We have played many Asquith-directed films in the past, and doubtless will play more in the future. As a very short recap on his career: the son of a British prime minister, he had all the earmarks of an aristocratic dilettante film-maker. He "studied" in Hollywood as an apprentice to Ford and other top film-makers, and absorbed the technique of the Europeans too. However, getting in to British films in the late 20's -- one of the very few periods in British film when newcomers were welcomed -- he showed right away that he had real talent and individuality; he might "borrow" from the masters, but he certainly had ideas of his own. His late silents and early talkies were essentially and often strikingly visual; then in the late thirties, appropriately enough via "Fyngallon", he effected a dramatic change in style, and became, and remained, one of the foremost translators of stage material to the screen--working on material by Shaw, Wilde, and most especially in tandem with one of the foremost contemporary playwrights, Terrence Rattigan. Such films, and "The Browning Version", "The Winslow Boy" and "The Importance of Being Earnest" in particular, not only displayed incomparable taste, but a retention of solid, if never overtly displayed, cinematic virtues as well. His last film was in 1964; he died in 1968. Tonight's two films offer him both in a tentative return to his earlier style in "We Dive at Dawn", and at his best as a stage-to-screen translator in "Quiet Wedding". Both films fit well into the "fimlic orphans" category which links this whole series. "We Dive at Dawn" was never released here theatrically, and its tv exposure has been limited. "Quiet Wedding" did get a theatrical release here, and indeed was extremely well received; but it was a "small" film, and, being owned by Paramount, not the kind of British film that get loose for later pick-up and reuse. It has long been available as part of Paramount's tv package, but with little reputation or star value, it was usually ignored by tv stations that may have the right to play it, but would rather play a Crosby or a Ladd film for the 5th time than play it once!

WE DIVE AT DAWN (Gainsborough-British, 1943) Directed by Anthony Asquith; produced by Edward Black; Screenplay by J.S. Williams and Val Valentine (with some additional scripting by Frank Launder); Camera, Jack Cox; Music, Louis Levy; 98 mins.

Britain never had the money -- nor, more importantly the production expertise at that particular time -- to compete with Hollywood in the area of big war spectacle. A few attempts, such as "Ships With Wings", had failed rather badly, the miniature work and trickery being obvious, and the plotting little more than old-hat Hollywood, 1943 marked a new approach to the British war film. The big, jingoistic, protagonist and morale-boosting films like "In Which We Serve" had now been bypassed; 1943 was notable not only for such controversial and self-critical films as "The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp", but also for the smaller, more intimate combat film, mixing qualities of warmth and humanity with underplayed documentary values. Harry Watt's "Nine Men" was such a film, and so, certainly, was "We Dive at Dawn". At the time, in direct competition with such glossy and exciting Hollywood films as "Crash Dive" and the later "Destination Tokyo" it seemed rather bland, but time has been kind to it. It has dramatic values of a rather universal kind, not linked irrevocably to the war film; moreover, the big splash Hollywood war film is not so much in evidence any more, either theatrically or on tv, as direct comparisons are not so easily made. Although comparison with the new German "The Rat" might be interesting.

With the exception of "Quiet Wedding" and the 1944 "Fanny By Gaslight", a period melodrama, all of Asquith's 1940-47 films were war oriented, though they ran a wide gamut from comedy and straightforward documentary to underground resistance thrillers. If "The Way to the Stars" was the best of the group, then "We Dive at Dawn" was the least theatrical. It was the only one of his wartime films that seemed, deliberately, to recapture the style and manner of "Tell England", his very early talkie account of the Gallipoli campaign, which likewise mixed documentary and theatricality and used characters that reflected a good deal of class consciousness. However, this latter was an almost unavoidable and (often deliberately critical) element in any British war film, just as the deliberate avoidance of class consciousness was stressed at Warners in the democratic hob-nobbing of Alan Hale, Dane Clark and Sam Levene. However, there are some interesting examples of type-casting reversals in "We Dive at Dawn". John Mills, for example, the perennial able seaman, is here promoted to a command, while Eric Portman (primarily typed as a Nazi villain in such films as "39th Parallel" and "Squadron Leader X") takes the role normally allotted to Mills. What seems like a major flaw at the time is less pronounced today, namely that the portions of really sustained dramatic interest occur in the middle of the film. Perhaps in 1943, the traditional shoot-out climax, so similar to the one in "Crash Dive" seems a miscalculated war film action spectacle. Today its somewhat claustrophobic, studio-bound quality gives this climax a lean, taut look... it's exciting enough without seeming overdone. On the whole however, the film is polished, realistic and human, and the final scene manages the neat trick of being morale-boosting (for the audience as well as the submarine crew) without being flabby or pretentious. All told, a solid and very satisfying film, if not a major Asquith.

**Ten Minute Intermission**
"Quiet Wedding" (Paramount-British, 1940) Directed by Anthony Asquith; produced by Paul Soskin; Script by Anatole de Grunwald and Terence Rattigan from the play by Esther McCormack; Camera, Bernard Knowles; Music, Michael Thomson; 80 min.

