THE RUDD FAMILY GOES TO TOWN (Australia: Cinesound, 1938) Dir: Ken C. Hall
Screenplay by Frank Harvey and Bert Bailey from the works of Steele Rudd;
Starring Bert Bailey, Shirley Ann, Murray, Fred MacDonald, Billy Hayes,
With Bert Bailey, Shirley Ann, Fred MacDonald, Billy Hayes,
Kellaway, Sidney Wheeler, Peter Finch, Connie Martin, Osie Weinbom, Valerie
With Bert Bailey, Shirley Ann, Fred MacDonald, Billy Hayes,
Patrick, Muriel Flood, Leila Steppe, Marshall Crosby, Cecil Perry, Billy
Kellaway, Sidney Wheeler, Peter Finch, Connie Martin, Osie Weinbom, Valerie
Stewart, Marie Dalton, Leslie Victor.

The history of Australian film is a long, fascinating, colorful one, notable
perhaps more for innovations and ideas than actual achievements. They were
among the very first to get into full-length features, and to give women
directors a chance. But apart from one unquestionable classic — 1919's "The
Sentimental Bloke" — Australian cinema has been either of such local
interest that it had no chance abroad, or was so imitative of Hollywood and
Britain that it couldn't really hope to compete. Most of the promising
stars soon migrated to Hollywood or Britain, and apart from Raymond Longford
no outstanding directors were developed. Oddly enough, while the Australians
deply resent the image that is reeled off of them as a
nation of outback ranches and kangaroos, their own films have done much
to perpetuate this image. Australian film comedy has been prolific but usually
rather crude, their no.1 comic — George Wallace — a heavy handed comedian
combining music-hall material with cheaply staged sight gag material. The
Rudd Family comedies (which date back to the silent period) are something
else again however. In a very superficial sense, the Rudds are the down-under
equivalents of Ma and Pa Kettle; but to the Australians, they are much more,
and approach the folklore level of Mark Twain. The first Rudd stories
stressed the nurturing spirit rather more, and purists feel that the later Rudd comedies,
of which this is one of the best,
vulgarised and distorted them. Bert Bailey, the star, was also a shrewd
businessman; he bought up a large chunk of the rights to the character,
and was able to reshape it to his own gruff, amiable image. He made four movies
in the mid to late 30's, all of them quite elaborate, polished, healthily
vulgar, embellished with Music Hall double-entendres. Since they were never
released in this country, tonight's showing represents an American premiere,
and rather than talk about the film itself (which holds up surprisingly well)
I'll leave you to discover it for yourself. Obviously, it's broad; don't
expect an Australian Lubitsch! But despite the vulgarity, it may be
very pleasantly surprised. Bailey is a very engaging player; Shirley Ann Richardson's
later came to Hollywood of course; Peter Finch, as the boy friend back home,
is little more than a teen-ageder and shows no signs as yet of changing into a
major dramatic actor. Alec Kellaway was the brother of Cecil Kellaway, who
likewise abandoned Australian films for Hollywood.

10 minute intermission

THE HOUSEMASTER (Associated British Picture Corp., 1958) Dir: Herbert Brenon
Screenplay by Dudley Leslie and Elizabeth Meehan from the story by Ian Hay;
Camera, Otto Tambur (widescreen process) 9 reels;
released in the US by Allied, edited to 7 reels. Courageous Rakish: Janus
With Otto Kruger, Diana Churchill, Phillips Holmes, Rene Ray, Kynaston Reeves,
Joyce Barbour, Walter Hudd, Cecil Parker, John Wood, Henry Heworth, Rosamund
Barver, Michael Shepley, Laurence Kitchin, Jimmy Hanley.

A light-weight "Goodbye Mr. Chips", "The Housemaster" represents probably the
best talkie of a major silent director, Herbert Brenon ("Peter Pan", "Beau
Geste") whose early Hollywood talkies failed to re-establish him, and who
made his final films (1935-40) in England. He and author Ian Hay make a most
colloquial team. Hay's forte was primarily light farce ("The Middle Watch")
and his more serious essays have never been too serious. There was always a
great deal of humanity, froth and even whimsy in his work, and Brenon — of a
like temperament — translated him most effectively to the screen. "The House-
Master" is basically a piece of froth and whimsy, but it is so sweet that any great or even important film
could be made from any Hay story. But it is a pleasant, amusing and
spiteful, deal of truth. Its faults are also those of Hay: one longs for the potential
dramatic strength to crystallise into powerful scenes, and once in a while
they do — as in the insecure teacher's discovery of his own strength, or the
genuinely moving sequence of the Housemaster's farewell to his boys — but it does
take a long time for the dramatic conflicts to get under way, and there
seems to be too much flippancy much of the time. But Brenon was ever a
realistic decorator of the stage, and if that was the way Hay wrote it, that
was the way he'd film it. On the whole though, allowing for its leisurely
placement of its highlights, and the at-times too obvious sets and use of
back projection, it's a thoroughly satisfying and enjoyable film. If it had
nothing else, it would be worth while for the magnificent playing of
Kynaston Reeves as the headmaster — perhaps one of the finest performances
in British film. (One only wishes that he had Ernest Thesiger as a jealous,
wanish second-in-command!) Even the skill and sincerity of Otto Kruger's
playing pales beside Mr. Reeves!

William K. Everson