BERKELEY SQUARE (Fox, 1933) Directed by Frank Lloyd; screenplay by Sonya Levien and John L. Balderston from the play by John L. Balderston;
Camera, Ernest Palmer; Editor, Harold Schuster. 84 minutes.

Apart from one New York showing a few years back in Henri Langlois' Cinematheque series, "Berkeley Square" has been unseen for 40 years, and a kind of cult has sprung up around it. This is rather unusual for a film. Its romantic theme is so appealing, and - as with "Lost Horizon" - its basic premise grows more wistfully attractive as the years go by. Secondly, a Tyrone Power remake in the early 50's ("I'll Never Forget You"), was so good on its own, partly because it was an easy-going, non-prestige production, that we all automatically upgraded the original a few notches higher. Unfortunately, it just isn't as good as we remembered (or assumed) - but its playing, its dialogue, and its civilised tone, certainly make it an enjoyable experience. A re-evaluation at this time is perhaps important too, since there is no negative left on this film, the original material is deteriorating (some of it showing up in this copy) and the chances of future availability of the film are slim.

There are (at least) two major reasons for the film's failure to work fully. First, Frank Lloyd, despite his commercial success, was not a director who could add to what was already provided by cast and scenario. In "Cavalcade", made a few months earlier, he hardly had to: the film succeeded beautifully just on its acting and on the Noel Coward writing, just as Lloyd's "Mutiny on the Bounty" worked more from writing and playing than it did from direction. But "Berkeley Square" is a ticklish property, and needs inspiration, nuance, warmth - none of them qualities that you can really build into a script (unless you're a Noel Coward!) but which a director like Frank Borzage, James Whale or Clarence Brown could certainly have added during shooting. (With its combination of theatrical bravura and the macabre, "Berkeley Square" could have been a knockout with James Whale directing!) Secondly, it is a very theatrical property, and needs to be wholly theatre, or wholly film. There are elements of the supernatural in the story, and screenwriter Balderston, adapting from his own play, and also being something of a specialist in horror films, does occasionally try to turn the film into a semi-horror film. The flashback montage is another device that could never work on stage (unless film itself were used) and it is a powerful and chilling highlight - but these moments of pure film do rather throw into stark relief the theatricality of the rest of the film, so that it doesn't really work on either level. However, it is always difficult to pre-judge a film like this which depends a great deal on audience mood and response: good theatre, well-written and played, can still be engrossing on film, but it depends a great deal on that unpredictable audience reaction. In any event, and whatever the response, it's good to have this film back again, and to enjoy one of Leslie Howard's most felicitous screen roles. The presence of Valerie Taylor, as Kate, is perhaps particularly worth noting. Not being a theatre historian, I knew her primarily from her interesting but not very prolific film career - which included Cavalcanti's "Went the Day Well?", which we have shown in an earlier series. But her stage career was apparently quite remarkable, embracing everything from Chekov and Shaw to Lillian Hellman and A.E.W. Mason: She launched a long and highly successful U.S. tour with "Berkeley Square" at the Lyceum in New York in 1929, and apparently switched roles occasionally, playing Kate for the most part, but sometimes taking on the romantic lead instead. She has been quite active in British television, and even had a fling at screen-writing ... none of which versatility is really suggested by the film tonight, where she is somewhat overshadowed by the more colorful Leslie Howard performance, and the more sympathetic one by the lovely Heather Angel. Rather appropriately, if accidentally, an anecdote from the cameraman of the film, Ernest Palmer (not nearly as well known as his superlative photography entitles him to be) sums up one of the basic problems of the film: Having worked on early sound musicals, science-fiction films, and under such demanding masters as F.W. Murnau, he still feels that this film presented him with the greatest photographic problem he had ever faced. The script called for this specific image:
"A closed door which looks as though it is about to open."
The italics are mine, but the problem was Balderston's - and the film's!

-- TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION --
"Love Affair" (Rko Radio, 1939). Produced and directed by Leo McCarey. Screenplay by Delmer Daves and Donald Ogden Stewart from a story by Leo McCarey and Mildred Cram; Camer, Rudolph Mate; editors, Edward Dmytryk and George Hively; music, Roy Webb; 82 mins.


