IT ALWAYS RAINS ON SUNDAY (Ealing Studios-Rank, 1947) Directed by Robert Hamer Associate Producer, Henry Cornelius; Screenplay by Hamer, Cornelius and Angus Macphail from the novel by Arthur la Bern; Camera, Douglas Slocombe; Art Director, Duncan Sutherland; Music, Georges Auric; 92 mins.


Although in its ultimate influence "It Always Rains On Sunday" is one of the major post-war British films, it made no major impact at the time, and indeed has been all but forgotten today. The critics were respectful, but the public approval was waiting for the war-time shortages to still be bound. Also, 1947 represented the absolute zenith of the defeatist film noir essays from Hollywood, and Britain too was producing its fair share of these. Among the many dominoes British films released earlier that same year were "Odd Man Out", "They Made me a Fugitive", "The Brothers", "Brighton Rock", "The Uptown Glass" and "Mine Own Executioner". "It Always Rains On Sunday" was the last polished of all these films, the most honest, and thus in a sense the most depressingly.

It is very close in spirit to the pre-war French school exemplified by "Quai des Orfevres", where the film-making then being revived in France, and reaching its peak just a few months later in "Une Si Jolie Petite Plage". But - at least to non-French eyes - there was a kind of lyricism and sad beauty to the French films. It is very difficult to do much lyrical with London's East End suburb of Bethnal Green. Even the second word of its name is a mocking contradiction of the facts! In fairness though, the film - and its milieu - will seem much more downbeat to a non-British audience. There is a real sense of community involvement even in an area like Bethnal Green; people who have their roots there and in places like it are often very reluctant to move away. (At least one British television series, "Coronation Street", built around such a community has been going its merry way for years, to become the serio-comic tv soap opera equivalent of "The Mousetrap", now in its third decade on the London stage!) Too, its lower-class "Brief Encounter" parallel might well be construed as near-tragic here, but not by the British, who love conformity, security and the dullness that goes along with it. And the two communities are almost as different as in "Brief Encounter", and the final rejection of a break from dull routine is, by British standards, a happy ending.

In some ways typical of Ealing films that preceded it, it is far more a foreshadowing of other Ealing films and characters that would follow. It is full of fine character performances. Googie Withers, almost the definitive Ealing heroine, is particularly good in the lead; although not exclusively, she had been with Ealing since the late 30's, when she played in a George Formby comedy. Initially typed in comedy, she could have been a British Carol Lombard had Britain made enough "Happy Days" and "Mr Smith Goes to Washington" type movies; instead she was the true earthy in a film like "Brief Encounter", and belatedly, Ealing recognised her true worth and gave her some solid dramatic roles. (She was married to John McCallum, who plays her convict-lover in this film; although a far less accomplished performer than she, they teamed up a good deal and still play together on the London stage). Particularly good in support is another somewhat under-used British actress, Betty Ann Davies, playing the sour betrayed wife of Sydney Tafler.

One of the most interesting aspects of the film is its more than casual relationship to Ealing's "Dead of Night". Robert Hamer also directed that film's framing story and its great single story, the mirror episode (which also starred Googie Withers) and which likewise used Georges Auric's Wagnerian music. Although a totally different kind of film, "It Always Rains On Sunday" presents Withers with a remarkably similar role, and the film as a whole with a similar structure. The mirror motif is established early in "Sunday"; the remembered former life seems to take over from the mirror (not literally, as in "Dead of Night"), and the film's ambiguous life-go-on climax also recalls "Dead of Night". The wacky and sophisticated comedy, and in a background-the-surface subtitles in "Sunday" too: Googie Withers is a blonde in the flashback pre-marriage sequences, a brunette in the contemporary post-marriage sequences. Her two daughters, who in a sense are a kind of rebirth of her own two natures, are likewise blonde (the sexy, slightly wild one) and brunette (the serious, home-body sister). While its entertainment value may seem somewhat mild today, its production even pointless, bear in mind that it was part of a very prevalent film-making faction of the time, and in a background-the-surface style it is an invaluable record of and reflection of the times, and attitudes of those times - almost the definitive post-war British film, just as "Saturday Night and Sunday Morning" was to be the definitive British film of the early 60's. Incidentally, it's an incredibly faithful adaptation of a rather dull book, so cinematic that it suggests that the book may in fact be much better than it is! And it is excellently photographed, particularly in its tense and underplayed sidestreet and railroad yard chase climax.
-- 10 minute intermission --

THE KING OF JAZZ (1930, dir: John Murray Anderson) - Trailer (5 mins)

This film obviously has no connection with our British program proper, but since it illustrates the old two-color Technicolor system, I thought it might make an interesting comparison/prelude to "Trottie True" and its stunning 3-color Technicolor.

