A GIRL MUST LIVE (20th Century Fox-British, 1930) Directed by Carol Reed
A Gainsborough Production; Scenario by Frank Launder from an original story
by Emery Bonett; Camera, Jack Cox; Musical Direction, Louis Levy;
Released in the U.S. (1931) by Universal Pictures; 8 reels
With Margaret Lockwood, Lilil Palmer, Renee Houston, Hugh Sinclair, Naunton Wayne,
Mary Clare, George Robey, Helen Hayes, David Burns, Kathleen Harrison, Moore
Marriott, Brasilia Willis, Frederick Burton, Martita Hunt, Muriel Aked.

Sandwiched in between "Night Train to Munich" and "Kipp", "A Girl Must Live" was
Reed's last non-prestige production - although still a big and handsomely
mounted film, with an extremely good cast and some expensive sets. Its plot is
admittedly trivial - rather like "Gold Diggers of 1933" without the production
numbers - but the cliches all seem to melt away because of the sensitive
performances (particularly from Margaret Lockwood) and some really amusing
dialogue. Unfortunately, a lot of the cleverer lines are thrown away because of
the speed, the overlapping dialogue and frequently shrill accents, and in some
cases a gag line depends for its effect on understanding the double-entendre of
a very British straight line that precedes it - so a certain alertness is
called for. Many of the players (notably Naunton Wayne and Lilil Palmer) are
deliberately cast against their usual type, and some of the lesser roles are so
rich that it is a pity that they weren't developed further. Particularly endearing
is an old actress who specializes in animal noises, and explains that she started
years earlier doing "noises off" - "I was a scream in 'East Lynne'". The earlier
portions stress comedy rather more than romance, and admittedly it does get a
little too seriocomic-minded towards the end, but it's still a slick, brittle
and vastly enjoyable romantic comedy, a Carol Reed that seems never to have been
revived. Its US release by Universal was trimmed by some 15 minutes, but our
print tonight is of the full original version. Incidentally, as a kind of
personal joke for British audiences, Moore Marriott - who plays the sanitary
engineer - reappears in the final scene in his toothless octogenarian makeup,
the much more familiar guise in which he was so beloved by British audiences as
the comic foil in the Will Hay comedies.

-- intermission --

SILENT WITNESS (Fox, 1932) Directed by Marcel Varnel, assisted by R.L. Hough
Scenario by Douglas Doty from the play by Jack De Leon and Jack Celestin;
Camera, Joseph August; 7 reels
With Lionel Atwill, Greta Nissen, Weldom Hayburn, Helen Mack, Bramwell Fletcher,
Mary Forbes, Montague Shaw, Lunsden Hare, Billy Bevan, Wyndham Standing, Herbert
Mundin, Alan Mowbray, Eric Wilton, Lowden Adams.

Lionel Atwill's sound-feature debut was a tightened-up version of the play in
which he had appeared so successfully in 1931, and understandably not too much
effort is made to conceal its theatrical origins. To the contrary, every means
is exerted to turn it into an absolute tour-de-force for Atwill, ridiculing him
with sustained scenes of menace, near-breakdown and of course sardonic humor.
It's still a theatrical performance, but a most impressive one. For the rest,
It's a good if talk ative murder mystery with enough ramifications to make one
discard the predictable solution well before one realizes that one was right
after all! The supporting cast is an interesting one, with Greta Nissen turning
on the heat once again, and Weldom Hayburn as the first of a long line of
imitation Clark Gables that included Don Castle, Kent Taylor and George
Montgomery. Hayburn - never a very interesting actor, and soon to disappear into
"B" pictures - is so groomed, tailored and photogenic that he does at times bear a surprising if superficial resemblance to Gable.

--- Wm. K. Everson ---