"Love Affair" in some ways finds itself in parallel circumstances to "Berkeley Square". It was extremely well received at the time of its release, it has later had a tv release and not a theatrical showing in years (its last NY showing was our own at the New School, in early 1968), and its reputation was further heightened by a 1957 remake, "An Affair to Remember". Too wide (in Cinemascope) and much too long, it was still a warm and charming film - directed again by McCarey, and with Cary Grant and Deborah Kerr in the leads. However, unlike "Berkeley Square", "Love Affair" not only retains its initial virtues but - because it was always a good film - seems to have increased them. At the time, its warmth, sincerity and charm were its mainstays. But it is so firmly entrenched in the Hollywood tradition of the late 30's - resolutely turning its back on the depression, and reflecting that time when going to Europe on a luxury liner was a normal pastime for the rich, and a means of escape and possible romance for the not-so-rich - that today it takes on an added socio-historical dimension as well. It's purely a trifle, and perhaps works so well because it never tried to be more than that. The first half is gay and witty, the second more emotional. In terms of film technique, it is often clumsy - as McCarey's films tended to be - and yet it succeeds all the time, often inexplicably. Irene Dunne's unemployment note to Maria Ouspenskaya is a suddenly touching and poignant moment, as it would be in life, but as such moments all too rarely are in film. McCarey, like Borzage, has the knack of wringing genuine emotion from minor incidents, and never showing us quite how he did it. Nothing really happens in "Love Affair", specially by 1974 standards, but it is elegant, well-shaped (the lack of shape and construction is perhaps the most irksome quality in contemporary films, the good as well as the bad) and generally a treat. In this unreal but very pleasant world, even the devil's supreme bitch (on film!) Astrid Allwyn is lovable, and the corn and the syrup pay off because the sensitivity outweighs the obviousness.

McCarey starred in silents as a Laurel and Hardy writer and producer, moved rather uneasily into early talkie features as a director, and then suddenly hit his stride in comedies as diversified as the Marx Brothers' "Duck Soup", Edie Cantor's "Roman Scandals", Lloyd's "The Milky Way", and "Ruggles of Red Gap". In "Make Way For Tomorrow" and "Going My Way" he showed a fine flair for honest sentiment and emotion. His films films before "Love Affair" - "Son of Paleface", "My Sister's Keeper", etc. - were alien to the things he did best, and were mistakes. "Love Affair", less zany than much of his most typical comedy material, is quite one of his best films and it is a major and crying shame that it is not generally available at this time. (Note the four directors-to-be in the film's crew).

Since we have a little space, herewith a brief listing of our Fall season. There'll be much more detailed listing on our final notes of this series, and in the October BULLETIN.

Oct. 4: Two by Mervyn LeRoy - HI NELLIE (Paul MunI) & HIGH PRESSURE (William Powell); Oct. 11: THE DEVIL'S LOTTERY (Elissa Landi, Victor McLaglen), FIRST LOVE (Deanna Durbin, Robert Stack); Oct. 18: A SOLDIER'S PLAYTHING (Curtiz, with Ben Lyon, Harry Langdon) and BEAST OF THE CITY (Walter Huston, Jean Harlow); Oct. 25: Two silent essays in the macabre - INGRAM'S THE MAGICIAN with Paul Wagner and Alice Terry, D.W.GRIFFITH'S THE SORROWS OF SATAN with Adolphe Menjou, Lya de Putti, Ricardo Cortez; Nov. 1: OLD ENGLISH with George Arliss; Henry King's ONE MORE SPRING with Janet Gaynor, Warner Baxter; Nov. 8: Clare Bow, silent and sound - HULA with Clive Brook and ROPLA with Richard Cromwell; Nov. 15: THE RAT, 1925 silent British version with Ivor Novello, Mae Marsh; THE INFORMER, 1929 British part-talking, with Lars Hanson, Lya de Putti; Nov. 22: THE RAT (1937) last of several remakes and sequels to last week's original with Ruth Chatterton and Alan Walsor; WHILE PARIS SLEEPS with Victor McLaglen, Helen Mack; Dec. 6: THE MAN WHO DARED with Preston Foster, Zita Johann; MERRY WU with Lon Chaney, Renee Adoree; Dec. 13: a two long unscripted films directed by Carol Reed: A GIRL MUST LIVE, a rather weathered comedy with Margaret Lockwood and I'lll11 Palmer; THE GIRL IN THE NEWS, a very Hitchcockian thriller with Margaret Lockwood, Emlyn Williams, Barry K. Barnes. GOOD NEWS!! Definitely confirmed and to be our initial film in the Spring of '75 - James Whale's JOURNEY'S END with Colin Clive.