One of the last films directed by Walter Summers ("The Lost Patrol", "Dark Eyes of London"), "Premiere" is rather a fascinating curio. It's typical of the kind of film that helped to wreck the economy of the British industry: an elaborate, large-scale, relatively inexpensive, real, but not very "B", comedy, with a great deal of names and content for it to make any real impression on. "Premiere" is a great deal better off its native soil. Also, like most British films of the period, it (conversely) several years behind the times—in this case quite literally, since it is exactly the same kind of film as the 1934 American "Mudra at the Vanities", likewise a mystery story in which a murder is committed, and solved, during the run of a musical review. None of these comments on the film's commercial problems reflect on its entertainment values: it's a breezy and handsomely filmed, and the musical numbers, while not of a nature to cause any trepidations over at Warner Brothers, are surprisingly efficient in spectacle; and really only lack good humoured tunes to go along with all the chorine manipulation. (Admittedly, the lack is not a minor one!)

The mystery element likewise, is not plumbed to any great depths, and it's mainly a matter of the inspector (that always reliable and interesting actor John Lodge) being on hand when the killer, for no very valid reason, goes to pieces and confesses. Since the killer is the British equivalent of the Frenchman who has been cheerfully unmasked on several occasions, and the unsuspected villain, there's not much guess-work involved there either! But the film is short, and interweaves neatly between melodrama and music, after first following one of the key rules of mystery construction (illustrated best in "The Kennel Murder Case") in establishing the murderer as such a swine that everybody in the cast seems to have a perfectly valid motive for polishing him off.

"THE YELLOW TICKET" (Fox, 1931) Directed by Raoul Walsh Scenario by Jules Furthman and Guy Bolten, from the play by Michael Morton; Camera: James Wong Howe; Music: Carl Sino; 9 reels


In 1928-1933, Hollywood seemed inordinately concerned with the melodramatic possibilities of the Russian revolution ("Battleship Potemkin", "The Virtuous Sin", "British Agent"), while the British side of course took the field, making their contribution in the series "The Red Night", "Knight Without Armor", and "The Demon". The film industry has been somewhat unmasked; Ozer's "The Yellow Pass" with Anna Stearn, though, was released in the US in 1931. "The Yellow Ticket" is a colorful earlier play (also made as a silent film in 1918), in which sex and suspense are happily given pride of place over political issues. (John Barrymore had played the brash young hero in the NY stage version in 1912). The film is an astonishingly slick and fast-moving piece of work for the normally rather stodgy 1931 period. There's a constant musical score, indeed, rare for that transitional period, and excellent camerawork. Moreover, there are no long talky met-pieces; even when nothing much is happening, the film is constantly broken down into good compositions, exciting shots, and well-paced cuts. It's all appropriately florid and theatrical, with no subtlety needed or offered. There's also some incredibly fascinating and highly stylised stock footage of a prison camp; it also turns up in "The Red Dancer" (1930) but may not originate there; it has a decided European touch. The "baron" however is pure Stroheim baroque with even a little nudity for our voyeurism. Logic perhaps isn't our main point: the disregard of diplomatic immunity in the British Embassy scene displays a behavior that is untoward, to say the least — but theatrical bravura is a more than acceptable substitute.

Lionel Barrymore has the time of his life as the villain, relishing lines and scenes that were only topped by his "Battleship" shortly thereafter. Boris Karloff has an effective bit as a drunken loafer who tries to assault Miss Landi, only to be stopped by Walter Byron who likewise tries to assault Miss Landi, only to be stopped by Lionel Barrymore, who likewise tries to assault Miss Landi, and so on. All of this enterprise does rather tend to put the whole idea on film. Laurence Olivier somewhat in the same shoe, and when he did finally get around to playing a Russian himself (in "The Dead Paradise") the script also did not call for him to assault the equally unfortunate Penelope Dudley Ward. (Coincidentally, a point I'd forgotten, he also played a Russian - opposite Miss Ward - in "Moonlight Nights") But let's face it, "Yellow Ticket" is both above-average Walsh and certainly above-average 1931 movie-making. ——— Mrs. K. Emerson ———