LAUNDER AND GILLIAT - AND IRELAND

CAPTAIN BOYCOTT (Individual Pictures-General Film Distributors, 1947) Directed by Frank Launder; A Sidney Gilliat-Frank Launder Production; Screenplay by Frank Launder and Wolfgang Wilhelm from the novel by Philip Rooney; Camera, Wilkie Cooper; Music, William Alwyn; Narrator, Arthur Shields; 93 mins.

With: Stewart Granger, Kathleen Ryan, Cecil Parker, Mervyn Johns, Alastair Sim, Noel Purcell, Niall MacGinnis, Maureen Delaney, Eddie Byrne, Liam Redmond, Bernadette O'Farrell, Edward Lacey, Harry Webber, Eddie Golden, Harry Hutchinson, Maurice Denham, Ian Fleming, Phyllis Ryan, Reginald Purdell, Michael Ripper. (Note: complete casts for both films posted at the rear of the hall.)

Guest appearance by Robert Donat as Parnell.

We have played many Launder-Gilliatt productions in the past, as well as examples of their earlier work as a writing team. It seems fairly well established by now that Gilliat was the better director and the witter writer of the two; nevertheless, they were a team and each contributed a great deal to each production. In the first of their collaborations, "Gilliatt Like Us", they never shared the direction. For anyone interested in a really thorough appraisal of their career, along with personal interviews with them, I recommend an excellent book "Launder and Gilliatt" by Geoff Brown, published by the British Film Institute and available here through specialised film book shops, or from New York Zoostrope here on 12th Street (see phone book).

"Captain Boycott" started out as a fairly small and probably semi-documentary account of the mildly tyrannical British landowner who aroused such antagonism in Ireland that his name (and its use) became a part of the English language. However, the sudden availability of (and interest by) Stewart Granger made it a much more important property; the budget was upped, location shooting in Ireland extended, and use of the newly re-opened and not then in full use Pinewood Studios encouraged. As a result the film grew in size and scope. Commercially it was justified and the film was a big hit in England, but there were certain casualties along the way. Characters, like the Priest (played by Alastair Sim) seem to get lost for long periods at a time and their roles fragmented, whereas in a smaller, shorter film, they might have stood out more. Seldom has any major film's leading lady had so little to do - though this may have been partially because Kathleen Ryan, fresh from "Odd Man Out", was still an inexperienced actress, being used mainly for her beauty and because she was a good "type" (and also was the role to be lugged) so the name with "Captain Boycott" is that Launder/Gilliatt films were known for their comedy or at least their lightness of touch, and this film seems almost deliberately to retain that lightness - without any real comedy to back it up. This works against the dramatic and action values of the film and prevents it from being taken as seriously as it should be. It seems forever poised to use the rich assortment of comic talent in the film, and never really does so. My own limited experience in Ireland seemed to confirm that all of the rich comic stereotypes portrayed by John Ford in "The Quiet Man" were not really stereotypes at all, but warm, affectionate and thoroughly accurate. It would seem to be impossible to make a film about any aspect of Ireland without getting embroiled at least in the comedy of frustration - and indeed, the production of the film was thwarted and hindered by a non-stop succession of much frustrations! But, apparently out of a desire to be fairly both to the Irish and the British (and Boycott, as Launder has said, was really a pretty decent sort of chap at heart), everything is kept to an even keel, with a serious note dominating despite that underlying lightness. In any event, it's certainly an entertaining film, and a plot with which most of us are probably quite unfamiliar. The location work is often quite beautiful, although matched-up studio shots at Pinewood sometimes a little too obvious.

-- Intermission, 10 minutes --

I SEE A DARK STRANGER (THE ADVENTURESS) (Individual Pictures-General Film Distributors, 1946)

Directed by Frank Launder; A Sidney Gilliat-Frank Launder Production; Screenplay by Frank Launder and Sidney Gilliat from a story by Launder and Gilliat and Wolfgang Wilhelm; Camera, Wilkie Cooper; Music, William Alwyn; original length, 112 minutes; US length 98 mins.

With: Deborah Kerr, Trevor Howard, Raymond Huntley, Liam Redmond, Harry Webber, Eddie Golden, Marie Ault, Erefn O'Rourke, Tony Quin, John Salew, James Parcourt, Olga Lindo, David Tomlinson, Michael Howard, Garry Marsh, Tam Macauley, Torin Thatcher, Everly Gregg, Katie Johnson, Norman Shelley, George Woodbridge, Eddie Byrne, Leslie Dwyer, Patricia Laffan, Hugh Dempster, Peter Cotes.

"I See a Dark Stranger" was made immediately before "Green For Danger" (probably L & G's best film) and signals a return to their favorite turf, the Hitchcockian comedy-thriller. It's one of the best films directed by Launder, though at least some of its delightful flavor must be attributed to the added writing input from Gilliat. This time comedy and thrills are pretty evenly matched, and Kerr and Howard make a fine team. Kerr won the NY critics award for her performance, and the film was a big success at its long run at the Victoria Theatre in New York. Its roots with Hitchcock (and especially "The Lady Vanishes") are stressed by the fact that originally the Chardells and Caldicott characters were written into it, but both Basil Radford and Naunton Wayne (with whom it was, of course, associated) wanted the parts to be lugged so they were changed and Garry Marsh and Tam Macauley used instead. They're good - but it's not like looking at two old and well-known friends, as it would have been in the case of Radford and Wayne. There's a nicely controlled sadness to the whole film, and occasionally some black undertones that manage to be unusually touching and funny at the same time, as in the death of Raymond Huntley and the disposal of his body. All told it's a film that holds up well. The full 112 minute version is unfortunately unavailable in this country, but the trimming is well done and mainly in the earlier portions of the film. It's tragic that conditions in Ireland have deteriorated to such an extent that neither of these films could - or would be made today with the same deft lightness of touch.

-- William K. Everson --

Program ends approx. 11.01. (No discussion period - so we'll take this opportunity to pass along holiday good wishes!)