Two early 50's thrillers by two major Writer-Producer-Director teams

STATE SECRET (London Films-British Lion, 1950). Released in the U.S. by Columbia and eventually retitled "The Great Manhunt"; written and directed by Sidney Gilliat from the novel 'Appointment with Fear" by Roy Huggins; produced by Sidney Gilliat and Frank Launder; stars Charles Boyer, Robert Krasker; Add: Photography; John Collin; Art Director Wilfrid Shingleton; Music, William Alwyn; 95 mins; US premiere, Victoria, NY.

With Douglas Fairbanks Jr. (As John Marlewe); Glynnis Johns (Lisa); Jack Hawkins (Col. Galen); David Heneker (Theodore); Walter Rilla (General Niva); Karel Stepanek (Dr. Revo); Carl Jaffe (Janovik Frades); Gerard Heins (Bendel); Hans Moser (Sigrist); Gerik Schjelderup (Bartorek); Hubo Lorraine (P. Frachi); Anton Diffring (policeman); Peter Illing (Macco); Olga Lewe (Baba); Therese van Ede (Teresa); Eric Pohlmann (cablecar conductor); Paul Demel (Barber).

While the Cold War in the early 50's was responsible for a prolific and often near-hysterical output of anti-Red thrillers and melodramas in the U.S., in Britain it was largely reflected in an enjoyable return to pre-war genres. "State Secret" can be seen as something of a post-war equivalent to Carol Reed's "Night Train to Munich" (1940) while "High Treason" is very much akin to Hitchcock's 1936 "Sabotage", in which the discreetly-hinted at activity of German spies was replaced, in the 1951 film, by tactful but slightly more definite suggestions that the Russians were behind it all. Although made first, "State Secret" was preceded in its U.S. release by the Cary Grant film "Charade", which had a virtually identical plot premise, though a very different mood. Clearly this hurt it over here, despite its excellent reviews, and Columbia combatted the problem by changing the title (after reviews to "The Great Manhunt"); and selling it as a straight action film. US reviews tended to suggest that it was a little too much Hitchcock, forgetting that Launder and Gilliat as scripters have written "The Lady Vanishes", and that their forte (especially in Gilliat's) has always been the witty and suspenseful comedy thriller, as witnessed in "Green for Danger". "State Secret" uses comedy more for punctuation than for its own sake, but does have an agreeable lightness of tone despite the superb suspense values. It benefits tremendously from location shooting in the Dolomites, from a fine cast of character actors, and the use of such notable European actors as Hans Moser. It even creates a special language to add conviction to the Britishian background. Considering how skilled a piece of film-making it is, and surprising a movie, it is surprising that it has been, if not forgotten, then virtually ignored in recent years, though "Crisis" (a heavier film) has suffered a like fate too.

HIGH TREASON (Ramp-Paul Soakin Productions-General Film Distributors, 1951)

Released in the U.S. by Mayer-Kingsley in 1952; Directed by Roy Boulting; original story and screenplay by Roy Boulting and Frank Harvey; Camera, Gilbert Taylor; Music, John Addison; Art Director, Vetchinsky; 95 mins; US premiere, 52nd St. Translux Theatre, NYC.

With Andre Morell (Supt. Follam); Liam Redmond (O. Brennan); Mary Morris (Ann Braun); Kenneth Griffith (Jim Ellis); Patric Deenan (George Ellis); Anthony Bushell (Maj. John Bower); Joan Hickson (Mrs. Ellis); Anthony Nicholls (Grant Mansfield); Geoffrey Keene (Morgan Williams); John Bailey (Stringer); Donald Davis (Bowers); Charles Loyd Pack (Ferdy War); Laurence Naismith (Gordon Wells); Stuart Lindsell (Commissioner); Lockwood West (Home Secretary); Julian Amyes (Slater); John Harvey (Watson); Harry Fowler (photographer); Cyril Coney (Sabotage leader).

In this "High Treason", quite unrelated to the 1929 film of the same title, a prophetic vision of a possible war in 1940, a whole band of terrorist saboteurs try to knock out the same Battersea Power plant that Oscar Homolka brought to a grinding halt with a little sand in Hitchcock's "Sabotage" 18 years earlier! Technically speaking, this is not a Boulting Brothers film, though it is a logical successor to their 1950 hit "Seven Days to Noon", and they would have made it together had not John been diverted to the ambitious "The Magic Box" (shown later this season), which had a deadline to meet as the Festival of Britain film. Actually this period marked the end of their concentration on serious and often controversial films; they were to find a new and profitable niche in comedy where their work was generally less distinguished but also more popular. (Two of these comedies will be shown in our Spring series). While "Seven Days to Noon" was a suspense thriller about the need to evacuate London due to the threat of an atomic bombing by a deranged and sympathetic scientist, "High Treason" uses London in a sleazier and more intimate manner, depicting the underground operations of the sabotage gang. Beautifully underplayed and well-crafted, it was less popular than its predecessor but probably better. The unpredictable British critics gave it a "III" certificate (the equivalent of a "G") despite its unsentimental theme, and the comparatively rare admission that a member of Parliament could also be a traitor.

— William E. Eyerson

Program Ends approx. 10:55