A WILLIAM SEITER Program

"THE LITTLE CHURCH AROUND THE CORNER" (Warner Bros., 1923) Dir: William Seiter
Based on a story by Olga Printzlau and a play by Marlin Russell; camera: Charles Rosher and Edwin Carewe; With Kenneth Harlan, Claire Windsor, Pauline Starke, Robert Benchley, Walter Long, Alec B. Francis, Cyril Chadwick, Winter Hall, Margaret Seddon, George Cooper, Stanton Heck, Fred Stanton, Winifred Miller, Mary Jane Irving.

"The Little Church Around the Corner" is sentimental, melodramatic hokum, but done with flair and style, the sort of picture that was a sure-fire attraction especially in the small towns, in the 20's. It was quite a bit of Tracy/Regan/the time. Photoplay go...consider it the best thing of its kind the company. Leighland "The Miracle Man" of a year or two earlier. We last ran it some ten years ago, and our print then was quite inferior to the lovely mint-condition toned original that we have tonight. In the interim, the film has been quietly forgotten again—though it did surface briefly, when Jack Warner made a passing but affectionate reference to it in his autobiography. For director Seiter, he immediately preceded his "Red Whirl" (which we have also shown twice), and while it wasn't really his forte (alas, comedies of manners, light rural dramatics) it is still one of the best of his purely dramatic films. Perhaps it needs greater emotional depth than it receives—the hand of a Brenon or a Borzage perhaps—but on the other hand, one shouldn't judge a programmer by the standards of a "Scarlet and Son" or a "Seventh Heaven"). It is well-acted, dramatically very satisfying, and photographically often superb. The camerawork is in the hands of Homer Scott and Edwin Dufall, who often worked together, Scott being especially in demand for rural and small town stories. The mine disaster scenes are particularly well done, the crowd shots reminding one not a little of the earlier similarly filmed in "Intolerance", and the much later ones in "How Green Was My Valley"—while one is less bizarre, split-screen, symbolic shot is so striking that we won't spoil its effect by talking about it here. If there is a single disappointing aspect of the film, it is the limited use made of Walter Long. He is as thoroughly evil as always, ill-treats a little dog almost the moment he arrives on screen, but then just disappears a little before the end. One can't help wondering whether originally he was permitted to assault one of the film's two heroines (the note, helpless one preferably!) and that this sequence was deleted prior to release when it was realised that the film was otherwise so ideal for church, school, and family group endorsement.

"The miracle" aspect of the film seems to be able to stand a test, and about a third of the footage is devoted to the mine disaster and riots, which is a little disproportionate perhaps, but it's still a very satisfying film and, amazingly, an almost unknown one.

"APPOINTMENT FOR LOVE" (Universal, 1941) Directed by William Seiter
Produced by Bruce Manning; Screenplay by Bruce Manning and Felix Jackson from an original by Ladielous Edmundson; Camera: Joseph Valentine; 9 reels With Charles Boyer, Margaret Sullivan, Reginald Denny, Rita Johnson, Ruth Terry, Eugene Pallette, Ceci Kallaway, Gas Schilling, Roman Bohnen, Anne Nagel, Tristram Coffin, Gordon de Maistre, Eddie Kane, Charles Lane, Aileen Pringle, Mary Gordon, James Bush, Stanley Blystone, Richard Fiske, J.M.Kerrigan, Rea Hadley, Shemp Howard, Larry Steers, William Huhl, William Gould, Jack Mulhall, Eddie Durn.

W.C. Fields apart, and Preston Sturges of course, the very early 40's seemed at the time to be a rather barren field for comedy—but in the grim '50's we can look back and realize that we weren't so badly off after all. 1941 for example gave us tonight's film, "The Bride Came C.O.D.", "The Man Who Came to Dinner", "That Uncertain Feeling", "Ball of Fire", "The Devil and Miss Jones", "Hellzapoppin" and numbers of other "A" and "B" ("Buy me that Town") comedies of charm and merit—not a bad batting average for one year! Yet at the time, it was the big sectional dramas that seemed to predominate—"Hold Back the Dawn", "Cheery for Miss Bliss", "Beggar on Horseback", "The Big Store", "Shining Victory", "Rage in Heaven", "Penny Arcade", "This Happy Breed", "Remember the Day", "Smiling Through", "So Enchanted", "Christopher" and the rest...all also 1941. There was a wartime market for comedy (especially in England, where "Appointment for Love" was an especial hit) and we leaped at this light froth avidly. "Appointment for Love" had its two big romantic stars letting their hair down as a follow-up to their earlier 1941 film "Back Street" (made by the same writer/producer, Bruce Manning); for stars of their magnitude, it's light, trivial stuff. But it's a light, pleasant, conceived piece of fluff—somewhat of a forerunner to the light, pleasing, well-crafted comedies of Cukor comedies. There were no special highlights, the photography and art direction and the cast obviously enjoyed working again with his old "Skimmer's Dress Suit" star, Reginald Denny. An unimportant, forgettable, but most enjoyable comedy.