebedeff (Ivan Valadev); Tito Corall (Tahoe); Marjorie Gateson (Mrs Brittany); Fred Kohler Sr. (Rock Glasses); Monroe Owley (Pleasure Colton); Gilbert Emery (Winslow); Grant Withers (Young Man); Adrienne D'Ambricourt (Annette); Luis Alberni (Signor Vitale); Lucie Villegas (Sener Lopez); Mena Rice (Delores Lopez); Paul Harvey (Donovan); Francis Ford (Sheriff); Wade Boteler (Ranch foreman) and Dewey Robinson, Ten Ricketts, Robert Dudley, Joe Frye, Cyril King, Morgan Wallace, Irving Bacon, Bert Reach, Jack Pennick, Ten London, Syd Saylor, Ben Cobert, Frank McGlynn sr., Stanley Andrews, Lew Kelly, Rafael Strose, Albert Conti, Larry Steers, Dennis O'Keefe.

After the forced and whitewashed "Every Day's a Holiday" and "Klondike Annie" one isn't too optimistic of any post-Code Mae West vehicle. "Goin' to Town" however comes as a pleasant surprise. True, it doesn't have the bawdy freedom of the earlier Wests and pulls its punches a bit, but nevertheless it is far more akin to "I'M No Angel" than to the anemic "Every Day's a Holiday". If the sexual quips are a little less blatant than before, then Mae works all the harder (delivering the lines she has written) to make their innocence suggestive, and to mask rougher lines with a double-entendre "safe" interpretation to pacify the Production Cede. And certainly there is no let-up; line for line with its rarity that it's hard to remember them all, though one can hardly forget Ivan Lebedeff's repartee in this stock "Loves of Sunny" role, telling Mae "For one kiss of these lips I'd give half my life" and Mae replyning "Come back tomorrow, and I'll kiss you twice!" Alexander Hall is possibly too stylish and tasteful a director to be ideal for West. It all seems a little too elegant and polished, many scenes framed with deliberate symmetry, for Mae to be as much at home with him as she had been with Lowell Sherman and Leo McCarey. But the only real weakness of the film is the last reel when the fun element of the plot come to a halt and it gets dramatic - not the raw, overdone dramatics of "She Done Him Wrong", but the kind of wrap-up dramatics intended to tie up the loose ends, and that reduce Mae to the status of spectator. This sequence also contains Mae's venture into Grand Opera - done half tongue-in-cheek, but also half-seriously, as a nod to the new boxoffice appeal of "popular" opera as currently exemplified by Grace Moore and Gladys Swarthout. Luckily most of the flaws of "Goin' to Town" are compressed into the final reel; far better that than a film that tones down the fun all the way through. Even apart from the comedy content, there's also a slightly sour edge to Mae's encounter with high society femininity, and especially Marjorie Gateson, as though she's using the film as an expensive home movie to hit back at the blue noses who condemned her earlier, and who certainly contributed, via subliminal pressure, to the enforcement of the Production Cede.

-- TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION --

NO TIME FOR LOVE (Paramount, 1943) Directed by Mitchell Leisen; Screenplay by Claude Binyon; Adapted by Warren Duff from a story by Robert Lees and Fred Rimalde; Camera, Charles Lang Jr., Music: Victor Young; NY premiere, Paramount Theatre, Dec.14; 83 mins.

With: Claudette Colbert (Katherine Grant); Fred MacMurray (Jim Ryan); Ilka Chase (Happy Grant); Richard Haydn (Roger); Paul McGrath (Henry Fulton); June Havoc (Darlene); Marjorie Gateson (Sophie); Bill Goodwin (Christley); Robert Herrick (Kent); Merton Lowry (Dunbar); Rhys Williams (Clancy); Murray Albert (Moran); John Kelly (Nurseryman); Jerome DeNurie (Leon); Grant Withers (Pete); Rod Cameron (Tayler); Willard Robertson (Company president); Charles Irwin (waiter); Gregory Gaye (Head Waiter); Arthur Loft (executive); and Frank Jenks, Tom Neal, John Dehner, Fred Kohler Jr. (sandhegs).

Colbert and MacMurray always made an excellent comedy team despite their silk and sandpaper characteristics, or perhaps because of them. MacMurray's straightforward physicality and Colbert's sleek sophistication meshed beautifully, and in "Taming of the Shrew" stories like this one, one always feels the winners. Though a lightweight subject, it was one of the big money-makers of its period, and contains an unusual amount of slapstick for a Mitchell Leisen directed film. Yet the physical humor, though often spectacular, is no mere underlined than the comedy of elegance, and the film is an unusually successful matching and mating of styles: never hilarious, but always amusing and entertaining. It also contains a briefer (longer in the initial cut) dream sequence that was a prelude to Leisen's much more elaborate dreams in the upcoming "Lady in the Dark", and students of ingenious art direction might care to note that Colbert's apartment set is merely re-dressed and re-painted from the apartment specifically designed for her in "The Palm Beach Story" and the felicitous move partially dictated by Paramount's normal economic bent, but also by wartime restrictions on the costs of building new sets.

--- William K. Everson

Program ends approx. 10.19

Fall schedules will be available on the reverse of the notes issued at the July 17 program.