ERIC PORTMAN : 1948 : TWO THRILLERS

THE MARK OF CAIN (General Film Distributors/Twice Cities, 1948) Directed by Brian Desmond Hurst; Produced by W.P. Lipscomb; Screenplay by Francis Crowdy and Christianna Brand from an adaptation by W.P. Lipscomb of the novel "Airing in a Closed Carriage" by Joseph Shearing. Camera, Erwin Hillier; Music, Louis, and other performers.

With: Eric Portman (Richard Howard); Sally Gray (Sarah Bonheur); Patrick Holt (John Howard); Dermot Walsh (Jerome Thorne); Denis O'Dea (Sir William Godfrey); Edward Lexy (Lord Rochford); Theresa Giehse (Sister Seraphine); Maureen Delany (Daisy Cobb); James Hayter (Dr. White); Helen Cherry (Mary); Vida Hope (Jennie); Andrew Cruikshank (Sir Johnathan); Miles Malleson (Mr. Burden).

By 1947 British film was facing a dilemma that was self-created. During the war British films had achieved new stature, and attracted both critical and audience support. Rank, the major producer, had created new stars, and had expanded his already large exhibition circuits. There was suddenly an audience for British films, and in order to satisfy that demand, there was a tendency to overproduce, if only to keep contract stars and directors busy. While many of the films did maintain a high standard, too many were made just because they were needed. Many of them were thrillers and mysteries, since that seemed one of the safest and most popular commodities. "Take My Life", "Green for Danger", and "Dear Murderer" all came from this period. Although "The Mark of Cain" is quite an elaborate film, it shows the strain of over-production, not least in its cast. Eric Portman as the villain remains the only interesting male character, not because it's a colorful role but because his opponents (Patrick Holt and Dermot Walsh) are too dull to snare our interest, and we cannot believe in the heroine's interest in them either. They're both second string players, rivals in the movie rather than in the productions. Dermot Walsh is involved in the film, including Christianna Brand, author of "Green for Danger" as one of the scene setters, it has a rather lack-lustre look, as though nobody had too much faith in it but knew that it had to be made to keep everybody busy and to play its allotted three weeks in the three-zone release system. Our main reason for playing it is (a) it provides a unique opportunity to see Eric Portman playing a good guy and a bad guy in the same evening, and (b) because it is totally unfamiliar. It received no U.S. theatrical release, partly because of the plethora of British films then, and partly because it fits poorly with the type of films they were making then. There were also signs that it might originally have been substantially longer; the early grim days of the heroine's marriage are played away with a simple dissolve. It makes for a rather abrupt transition, but it does get us into the melodrama rather more rapidly. (Print is uncut and exactly as released).

THE BLIND GODDESS (GFD/Gainsborough, 1948) Produced and directed by Harold French; Executive Producer, Betty Box; Screenplay by Betty and Sydney Box from a play by Patrick Hastings; Camera, Ray Elson; Music, Bernard Grun.

With: Eric Portman (Sir John Dearing); Anne Crawford (Lady Brasted); Hugh Williams (Lord Brasted); Michael Dennison (Derek Waterhouse); Claire Bloom (Mary Dearing); Nora Swinburne (Lady Dearing); Raymond Lovell (Mr. Mainwaring, KC); Frank Cellier (Judge); Clive Morton (Hersel); Elspet Gray (Daphne Dearing); Maurice Denham (Butler); Martin Benson (Count Mikla); Carl Jaffe (Meyer).

"The Blind Goddess" starts out suggesting that it may be a kind of spy action film, but soon settles down to being the kind of eminently satisfying and civilised mystery tale, told entirely by good dialogue and excellent acting, that made "The Franchise Affair" such a big success a season or two back. Written by a KC who knows his way around the law, it is intelligent, and full of atmosphere. To say more would spoil the surprise of discovery. Claire Bloom, in her very first film, is charming and appealing, but doesn't get the kind of directional guidance that she would soon get from Chaplin and Carol Reed. However, journeyman director Harold French, with such a good script and a fine cast, has no trouble keeping it all nicely on the move.

W.K.Everson

Since I am in Texas this weekend, looking at Australian films I hope to acquire to show here in '87, program will start promptly at 7:30 and will finish at approx. 10:25.

PLEASE - an impassioned plea in a very little space - audience talking in certain areas seems to be on the increase and is MOST disturbing to the rest of the audience. And those leaving the auditorium during the screening and returning have the habit of letting the exit doors bang behind them, another annoyance, particularly to those seated at the rear. Please - and thankyou.