DANCE GIRL DANCE (Rko Radio, 1940) Directed by Dorothy Arzner; Produced by Erich Pommer and Harry Edington; Screenplay by Tess Slesinger and Frank Davis from a story by Vicki Baum; Camera, Russell Metty; Musical Director, Edward Ward; Art Director, Van Nest Polglase; Dances, Ernst Matray; Special Effects, Vernon Walker; Editor, Robert Wise; 8 reels.


"Dance Girl Dance" is a good example of a film that hasn't necessarily been turned into a better film with age, but has undeniably become a more interesting film. The increasing wave of feminist writers on film have somehow adopted it as an example of early "women's lib" propaganda - which it really isn't, except for a conveniently outspoken sequence near the end. However, it isn't an easy film to see, and since there is an undeniable interest today in films of - and by - women, it certainly deserves the chance to prove - or refute - its reputation. Of much greater importance however is its position as a film by a woman director, Dorothy Arzner, whose films are gradually becoming available for reappraisal. Her talents as a film-maker have perhaps been over-rated merely by the tenacity of her career - an editor in the twenties, a successful director in the thirties and forties. While her films can hardly be said to have a consistent feminist viewpoint, her body of work as a whole is rather like that of Howard Hawks in reverse. There is a strong bond of professionalism and camaraderie among the women in her films, they are invariably strong, aggressive and dynamic, and most are at their best when they are most authentic and ineffectual. In many ways "Dance Girl Dance" is an ordinary film, but it is also a very sensible film. A programmer at the time, it was probably hindered by having better names and a longer length than most films of its budgetary status; but it was often used to bolster weak (and shorter) "A"-films on double-bills, and there was little incentive for anyone to see it. It's good enough for one to wish it were better, and to be able to afford some decent location work and avoid the obvious and unconvincing back projection that serves for the New York locations. Arzner's style probably dominates that of its German producer Erich Pommer, although there are some decidedly Germanic moments, not least the stylised opening where the lighting and costuming (Lucille Ball in top hat and tights) not by accident recalls Dietrich as Lola Lola in "The Blue Angel".

--- Ten Minute Intermission ---