THE NIGHT IS YOUNG (MGM, 1935) Directed by Dudley Murphy; Produced by Harry Rapf; Screenplay by Edgar Allan Woolf and Franz Schulz from an original story by Vicki Baum; Camera, James Wong Howe; Music by Sigmund Romberg, libretto by Oscar Hammerstein II. 78 mins.

With: Ramon Novarro (Franz Otto); Evelyn Laye (Lisl); Charles Butterworth (Willy); Una Merkell (Pammie); Henry Stephenson (Emperor); Edward Everett Horton (Szereny); Rosalind Russell (Countess Rafay); Charles Judels (Riccardi); Herman Bing (Monsieur Duchesne); Albert Conti; Alexander Scourby; Elspeth Dudgeon (Duchess); Gustav von Seyffertitz (Ambassador); Carlos Valdenegro (Adjudant); Billy Dooley (Coronetist); Edith Kingdon (Dowager); Snuß Pollard (Drummer); Torben Meyer (2nd Adjudant); Josef Swiark (Doctor); George Davis (Milkman) and Donald Cook, erroneously omitted from his correct place, eighth in the cast, as Toni.

"The Night is Young" is an oddity indeed; from its gay opening, and the omnipresence of messieurs Bing, Butterworth and Horton, we assume we are back in Lubitsch-land. And so we are, except that before too long we realise it is the Lubitsch-land of "The Student Prince", with Ramon Novarro virtually re-playing his original role. It is so close to the original that one wonders why they didn't just remake it officially and be done with it. One would also have thought that MGM would have done a little more to exploit - or use - Evelyn Laye in what was her second, and last, Hollywood film - especially as her British "Evensong" had been such a big hit the year before. She is charming, but alas gets to sing too little. However, it is an eminently more satisfactory film on all counts than her earlier Hollywood foray, "One Heavenly Night", and far more entertaining than the appalling review in the NY Times would lead one to expect. What really hurts the film is a lack of chemistry between the leads. Bing and Horton - and of course dear old Henry Stephenson playing the Emperor - are all perfect in their well-trod roles, but Novarro one can't really commiserate with Laye for losing him. And Rosalind Russell is by no means the kind of horrendous "Royal Match" that is thrown at the hapless Kings and Princes in situations like this, to emphasise his "sacrifice". One can feel pity for poor Miss Laye however, with only Donald Cook at his most priggish hovering in the wings. But the strangest mystery of all, and certainly the prime example of a lack of chemistry, is why the decidedly non-prolific Dudley Murphy (whose best films were "Emperor Jones" and One Third of a Nation") should have been signed to direct it. Perhaps it was fortuitous that the actors had all done different roles before and had no intention of letting his direction get in the way! However, it's a curiosity - and a most entertaining one, with all of MGM's expected production value. And since it never seems to get shown otherwise (unless I'm forgetting a Theatre 80 booking?) we're glad to welcome it back tonight.

--- Ten Minute Intermission ---

KEEP SMILING (20th Century Fox-British, 1939; US title "Smiling Along")
Directed by Monty Banks; Screenplay by Val Valentine and Rodney Ackland from the original story "A Boy, A Girl and a Dog" by William Conselman. Produced by Robert Kane; Camera, Nutz Greenbaum 91 mins. (US version cut to 83 mins; our print is of the British original)

With Gracie Fields (Gracie Gray); Roger Livesey (Bert Wattle); Mary Maguire (Avis); Peter Cockerill (Rene Signani); Jack Donohue (Denis Wilson); Nonwser Eddie Gray (Silvo); Edward Rigby (Silas Gray); Tommy Fields (Bola); Hay Petrie (Jock); Joe Mott (Bill Sneed); Gus McNaughton (Eddie Perkins); Philip Leaver (DeCoursey); Mike Johnson (Charlie) and "Asta" the dog.

If "The Night is Young" was preaching a little from "The Student Prince", then "Keep Smiling" seems to have borrowed almost as much from "The Good Companions"! It was the second in Gracie Fields' new group for Fox, which afforded her the production values (and especially the better photography) denied to her lively but rather crude Bailing films. The first, "We're Going To Be Rich" was unsuccessfully over-americanised, and the last (which we showed here some time ago) "Shiloh Sally" probably got her best from any period. "Keep Smiling" is decidedly simplistic, but director-husband Monty Banks (who also gives himself a good bit as the impresario) keeps it moving right along. Gracie gets to run through several of her standards, the melodramatic climax has a bit more bite to it than British films were usually able to muster at that time, and for once Gracie relinquishes her sacrificial Chaplin role. The lovely Mary Maguire is neatly paired off with Peter Cockerill, giving Gracie her first full-fledged romantic teaming in quite some time, with the not very exciting but at least reliable Roger Livesey. Sneezy there's not quite enough comedy for the clearly American snape-in-grass. WHY did British films, trying so hard to break into the US market, make it tougher by constantly having these implied American villains? Print quality is a little on the dark side, making it look as though it was all shot on a typical pre-war English Summer afternoon, but we'll try to get extra light on the screen to compensate.

--- W.K.Everson

Program ends 10.40. No discussion period this evening. A reminder -- all of the MOMS have been confirmed except for THIS SIDE OF HEAVEN (March 1) when the substitute will be NIGHT COURT (dir: Van Dyke) with Walter Huston, Lewis Stone and Anita Page.