Women in a Man's World: Two British Crime Films

THE MAN WHO WOULDN'T TALK (Neagle-Wilcox, 1957) Produced and Directed by Herbert Wilcox; Screenplay by Ernest Lustgarten from a novel by Stanley Jackson; Camera, Gordon Dines; Music by Stanley Black; Associate Producer, John D. Wilcox; 80 mins.

With: Anna Neagle (Mary Randall, Q.C.); Anthony Quayle (Dr. Frank Smith); Zsa Zsa Gabor (Mrs Smith); Katherine Kath (Yvonne Delbeau); Dora Bryan (Telephonist); Patrick Allen (Jim Kennedy); Lloyd Lamble (Bellamy); Hugh McDermott (Bernie); John Welsh (George Fraser); Leonard Sachs (Professor Horvard) John Paul (John Castle); John le Mesurier (Judge); Edward Lexy (Hobbs)

"The Man Who Wouldn't Talk" was Anna Neagle's last film but one as an actress, being followed by "The Lady is a Square" (which we ran a couple of years back) and "The Heart of a Man" (1959) in which she was a co-producer along with husband Norman. Wilcox's不及格 acting appearances were hardly spectacular farewells, but they were more than serviceable, carefully made if somewhat old-fashioned productions. "The Man Who Wouldn't Talk" had virtually no exposure here; it did open as a second feature on 42nd Street, was not reviewed, and promptly disappeared into the limbo of largely unknown television releases.

Like so many British courtroom dramas, it is fascinated by the intricacies and loopholes of the legal profession, but it's a fascination that crosses the Atlantic rather well, since the practice of British law is so vastly different from its American equivalent. The film has far more talk than action, and like its co-feature was given a "G" certificate by the British censor - the equivalent of the American "G" - a pretty safe tip-off that violence and melodrama are going to be well under control. But action/crime films are hardly a rarity, and it's more pleasing to find one like this that doesn't rely on fights and chases, but is content with an involving and satisfying story that seems to start off in one direction and then veer off in another. It's a trifle confusing at times, and the solution would seem to have a few potential holes in it. Were Anna Neagle opposed by Warren William, John Barrymore or any one of the dynamic old Warner lawyers she might not have won the legal day quite so easily! But in its own gentle, even stolid, way, it's a most enjoyable film and should certainly please the Neagle admirers, of whom I know we have a great many.

-- 10 Minute Intermission --

STREET CORNER (U.S. title BOTH SIDES OF THE LAW) (Rank-GFD, 1955) Directed by Muriel Box; Produced by Sydney Box and William MacQuitty; Screenplay by Muriel and Sydney Box from a story by Jan Read; Camera, Reginald Wyer; Music, Temple Abady; 80 mins.

With: Anne Crawford (Susan); Peggy Cummins (Brigit Foster); Rosamund John (Sgt. Pauline Ramsey); Terence Morgan (Ray); Barbara Murray (WPC Lucy); Ronald Howard (David Evans); Eleanor Summerfield (Edna); Michael Medwin (Chick Farrar); Ethel Goodall (MaryFair); Richard Waring (Inspector); Lise Martin (Mrs Fair); Frances Vine (Elizabeth); Michael Hordern (Insp.Heron); Lloyd Lamble (Sgt.Weston); John Warwick (Insp.Grey); Joyce Carey (Miss Hopkins); Maurice Denham (Mr. Dawson); Thora Hird (Mrs Perkins); Marjorie Rhodes (Mrs Foster); Anthony Oliver (Stanley Foster); David Horne (Judge); John Stuart (Magistrate); and Dora Bryan, Harold Lang, Lily Kain, Archie Duncan, Charlotte Michael, Peter Swanwick, James Gilbert, Jean Anderson, Nelly Arno.

Muriel Box, a prolific writer and co-producer with her husband Sydney, became the most prolific of Britain's very few women directors in the 50's and 60's. This was her second film (of approximately fifteen) and like most of them it is gentle and unsensational, although there was a great deal of thematic variety in her work, ranging from thrillers to social protest and romantic comedy. "Street Corner" is an American-type title considering its theme was clearly designed as an answer to Ealing's "The Blue Lamp" (1949) and a tribute to the women's police. It's less successful and less realistic than "The Blue Lamp", primarily because it is intended as an entertainment "package" in which all the right things happen to the right people, and no sour tastes are left in the mouth. Like its co-feature, it's a little old fashioned in concept -- one might even compare its treatment to that of the Edison/Edwin S. Porter "Life of an American Policeman" of 1905 -- but it's a pleasing film, so slickly produced that it's hard to realise that it's 42 years old. For all its artificiality, it's a well-intentioned tribute; the London lady police are a grand lot, but they don't all, alas, look like Anne Crawford and Rosamund John. Over-glamorous and over-obvious type-casting is the picture's main flaw -- once again, Terence Morgan (one of Britain's few good-looking male leads of the period) is wasted as an out-and-out rotter, doing as badly by Peggy Cummins here as he did by Joan Collins in other films. Both films incidentally are seen in their U.S. versions, both slightly edited, but the pruning seems to have done little damage.

--- William K. Everson ---

Program Ends approx. 10.30; short discussion session follows.

Schedules for the Summer (Wednesday night) series will be available at the two closing programs of this series. ---