"THE GOOD COMPANIONS" (Gaumont-British-Fox, 1933) Director: Victor Saville
Screenplay by M.A. Lipscomb from the novel by J.B. Priestley;
Camera, Bernard Knowles; 9 reels
With: Jessie Mathews, Edmund Gwenn, John Gielgud, Mary Glyne, Percy
Pascoe, A.W. Backwood, Florence Gregson, Frank Pettingell, Lawrence Hanney,
Annie Esmond, Max Miller, George Zucco, Margaret Yarde, Gilbert Davis,
Henry Crocker, Dennis Hoey, Viola Compton, D.A. Clarke-Smith, Finlay Currie,

Unseen for many years, with a reputation enhanced (as is often the case) by
a much inferior remake in 1956 "The Good Companions" not unexpectedly
fails a little to live up to its reputation. But it's easy to understand
its tremendous success in 1933 as one of the first British talkies of real
professional quality after an interim period of stiff, economically-made
films designed to get their money back at home with few ambitions elsewhere.
The first major property that Gaumont-British had, it benefits from typical
Saville taste and style, impressive photography and lighting, and a good
deal of charm. If the studied informality of the acting seems occasionally
affected today, it was at the time a big improvement on the rigid theatric-
ality of so many contemporary British talkies. Priestley's story is not
marked original, but it does have a sense of period and an honest feel for
the only moderately-talented people of the musical shows that tour the
provinces and seaside towns of England. Possibly the first half is better
in that respect, the second half turning more into a vehicle for Jessie
Mathews and her songs and dances, though few audiences today should complain
at that. It's a slick production in all aspects but one. The sound
recordings were always high-standard on this film, making a big dent in its potential profits outside England, and causing its
early withdrawal. The Yorkshire accents don't help either, and this sole
surviving 16mm print - taken from a decomposing and shrinking 35mm original -
has the ravages of age to contend with as well. A bit muddy in the opening
sections, it happily clears up before the musical sequences arrive. Jessie
Mathews, as always, is charming, graceful and sensuous, but John Gielgud,
like Laurence Olivier in the same period, is somewhat mannered and self-
conscious. Max Miller (as the publisher's agent) here has just one scene,
making his debut. Soothingly bland, he becomes one of the most popular British
comedians of the 30's. Several other cast members (Gwenn, Hoey, Zucco)
emigrated to Hollywood, Jack Hawkins did rather better when he matured,
Finlay Currie - then type-cast in picture after picture as a high-pressure
Hollywood or show biz executive - really hit his stride much later in the
40's as a character actor, and cameraman Knowles became an efficient
director.

--- Ten Minute Intermission ---

"NIGHT TRAIN TO LONDON" (Gainsborough-Fox, 1940) Directed by Carol Reed
Screenplay by Sydney Gilliat and Frank Launder from a story by Gordon
Wellesley; producer, Edward Black; Camera, Otto Kanturek; Art Director,
Vetchinsky; music, Louis Levy; 10 reels
With Rex Harrison, Margaret Lockwood, Paul Henried, Basil Radford, Nauntion
Wayne, James Harcourt, Felix Aylmer, Wynhand Goldie, Roland Culver, Eliot
Lakeham, Raymond Huntley, Austin Trevor, Kenneth Kent, C.V. France,
Frederick Valk, Norland Graham.

With Hitchcock newly departed for Hollywood, Carol Reed in 1940 assumed the
role of Britain's leading director, and retained that mantle until the
post-war years, when David Lean surpassed him. At this particular period,
Reed was going through a very brief period of Hitchcock thrillers, and
"Night Train to Munich", scripted by the writer (later producer/director)
team of Launder and Gilliat, who had written "The Lady Vanishes", is perhaps the
most effective imitation-Hitchcock that anyone has ever made. Only in its
own way, its "peril" scenes (the hero and heroine forced to spend an innocent
night together) does Reed back off, setting aside the situation before it
really develops, and getting back to the plot proper. But the approach
throughout is generally light, the comedy element stressed by the
delicious team-work of Basil Radford and Nauntion Wayne, by the polished
theatricality of all the performers, and by the civilised ending in which,
as in "The Lady Vanishes", the gentlemanly villain is defeated but otherwise
unscathed. The miniature work in the actionful climax is perhaps not always
too convincing, but it hardly matters. The propaganda element is generally
"soft-sell" too, but then in 1940 the British didn't still know much more
about the Nazis then Chaplin did in "The Great Dictator", and were using
them more as conveniently topical villains than as hate-worthy
enemies! Incidentally, our print tonight is a brand new one, in
substantially better condition than the rather well-used print that we
showed here a few years back. (Due to the length of tonight's program,
there will be no post-screening discussion period).