Monday next, January 12th: "THE KING OF JAZZ" (1930) In Technicolor, with Paul Whiteman, Bing Crosby, John Boles; "THE GHOUL" (1933) with Boris Karloff.

January 5, 1970

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

A British evening with Edgar Wallace: refined and thick-ear


"THE SQUEAKER" is perhaps more of a Korda production than a Howard one; it is elegant, tasteful, and perhaps a trifle too dignified. Only occasionally does Howard's talent for rich melodrama come to the fore -- the effective scenes of the chief getting his answers from the "unknown" via finger writing on a fog-clouded window, the escape from Scotland Yard, the bizarre sequence of the master criminal's Mabuse-like final breakdown -- even though it seems a trifle that such a mastermind would be taken in by such obvious theatrics. But if it lacks the taut thrills of Howard's American melodramas, it's at least partially due to the Wallace story, which is well-enough knotted and singularly lacking in surprise. Nevertheless, it's an enjoyable thriller, and Lowe and Howard, as always, work well together. A couple of establishing stock shots from "Things to Come" are borrowed to lend added production values, and there's an interesting attention to detail -- as in the use of a photo of Australian comic Will Mahoney in a theatrical dressing room.

"DARK EYES OF LONDON" (Pathe, 1939) Directed by Walter Summers; Produced by John Argyle; Screenplay by John Argyle, Patrick Kirwin and Walter Summers from the novel by Edgar Wallace; Music, Guy Jones; Camera, Bryan Langley; U.S. release by Monogram under the title "The Human Monster"; 8 reels

With Bela Lugosi, Hugh Williams, Greta Gynt, Edmon Ryan, Wiltfrid Walter, Gerald Pring, Alexander Field, Arthur E. Owen, Julie Suedo, Bryan Herbert, May Haliatt

The normally very conservative British company Pathe -- usually restricted to a genteel diet of romances and armchair detective thrillers -- decided to pull all the stops out in this one, aiming at a full-scale horror film to match Hollywood standards. It was the first really major British chiller of its type, and earned itself the "X" (strictly adults only) certificate at the time, thus cutting itself off from major circuit bookings, although Pathe -- affiliated with the big ABC chain of theatres -- did use it as somewhat of a "special" to open new theatres with. Through the years it was certainly a very profitable item for them, and was finally withdrawn only some eight years ago, when so many of the Wallace properties were sold, and this one was remade in Germany under the title "Dead Eyes of London". It's a gruesome, well-mounted thriller, that sometimes tries too hard to be the "definitive" British horror film; there's a stress on the physically repugnant that somewhat foreshadows the later Hammer work, although in comparison with these subsequent films, it is actually a model of decorum! The sets and camerawork are atmospherically effective, and of course Lugosi has a field day in what was then his biggest and best role in some time. The film cheats a little however in dubbing in the voice of British character actor O.B. Clarence when Lugosi is masquerading as the kindly and benign benefactor of the blind. The physical disguise might well pass muster with the not-too-discerning, but obviously dear old Bela could never, under any circumstances, summon up an accent that could sound even remotely kindly or benign! Hugh Williams (who died just recently) makes a good hero, but obviously it's Bela's show all the way. The shock scenes do have suspense and a nice blood-and-guts quality to them, and it's an expensive looking film, marred only by some typical British-conception-of-Americans comedy relief, and the rather harsh sound recording that is so typical of British 16mm printing.

-- W. E. Everson --