Two British Films Unreleased in the U.S.A.

MY SISTER AND I (Rank, 1948) Produced and Directed by Harold Hunt; Associate Producer, John Corfield; Screenplay by A.R. Rawlinson, Joan Rees, Michael Medwin and Robert Westerby from the novel "High Pavement" by Emory Bonnet; Camera, Harry Waxman; Music, Brettton Byrd; 97 mins.

With: Sally Ann Howes (Robina Adams); Barbara Mullen (Hypatia Foley); Dermot Walsh (Graham Forbes); Hazel Court (Helene Forsythe); Martica Hunt (Mrs Camelot); Patrick Holt (Roger Crisp); Jane Hylton (Dolse); Joan Rees (Aradh Bondage); Michael Medwin (Charlie); Helen Goode (Mrs Penfold); Stewart Home (Capt. Thurn); Diana Dors (Dreamy girl); James Knight (Dustman) and Ian Wilson, Hory McDermott, Niall Lawlor, Olwen Brookes, Jack Vyvyan.

Sometimes the non-release of a British film in the U.S. is commercially quite understandable, and "My Sister and I" is a good case in point. Made at a time when Rank was flourishing, cashing in on the momentum British films had received in wartime, and needing product to keep his new stable of stars busy and his exhibition chains well supplied, it has comparatively little to offer the U.S. distributor. It is very long, it has no major names, and while that's part of its charm, it's also rather old-fashioned and essentially British. The only future for films like that was to (later on) add weight and numbers to tv packages, where the same drawbacks kept their exhibition opportunities slight. "My Sister and I" is an Agatha Christie-like mystery, set against the background of a small theatrical company in a rural English town, and it is the "why" that is more interesting, if never very menacing. Denial of a film like this to the American market hardly represents severe deprivation, but it's an enjoyable enough film to warrant an occasional showing like this one. Its only real drawback is the premature casting of Sally Ann Howes in the adult feminine lead, only three years after doing child roles in films like "Dead of Night". She tries hard enough, but as always one's eyes are cast back to the lady in the '30s, and in any case she looks much too young to be playing a well-established designer and art director!

-- Ten Minute Intermission --

THE COMEDY MAN (British Lion-Grayfilms, 1963) Directed by Alvin Rakoff; Produced by Jon Penington; Screenplay by Peter Yeldham from the novel by Douglas Hayes; Camera, Ken Hodges; Music, Bill McGuffie; 92 mins.

With: Kenneth More (Chick Byrr); Billie Whitelaw (Judith); Cecil Parker (Rutherford); Dennis Price (Tommy Morris); Edmund Purdom (Julian); Angela Douglas (Fay); Norman Rossington (Normore); Peter Van de Velde (Jan Dobie); Russell Thorndike (Mr. Crichton); Valerie and Leila Croft (Yvonne and Pauline); Gerald Campion (Gerry); Freddie Mills (Indian chief); Jill Adams (Jan); and Jacqueline Hill, Harold Goodwin, Naomi Chance, Guy Dehgy, Derek Francis, Myrtle Reed, Edwin Richfield, Gordon Rolli, Eslen Way.

If the non-release of "My Sister and I" was understandable, the suppressing of "The Comedy Man", one of the top British films of the 60's, is absolutely incomprehensible. Quite apart from its own merits, which have ensured it good reviews, it had all the elements for commercial exploitation including a popular star at his peak, and lots of (tasteful and non-explicit) sex which was typical of the new, liberated British cinema, but was still considerably in advance of what Hollywood was doing at the time. Yet it too was shunted into tv, where those very qualities ensured that it would be cut to ribbons by local stations. Our own last showing at the New School was in 1972, and it has remained a virtually unknown film ever since. In some ways it has dated a little: the jazz score locks it rather recognisably into the sixties, and the photographic and editing techniques are a little self-indulgent, as often happens with a major film early in a new director's career. (Rakoff's subsequent films, or at least the opportunities given him, failed to live up to the potential of this film). On the other hand, time has in some ways added extra poignancy. The plight of the actor in Britain has, if anything, worsened since then. And the roles played by Edmund Purdom and by Kenneth More can now be seen as largely autobiographical in nature, particularly the case of the late Kenneth More, who broke up so that he could marry Angela Douglas, who plays his young mistress here, and whose obituary stressed his reluctance to step out of character and take chances on different kinds of roles.

Together with the very different "20th Century", "The Comedy Man" is probably the best film ever about actors, and especially their plight in the modern world where the demand is more for personalities to sell product than for acting. The film covers the London theatre and also the worlds of summer stock, movies, tv and commercials, presenting an honest picture of the realities, and what one goes through with it. The many ironies extend to Freddie Mills, once a boxing champion, playing an extra playing an indian, a parallel perhaps (though probably not specifically intended as such) to athlete Jim Thorpe's career in this country. Moving, funny, topical and superbly acted, "The Comedy Man" surely one day will get the recognition it deserves. Incidentally, in these days when virtually every movie has a pre-credit teaser designed to grab attention when it hits the tv market, it's good to see one where the pre-credit sequence really works well, perhaps the best of its kind since 1939's "O. Itice and Men".

--- W.K. Everson

Program ends app. 10:50