GIVE ME YOUR HEART (Warner Brothers, 1936) Directed by Archie Mayo

Supervisor: Robert Lord; Screenplay by Casey Robinson, based on the play "Sweet Aloes" by Jay Mallory (Joyce Carey); Camera, Sid Pickox; 8 reels


Although one was always aware of Archie Mayo as a "presence" at Warner Brothers, somehow he was regarded him as part of the Warner team, along with Curtiz, Wellman and the others. One tended to think of his best film, "Svengali", and his most pretentious, "The Petrified Forest", to accept that there were others in between, and let it go at that. Yet Mayo was as much of a work-slave as any of them, turning out close to 40 films during his Warner tenure, before slowing down a bit, making a handful for Goldwyn and Warner, and then turning out a prolific and routine body of film in the 50's. (After a long hiatus, his last film was "The Beast of Budapest" for Allied Artists in the 50's). Tonight Mayo underlines his versatility by directing two (quite different) films in the area that once used to be referred to somewhat contumuously but profitably as "Women's pictures".

The successful 1935 play, which had served as a vehicle for Diana Wynyard and Evelyn Laye, was turned by the Warner Brothers into an equally successful screen vehicle for Kay Francis, once the troublesome title had been disposed of, and some alternates (including "I Give My Heart") tried out first. In 1936, critics were generally enthusiastic, commenting on the "maturity" and "sophistication" of the film. The adaptation got plaudits, but its plaudits were for its adherence to the restrictions of the Production Code that none seemed to feel it necessary to comment on the excessively genteel quality of the film. Never afterwards, has an illegitimate child (or a legitimate one, for that matter) been conceived, carried and delivered in such a state of concealment and decorum that one really only gets hints of it until it is a fait accompli. But the suffering, the accusations, the guilt, etc., to make sure that the audience is well aware that sin never goes unpunished, and that even those innocent of the crime must pay along with the guilty. Today of course this attitude quite removes it from the realm of reality, and the pleasing art direction, with its cottages, castles and spacious interiors, further stresses its artificial qualities. We can enjoy it without censure, but also without involvement: it's a pleasure to watch Kay Francis going through her accustomed pace, and especially to discover the inspired RD teams often, "Helen" and Helen Peil Sr., "Tina" and "Molly". Their dialogue, and the relish and superb timing with which they deliver it, is a joy to behold. The film may not have quite the emotional pull it had in 1936 - even its musical score, with its insistent echoes of Tchaikovsky, seems a little old-hat - but it has gained in other ways. A thespic footnote: the Elspeth Dudgeon who appears as Zelma Tilbury's companion is the "John" Dudgeon who played the elder Penn, locked up beyond the top landing in "The Old Dark House", and also played the gypsy woman who asks for the pepper and salt in "The Brides of Frankenstein". — Ten Minutes Intermission —

EVER IN MY HEART (Warner Brothers, 1933) Directed by Archie Mayo; Screenplay by Bertram Millhauser from an original story by Millhauser and Beulah Marie Dix;

Camera, Arthur Todd; Art Director, Anton Grot; 7 reels.


A pre-Code film, and much gutsier than its later co-feature, "Ever In My Heart" reaped some strange reviews. Some critics found them factually and stylistically out of date, belonging more to the World War One period in which it is set; others considered it artistically notable, but so sad a film that it provided "poor entertainment" for the average audience. Apart from the sincere and poignant plot premise (admittedly, not a very timely one in 1933), its main asset is unquestionably the fine performance from Barbara Stanwyck. It was her 16th film, and while there had been some good ones prior to it, still it was her first really heavy, the kind that made her name in the climactic scenes. It also afforded Otto Kruger one of his best Hollywood roles. Like Curtiz' "Aias the Doctor", shown a season or two back, it is perhaps too short (68 minutes) to reach its full potential. It manages to be dramatic, moving, touching - but it gets from one place to another too fast to be subtle. The "instant" motivations and reactions are not always believable. On the other hand the moments of the heartbreak are not arbitrarily or effectively inserted when it is needed most - is vastly preferable to some of Warners' expanded two-hour emotional excursions of World War Two: "In Our Time" for example. If it's a choice between unsubtlety and pretention, then the former wins hands down every time. Nor is the film wholly unsubtle: the deaths of a child and of a small dog are both suggested rather than shown, and suggested very poignantly. "Ever in My Heart" is an exceptionally good programmer, and the best of three with Mayo at Warners. (The others: "Tillicot", "Gambling Lady"). — W.K.Everson —