THE NEW SCHOOL FILM SERIES 52: Program #3 February 28 1986

Two rare and off-beat early 30's British films: (Program ends app. 10.20)

THE LADY IS WILLING (Columbia-British, 1934) Directed by Gilbert Miller
Adaptation and screenplay by Guy Bolton from a play by Louis Verneuil;
Camera, Joseph Walker; edited by Otto Ludwig; 69 mins. (Some British
sources give it as 74 mins). Produced by Joseph Friedman.
With: Leslie Howard (Albert Lautour); Cedric Hardwicke (Gustav Dupont); Elinie
Barnes (Helena Dupont); Nigel Playfair (Prof. Menard); Nigel Bruce (Welton);
Claud Allister (Brevin); W. Graham Browne (Pipnecot); Kendall Lee (Valerie);
Arthur Henderson (Cormont); Virginia Field (Maid); George Zucco (Bailiff),
John Turnbull (butler).

"The Lady is Willing" (no relation to the Columbia Dietrich film of the same
title in the 30's) is an engaging curiosity but very much a mystery film.
The only film to be directed by Gilbert Miller, it is interestingly odd and quirky
in its camera angles and pacing, and doubtless the American cameraman and
director were added to the essentially British production to give him a hand
when needed. Basically it's undated and surprisingly elaborate; it also has an
elegance quite rare in British films at that time. If the pacing is a little off
it's mainly because of its refusal to use incidental music except in scenes
where a musical source is shown. Yet with all its charm and the pleasure of
seeing so many interesting players, it has one basic flaw, a not inconsiderable
one in a comedy - it just isn't funny. The original play would seem to have offered both Rene Clair wit and Prevert irony, and those qualities
don't seem to translate into this particular British idiom, even though the
French locale is maintained. Surprisingly though, it doesn't matter too much.
It is brisk and full of surprises. Hardwicke quite steals the show as the
trickster financier, though Leslie Howard affects almost as many disguises as
in his subsequent "The Scarlet Pimpernel". One is particularly effective since
he disguises as a character by his own brother, Arthur. Virginia Field
is charming as a maid, George Zucco makes more than the most of his one scene,
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