THE FIGUREHEAD (6 minutes)

This charming Halas and Batchelor Technicolor fantasy - one can hardly call it a cartoon - somehow seems to fit rather nicely in tonight's British program. To my lovely, lyrical, and literary narrative, the narration, and it's based on a poem by Grosbie Garstin - original author of the Gable/Harlow "China Seas", but apart from a maritime motif, the two works have little in common.

THE CHALLENGE (London Films-Alexander Korda, 1938; US release, 1939)

Directed by Milton Rosmer and Luis Trenker; Produced by Guenther Stapenhorst; Scenario by Patrick Kirtwan and Milton Rosmer, from an original screenplay by Emeric Pressburger; Camera, Georges Perinal and Albert Benitz; Art Direction, Vincent Korda and Max Pitsch; Music, Allan Gray; 75 minutes


By the end of the 30's, Anglo-German co-productions had virtually disappeared, as had the Hollywood-German collaborations, and this late entry is far less closely linked to its German counterpart than such earlier Trenker productions as "The Rebel" and "The Doomed Battalion" had been. The sense of German mysticism so present in the English-speaking versions of those earlier films is here largely absent, replaced by the British austerity of a near-documentary style.

Much of this may also be due to the British director, Milton Rosmer, an excellent actor (and director) who was curiously assigned more than once to the Hollywoodian action-type films (e.g., "The Great Barrier", shown some seasons back on this program) in which the American producers and directors took care of the thrill. "The Challenge" is a romantic and occasionally melodramatic recounting of the conquest of the Matterhorn, and the romanticizing of history may have worked rather better in the German version. Nevertheless, it's an absorbing little film that wastes no time getting down to business, and the matching-up of Alpine and British locations is very well done. (A lot of the closeup work was done on the craggy, but far from Alpine peaks of England's Lake District). Trenker celebrated his 60th birthday this fall by making a film for German television on his movie career of mountain films; hopefully it will be available here before too long.

-- Ten Minute Intermission --

I KNOW WHERE I'M GOING (The Archers-Rank-General Film Distributors, 1945)

Written, produced and directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger; Camera, Erwin Hillier; Production Design, Alfred Junge; Music, Allan Gray; U.S. release by Universal in 1947; 91 minutes

With Wendy Hillier, Roger Livesey, Pamela Brown, Nancy Price, Finlay Currie, John Laurie, George Carney, Walter Hudd, Murdo Morrison, Margot Fitzsimmons, Jean Cadell, Norman Shelley, Petula Clark; Catherine Lacey, Valentine Dyall, Herbert Lomass, Graham Moffat.

We wrote quite extensively about Michael Powell in our notes for "The Small Back Room" a couple of seasons back (some of those comments we'll recap in the introduction this evening) and particularly stressed how many of his films had been either drastically cut or unreleased in this country. "I Know Where I'm Going" fortunately was released here, and indeed, initially at least, was more popular in the States than it had been at home; and it was released intact. It's a lovely, lyrical, gentle, totally civilized film, meticulously crafted and designed, very much a labor of love, yet approached with that casual affection which often begets major films. Powell and Pressburger actually made it, developing it from a vague idea, only because they were being forced to await delivery of Technicolor stock for their much more ambitious "A Matter of Life and Death" ("Stairway to Heaven"), and didn't want to be idle in the meantime. Curiously, film-makers and film-making-students - contemporary ones as well as those involved with the film and actively dislike it. They feel that films have to "say something" - and since the "message" of this film is obvious and predictable from the beginning, the journey to the film's end seems a waste of time! Such an attitude of course robs them of a great deal of charm, some marvellous location photography, a remarkable special effects climax, many rich and warm characterisations, and interesting insights into British and Scottish character and social-strata. It's a lovely film which brings forth added delights with each re-viewing, and of course the marvellously witty acting of Wendy Hillier (with Pamela Brown running a close second) is a major asset in itself. This and the earlier "Major Barbara" were the highlights of a film career that was all too spasmodic; however, she can be seen in another fine (and substantially-sized) performance in the interesting new remake of "The Cat and the Canary", due for release shortly. Two post-scripts to word off inevitable frustrations with this film: the oddly-fitting bit where a girl who appears exactly at the halfway mark is Petula Clark, now better known as a recording star and night-club singer. And if the haunting theme melody seems familiar even if you've hadn't seen the film before, it's probably because the Nicholas Ray "They Live By Night" appropriated it for its theme! --Wm.K.Everson--

Program ends: 11.15