Two early British films by Joseph Losey

THE INTIMATE STRANGER (U.S. title "Finger of Guilt") (Anglo-Amalgamated,1955)
Produced by Alec Snowden; Directed by Joseph Losey; Screenplay by Howard Koch
Based on a story by René Gruau; Cameraman, Geoffrey Nunn; Music, Trevor Duncan. 8 reels. (Note: On the U.S. prints, producer Alec Snowden was also given directorial credit, while on the British prints Losey used the pseudonym of Joseph Walton; writer Howard Koch used the name Peter Howard on both British and U.S. prints).

BLIND DATE (U.S. title "Chance Meeting", through Paramount release)
(Independent Artists-Rank, 1959) Directed by Joseph Losey; Produced by David Deutsch for Julian Wintle-Leon Parkyn-Sidney Box; Screenplay by Ben Barsam and Leslie Arliss; Cameraman, Ray Leigh; Assistant Cameraman, Michael Lash; Art Director, Edward Carrick; Music, Richard Rodney Bennett; 9 reels.

Joseph Losey's career can be divided fairly evenly into three parts: his early years of stylish thrillers ("The Prowler", "The Boy With green Hair"), and films of some social content ("The Lawless", "The Boy With Green Hair"), done in Hollywood from the mid-40's on, and establishing him as a major new director; an interim period in England during the McCarthy years, and the more prestigious later years, beginning with 1959's "The Servant", in which he became something of an ingmar Bergman, more concerned with complex content than with the film-making process itself.

Tonight's two films are from that middle period, and are his second and fifth British films. "The Intimate Stranger" was made during the period of Losey's blacklisting. Without a directorial director, he was, like another talented new director, Roy Endfield, he worked in England under an assumed name (as did his writer, Howard Koch). Although in the immediate present Losey seems to have been semi-forgotten, in recent years he has been so over-analysed and copiously interviewed that it would be all too easy to go back to these earlier works and find in them the roots for themes explored more fully in later films. Easy - but pointless. Losey's earlier films were certainly complex and never superficial. Certainly in tonight's two films, nothing is ever quite what it seems, and for those who like to delve beneath the surface, there is added significance. But it is never ambiguous or mystical significance: if Losey has something to say about the social structure of England, as he does in "Blind Date", it is kept in focus by dialogue and characters (particularly the interplay between Stanley Baker and Robert Flemyng) and never left to individual interpretation. Both films are first and foremost good solid melodramas and thrillers in the tradition of Lang and Stoddard. This phase of Losey's career came to its climax with the science-fiction thriller "The Damned", and thereafter - with the major exception of "The Go Between", a beautifully-made film and one of his best - his films have been, unfortunately (and in my opinion, which is not by any means universally shared) increasingly "important", "personal" and at the same time, pompous and pretentious (examples: "Boom!" and "The Secret Ceremony").

Tonight's two thrillers are linked by a similar plot (with unstressed Kafka-esque undertones) and even by similar individual scenes. The first one is possibly the more personal, due to its exiled film-director protagonist being at times a spokesman for Losey; the second is certainly the more sophisticated, and a film that Losey himself regards very highly. For an independent production (though the then small but enterprising Anglo Amalgamated was able to pull into the huge and complex EMI organisation) "The Intimate Stranger" is an extremely creditable job. It looks far more expensive than it was, it has some of the best and convincing "back-up" dialogue of any movie about movie-making, and it is unusually strong in its cast. Unfortunately the type-casting system gives the game away a little. We may not know what the solution is, but the part is one of a major actor at a cross-roads, and we can't help wondering at which direction to look for clues. If the ending is Agatha Christie, then the influence in the other film is more Dashiell Hammett - although here the complexity of the mystery is of more import than the fate of the victim-hero. Micheline Presle - one of the finest and perhaps most under-rated actresses of the 40's and 50's (in both French and American films - and still going strong of course) commands special attention in the second role. Her performance, and all her performances, are an acquired mastery of English. It's a pity that she never had a chance to work in really first-rate Hollywood films, though she certainly added taste, intelligence and charm to such films as "Under My Skin" and "An American Guerrilla in the Philippines". Incidentally, the release of "Blind Date" was delayed for a while in the U.S. and there was some talk about it having been cut to conform to American censorship rulings. I saw a U.S. release print only once, and it seemed to be exactly the same as the British version. In any event, our print is a British one, and definitely full and uncut.

PROGRAM ENDS: 10:40

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William K. Everson ---