RETURN TO YESTERDAY" (Capad/Ealing/AEFD, 1939) Dir: Robert Stevenson
Screenplay by Robert Stevenson, Angus Macphail and Roland Pertwee from the
play "Goodness, How Sad!" by Robert Morley; Camera: Ronald Neame;
Produced by Michael Balcon; music by Ernest Irving; 8 reels

4th Clock Brook, Anna Lee, Dame May Whitty, Hartley Power, David Tree, Milton
Osmer, Olga Linda, Garry Marsh, Arthur Margetson, Elliot Kasen, O.E. Claydon,
David Horne, Frank Pettingell, Wally Patch, Alf Goddard, John Turnbull, Mary
Arrol, H.P. Maltby, Ludwig Stoessel, Molly Hanks, Patric Curwen, Peter Glenville

...an extremely pleasing trifle that was rather lost in the shuffle even in England, so
her release collided with the outbreak of war, "Return to Yesterday" is
yet another reminder of the compact and tasteful films that Robert Stevenson was
turning out with such regularity in his pre-Hollywood years. Its plot is little
more than a vignette, but the pleasant evocation of a British seaside resort,
with the gallery of characters, the neat interchange of pathos and comedy, and the
anecdotal yet witty dialogue makes it all a minor delight, with the credit due
perhaps as much to the original author (Robert Morley) as to scenarist/director
It is extremely well cast and acted, and Anna Lee (Mrs Stevenson),
a charming if limited player, here even manages to keep her one irritating
manieres, (an over-use of a sunny smile that ultimately seems artificial, a trick
even John Ford couldn't shake loose from her) well under control. Her performance
is quite one of her best. Although no great dramatic heights are scaled or
climbed, the film does occasionally achieve emotional effects that are quite
moving, and the poignantly underplayed climax has much of the sensitivities of the
final scene of Barrie's "A Kiss for Cinderella". Not the least enjoyable of the
film's many assets is its sprightly musical score which makes good use of such
traditional English songs and ballads as "Uncle Tom Cobbley", "Barbara Allen" and
"Will Ye Ne Come Back Again?" (All right, the last-named is Scotch - but that
still puts it under British jurisdiction!) - - - - Intermission - - - -

"FIDDLES THREE" (Ealing, 1942) Directed by Harry Watt
Associate Producer: Robert Hamer; Screenplay: Angus Macphail, Diana Morgan
Camera: Wilkie Cooper; Music: Ernest Irving; Songs by Mischa Spoliansky,
Robert Hamer, Geoffrey Wright, Harry Jacobson, Diana Morgan, Roland
Blackburn; 8 reels

With Tommy Trinder, Frances Day, Sonnie Hale, Francis L. Sullivan, Elisabeth
Wells, Diana Decker, Mary Clare, Ernest Milton, James Robertson Justice.

I must admit that I acquired this print largely out of curiosity (I missed its
original release in England) and not with any Huffian exposure in mind, but its
first exposure (to a 100% American audience) produced such unrestrained laughter
that to keep it hidden was out of the question. Maybe we were all taken by
surprise by its wit, pace and outrageously blue humor (healthy dirt in British
comedies is commonplace now, but was quite rare in the war years apart from the
occasional punch-line), and by the genuinely zippy and pungent songs, and a
subsequent viewing will prove it to be not quite so good after all. But it
certainly rates its chance to show its stuff! Oddly enough, in England at the
time it was just considered more of the same. There was quite a rash of time-
machine comedies, in which leading comics were whisked back to previous eras --
Tommy Handley in "Time Flies" and Jack Buchanan's "When Knights Were Bold"
from the 30's was being recirculated too. The idea of a male comic imitating
Carmen Miranda was also standard stuff then too - both in films and in the music
halls; but, today at least, Tommy Trinder's version seems the best of them all.
It's an oddly efficient and fast-paced comedy for such an austere documentarian
as Harry Watt to have made, and he does run out of steam a little towards the
end. The climax veers more to suspense than comedy, and it does lack a
towards the good
The rest of the film is too good to justify carping --
and anyway, it seems to have been good enough to influence two Italian carbon
copies... "OK Nero" and "Nero's Weekend". Tommy Trinder notwithstanding, the
richest comedy comes from Francis L. Sullivan, literally immense as Nero, wandering
around and uttering such gems as "What delicious debauchery; we can see we're
going to make a perfect beast of ourselves!" The orgies may be rather polite in
the British manner, but the double-entendres and jokes about eunuchs are quite
brash for staid old England.

--- William K. Everson ---