"STREET SCENE" (United Artists, 1931) Directed by King Vidor
Produced by Samuel Goldwyn; screenplay by Elmer Rice from his original play;Camera: George Barnes; Music, Alfred Newman;
Art Direction, Richard Dyer; editor, Hugh Bennett; 7 reels

Just as "A Streetcar Named Desire" is rigidly locked in to the Kazan and Williams of 1948-50, and appears hopelessly dated and ludicrous today (the timeless universality of Leigh's performance excepted), so is "Street Scene" so much a dated product of the very early 30's that one likewise cannot take it seriously today. If one were to, it could only emerge as a total justification for mobbing, class distinction and racial prejudice! As a piece of writing, it is a museum piece. As a piece of filmed theatre however, it still has more than academic interest. Apart from two cutaways for establishing shots of the city, Vidor never leaves his single but elaborate street set. (Thank heavens he never follows the characters inside to the privacy of their apartments; they are quite intolerable enough in public, sitting on the front steps!) Vidor tells his story with great visual virtuosity; sometimes a camera angle is a little too stylised and non-subjective for comfort (those extreme low angle shots, looking up, suggest that they were taken from the vantage point of a sewer) and occasionally the extreme mobility of the camera causes disturbing microphone shadows to appear. But his camera does keep moving, and the pacing is good; the cumulative effect of the editing and the use of increasingly longer shots in the final big crowd scene is particularly effective. Several of the performances are still very valid too, particularly David Landau and Estelle Taylor. Also particularly effective is Matt McHugh, although the nastiness of his performance is minimised here by a print in which several of his lines are casualties of either the particularly ragged copy, or unsuitable cutting if this print was ever used on tv. His bathing references to William Collier jr. as "the pride of Jerusalem" are, for example, completely missing. But while the print condition is unfortunate, it is lucky that it now affords what has become the film's least interesting aspect - its dialogue. The pictorial power is largely unimpaired, and still shines through all the splices.

- intermission -

"LE BELLE EQUIPE" (France, 1936) Directed by Julien Duvivier
Scenario by Duvivier and Charles Speak; music by Maurice Yvain, Lyrics by Duvivier and Speak; Camera, J. Kruger; French dialogue; English titles;
Released in the U. S. under the titles "Here We Were Five!" and "Five Men and a Woman"; 8 reels

The last time I recall "Le Belle Equipe" playing in New York was at the 42nd St. Apollo in early 1951 - although it probably had an isolated single-day booking or two at the Theater since then. In any event, it is one of the least familiar Duvivier films of the 30's and well worth a revival today, even though it is somewhat of a misfire. Looking the consistency of most Duvivier films of the period it seems to be trying instead for a kind of pastiche of French cinema - it starts off like a Gene Clair, and winds up like a Renoir. Its basic flaw is one of construction: the picture is half over before its basic story promise is established, and then it has to rush everything. The ending demands the kind of elegant melancholy that Renoir brought to "Partie de Campagne" - or at the very least, the bravura sadness of the climax of "Maurice et les Enfants" - "The Iron Mask" - but its tragedy seems arbitrary because it has been forced on us without sufficient exposition. However, it is an interesting, stylish, and sometimes quite moving film, and appears to be complete - other than for an obvious trim or so in the obligatory sex scene, even though we can now be fairly sure that what was deleted was probably more a matter of inference than direct statement. Heroes in movies of the 30's - even imported ones - just weren't supposed to behave like that!

William K. Everson