April 25, 1967

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

An Evening of Mystery and Murder from the 40's

"GREEN FOR DANGER" (Rank-Eagle Lion, 1947) Produced by Frank Lauder and Sidney Gilliat; Directed by Sidney Gilliat; Screenplay by Sidney Gilliat and Claude Guernsey from the novel by Christiana Brand; Camera: Wilkie Cooper, Oswald Morris; Production Designer, Peter Proud; Music: William Alwyn; 9 reels

With Trevor Howard, Sally Gray, Rosamund John, Alastair Sim, Leo Genn, Megs Jenkins, Judy Campbell, Moore Marriott, Henry Edwards, Ronald Adam, George Woodbridge, Frank Ling.

One of the big Rank "prestige" films of the 40's, "Green for Danger" was one of those items that seemed finally to have crashed the American market with a vengeance. It opened with a big commercial splash at the Winter Garden - then the Rank showcase - and collected a state of rave reviews, with unanimous enthusiasm for Alastair Sim. A wide variety of ads enabled the film to be sold as a class in itself, a thick-as-thieves, as a sex thriller. Yet it wasn't too long before its well-deserved reputation had been largely forgotten, and retitled THE MAD KILLER, it was sent into the 42nd Street grind-houses on a double-bill with GANG WAR!, which turned out to be Carroll Reed's ODD MAN OUT.

"Green for Danger" is very much a classic of its kind, the perfect translation of a comfortable and civilized mystery novel into an equally civilized (though sometimes far from comfortable) mystery movie. As one would expect from Gilliat and Lauder (and especially Gilliat), who can now be seen to have dominated the duo much as Billy Wilder dominated the Brackett and Wilder team) it is witty, light-hearted, but unpredictable, the moments of terror (and even visual horror) all the more effective because of their lack of build-up. The swinging doors in the dispensary, and the silent appearance of the masked and gowned killer, provide a stunning moment of the macabre with a welding of sound and image that would have done credit to Val Lewton or James Whale.

Alastair Sim so completely wraps up the film with his off-beat detective - both awkward and adle-brained by turn - that critics of the time automatically expected Rank to launch him in a series. Fortunately it never materialised. Just as a succession of Bogart Sam Spades would have cheapened "The Maltese Falcon", so a number of Inspector Cockrill follow-ups would have lessened the subsequent-viewing impact of "Green for Danger". Sim is a delight however, and the rest of the cast - happily not type-cast at all - is first-rate. Some of the best performances come from the supporting players, especially Ronald Adam, rounding just the right note of objectionable pomposity at the chief of staff, without overbalancing into caricature - Henry Edwards (a fine old veteran of the British silent days) and Moore Marriott as the postman. Marriott's dignity and expertise as a character player make it hard to realize that he enjoyed his greatest popularity as the toothless octogenarian stooge to Will Hay in slapstick comedies of the thirties.

But regardless of the adroit mixture of comedy and thrill, and the smoothness of all the playing, what really makes "Green for Danger" so unique among its species is its restraint and honesty. It plays fair with the audience at all times, never cheats, keeps red herrings to a minimum (and even introduces those legitimately and for a purpose), points the accusing finger equally at all, and never once tries to lead the audience up the garden path by the false clues and manipulation of audience familiarity with who-dun-it? rules that made guessing the identity of the killer such child's play in most Hollywood mysteries of the 30's and 40's.

"LADY ON A TRAIN" (Universal, 1945) Directed by Charles David Produced by Felix Jackson; Associate Producer, Howard Christie; Screenplay by Edmund Beloin and Robert O'Brien from an original story by Leslie Charteris; Music: Niklos Rozsa; Special Effects, John Fulton; Art Directors, John B. Goodman and Robert C. Clatworthy; Camera: Woody Bredell; 9 reels

With Deanna Durbin, Ralph Bellamy, Dan Duryea, Edward Everett Horton, David Bruce, George Colbert, Allen Jenkins, Patricia Morrison, Maria Palmer, Elizabeth Patterson, Samuel S. Hinds, William Frawley, Jacqueline de Wit, Clyde Fillmore, Thurston Hall, Ben Carter, Mary Forbes, Sarah Edwards, Nora Cecil, Hobart Cavanagh, George Lewis, Al TaRue, Tom Dugan, Stuart Holmes, Eddie Dunn, William Desmond.