A SON COMES HOME (Paramount, 1936) Directed by E.A. Dupont; produced by Albert Lewin; Screenplay by Sylvia Thalberg from a story by Harry Harvey; Cameos: William Mellor; Marie Dressler; Ollie Nelson as the Son Vic Oliver; Julie Hayden, Donald Woods, Wallace Ford, Roger Imhof, Thomas Jackson, Anthony Nace, Gertrude Hoffman, Eleanor Wesselhoeft, Charles Middleton, Herbert Rawlinson, John Wray, Robert Middlemass, Lee Kohlmeyer.

We've spoken before about Dupont's somewhat enigmatic career, of how his classic "Variety" (1925) was never equaled by any of his succeeding films, including some very ambitious ones in England in 1926-30. But his Hollywood career, if never really successful, was productive of a number of interesting and off-beat films like this one, a kind of early fringe film noir. It was an attempt by Paramount to reward comedienne Mary Boland with a straight starring vehicle, and to create their own Marie Dressler. Despite a good performance, neither the critics nor the public bought the idea, so it was back to Charlie Ruggles for more comedy. Minimal location work on Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco doesn't always match the USA-like studio sets, but it's overall an interesting film with a good cast in which many of the players are cast against type.

HE FOUND A STAR (John Garfield Productions-General Film Distributors, 1941)
Directed by John Paddy Carstairs, 85 min excerpt from an 86 min film With Vic Oliver, Sarah Churchill, Evelyn Dall, Raymond Lovell, J.H. Roberts.

When "The Entertainer" was originally written, it was intended for Noel Coward. When Laurence Olivier took over, the character was reshaped somewhat, and for his inspiration (though it was never publicly admitted) he turned to his own Vic Oliver, once a popular British nightclub comic who had slipped very badly and become a virtual has-been. Here, to stress how remarkable was Olivier's copy, is a good glimpse of Oliver in his has-been period — trying desperately to be jovial and funny often (through no fault of his own) with poor material. He survived mainly by virtue of a long-running radio show "Hi Gang!" (which in the original notes I inaccurately referred to as BAND WAGON, actually a rival and better radio show) where he was the comic to the very popular stars Ben Lyon and Bebe Daniels, but where he was already being kicked openly for his use of old material and theft of new jokes. It also didn't hurt that he was once again married to Sarah Churchill, Winston's daughter. She is his co-star here, and since she died just a week or two ago, it's a sad reminder of this graceful actress and how few good chances she got in film.

THE ENTERTAINER (Woodfall, 1960) Directed by Tony Richardson; Produced by Harry Salzman; Screenplay by John Osborne and Nigel Knafe from John Osborne's play; Music: John Addison; Camera, Oswald Morris; 97 mins. (Released in Britain with an "X" certificate).

With Laurence Olivier, Brenda de Banzie, Joan Plowright, Roger Livesey, Albert Finney, Shirley Ann Field, Daniel Massey, Alan Bates, Thora Hird, Miriam Karlin, Geoffrey Toone, Mex Bacon, George Doonan, MacDonald Hobley, Bery & Bobo.

Made over twenty years ago (where have those last two decades gone?) and unavailable for far too long, "The Entertainer" certainly gains in all areas by the passage of time. Then one wondered just what all the "Angry Young Men" writers were so peeved about; today one can see the causes of the 1960's frustration at work in the stagnation of 1980's Britain. Even the film that seemed better than "The Entertainer" at the time, "Sunday Morning" is a good example — they have gained by that passage of time too. One of the more depressing aspects of "The Entertainer" is how little things have changed (except for the worse) in those intervening decades; change the Egyptian crisis of Osborne's play to last year's Falklands crisis and the play (and film) would be uncomfortably topical. There have been many interpretations of the subtler meanings of "The Entertainer" (and these will doubtless be assessed anew with the upcoming NY stage revival) including the suggestion that Britain itself is being both parodied and indicted by being symbolised by a broken-down entertainer living on former glories — with an equally symbolical father to represent the dignity of an earlier generation. Regardless, purely on a human and dramatic level, it's a marvellous showcase for Olivier and one of his finest performances, the more so in that his Archie Rice is omnious and talentless, painful and abrasive to watch, yet withal somehow sympathetic. One feels for his growing desperation. It's an exhausting film emotionally, but it's also a film that has proven itself to be much better — and alas more honest — than many of us thought it to be 20 years ago. And, in retrospect, what a fantastic cast of stars-to-be. Joan Plowright, to become Olivier's wife, is luminous as his daughter, and that much-under-rated actress Shirley Ann Field is exactly right in her role too, as are Albert Finney (in a small but very poignant role), Alan Bates and Daniel Massey.

— William K. Everson ——