LILACS IN THE SPRING (British Lion-Republic, 1954) US release by United Artists under the title "Let's Make Up"; produced and directed by Herbert Wilcox; Based on the stage musical "The Glorious Days" by Harold Purcell; Screenplay by Miles Malleson; Camera, Max Greene; In Tricolor; original length, 94 mins. US edited length: 70 mins.

With Anna Neagle (Carole/Lillian/Neill Gwynn/Queen Victoria); Errol Flynn (John Beaumont); David Farrar (Charles King/King Charles II); Kathleen Harrison (Kate); Peter Graves (Albert Gutman/Prince Albert); Helen Hayes (Lady Dayton); Scott Sanders (Old George); Alan Gifford (Director); George Margo (Reporter); Alma Taylor, Hetty King (Women in balcony).

"Lilacs in the Spring" was the first of a brace of disastrous (commercially) films that Anna Neagle made with Errol Flynn in 1954/55, the second being "King's Rhapsody", a particularly unfortunate entry with Cinemascope emphasising the limitations of the material, and its US release handicapped by removal of all the music, leaving its Ivor Novello operetta plot to play straight. "Lilacs in the Spring" (unique in having Errol Flynn play Anna Neagle's father as well as her husband) is based on one of those patriotic musical cavalesques that the British do so well and so often on the London stage, but that really need the London ambience and audience to make them work well. It is hardly done justice here by the American editing which makes a shambles of the original. Normally we would hesitate to play such a version, but it is at the moment (and has been for many years) all that is available, and this program is, after all, a combination of two rarities mainly in response to requests from many Anna Neagle admirers among us. Certainly it is not a butchered masterpiece, but it is a butchered entertainment, and rarely has any US editing job been so ineptly done. It literally looks like a workprint - the first rough-cut of the edited down continuity, before the smoothing-out process. Music was clearly the be all and end all of the film, with a couple of Noel Coward and Ivor Novello songs thrown in, yet the film has been edited with plot in mind. Even that continuity is somewhat ragged, with the David Farrar and especially the Peter Graves characters suffering in the process. Slightly cut and abandoned, and quite obviously the title number, used as a background theme throughout, had an earlier vocal rendition before its (now) sole usage at the climax. At least it's obvious where all the cuts were made, and in its own rather specialised way, it must have been a rather appealing film, almost a kind of swan-song wrap-up of Neagle's career in film (though in fact some half-dozen more films lay ahead). Errol Flynn's ultra-relaxed performance suggests a little slackening on the side, and the script is a little insensitive in making occasional inside jokes about his career (he plays a Hollywood movie star) and about Hollywood life as well as to "The Jazz Singer" as an all-talkie!). Clearly one can only be frustrated by this version, yet at the moment it is all that there is and better than nothing. However, since the program was announced, a whole group of Neagle films (including this one) have been bought by an independent American distributor (impresario might be a better word) so there is the hope that it will show up in its full form eventually.

--- Ten Minute Intermission ---

THE LADY IS A SQUARE (ASSOCIATED BRITISH-PATHE, 1959) Produced and Directed by Herbert Wilcox; A Wilcox-Neagle Production; Screenplay by Harold Purcell, Pamela Bower and Nicholas Phipps from an original story by Purcell; Camera, Gordon Dixon; Musical Director, Wally Scott; 99 mins.

With Anna Neagle (Frances Baring); Janette Scott (Joanna Baring); Frankie Vaughan (Johnny Burns); Anthony Newley (Freddie); Wilfrid Hyde-White (Charles); Ted Lune (Harry Shuttleworth); Christopher Rhodes (Greenslade); Kenneth Cope (Derek); Josephine Fitzgerald (Mrs Eady); Mary Peach (Mrs Friday); and the National Youth Orchestra.

"The Lady Is a Square" was never released in this country, even for tv, so tonight can be considered a belated Premiere some quarter of a century after the event. The reasons for its absence are fairly obvious. Wilcox had really lost touch, by this time, with what the contemporary public wanted. This film came out just a few weeks after "Room at the Top", the most aggressively up-to-date of the new British films ... and "Lady is a Square" is at least fifteen years behind the times, being exactly the kind of film that Donald O'Connor has been making at Universal in the '60s and as musicals, so that the film's plot-line is a clear borrowing from the current youth scene, yet it is naive and artless, though not without a certain charm because of that. It does however have some importance as Anna Neagle's last screen appearance (although she kept going, and still does, on the London stage) and she quite graciously allows the younger Janette Scott the benefit of good closeups and camerawork. Frankie Vaughan was (and is) one of the more horrendous of the new pop singers, and Wilcox was never able to turn him into a major movie personality although he certainly tried in this and other films. However, Vaughan is still a big name on the London music-hall stage and also made the film "Sweet Adelines" to give him every opportunity, but the raw material isn't there. An overlong but enjoyable trifle; after all, how can one complain of 99 minutes with Anna and Janette Scott? ---- William K. Everson.

Program ends: 10:39