Conflicting assignments keep me (reluctantly) away this week and next, so programs on both evenings will start promptly at 7.30. I'll be back to wrap up the series for the last session which, as you know, is preceded by a jazz concert, so the doors won't open until around 7.20. However, it is a fairly short program, and as a bonus we've added to it an excellent and recently rediscovered Harold Lloyd 2-reeler of 1920, "Number Please".

RED SALUTE (Edward Small—United Artists, 1935) Directed by Sidney Lanfield; Screenplay by Humphrey Pearson and Manuel Seff, from an original story by Pearson; Camera, Robert Planck; 78 mins.
Note: reissued as "Her Enlisted Man" and later as "Runaway Daughter"; released in England as "Arms And The Girl".

Tonight's program was on the fringe of being allocated an "Archive Night" slot since both films are essentially curiosities, but since both are rarely shown and there is a large contingent of both Stanwyck and Boyer devotees, it seemed rather unfair to saddle them with that mildly academic frame. However, it will probably give you a clue as to how the films should be approached.

"Red Salute" was Stanwyck's 21st film, and her first after winding up her concurrent Warner and Columbia contracts. After fairly heavy material at those two studies, it does give her a welcome chance to concentrate on a madcap comedy role and display the skill at verbal repartee that would become more marked under Leisen and Sturges — when she had better verbal ammunition with which to spar. Historically the film has two areas of interest. First, it's one of the earliest of many quite blatant rip-offs of 1934's "It Happened One Night" — a comedy that was actually remade only twice (once with Ann Miller, once with June Allyson) but which inspired dozens of close-to-plagiarism copies ranging from "A"s like "She Couldn't Take It" and "There Goes My Heart" to "B"s like "Fifty Roads To Town" and "Time Out for Romance". It's also one of the few in which the heroine isn't an heiress, although as will be seen, that's a minor detail. Secondly, it's one of several films of its period dealing with Communist infiltration into college campuses, and at the time it was picketed and attacked for dealing with this political hot potato in somewhat hysterical and superficial terms. The FBI gets up to some rather underhanded tricks to trap and deport the #1 malcontent — and presumably one is supposed to applaud their cleverness. However, the film does rather load the scales: when Hardie Albright is playing the Communist, obviously any tactics are justified. The decidedly surface-level understanding of what constitutes Communism is underlined by a deathless scene (and line) wherein Young discovers: that heroine Stanwyck can't be a Communist because she dances well, and "Deep-thinkers are dodos on the dance-floor!" Never as funny as it might be, and occasionally a little mawkish as in the flag-wagging and Capra-ish speech at the end, it is nevertheless brisk and consistently entertaining. No longer on tv, and because of its theme never revived theatrically, it's an interesting oddity worth seeing again for its own sake, and for Stanwyck's.

--- TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION ---

THE BATTLE (French—German—English co-production, 1934) Directed by Nicholas Farkas; Produced by Leon Garganoff; Scenario by Farkas and Bernard Zimmer, with dialogue by Robert Stevenson; Camera: Roger Hubert; Art Direction by Serge Pimennoff; 80 mins.
With Charles Boyer, Merle Oberon, John Loder, Betty Stockfield, Miles Mander, Henry Faber, V. Inkijinoff. (Boyer, dubbed, was also in the German version as well as the French; Loder was in all three, but speaking his own dialogue in the various languages; Annabella was in the French and German versions only). Note: later reissued as "Thunder in the East", and during World War 2 as "Hara Kiri" when new footage and a narration was added to turn it into anti-Japanese propaganda; originally released in England as "The Eve of the Battle".
Multi-lingual productions were rampant in the early 30's (we showed another such Boyer film, "The Only Girl", just a few seasons back) and generally speaking were consistent in one respect. Those made solely in Europe were all virtually identical in each version, while the Hollywood-European co-productions often tended to be quite different, Hollywood regarding its domestic audience as having entirely different standards and requirements from the Europeans. (The American version of Luis Trenker's "The Rebel" will be shown early in the Spring). The three versions of "The Battle" are almost exactly the same, and critical comments applied to one apply to all.

The New York Times raved about "The Battle" in 1934, as did other critics and even the trade press, considering it the most sophisticated French film since the coming of sound. Considering the high quality of many early French talkies by Clair, Duvivier and others, this evaluation does seem a little over-generous today, and was probably based at least partially on the unusual subject matter.

"The Battle" is a most interesting film, and does seem to get better with second and third Viewings, but there is no denying that it is often a surprisingly crude film technically, and this causes it to date somewhat. Moreover, it is notably lacking in any sense of period. After all, it is the Sino-Japanese war of the early 1900's, but costumes and decor are very much those of the 1930's, and some familiar (and later) footage of a sinking ship is edited in rather too obviously. On the other hand, when one considers that this was the very first film directed by former cameraman Farkas (and a film unusually complex in terms of human relationships at that) it's quite an achievement. There seems to have been a deliberate attempt to de-emotionalise it to match the pattern of Oriental stoicism, and it is often extremely powerful. I suspect it would have been even more so had it been leavened by a little humor, even if only of the sardonic kind that von Sternberg employed in "The Shanghai Gesture". As it is, it is deadly serious at all times, giving the audience no chance to relax. However, it is helped a good deal by the high standard of the acting. With Boyer, it is easy to be seduced by his Oriental makeup, but his performance is remarkably subtle and well controlled. Merle Oberon is rather more effective than Anna Bella, since she is more convincing, facially and otherwise, in the Oriental role. Somehow the Gallic effervescence of Anna Bella seemed unnaturally controlled, charming as she was in the French version. Betty Stockfield is there primarily because she was a good linguist, and thus useful to have around in films like this, and Boyer and Loder had both had experience in both European and Hollywood films.

Farkas, whose films were sparse and often promoted in the most unlikely places (including Mexico), got another multi-lingual film out of the Sino-Japanese war. Released in the U.S. much later as "I Give My Life", it had a plot-line remarkably similar to "The Battle" except that it dealt with land action and the cavalry rather than the Navy. Anton Walbrook and Danielle Darrieux starred. Despite several reissues and a brief tv exposure long ago, prints of "The Battle" are extremely hard to find. Even the Cinematheque in Paris has only a hybrid version, put together from parts of a French release print and parts of a German work-print; in that version the climactic battle has all the dialogue, but none of the sound effects, making it a very curious, dream-like battle indeed! This print is thus very much of a rarity; it seems to be fully complete, but pictorial and sound qualities are not always of the best standards, and indeed never were. The considerable documentary footage that is intercut is often quite remarkable, and it's odd that the film hasn't been constantly pillaged for stock footage.

William K. Everson

Program finishes approx. 10.15.

The Spring schedule will be published on the two sets of program notes remaining to this series.