Two off-beat British Comedies: Crime in the City, Ghosts in the Country.


When we ran "A Canterbury Tale" and "The Tawny Pipit" about a year ago, we commented on the propagandist/escapist values of British rural comedies in wartime. "Don't Take It To Heart" is very much a film in this category, casually similar to the pre-war "Storm in a Teacup", but more relaxed and less self-consciously clever. Many of the cast and crew overlap with "The Tawny Pipit" too. It was somewhat of a surprise success in England at the time, somewhat due to the fact that it was surrounded on all sides by "prestige" British pictures, and its cozy charm seemed doubly enjoyable in the face of all the serious craftsmanship coming from Olivier, Asquith, Lean and Reed. Too, the British had a soft spot in their hearts for Richard Greene at the time, since he had given up a lucrative Hollywood career to return to wartime England. Like "Tawny Pipit" it is inevitably linked to the war without in any way being a war film. It's never uproariously funny or even particularly original, but the rural backgrounds are pleasant, and a large cast of familiar British troupers go through their paces rather agreeably. When it finally got to the U.S., five years later, it did quite well but of course its impact was lessened by the more sophisticated comedies that were by then beginning to flow from England with some regularity.

Ten Minute Intermission

HUE AND CRY (Ealing Studios, 1946; rel: 1947) Directed by Charles Crichton; Associate Producer, Henry Cornelius; Script by T.E.B. Clarke; Camera, Douglas Slocombe; Music, George Auric; 82 mins. With Alastair Sim, Jack Warner, Jack Lambert, Valerie White, Harry Fowler, Frederick Piper, Vida Hope, Gerald Fox, Grace Arnold, Joan Dowling, Douglas Bann, Stanley Escene, Ian Dawson, Paul Demel, Bruce Belfrage.

In a very real sense, "Hue and Cry" is the first of the traditional Ealing comedies. Notwithstanding such transitional movies as "Turned Out Nice Again", "Hue and Cry", with its happy collaboration of talents both in front of and behind the camera, is the kind that would look large in such upcoming Ealing comedies as "Tight Little Island" ("Whisky Galore") "Passport to Pimlico" and the Guinness vehicles, almost accidentally hit upon a formula - if one may call it that - which became the mainstay of future Ealing comedies. Not an ambitious film initially, its very lack of pretension adds to its charm. Its good reviews and quite unexpected commercial success caused Ealing to accelerate and expand their comedy program immediately.

Although it perhaps draws its basic inspiration from the old German "Emil and the Detectives", "Hue and Cry" is very much a film of contemporary Britain. The scars of bomb-torn London remained a fixture until long after the end of the war (by which time similar bomb damage in Germany had been industriously cleared and rebuilt) and forms both the cause and the consequence of the one continuous, climactic chase through the London streets! The atmosphere of petty-crime and black marketeering, with which Britain was inundated right after the war, is likewise realistically depicted - and it should be stressed that the British children's addictions to comic books (of a rather different type from the American comic strip), especially in the pre-tv age, was a major one. While the story is hardly sophisticated or even very serious, nevertheless the importance laid on the comic book to a British child - even taking it quite unrealistic or over-stressed. Another asset of the film is its utilisation of the actual street scenes; at least two of the villains are cast very much against type, and were normally stalwarts of law and order at Ealing. One would like a little more of Sim, but "Hue and Cry" came hot on the heels of "Green For Danger", the film that eventually proved the turning point in transforming him into a major star. He was very popular and enjoyed substantial prestige, but was not yet a major star and audiences did not feel cheated in seeing him with restricted footage. And of course, his appearances throughout the film are comic highlights. A tragic footnote: Harry Fowler (the leader of the boys) later married Joan Dowling (the girl in the gang of kids) and both seemed on the threshold of important stardom, when she committed suicide.

— Wm. E. Everson

Program ends approx. 10:30.

An apology: the last five sets of notes for this series were done rather hurriedly without sufficient time to re-read and correct. Please bear with us if any types have crept in.