BY CANDLELIGHT (Universal, 1933; rel: 1934) Directed by James Whale; screenplay by Hans Kraly, F. Hugh Herbert, Karen de Wolf and Ruth Cummings from a play by Siegfried Geyer; Camera, John Mescall; 68 mins.
With: Elissa Landi (Marie); Paul Lukas (Josef); Nils Asther (Prince Alfred); The Baroness (Esther Ralston); Dorothy Revier (Countess von Rischenheim); Lawrence Grant (Her husband); Warburton Gamble (The Baron); Lois January (Ann)

Here James Whale deserts Grand Guignol and melodrama to enter Ernst Lubitsch territory, and does so rather successfully. While it doesn't have the basic material of Lubitsch's "Trouble in Paradise", it's fascinating to watch Whale literally squeeze sophistication out of it, while retaining so many of his personal visual and other trademarks, and overcoming the fact that fine actor though he is, Paul Lukas doesn't really belong in a Maurice Chevalier role. Whale also has fun with the musical score, which is admittedly excessive by today's standards (though not by those of the period in which it was made), but which he uses to remind the audience of the artifice of the whole and the fact that this is a show rather than a realistic forgery into high society. He even kids his own stock in trade by using low-key lighting and an agitato theme to turn a moment of comic embarrassment into mock horror. Lukas' basic stiffness; is even put to work in a running gag wherein, with superbly timed mis-timing, he repeats ineffectually the great lines aimed at surefire seduction uttered earlier by the more practised Mr. Asther. As an exercise in applied directorial style, and as a further example of depression escapism that tactfully transfers its riches and indulgences to a European never-never land, "By Candelight" remains a breezy and delightful frolic.

-- Ten Minute Intermission --

THIS ABOVE ALL (20th Century Fox, 1942) Directed by Anatole Litvak; produced by Darryl F. Zanuck; Screenplay from the novel by Eric Knight; Camera, Arthur Miller; 110 mins. NY premiere: Astor Theatre with: Tyrone Power (Clive Briggs); Joan Fontaine (Prudence Cathaway); Thomas Mitchell (Monty); Henry Stephenson (General Cathaway); Nigel Bruce (Ramsbottom); Gladys Cooper (Iris Cathaway); Philip Merivale (Dr. Roger Cathaway); Sara Allgood (waitress); Alexander Knox (Rector); Queenie Leonard (Violet Worthing); Melville Cooper (Wilfred); Jill Esmond (Nurse Emily); Miles Mander (British Major); Rhys Williams (Sergeant); Arthur Shields (Chaplain); Dennis Hoey (Parson)

Not all of the big wartime romances hold up well today, denied as they are the immediacy and emotional involvement that made them work so well at the time, but most of them are still superior to the rash of recent romances we have had trying to re-establish that wartime milieu. "This Above All" was a big prestige success in its day, coasting to a degree on the momentum of the original novel, considered a wartime classic, but also scoring on its care, craftsmanship and dignity. There is perhaps a shade too much of the latter, with the Production Code dictating much pussy-footing around in the love affair, adding a marriage, much anguish, and establishing that the lovers occupied separate rooms for one of their trysts (although a baby still manages to materialise from somewhere!) Also, as in most Hollywood versions of British life, there seems to be an excess population of the aristocracy, and a notable absence of the social-change issues which the novel was at such pains to stress. Perhaps it's the kind of film that, to be truly honest, should have been filmed in England with a director less detached than Litvak; but then it wouldn't have had such style, nor would it have permitted to many pats on the back for England. (Fontaine's speech on why she loves England is beautifully done). Details of wartime life are often spectacularly awry, and the film's climax, with the boxoffice in mind is disturbingly ambiguous. It's a mirror partly of its time, but more so of Hollywood's censorship-oriented enforced attitude to those times, as thus of interest to the social historian as well as the romantic novel devotee and the "mere" film buff who can enjoy such a fine example of old Hollywood class, phoney "exterior" and all.

Program ends approx. 10.40

-- William K. Everson