

COMING OUT PARTY (Fox, 1934) Directed by John Blystone; produced by Jesse Lasky; Screenplay by Gladys Unger and Jesse Lasky jr. from an original story by Becky Gardiner and Gladys Unger; Camera, John Seitz; 79 mins.

With: Frances Dee, Gene Raymond, Nigel Bruce, Alison Skipworth, Harry Green, Gilbert Emery, Marjorie Gateson, Clifford Jones, Germaine de Neel, Jessie Ralph, William Henry, Kane Richmond, Dave O'Brien, Paul Porcasi, Suzanne Kaaren, Claude King.

Throughout the 30's and into the pre-war 40's, films with titles like "Coming Out Party", "Social Register", "Finishing School", "Sorority House" and "Public Deb No.1" became almost a sub-genre. They not only provided useful fodder for up-and-coming young stars like Frances Dee, Ginger Rogers, Anne Shirley and Brenda Joyce, but they also enabled leftist-inclined writers such as John Howard Lawson to take a few swipes at a wealth-oriented American society! Even at the time, they seemed pretty superficial, but in retrospect they take on added interest as being so reflective of certain aspects of those times. There seems to be a certain amount of very low-key New Deal propagandising injected into this one. It is the "little people", regardless of race or origin, who are the good guys here; it is the servants, or the poor struggling artist/musician hero, who display all the decency and compassion. The rich aren't exactly the villains but they are shown as aloof and in need of the overhaul and reformation that the New Deal was all (or partially) about. Too, the film - prepared in 1933 and released early in 1934 - is clearly a casualty of the rigid new restrictions laid down by the Production Code. Quite obviously the as yet unwedded heroine is pregnant in the final portions of the film, but one would never know it - except by the most indirect inference - from the dialogue. Youngsters, who were happily a good deal more innocent in 1934 than they are now, must have indeed wondered at the unexplained desperation of the heroine towards the end of the film. Basically, it's a soap opera, but it's a rather humanly done one, with some sensible writing and acting, and enough cynical comedy to prevent it from becoming sticky. Frances Dee, at this stage in her career, was both beautiful and animated, not yet transformed into the cold aristocratic statue that she became in so many later films - through no fault of her own. For Nigel Bruce, it was his Hollywood debut - and the first of six films he made there in the first half of 1934, before returning (temporarily) to England.

-- Ten Minute Intermission --

THE PRIZEFIGHTER AND THE LADY (MGM, 1933) Directed by W.S. Van Dyke; Associate Producer, Hunt Stromberg; Screenplay by Frances Marion, John Lee Mahin jr. and John Meehan, from an original story by Mahin and Meehan; Camera, Lester White; 102 mins.

With Myrna Loy, Max Baer, Primo Carnera, Jack Dempsey, Walter Huston, Otto Kruger, Vince Barnett, Robert McWade, Muriel Evans, Jean Howard, Jess Willard, Jim Jeffries, Strangler Lewis.

Both of today's films are relatively unfamiliar, and much of the enjoyment they offer is in their surprise content, so I don't want to minimise that quality by saying too much about the films themselves - particularly this one. Why the film has never been reissued is something of a mystery, since it holds up beautifully, and one can only suppose that its lack of exhibitor interest is occasioned by the absence of a Gable, Powell or Montgomery playing opposite Miss Loy (who may have been a bit miffed at having three fighters sharing above-the-title star billing with her!) Plotwise, it is an amiable confection probably thrown together in order to cash in on the incredible publicity - and popularity - that Max Baer achieved a few months earlier in his fight with Max Schmeling. But if the original idea was "thrown together", borrowing certain cliches and traditions (the Loy-Kruger relationship was a standard at MGM; Loy and Gable went through the same routine in "Manhattan Melodrama", and poor Otto was back at the same stand losing Crawford to Gable in "Chained" only a few months later!), then there's nothing "thrown together" about the final film. It's polished, witty, funny - and like all W.S. Van Dyke films, moves briskly and without pretention. Biggest delight of all however, is Max Baer, who is such a pleasant and accomplished player that one has no sense of the novelty amateur moving in from another field. Indeed, one wonders why later films wasted him in supporting roles, and made so little effort to tailor material to him specifically. Overlooking "guest" appearances and one-night stands (the Polish wrestler in "The Night And The City") the list of fighters who have become actors is not very large - Mike Mazurki, Billy Conn, James Corbett, a few others. Leaving time and perspective to decide on Muhammed Ali's talents as an actor, Max Baer is far and away the most pleasing - and the most successful - of all the fighters turned actors. (This I know leaves me wide open for questions about Maxie Rosebloom afterwards!) Van Dyke's other 1933 movies were "Penthouse" and "Eskimo", both of which we've shown earlier; we're glad to be able to complete the coverage for that year with such a delightful and entertaining movie.

William K. Everson

Program Ends approx. 10.50.