The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

Two British Films

PRISON WITHOUT BARS (Alexander Korda-UI, 1938) Directed by Brian Desmond Hurst. Adapted from a play by E. and G. St. E. G. S. Kunz and Hans Wilhelm, and the French film of the same title produced by Arnold Pressburger; original story by Henri Jeanac; scenario by Arthur Wimperis; dialogue by Margaret Kennedy; edited by Charles Crichton; photographed by Georges Perinal; music by John Greenwood; art direction by Vincent Korda; a London Films Production: 8 reels With Corinne Lucario, Edna Best, Barry K. Barnes, Mary Morris, Martita Hunt, Margaret Varde, Glynis Johns, Elsie Shelton, Lorraine Ciesla, Sally Fisher, Enid Lindsay, Myllis Morris, Nancy Roberts, Beatrice Varley, Ronald Shiner.

Starting off like a stark imitation of "Diary of a Lost One", "Prison Without Bars" becomes increasingly more gentle as it progresses, and the thoroughly English types never quite manage to look or sound like Frenchmen. However, like most Korda films of the period it is so thoroughly professional that one remains engrossed and entertained, if never very profoundly moved. Edna Best is a tower of strength as always in the kind of role that was her real forte, and Corinne Lucario, repeating her role from the French version, is definitely appealing even if excessively well-groomed for such a role. Her career, apparently off to a brilliant start, was cut tragically short when she was reputedly shot for collaborating with the Nazis during the occupation of France. Barry K. Barnes, one of the few really appealing and virile British leading men of the late thirties, is rather badly handicapped by an unsuitable mustache and an ambiguously written but generally unsympathetic role. Louise Brooks and G.W. Pabst are currently too fresh in our minds for this film to be taken too seriously, but nevertheless it's good to see it again.

NIGHT TRAIN TO MUNICH (US title: "Night Train") (Gainsborough-20th Century Fox, 1940) directed by Carol Reed; produced by Edward Blaik; scenario by Frank Launder and Sydney Gilliatt; camera: Otto Kantzrock; art director: Vethinsky; 9 reels With Rex Harriss, Margaret Lockwood, Paul Henreid, Basil Radford, Naunton Wayne, James Harcourt, Felix Aylmer, Kenneth Kent, Raymond Huntley, Wynham Goldie, Roland Culver, Elliot Makeham, Austin Trevor, Norland Graham, G.W. France, Fritz (Frederick) Vahl, David Horne, Torin Thatcher, Allan Jeayes, John Wengraf, Albert Lieven, Wally Patch, Ian Fleming, Howard Marion Crawford, Eugane Beaker.

Possibly no film has ever been quite so frankly imitative of Hitchcock, and pulled off so well. So smoothly does Carol Reed keep it in motion that one wonders why he maintained such a serious mission in most of his later films, and never let his hair down quite like this one. Perhaps a good deal of the credit should go to writers Launder and Gilliatt, who re-work much of their "Lady Vanishes" material — and also lay a few foundations for their much later "State Secret". So much is pure Hitchcock: the audacious use of the most obvious models, the kindly English cowpuncher whose concluding role actually provides a front for Nazi espionage; the junglistic British travellers, not nearly as exaggerated as one might suppose; and the quite decent Nazi villain who, like Paul Lukas in "The Lady Vanishes", is a good sport about loving. What he does lack is the carefully-developed inner vingtette — like Donat at the political meeting in "The 39 Steps", or Cummings at the charity ball on "Sabotage". The plot moves along neatly and quickly, but no such highlight sequences develop. Even the potentialities of the hero having to spend a night with the heroine to foil the Nazis into thinking he is her lover, are undeveloped and the episode is out short before it really gets under way, almost as though Carol Reed didn't want to bother with anything but essentials. However, he makes up for it with a marvellous chase and suspense climax, right out of Hitchcock's top-drawer. He also takes a leaf out of Hollywood westerns here too. Many of the better actors of the 30's echoed background music entirely until the action climax, when its sudden introduction enhanced the excitement enormously. The same pattern is followed here — and it works. The print, somewhat worn, is fortunately complete, and while the sound has some low areas in the first third, this too improves — like the pace of the film — as it gets under way.

EXTRA: We normally try to keep away from experimental and/or abstract films as being none of our business or policy. However, with Cinema 16 shut down, we are glad to make an exception when the film in question has been made by one of our own members. So tonight — Charles Levine's "Beeches and Cream". No extra charge — and no refunds — and don't worry, it is not another "Flaming Creatures"!