With: Margaret Lockwood, Derek Farr, Marjorie Fielding, Frank Cellier, A.E. Matthews, Athene Seyler, Jean Cadell, Margaretta Scott, David Tomlinson, Peggy Ashcroft, Sidney King, Roland Culver, Michael Shepley, O.S. Clarence, Bernard Miles, Margaret Rutherford, Muriel Pavlow, Roddy Hughes, Muriel George, Wally Patch, Hay Petrie, Peter Bull, Margaret Halston, Marta Hunt.

"Quiet Wedding" came immediately after "Freedom Rout" and two features ("Cottage to Let" and "Uncensored") and two propaganda shorts before "We Dive at Dawn." In a sense it was a follow-up to Asquith's 1939 stage-to-screen success "French Without Tears," although that very funny comedy was mass-issued in this country by having its last third lopped off!

Based on a hugely successful London play, "Quiet Wedding" was an enormously popular movie, and a huge morale-booster in Britain in those early days of the war. (It was actually released in early 1941). It was a contemporary story, yet it was not about the war ... it reminded audiences that life could go on normally despite the war, and its glorification of the English rural way of life was a gentle propagandist reminder that this was one of the reasons that the war was being fought. Comedy was needed then, Margaret Lockwood was one of the most popular of the new stars and it may have been a little over-rated by the critics. But the public loved it, and it was released several times. It has virtually disappeared from view in Britain now, thanks to a 1957 remake, "Happy is the Bride." As remakes go, it was quite faithful and still rather funny, but geared more to teen-age romance than the sophistication of the original. JanetScott and Ian Carmichael were the stars, and Athene Seyler repeated the same role. But the new breed of comic types couldn't match the old, and one of the major delights of "Quiet Wedding" is that it is a virtual who's-who of British comedy and farce, and if Margaret Rutherford's appearance is delayed until the climactic reel, it's well worth the wait.

I don't want to over-sell "Quiet Wedding" as a comedy. It's a delight, but a gentle one, with charm as vital an ingredient as laughter. It also has a few serious points to make, and manages to be mature and sophisticated, often just by implication. Sex - and beds - somehow seem to be omnipresent throughout as a threat to marriage and yet it's never necessary to really bring it out into the open, or use that element for double entendre comedy.

"Quiet Wedding" is almost the definitive British comedy-of-manners. As I've mentioned in earlier notes on British comedy, and with no slur intended, the British as a whole tend to separate themselves into two groups: those who are frankly dull and rather boring, and the eccentrics; numerically the former outweigh the latter. The British know they're dull and they rejoice in it; perhaps a desperate attempt to embrace normality above all else is the only way to survive in a country that is continually beset by disasters of one kind or another (as with the weekly nation-wide rail strikes, which are currently creating chaos over there at the height of unprecedented cold weather). And it is the eccentrics (Rutherford, Sim, Matthews) who are able to take basically dull characters (helped of course by matching talent in writers) and make them warm, human and amusing, without really distorting those characters. It's no mean trick.

When the Italians made movies a few years back about dull and frustrated people, they came up with dull and pointless movies. But films (and plays) like "Quiet Wedding" are both true and far from dull. Admittedly, dramatic licence and compression help a great deal: a few minutes with Roddy Hughes as the local vicar in an 80 minute film renders him rather endearing; having to encounter his day after day, let alone in the pulpit on Sunday morning, would be something else again!

There really is no comedic equivalent in America to "Quiet Wedding," mainly because Americans as a group are not dull. They certainly run the gamut from the obnoxious to the endearing to the inspiring, but they all somehow have a dramatic, larger than life quality. To find a group of Americans similar to the group of Britishers of "Quiet Wedding," one would have to go to the films of Sturges or Capra - or to such opposing ends of the social spectrum as "Pot Saturday" or "The Philadelphia Story" - and the common denominators would be few and far between.

Britain no longer makes movies about the kind you'll meet in "Quiet Wedding," more's the pity. But they still exist, and they still parade across the London theatre stage. (A current hit, "Her Royal Highness?", satirising the recent Royal wedding, even manages to reduce the entire Royal Family to this kind of endearingly humdrum level!) Perhaps that's why "Quiet Wedding" doesn't really date - it's as true to the British milieu as it ever was, despite the permissive age which has overtaken so much of Britain, but which has happily left the rural areas - and virtues - remarkably intact.

--- William K. Everson ---

Periodically in the Spring session I have to absent myself for one screening. This term I was able to arrange it for next week, which I think is the program least likely to need a question and answer session, though of course any questions that arise can be held until the following week. So please note that next week's program will start promptly at 7:45 without an introduction. Notes will be available as usual of course.

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Program ends tonight at approx. 11:00. Since it is the first program, there will be a discussion session, but in view of the lateness of the hour, a fairly brief one.