November 2 1970

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

"SO THIS IS LONDON" (20th Century Fox—British, 1938) Directed by Thornton Freeland Screenplay by William Conselman from the George M. Cohan play by Arthur Goodrich; additional dialogue, Ben Travers; Camera, Otto Kantorowski; 6 reels
With Robertson Hare, Alfred Drayton, Berton Churchill, Carla Lehmann, Stewart Granger, George Sanders, Pay Chalmers, Lilly Cahill, Havis Clair, Ethel Revnell and Gracie West.

Although based on the old Cohan play and earlier Will Rogers film, this version of "So This is London" has been considerably reshaped to fit into the framework of the famed Aldwych farces, huge British theatrical and filmic hits right through the 30's. (Robertson Hare's "Aren't Men Beastly?", a more legitimate entry in the genre, had immediately preceded it in production). The basic story remains the same, but the emphasis has been shifted from the American business-men to the British do-it-yourself, making it more of a vehicle for Hare and Drayton, and providing more excuse for Ben Travers' outrageous yet genuinely amusing sexual double entendres. Hare (still going strong on the London stage, and on British tv, though now in his 80's) and Drayton still make an amusing team, and it's interesting to see youthful Granger and Sanders well before their periods of peak stardom. Carla Lehmann too is a pleasure to behold; a lovely young player who never quite attained the stardom she seemed to merit. U.S. release was delayed by some two years, and the American version (tonight's print, unfortunately) was somewhat inauspiciously edited down to second-feature length. (Actually, one wonders why Fox, both to the public and their American audience—although an essentially British comedy in the first place)—a lot of the funning seems to have been done in the doubtful extended comedy (?) antics of Ethel Revnell and Gracie West. Thanks to BBC radio, which fortunately could only be seen and not heard, and backed up by the music halls and movies, British audiences of the 30's had to put up with quite an assortment of double-act female comics—though in all fairness they did seem to be genuinely liked by audiences. The unfunny slapstick antics of Revnell & West were topped in mediocrity only by the more talkative but even less funny grunts of "Cockey Dockey Dot" (Deanna Durbin and Ginger and Daisy). Most popular of all were Old Mother Riley and her daughter Kitty who were also the most prolific in their film-making—but perhaps they don't really belong since Mother Riley, a kind of Irish live-action Donald Duck, was actually played by a man—Arthur Lucan—and daughter Kitty by his wife Kitty MacShane, an overweight and untalented lady of approximately the same age as he was.

Anyway, if only briefly, you'll get a sampling of Revnell and West in this film, and Thalas Todd and Zasu Pitts they most certainly aren't! Snappy, slick, pleasantly culled from "So London", is a most enjoyable feature and as in "Mark", which we ran a few years back, the dialogue is paced as for the stage and the accents clearly understandable, so you'll have no problems decoding all the double meanings.

"FIFTY MILLION FRENCHMEN" (Warner Brothers, 1931) Directed by Lloyd Bacon Scenario by Al Boasberg, Joseph Jackson and Eddie Walsh from the musical play by Herbert Fields and Cole Porter; Camera, Dev Jennings; 7 reels

So transit_solution! When we first saw this film some twelve years ago it seemed to hit a new high (or low) in cheerful "blue" humor. How times have changed! The couple of harmless dirty set-pieces remain as amusing highlights (especially Helen Breinnick as an insatiable thrill-hungry tourist), and the general depravity of Olsen and Johnson is well scattered through the film, but all too often your thunder has now been totally stolen by this year's British "Carry On Up the Jungle", quite the most outlandish and unbelievable "blue" comedy ever made, and carrying the distinction of containing only one non-sex joke in the entire picture.

Alas, it's unlikely that it will be released here—the sex jokes they'd get away with, but stereotyped native safari porters are the butt of much of the humor, and if Van Dyke's "Tarzan the Ape-man" almost caused a race riot at Yale last year, this one could start the Civil War all over again! Slow in starting, but quickening in pace to a slapstick finish, "Fifty Million Frenchmen" is notable mainly as a prime example of the early thirties non-musical, at a time when the genre was thought to be finished and box-office poison, all the music was removed (from this and similar properties) and only a hint of the Cole Porter melodies remains occasionally in the background. As compensation, we are repeating a film we showed many years ago, to round off the program—Warner's later (1934) 2-reel remake, "Parade Parade". Here all, or seemingly all, of the songs tumble off the screen one after the other, linked by a lightning condensation of plot. It was directed here in the East by Roy Mack, photographed by Ray Porter, and stars Dorothy Coonan, with Billie Leoniard, Rodney Huleman, Charles Collins and Stephi Dunn—plus some economical imitations of the Busby Berkeley overhead studies of chorines.

— Wm. K. Evans