Unseen in America for a great many years, "Evergreen" is one of the very few British films of the 30's remembered with affection by the general run of U.S. moviegoers, as opposed to the art-house-oriented buffs who turned Alfred Hitchcock into the only cult Britain was able to export in those pre-war years. Based fairly closely on the tremendously successful stage revue (which incidentally seems to have influenced the Rita Hayworth-Gene Kelly "Cover Girl" no little), "Evergreen" has even less plot substance than the other Jessie Mathews vehicles. Although her films pre-dated Astaire/Rogers, when one was at her peak popularity her films did generate and follow the dramatic and musical pattern and misunderstanding that always characterised the Astaire/Rogers movies. "Evergreen" covers two generations (like "Show Boat", somewhat shakily) and has some complex story threads, but just about all of its "plot" is set up within the first three reels. From then on, even the expected cliches rarely rear their heads, and plot as such is reduced to just so much padding between the musical numbers. If it's hardly as creative a film as Rodgers and Hart's Hollywood collaboration with Rouben Mamoulian on "Love Me Tonight", surely, the perfect film-musical, and it's still a constant delight. Actually almost 50% of the running time is devoted to music, ranging from the charming and intimate "Dancing on the Ceiling" to the fantastic "Cannon Fodder" sequence, which is like a meeting of Busby Berkeley and Fritz Lang, with a little Eisenstein and Pabst thrown in for good measure! If the big numbers lack some of the imagination of their Hollywood parallels (it seems pointless to set up groups of pattern-weaving chorines and then photograph them from the side rather than above) then they lack little in size or design. And certainly the rhythm, sophistication and refinement of Jessie Mathews' musicals were so popular not only in England (where their scale alone was surprising) but in the U.S. as well. They were probably the only British films of the 30's that were wholly successful in their outright imitation of Hollywood. Miss Mathews herself remains an enchanting personality. Even at the time, when some chose to criticise her for "vulgarity" (she did display more cleavage, flesh and lingerie than any other British star of that period) she managed to pull off her occasional naughtiness with superbly ladylike aplomb. A good film star is a mass of stage but one with but little range, she managed to make the very most of her assets, and with a piquant sexuality wrap them all up into a star quality that was quite unique. Ann Miller had some of the Mathews qualities, but not enough to spell the difference between a good all-around hooper personality and a genuine "star". Even the Mathews mannerisms, and there are a few, fail to irritate in the face of her overall appeal. Certainly she and the numbers are the whole show here, though director Seville's unobtrusive direction is as tasteful as always, the effortless troping of "Evergreen" (a musical that makes its weight felt. The rather obnoxious and artificially Americanised Barry Mackay - Gainsborough's equivalent of Glenn Tryon - isn't very endearing, and due to the lack of good British leading-men in the 30's (poor John Loder was sadly over-worked!) he was used a good deal. However, while Mackay lacks the easy charm that Robert Young brought to some of the later Mathews films he does his best, and doesn't interfere too much with the basic entertainment at hand.

Preceding "Evergreen" will be a number of musical excerpts from 1929-34, chosen not for their merit necessarily (hence no Busby Berkeley or Astaire/Rogers) but for their interest and rarity. In order of screening they are: "MAKERS OF MELODY", a 1929 2-reeler in which Rodgers & Hart introduce three of their numbers (and Hart emerges as a true star composer as well as a) John Boles and Deanna Durbin (a Cuban from 1929's "RIO HOTA" (the poor picture failed due to this having been made from a much-loved Technicolor original). Nancy Carroll in a lively number from 1929's "PARAMOUNT ON PARADE", Grace Fields, supported by Vivien Leigh (her first screen role) in 1934's "LOCK UP AND LAUGH", and finally, the two big numbers from 1936's "FOLIES BERGERES" with Maurice Chevalier, Ann Southern and Merle Oberon, the best imitation Busby Berkeley we've yet seen. The numbers are shorter than Berkeley's, and lack his "dramatic" framing stories - and perhaps the girls aren't quite as voluptuous - yet still and all, Dave Gould's derivative staging is more exciting end cinematic than anything you'll see in "Star" or "Punny Girl!"