YES, MY DARLING DAUGHTER (Warner Brothers, 1939) Directed by William Keighley
Screenplay by Casey Robinson from the play by Mark Reed; Camera, Charles Rosher; 88 mins. NY premiere: Strand and Globe Theatres.
With: Friscilla Lane (E llen Murray); Jeffrey Lynn (Douglas Hall); Fay Bainter (Anton) and Manoel (Nick Daywood); Ian Hunter (Lewis Murray); Genevieve Tobin (Connie); May Robson (Granny Whittman); Rosella Towne (Edith); Robert Homans (Sgt. Murphy); Edward Gargan (Policeman); Spencer Charters (Mr. Dibble); Vera Lewis (Mrs Dibble); Clem Bevans (Henry); Lottie Williams (maid); Paul Panzer (Peter); Jack Richardson (Husband); John Harron (ship steward)

22 years apart in time, and 3000 miles in space, tonight’s two comedies of morality supplement one another rather well. The Hollywood film, actually made in 1938 before the Production Code ( unofficially ) relaxed a little in 1939, reminds us, through its “daring”, how hidebound censorship was in those days. In it, the young lovers consider sex but reject it; in the British film of course the thought never occurs to them. Today of course, standards of morality have so lowered - or changed, if you will - that both films in a sense now must seem like antiques to the younger generation.

Incredibly, “Yes, My Darling Daughter” was initially banned by the NY censors, and was only passed after some minor cuts. In the meantime of course the furor created such a cause-celebre that Warners opened the film at two first-run Broadway houses to accommodate the remit. The film actually deviates but little from the original play — there are two scenes and one line of dialogue clearly there to placate the Production Code, but they do not seem like intrusions or concessions. Far greater changes were made in re-arranging the structure of the play to give greater prominence to the young lovers. In the original play the lead role was that of the mother, as played by Lucille Watson, and later redone in summer stock by Frances Farmer. Quite apart from its interest as a footnote to the history of censorship, the resulting film, unavoidably theatrical but engagingly directed by Keighley, is the best thing Roland Young and Genevieve Tobin - picking up where they left off in “One Hour With You” - are especially delightful. Incidentally, another interesting footnote to history: despite the strong cast, there are no stars; everybody gets merely featured billing. In a film I saw recently, by virtue of the “starring”, “also starring” and “guest starring” billing gimmicks, everybody in the film - including the unknown actor who had a 20 second bit as a would-be rapist truck driver - was one of its stars!

Ten Minute Intermission

NO, MY DARLING DAUGHTER (Rank, 1961) Directed by Ralph Thomas; Produced by Betty Box; Screenplay by Frank Harvey from the play “A Handful of Tansey” by Harold Brooke and Kay Bannerman; Camera, Ernest Stewart; Music by Ronald Neame; Production, Paramount Theatre.
With Michael Redgrave (Sir Matthew Carr); Roger Livesey (General Henry Barclay); Juliet Mills (Tansey Carr); Michael Craig (Thomas Barclay); Rod Fulton (Cornelius Allingham); Renee Houston (Miss Yardley); Joan Sims (Typist); Peter Barkworth (Charles); David Lodge (Flanagan); Victor Brooks (Policeman); Terry Scott (Policeman); Ian Fleming (Minister).

While British films had no compunction about reflecting contemporary morality honestly in films like “Saturday Night and Sunday Morning” or “The Comedy Man”, when it came to romantic comedy for a mass audience, they were far more cautious, trying to seem up-to-date for the younger segment of the audience, yet still trying to cater to the older diehards. As a result, most comedies of this type - with perhaps 1956’s “Now and Forever” the best example - seemed quite old-fashioned when they were first released. A couple of decades puts that perspective on them, and charm then becomes much more important than honesty. Actually this film could have done with some of the re-structuring of its co-feature. Juliet Mills, then just 20 and being “introduced” in this film (though as a tot she had appeared with her father, John Mills, in three late 40’s films) is so charming and appealing that one could have done with a great deal more of her and proportionately less of the stars. (With her beautiful performance in Billy Wilder’s “Avanti!”, one can hardly call her career a failure yet she was only now starting to fulfill potential). Although it’s probably his best film, Ralph Thomas (after a promising beginning on thrillers like “The Clouded Yellow”) became best known for broad comedies in the “Carry On” tradition, and his heavy-handiness intrudes here at times. He encourages Roger Livesey to overact - surely an actor who needs no such encouragement - and permits one of those aggressively comic musical scores that marred so many British comedies of this period. He could also profitably have extended the pleasing Scottish location scenes, and made less obvious use of the much-overused Pinehouse Studios exterior, here doubling as a girl’s school. Nevertheless, it’s a pleasant little comedy like Redgrave (who sings the main title song himself) go at it, and Mills’ charm more than takes up the slack. Another nice touch is the way the script arrives at the climax that the audience wants and expects, but doesn’t seem likely to get, and arrives at it in a very...
pleasant and civilised fashion, without having to make any of the protagonists suddenly unsympathetic to tie up loose ends.

A point we made some years back in the program notes for "Now and Forever" might be worth repeating. To American eyes, it might seem illogical that the apparent elopement and flight of two young lovers could command front page headline space in the British newspapers, but it has in fact happened many times. Running away to get married was (at one time at least) about the only way that British youth could defy authority and convention at the same time — and the British public, bemused in with restrictions and bureaucracy, loved it, and shared every vicarious moment of it. The newspapers invariably took the side of the young people, and milked the story for all it was worth. Today of course, it's a relic of the past, and if young people want to rebel against convention they do it by dyeing their hair purple and hanging razor blades from their ears. The modus operandi as practised by Janette Scott in the 50's and Juliet Mills in the 60's is far more attractive.

"No, My Darling Daughter" is a relatively unknown film in this country. It did, surprisingly, get a Broadway first-run, but as an inexpensive feature to go along with a rock-and-roll stage show at the Paramount. Presumably it was thought that the youth-oriented theme and title might consolidate the overall appeal of the show in the ads — but that its restrained British style would then help to systematically empty the theatre before the next stage presentation. Surprisingly, the audience seemed to enjoy the film very much and it turned out to be by no means the "chaser" that was intended. Probably because it was thus sold individually — and its US rights expired individually — it doesn't seem to have wound up in any major TV packages for later showings. Even though it has few surprises, its relative obscurity and its major charm in the form of Juliet Mills, make it a most enjoyable film today. In a double-bill like today's, it was clearly important to run them in the right chronological order — and even up against Keighley's expertise and that Warner cast, "No, My Darling Daughter" holds up its end as the top half of the double bill quite well.

William K. Everson

Program ends 10:54

Due to the length of the program, there will be no time for an official discussion session this evening. However, if anyone has any questions that can't wait until next week, they can be taken care of informally outside the school this evening!