TROTIE TRUE (Two Cities-Rank, 1949) Directed by Brian Desmond Hurst; produced by Hugh Stewart; Screenplay by C. Denis Freeman from a novel by Carmel Brahms and S.J. Simon; Camera, Harry Waxman; Art Directors, Ralph Branton, Sets, Colleen Browning; Music, Benjamin Frankel; Songs, Hughie Carroll Gibbons; in Technicolor; US release (1950) by Eagle-Lion as THE GAY LADY; 95 mins.


"Trottie True" was made at the very peak (and near climax) of Rank's prestige period. The following year would see most of his key directors and some of his stars trekking over to Alexander Korda. Korda took over prestige and creative leadership of British films, and the Rank films began to practice economy and studied efforts to imitate Hollywood. But "Trottie True", full of self-confidence, was made just before this downward trend in the Rank fortunes, in the sure conviction that the momentum of previous Rank films would carry it to success.

Not that it needs a false momentum to carry it along. It's a charming film and a delightful one, and succeeds totally on a light-weight level, but it does seem far too elaborate and expensive a production ever to get its money back without the insurance of some top stars. It's probably as good as it is because it doesn't have to be a star vehicle. On the other hand, it came, was appreciated by the critics, had nothing to really attract mass audiences, and was forgotten rather too quickly. Its charm is undiminished - both better and worse than it was thirty years ago - but in another sense it is far more rewarding today since it is a veritable showcase for stunning art direction and lovely, rich, three-strip Technicolor - now a lost art, since Eastmancolor has taken over totally, and 3-strip Technicolor's only operating equipment is in China! It's rather ironic that important new color films, printed in the unstable Eastman color, are faded and distorted within a few years of release, while this quite old print remains as breathtakingly fresh as ever. And if it's this good in a humble 16mm print, imagine the impact on a 35mm print.

It's a little difficult to see the selling angles of the film. It has a musical flavor, but it certainly isn't a musical. It has an elegant, Oscar Wildean tone of social comedy, and it is certainly amusing, but it is never really funny, nor does it try to be. It's based on a novel by the writing team of Brahms and Simon, who should have been used more by British films. Their "A Bullet in the Ballet" would have made a marvellous vehicle for Powell and Pressburger, especially with the success of "The Red Shoes" to help sell it.

Brian Desmond Hurst, who directed, was one of the most interesting - yet least employed - of all British directors. A former assistant to John Ford, he tackled just about anything that was given him, but seemed most at home with psychological thrillers. Ironically, his best film - 1939's "On the Night of the Fire" - is now lost. Although certainly not a specialist in Edwardian musical comedy, he seems to have adapted to it extremely easily in "Trottie True".

In only one sense can "Trottie True" be said to fail. It was supposed to make a major star of Jean Kent (to replace some of the big names that Rank was on the threshold of losing). Kent is well cast and works hard; there is nothing wrong with her performance. But she just lacks that extra something that makes for real stardom, and in any case, the timing was way off. Kent had been in a British film for nearly a year even before the first one was over. In the big early 30's, she had been tipped in "other women", bitch and tough roles, or occasionally as in "Garavan", to be seen later this season, as the self-sacrificing second-string heroine. It was just too late to change her overall image, or to sell her as a new star. James Donald, her co-star, may even have been considered for the same kind of build-up. He too lacks star charisma, but was and is an excellent actor, and did very well for himself without ever achieving real box-office importance. All in all, "Trottie True" is relaxing, gentle and civilized, and above all, a visual treat.

Wm. K. Everson

Program Ends 11.00 p.m. (No discussion period)

Please note: the titled print of LE DIABLE AU CORPS proving to be of inferior condition, we will be using the (excellently) dubbed version next week, as originally announced.

Space precluded giving the full cast lists of today's films in these notes, but since many of the players may be unfamiliar, cast lists will be displayed for your information at the rear of the auditorium.