Two By Garson Kanin

Garson Kanin has never been a prolific film-maker, and his work has often been notably stage-derived. Tonight's two films are both from his most light-hearted and most creative period.

"THE GREAT MAN VOTES" (Rko Radio, 1939) Directed by Garson Kanin
Produced by Cliff Reid; screenplay by John Twist from a story by Gordon Melberbe Hillman; Camera, Russell Metty; music, Roy Webb.

"The Great Man Votes" was one of the most successful "sleepers" of its year. Sleepers are sometimes solely the creation of the critics, who, unused to seeing "B" pictures, rhapsodize them to the skies when they accidentally happen to see a good one. Thus, the competent but routine "The Narrow Margin" was boosted to undeserved success a few years back. But occasionally of course the critics are both lucky and right; they deservedly applauded "Cat People", "The Window" (if such an elaborate little film can really be termed a "B") - and "The Great Man Votes". One of Kanin's earlier films, it's a charming, whimsical, often biting political satire, more resembling the films of Preston Sturges than the later work of Kanin. In terms of production value, the very most is extracted from a limited budget, this perhaps due more to the experience of that interesting producer Cliff Reid, a long-time John Ford associate. But for all the neat writing and direction, it is the Barrymore performance that makes it live. Barrymore is not even given star billing; one can see that he is reading most of his lines from boards and occasionally corrects editing and non-matching scenes suggests that much of his performance had to be pieced together. But even a Barrymore on the decline is more than a match for any other actor in Hollywood; most of his role calls for flamboyant theatre a la "20th Century" and he launches into such scenes with magnificent gusto. But in the scenes of pathos and tenderness, and in the climactic speech, that love of his profession makes itself manifest - it's a tired Barrymore reciting the lines, but still a Barrymore too devoted to the theatre to give anything less than his current best. This knowledge perhaps gives an added poignancy to his performance that was denied to some of the more lesser-perfect performances of happier times. "The Great Man Votes" in any event represents his last serious screen acting. Thereafter, forced to lampoon himself in insulting roles that he accepted only in order to earn money to pay off debts - the descending spiral of Barrymore's career flattened out into an inglorious fag-end with a cheap Kay Kyser musical comedy. —— ten minute intermission ——

"BACHELOR MOTHER" (Rko Radio, 1939) Directed by Garson Kanin; produced by E.G.DeSylva; Screenplay by Norman Krasna from a story by Felix Jackson; Camera, Robert de Grasse; edited by Robert Wise and Henry Berman; 8 reels.

After Kanin's disastrous attempt to make a "with-it" generation-gap comedy for today's teen-age audience just this past year, it's a pleasure to flash back three decades to a day when movies were still made primarily for adults. With two such professionals in the lead, and the story from the typewriters of two such charmers as Felix Jackson and Norman Krasna, its sparkles is assured. It's simple, slight, content to settle for the continual chuckle rather than the spectacular belly-laugh. What comedy today would dream of trying to get a laugh out of a line like "You've disgraced the tax department?" - and what performer could pull it off as perfectly as priggish Paul Stanton does here? Ginger Rogers, as was her habit in those days when she was trying to kill her image as Astaire's dancing partner, tends to try a little too hard at times, but even so her playing is much more assured and relaxed than it was in, say, "Tom Dick and Harry", a 1941 comedy in which Kanin too tried a bit too hard. A comment on changing moral standards: the film's original closing line "Are you going to be surprised?!" (the meaning of which will be apparent when you have seen the film) caused quite a Hays Office furor. The current quizzical "Hm-hmhm" was substituted, and works just as well. —— Wm. K. Everson ——