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Frank Capra's **ARSENIC
AND OLD LACE** (1944),

from a screenplay by Julius J. and Philip G. Epstein, based on the Joseph Kesselring play, with Cary Grant, Raymond Massey, and Peter Lorre, was a

wild reworking of a Broadway chestnut by Capra, who was coming off his monumental wartime documentaries to test the waters at Warner Bros. in a one-shot deal. Josephine Hull, Jean Adair, and John Alexander as the mad Brewsters of Brooklyn are still on hand to preserve some of the ambience of the long-running theater piece, but the cream of the jest, Karloff's stage-created ogre, found a mannered substitute in Massey and a minimized sidekick in Lorre. The new ingredient that put back the voltage and more so was an inspired Grant in his prime, playing broader and more knockabout than he was ever to do again and uncorking an ingeniously fevered repertoire of burlesque antics. Grant was responding to Warners' sledgehammer mystique for comedy and Capra's instincts to transform a chucklesome satire

*9. 2. 86. Voice
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into belly laughs and wide-eyed reaction shots. The lark was very successful as a farce and helped make the war seem very far away. **Saturday, 11 p.m., Channel 5**