We rarely run travelogues, but this simple and pleasing little film seems to fit in rather well with tonight's program. It captures the essence of a pre-War London that has now largely disappeared, though some of its elegance does seem to have survived. We have increasing clusters of pizza parlours and taco huts. Most of it does seem to have been shot over the last few weeks and doubtless out of a stock library, since it is a 1933 release and there are ample clues as to the 1935 vintage of most of the footage, as for example glimpses of advertisements for "Frai Diavolo" and "Caivalcada".

THE LILAC DOMINO (A Grafton-Capitol-Cecil co-production, released by United Artists, 1937) Directed by Frederick Zelnick; produced by Max Schacht, Lee Garmes and Isadore Goldsmith; Screenplay by Basil Mason, Neil Gow and R. Hutter from an original play by Rudolf Bernauer, E. Gatti and B. Jenbach; Lyrics by Clifford Grey; Camera, Bryan Langley. Roy Clarke and (unbilled) Lee Garmes; 79 mins. US release in 1940 by Select, edited to 60 m. With: June Knight (Ghari de Gonda); Michael Bartlett (Count Anatole); Athene Seyler (Irene Alery); S-Z. Sakall (Gandor); Richard Dolman (Stephen); Fred Emney (Baron de Gonda); Jane Carr (Leonie); Morris Harvey (Janosh); Paul Blake (Andor); Joan Hickson (Naid).

Anglo/French, German, Italian and, here, Hungarian co-produced musicals were surprisingly popular in Britain in the 30's, but the best of them were made by Gaumont-British in the first half of the decade. Thereafter they were usually made by small independent companies who spent far too much money on them hoping to put themselves on the map, and were usually wiped out in the process. "The Lilac Domino" is typical of these later films, either co-productions or reworkings of European films, far too elaborate (and frankly old-fashioned) to stand a chance of success at the box office. Although the film's musical numbers are often quite good, much of the film's charm and tunefulness is lost, though it does rather run out of steam in its last third, when it tries to wrap up all the loose ends and has already shot its bolt musically, so that it has to start repeating. It's certainly no Lubitsch-level frolic, but it is rather enjoyable as an amiable antique. June Knight, a prominent Broadway star from 1932-46, made approximately ten films, and died last June, aged 80. She and Richard are with excellent cast, and through his acting persona is rather stiff and non-variable. Still, any film that asks us to accept S-Z. Zakall (several years before his Hollywood work) and eccentric English comic Fred Emney as fellow-Hungarians isn't asking for total conviction in the acting departments. It's a surprisingly handsome and elaborate production, obviously using some footage (though not overmuch) from the Hungarian original, and benefitting from the class act camerawork of Lee Garmes who was presumably prevented from taking screen credit for contractual or union reasons. When it was finally released in the US, it must have made little sense at 60 minutes and during wartime must have seemed very trivial and outdated, so not surprisingly reviews were weak. I have a personal and nostalgic fondness for the film since it was the first movie I saw not of my own choosing, and helped show me that other people's ideas were worth paying attention to. For what it's worth, tonight's showing will be the US premiere of the full original version.

--- Ten Minute Intermission ---

GANWAY (Gaumont-British, 1937) Directed by Sonnie Hale; Screenplay by lesser Samuels and Sonnie Hale from an original story by Dwight Taylor; Camera, Glen MackWilliams; Art Director, Alfred Junge; Set Decorator, Bub; Set Decorator, Emery; Sets, Edwin B. Pabst; Wardrobe, John and Keith; Makeup, Orval Hageman; Hair Stylist, Kenneth Shand; Sound, W. A. Whelan. With Jessie Matthews (Pam Warms); Barry Mackay (Insp. Bob Deering); Nat Pendleton (Mr. Hagen); Noel Madison (Mike Otterman); Alastair Sim (Taggerty); Olive Blakeney (Nedd Beaumont); Graham Moffatt (Joe); Edmon Hyan (Red Mike); Danny Green (Shorty); Patric Ludlow (Carl Freemason); Liana Ordeyne (Greta Brand); and Peter Gathorne, Doris Rogers, Blake Dorn, Henry Hallatt.

One of Jessie Matthews later films (only two others, "Sailing Alone" and "Climbing High" were to follow before 1939 signalled the end of her big starring period) "Ganway" was also admittedly one of her lesser films. Her director/husband Sonnie Hale never managed to duplicate the elegance and taste that Victor Saville had generated earlier, though he tried hard, and the most aggressive parts, with its heavy-handed satire of Academic gangsters, was one of her silliest. Too, she was pregnant at the time so strenuous dance routines had to be avoided. The film has been criticised for having too little music; actually it has plenty, but dancing is downplayed, and the film sorely needs a bang-up climactic number to counterbalance the plot shortcomings, and the omnipresence of the always irritating Barry Mackay. Nevertheless, it is sprightly and enjoyable, full of good people, both British and American, well handled by Sonnie Hale, and certainly a film we're delighted to be able to show (surprisingly) for the first time in these series, since earlier prints were always unsatisfactory.

Program Ends app. 10.40. Brief Discussion Period follows. --- WM. E. EVerson