While in terms of drama and documentary, BBC radio and tv has often risen to exceptional heights, its purely "entertainment" programs - class-consciously arranged with "highbrow" stuff on one channel, and "popular" material on another - have been stodgy and dull, and have changed terrifyingly little since the 70s. Like most TV entertainment, therefore, this survey of its first six months of TV, starting in November of 1936, is of value far more for its academic interest than for its dubious entertainment value. Even more terrifying than the thought that this represents the "cream" of the programs is the realization that if the British hadn't lost interest in the colonies in 1776, this might well be the level of American tv today too! It hopes from sculpture to zoology, from fashions to ballet and roller-skating, seemingly aware - its own boredom, yet aware too that on non-commercial radio & tv channels, there was no competition. A few names - Margot Fonteyn, Dame Nellie Melba, McKayney, Valerie Hobson, Cyril Ritchard, Frances Day - will be familiar to US audiences - but the others, from politicians to vaudevillians (and on BBC it is sometimes hard to tell the difference) will be new if not exciting faces.

It Began in Brighton (BBC-TV in collaboration with the B.P.I., 1970) 3 reels Directed by Tristram Powell, with John Huntley.

A serious and enjoyable, if unavoidably fragmentary, look at the pioneer British film-makers that, quite accidentally, seemed to turn Britain's Brighton into an equivalent of Fort Lee in the 1895-1910 years. Little actual footage is available, but what there is is fascinating. The interviews with the old-timers themselves are quite charming, though none too reliable. One of them places a date only because he recalls that that's when he was courting, while another - showing a marvelously inventive example of black slapstick comedy - lets us dream a bit by describing its trick photography with all the details obviously wrong. However, an actual demonstration in these scraps of pre-1910 film than in all of the BBC's proudly presented "highlights" from early 1937?

--- INTERMISSION ---

ATLANTIC (British International Pictures, for Wardour Films release, 1929) Directed by E.A. Dupont; Camera, Charles Rosher; S蔡enplay by Victor Kendall from the play "The Ber" by Ernest Raymond; Music, John Reynolds; Assistant Directors, John Harlow, J.P. Green, M. Caffney; Original length (and length of our version tonight) 10 reels; US release length, 7 reels. Produced in English and German versions; key German actors are listed below after the names of the players in the equivalent British roles:

Franklyn Dyall (Fritz Kortner) as John Rool; Elialine Tarris (Ilka Wager) as Mrs Rool; Donald Calhrop (Georges John) as Pointer, the valet; John Stuart (Franz Lederer) as Lawrence; Madeleine Carroll (Lucie Mannheim) as Monica; Franz Lister (Theodor Loes) as The Father; Monty Banks (Willi Forst) as Dandy; and D.A. Clarke-Smith, Helen Haye, Joan Barry, Arthur Hardy, Sydney Lynn, John Longden, Sue Creweley, Dino Gervini, Danny Green.

A big critical and commercial success at the time, rather over-generously listed as an equal of the best Hollywood films of the period, "Atlantic" has suffered through the years by being known only for its worst and most pedestrian scenes, these used by Elstree Studios as a means of measuring their progress since. Actually, while it naturally disappoints as the collaborative work of two such craftsman as Germany's Dupont and Hollywood's Rosher, it is by no means as slow and stodgy as we've been led to believe - although admittedly, its main interest is as a veritable text book of the problems involved with both early talkies and bi-lingual productions. Dialogue scenes are frequently sidestepped merely by playing them against backgrounds (a ballroom for example) with its own sound, thus reducing the dialogue to silent pantomime. Much key dialogue is spoken with the characters' backs to the camera, and the pacing is quite awkward. Yet the plot is inevitably held some of the acting quite powerful (especially Franklyn Dyall) and the staging often elaborate, if lacking in showmanship. Delayed and underplayed dialogues have very often been the only aspect that really dates is the rather class-conscious contrast between stammering panic and first-class calm and courage - although stumpsness and complacency is perhaps a better description. With all hell let loose above desks, mobs, panic and general hysteria, it's just a little hard to understand why the stiff upper-lippers in first-class take so long to cotton on to the fact that something is ailing. However, given the problems of the day and the fact that Dupont only really shone with major stars (but not in "Atlantic" as in "Variety") and was no great shakes on his own, "Atlantic" is a fair bet to tell the truth to which we've been led to expect. On the other hand, don't anticipate too great a surprise!

--- William K. Everson ---