"The Voice of the Nightingale" (France, 1923) Directed by Ladislav Starevitch
In Prisma Color; one reel

This charming and pictorially lovely little fairy-tale by the pioneer trick and puppet film-maker Starevitch (and starring his daughter) is a real find. Apart from its inventiveness, Starevitch’s work has always pre-dated Willis O’Brien’s in its inclusion of elements of cheerful savagery and personality-conscious monsters. There’s less opportunity for these elements here, but they are present nonetheless.

"THE RAT" (Gainsborough, 1925) Direction and screenplay by Graham Cutts; Produced by Michael Balcon; based on the play by Ivor Novello and Constance Cellier, as presented by David Streatfeild; Camera, Hal Young; Art Dir: tex, Charles Arnold; Production Manager, Leslie McPhie; 8 reels
With Ivor Novello, Mae Marsh, Isabel Jeans, Robert Scholts, James Lindsay, Marie Ault, Julie String, Hugh Brock. Esme Witjigibs, Lambert Glashy, Iris Gray.

Curiously un-British and a-typical Novello, "The Rat" on stage was a huge success, and the launching pad for this film and a number of remakes and sequels, the best of which is we are playing next week for purposes of direct comparison. Its individual components are altogether more interesting than its collective whole. It seems to have been designed to copy the slum melodramas of D.W. Griffith of a few years earlier - "Broken Blossoms", "DREAM STREET" - and the co-starring of Novello with Mae Marsh, who had teamed in Griffith’s "The White Rose", is surely no coincidence. Its sets are elaborate and intriguing, and the prolonged doses of Follies showgirl parades and musical numbers utterly fascinating, even if they do totally hold up development of the story until quite late in the proceedings. Most interesting of all is its abortion in - one might almost say obsession with - the constantly mobile camera, indicating that Britain was borrowing from the just-released German "The Last Laugh" long before Hollywood.

Graham Cutts was one of the best British directors of the 20’s, though his work has now been rather unfairly forgotten because of the later silent work of Hitchcock and Asquith. Cutts continued as a director into the 40’s, but never again reached the stature he had enjoyed in the 20’s. It’s an uneven film, sometimes too wildly melodramatic for its own good, but always interesting although - Isabel Jeans apart - the performances disappoint. Ivor Novello is too unsympathetic in the lead, and gives the character nowhere near the warmth that Anton Walbrook provided in the remake, and Mae Marsh, too mature for her role, seems to be lending her name and little else.

PIANO SCORE FOR "THE RAT" and the short ARRANGED AND PLAYED BY STUART OBERMAN

Technical note: "The Rat" needs to be played at variable projection speeds, and our new projectors do not allow for fluctuations within the film: it’s one speed or the other in toto. So we have brought in the old reliable RCA projector for this film. However, because of the crowded conditions in the booth with the two large new projectors installed, we can only fit in one RCA. Thus there will be a brief (approx. 15 second) intermission between reels 1 and 2 of "The Rat" for a change of reel.

TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION

"THE INFORMER" (British International Pictures, 1929) Directed by Arthur Robinson; Screenplay by Rolfe E. Vanlo, with dialogue by Benn Levy, from the novel by Liam O’Flahert; Camera, Werner Brandes and Theodore Sporkuhl; Assistant Director, John Harlow; Art Director, J. Elder Willis; musical score by Hubert Bath and Harry Staddon; 8 reels
With Ivor Novello, Mae Marsh, Leslie Havilland, Carl Harbord, Dennis Wyndham, John Carradine,_ISOBEL JEANS, CARL HARBORD, DENNIS WYNDHAM_ and Johnny Butt.
We’ve often commented on, and shown examples of, the incredible German influence on (and domination of) British film in the late 20’s. Dupont’s "Moulin Rouge" and so certainly is "The Informer", with its concentration of European talents in key positions in front of and behind the camera. (The director, Arthur Robinson, was actually an American dentist who had gone to Germany and established himself as a director with such films as "Warning Shadows".) The Informer starts out as a silent, and switches to being a talkie two-thirds of the way through, but the transition is achieved smoothly, and without the customary slowing down of rhythm or abandoning of style. (Considering the fairly primitive sound conditions then, the English voices supplied for Novello’s parts by the various dubbing artists were obviously saw “his” (and a version of "The Lost Patrol" made by the same company), remembered, and copied a good deal of it. But it’s unquestionably a better film than Ford’s, not just because it’s more expensive and more elaborate, but mainly because the script is so much better, with more depth, greater irony and a subtler plot construction than the much more simplistic Victor Melagren version.

Many of the crew - Sporkuhl, Willis, Levy, Harlow - went on to substantial Hollywood or British film success; even Ray Milland was involved in the film (off-screen) as a sharp-shooter during the street battles and police action.

William K. Everson