Next program: March 21: VOYAGE IMAGINAIRE (Rene Clair, 1924) with Albert Præstæen; preceded by HAPPINESS (Ince, 1917) with Enid Bennett, John Gilbert.

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Erratum in date above: next program is April 11.

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Theodore Haff Memorial Film Society  TWO BY J.B. PRIESTLEY  March 21, 77

LET THE PEOPLE SING (British National, 1942) Produced and directed by John Baxter; screenplay by John Baxter, Barbara K. Emery and Geoffrey Orme from the novel by J. B. Priestley; Camera, James Wilson; Art Director, Holmes Paul; Musical score, Kennedy Russell; Original length, 10 reels; this print, 7 reels. With Alastair Sim, Fred Emney, Patricia Roc, Edward Rigby, Oliver Wakefield, Annie Edmond, Marian Spencer, Olive Sloane, Mairi O'Neill, Peter Gawthorne, Ian Fleming, Peter Utstein, Gus McNaughton, Charles Hartley, Aubrey Mallalieu, G.H. Midcote, Wally Patch, Horace Kenney, Ida Barr, Morris Harvey.

J.B. Priestley, still active as a writer and a rather pompous TV personality, was a prolific contributor to films of the 30's and 40's, either via plays and novels adapted to the screen ("The Old Dark House", "When We Are Married", "Laburnum Grove", "They Came to a City", "An Inspector Calls", "The Good Companions", tonight's two films) or via original stories and collaborations on adaptations ("Sing As We Go", "The Foreman Went to France", "Jamaica Inn", "Last Holiday"). Tonight's films hardly represent either his best work or the cinema's best treatment of his work, but they are both relatively unfamiliar films, curious and diverting if not overwhelming. "Let The People Sing" was, so far as I can discover, never shown in this country either theatrically or on TV, which I had thought was an edited TV print is actually a third British reissue print. Pictorial quality is excellent, but the trimming - done mainly in the early part of the film, and consisting of about 30 minutes of footage - does play havoc with the narrative. Not to rationalise or excuse it, it was originally a film that was too long and ponderous, and surprisingly lacking in showmanship. The title song was a huge wartime hit, written by Noel Gay - not only was it well known, but its title suggests a natural tie-in with the traditional brand of "popular" light socialism that was Priestley's forte. Yet it is never used until the climax, and then almost as an afterthought! If nothing else, the cutting does get us to the comedy content quicker, and the last section of the film, when the magnificent Fred Emney takes over, is virtually intact. John Baxter, its director, tried hard through the years to be Britain's Frank Capra, and never made it - but he did direct one really notable film in "Love on the Dole". The producing company, British National, was something akin to Allied Artists here in that it was the smallest of the major companies, but far bigger than most independents. British National on the whole made awful pictures - long, empty, old-fashioned - good only when they snagged a worthwhile director (Michel Powell) on the way up. But they had powerful links with a major theatre chain, and their films did get good exhibition. Priestley's work in "Let The People Sing" involves plagiarising a basic comic plot peg from Chaplin's "City Lights" incidentally, and the cast is certainly a strong one by today's standards, although in 1942 Alastair Sim and Patricia Roc were still second echelon names. The editing is obviously disruptive and frustrating - but the film moves faster thereby, and much of the deadweight is gone.

DANGEROUS CORNER (RKO Radio 1934) Directed by Phil Rosen; screenplay by Ann Morrison Chaplin & Madeleine Ruthven from the Priestley play; Camera, Roy Hunt; Music, Max Steiner; Art Direction, Van Nest Polglase, Perry Ferguson; 6 reels. With Virginia Bruce, Melvyn Douglas, Conrad Nagel, Eric O'Brien Moore, Ian Keith, Henry Wadsworth, Betty Furness, Doris Lloyd.

Good theatre if not striking cinema. "Dangerous Corner" has a "gimmick" plot in which the gimmick is used (here) only as a convenient quick wrap-up; Priestley made much more of it. Next to Bernie H. Ray, Phil Rosen must be the least felicitous director for a Priestley subject, but the plot itself, plus a really good cast, keep it lively and interesting if still theatrically talkative. With "The Old Dark House", it represents the only Hollywood usage of Priestley.