Thanks to the increasing boxoffice emphasis on "family" films and the stifling restrictions of the production code, the latter days of the 30's saw Hollywood fleeing both a Never-Never-Land and a Cinderella-escape from the still very much present depression. Few serious issues were raised; comedy directors like Lubitsch were shackled, Mae West lost her bite, and dramatic features were riddled with compromise and evasion. The one consolation was that the purely escapist family features -- the swashbucklers like "The Prisoner of Zenda", the Dorothy Lamour adventure films, the actioners like "Gunga Din", Disney's "Snow White" -- films that didn't have to worry about dramatic, political or sexual taboos -- exploited their self-imposed boundaries to the hilt. During this period we had some of the most inoffensive and uncontroversial -- but also the most elegant and charming -- of Hollywood's two-decade dominance.

Tonight's two films are prime examples of what Hollywood was doing best during those years when the best of Hollywood seemed to be behind us, and we were unaware that Welles and Sturges were just around the corner, with resurgences of Ford, Wellman & Milestone.

"MAD ABOUT MUSIC" (Universal 1937, rel. 1938) Directed by Norson Taurog
Produced by Joe Pasternak; screenplay by Bruce Manning & Felix Jackson from an original story by Frederick Kohner & Marcella Burke; Camera: Joseph Valentine; Songs by Harold Adamson, Jimmy McHugh; editor: Phil Cahn; 10 rls.

Deanna Durbin's third starring vehicle perpetuates the successful formula that had made her a boxoffice phenomenon, and that would continue to work its mathematical yet seemingly spontaneous magic in other films yet to come. With its gingerbread sets and super-luxury everywhere in evidence, it was both a Cinderella escape, and a none-too-convincing argument that money isn't everything. Once again Deanna sings, is involved in white lies and intrigues almost to the point of being a brat, meddles in the affairs of adults, settles marital strife, and is made the focal point of all of Universal's behind-the-scenes real-of-the-camera Talent. Even without her virginity and youthful beauty the film could hardly help being a pleasure; with it, sasharine or not, there's never a false step. Even the bad little girl turns out true blue, and it's quite a giant step from this film to its contemporary "equalvaent." "Doctor, You Have to Be Joking" (or words to that effect) in which Deanna's successor, Sandra Dee, is pregnant as the film begins and just manages to land a husband en route to the delivery room! Maybe there was something to that late 30's Never-Never-Land after all.

-- Intercision --

"LOVE AFFAIR" (RKO 1938) Directed by Leo McCarey
Produced & Directed by Leo McCarey; Screenplay by Delmer Daves & Donald Ogden Stewart from a story by Mildred (larm and Leo McCarey; Camera: Rudolph Mate; Editors: Edward Dmytryk and George Hively; Music: Roy Webb 8 reals
With Irene Dunne, Charles Boyer, Maria Ouspenskaya, Lee Bowman, Maurice Roscovich, Astrid Allwyn, Scotty Beckett, Tom Dugan, Lloyd Ingraham, Bess Flowers, Harold Miller, Gerald Mohr, Joan Leslie, Dall Henderson, Carol Hughes, Layland Hodgson, Oscar O'Shea, Frank McOlym sr.

In a recent issue of "Cahiers du Cinema" Leo McCarey made a rather sad spectacle of himself (especially to his admirers) by boastfully claiming credit for Laurel & Hardy, by praising his weakest pictures -- and ignoring his best. What a pity that so many veteran directors always speak for publication with both eyes open to the effect that statements can have on future jobs. Fortunately, their films remain to speak for them -- and "Love Affair" is one of McCarey's best. It's a trifle; the first half gay and witty, the second emotional. In terms of film becoming and directing, it works all the time, and often inexplicably, Irene Dunne's underplayed farewell to Maria Ouspenskaya is a suddenly tender and poignant moment, as it would be in life, but as such trifles rarely are in film. McCarey, like Borzage, has the knack of wringing true emotion from minor incidents, and never quite showing us how he does it. Nothing really happens in "Love Affair", but it is quite elegant, moving -- and a treat. In this unreal world, even Hollywood's supreme bitch (on film) -- Astrid Allwyn -- is pleasant and likeable, and the corn, the sentiment and the syrup, all pay off when written, not directed. Leo McCarey may have written the script on his own or with a twenty-year-old with some inexperience, but it works, and it works all the time, and often inexplicably. Sometimes it is seen theatrically or on tv for many years, thanks to the remake, 1957's "An Affair to Remember". As remakes go, it was rather good; Grant and Deborah Kerr were fine follow-ups to Boyer and Dunne, and it still had the benefit of McCarey at the helm. All it lacked was the brevity of the original; like most CinemaScope affairs, it went on far too long! A fine final note of some academic interest -- no less than four directors-to-be can be found in the crew of "Love Affair".

-- V. G. --