"THE MIKADO" (Excerpt only) (1939, dir: Victor Schertzinger)

This brief excerpt may frustrate Gilbert and Sullivan devotees, but it was chosen for color rather than musical purposes, the rich, warm but deliberately artificial tones making the most of the Oriental decor, makeup, swirling parasols and glowing lanterns.

"WINGS OF THE MORNING" (20th Century Fox-British, 1936)

Directed by Harold Schuster; produced by Robert T. Kane; screenplay by Tom Geraghty from a story by Donn Byrne; Director of Photography, Hay Bennahan; Cameramen, Jack Cardiff, Henry Imus; 8 reels

"Wings of the Morning" was Britain's first three-color Technicolor film, and was literally designed to exploit color in every way possible. Frankly, it needs the color. Seen in black-and-white, the film loses all of its appeal and can be seen rather more obviously for what it is - an incredibly old-fashioned romance, filled with novelettish situations and outdated conventions which were already somewhat old-hat in the British film of the twenties! However, it's hardly fair to criticise a film made for color if it doesn't work in black-and-white. In color, and our print is a beauty, it still impresses: everything about the film - the landscapes of England and Ireland, the green of the racetrack, the magnificent reds of the Irishwoman, the verdant, flowerful lakes, the idyllic romantic scenes amid picturesque scenery and piles of golden straw - is designed to impress audiences with the beauty and versatility of color photography. Old-hat though the plot is, it is still...pleasing in its own simple-minded way.

Films about gypsies have always been popular in Britain - both in film and in romantic novels - perhaps because the gypsy (still very much present, although less so since the war years) with his caravans and redcoats is a living link with the past, and provides something of a mirror to the younger generation of today's youth. The film was a tremendous success commercially in England, and a substantial one here. With a little effort, it could even have been a much better film, its artificiality turned to an advantage by a really good director. But feeling that its commercial success was assured by its color, its stars (Annabella was a big new name then, and Fonda had just done Hollywood's first 3-color outdoor film with "Trail of the Lonesome Pine"), the presence of John McCormack to wrap up the Irish areas, and the slickness of a Hollywood scenarist (working from stories by Donn Byrne, who also provided the original novel for John Ford's "Hangman's House"), Fox obviously decided that a good director was an unnecessary luxury. Harold Schuster, a former editor, was bid a fledgling director then, and actually never became a major one, although later on he did turn out some good medium-budget American melodramas like "Jack Slade". "Wings of the Morning" however, made at the very beginning of his directorial career, was to remain his only "big" film.

----- TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION -----

"THE DRUM" (United Artists-London Films, 1938) Directed by Zoltan Korda
Produced by Alexander Korda; screenplay by Lajos Biro, Arthur Wimperis
Hugh Gray and Patrick Kirwan from the novel by A.E. W. Mason;
Camera, Georges Perinal; edited by Henry Cornelius; 9 reels
With Sabu, Raymond Massey, Valerie Hobson, Roger Livesey, Desmond Tester, Francis L. Sullivan, Edward Lefly, David Tree, Reginald Batty, Amid Taftzami
Roy Channon, Michael Martin Harvey, Martin Walker, Ronald Aidan, Julian Mitchell

"The Drum", was made by Korda as kind of a dry run for his subsequent "The Four Feathers" (one of the best and certainly most serious of all big movie adventures) to both work out the logistics of location shooting, and to note audience reaction to such a (for Britain) new movie departure. "The Drum" certainly lacks the sweep and really spectacular action of a Hollywood counterpart like "Gunga Din", and it is all handled on the level of a schoolboy adventure yarn. The issues are slim, the menace never very frightening. But it moves along pretty well, and while the color is again most pleasing in its restraint and pastel tones, the dialogue is full of jingoistic lines and subtly (?) veiled British threats and/or insults to Indian princes who forget their place, and a marvellously rich villain performance by Raymond Massey, forever prattling about "white English threats ready for the knife!" But again, it is the color that makes it of major interest today - and now that Eastmancolor has proven to be unstealable, their prints of only ten years vintage fading right and left into sepia or impure red, it's good to be reassured of the permanence and stability of the old Technicolor process, and especially of the British prints which represent Technicolor at its very best.

-- Wm. K. Everson --