THE NEW SCHOOL

FILM SERIES 61: Program #2

February 17, 1982

Two Comedies by the Boultung Brothers

From 1939 to 1950, the writing-producing-directing team of Roy and John Boultung was considered one of the most solid creative teams in British films, tackling important social themes, documentary, literary adaptations and psychological thrillers in films as far-ranging as "Pastor Hall", "Thunder Rock", "The Guinea Pig" and "Seven Days to Noon". Then there was a surprising switch to blander, more commercial fare, and in 1956 the huge boxoffice success of "Private's Progress" caused them to veer almost entirely towards farce and comedy, with the occasional serious film sandwiched in between. "Two Buohtings" was a work, never fulfilling their promise or maintaining the momentum of those first ten years. On the other hand the comedies that followed were funny, satiric, and often as socially conscious as their more serious work. Tonight's program consists of that first highly successful comedy and its immediate follow-up.

PRIVATE'S PROGRESS (Charter-British Lion, 1956) Directed by Roy Boultung; produced by Roy Boultung; Screenplay by John Boultung and Frank Harvey from a novel by Alan Hackney; Camera, Eric Cross; Music composed and conducted by John Addison; Title animation, Hulas & Batchelor; 102 mins.

With: Ian Carmichael (Stanley Windrush); Richard Attenborough (Cox); Dennis Price (Bertram Trayspercal); Terry Thomas (Major Hitchcock); Peter Jones (Egan); William Hartnell (Sgt. Sutton); Thorley Walters (Capt. Bottle); Jill Adams (Prudence Greenslade); Ian Bannen (Pte. Horrocks) Victor Maddern (Pte. Blake); Michael Hordern (Mr. Hordern); George Colours (Padre); Derrick de Marney (Pat); Miles Malleson (Mr. Windrush); Michael Trubshawe (Col. Fanshawe); John le Mesurier (Psychiatrist); Ronald Adam (Doctor); Karel Stepanek (German officer) and Brian Culton, Nicholas Bruce, David Lodge, Basil Dignam, Henry Oscar, Michael Ward, Sally Miles, Marianne Stone, Glyn Houston, Lloyd Lamble, Ludwig Lawinsky, Henry Longhurst.

If Carol Reed's wartime classic "The Way Ahead" was the definitive tribute to the British Army and its spirit of camaraderie, then "Private's Progress" is the definitive tribute to the lunacy of the British army and its malingerers and scroungers. Both films are quite honest in their own way, and the war probably wouldn't have been one without a careful balancing of the pride of the one with the idiocy of the other. "Private's Progress" isn't markedly original in concept, but works because of moments of unexpected underplaying and even quite grim black humor, but most of all because of the wonderful ensemble playing of a great team of character comedians and straight actors. (My own Commanding Officer was exactly like Terry Thomas, and I was called far worse than "an absolute shower")

--- Ten Minute Intermission ---

BROTHERS IN LAW (Charter-British Lion, 1957) Directed by Roy Boultung; produced by Roy Boultung; Written by Roy Boultung, Frank Harvey and Jeffrey Dell from the novel by Henry Cecil; Camera, Max Greene; 94 mins.

With: Ian Carmichael (Roger Thursby); Richard Attenborough (Henry Marshall); Jill Adams (Sally Smith); Miles Malleson (Kendall Grimes); Terry Thomas (Alf Green); Raymond Huntley (Tatlock); Eric Barker (Alec Blair); Nicholas Parsons (Charles Poodle); Kynaston Reeves (Judge Lawson); John Le Mesurier (Judge Rymar); Irene Handl (Mrs. Potter); Olive Sloane (Mrs. Newens); Edith Sharpe (Mrs. Thursby); Leslie Phillips (Shopman); George Rose (Frost); Brian Culton, John Schlessinger (soliciors); Kenneth Griffith (undertaker) and Basil Dignam, Henry Longhurst, Wyndham Goldie, Ronald Cardew, John van Eyssen, Everley Gregg.

A follow-up rather than an official sequel, "Brothers in Law" also saw the two Boultungs switching their Producer/Director chores, to no major discernible effect since they worked so closely together. Though less commercially successful than its predecessor, "Brothers in Law" is actually a better film - quieter, subtler, wittier, and with soft-pedalled laughs - inevitably so in dealing with the baffling frustrations and bureaucratic intricacies of the British legal profession. Once again, it is the superb ensemble playing by virtually the same cast - Raymond Huntley making a very efficient stand-in for Dennis Price - that makes it all work so well, and Irene Handl's scene as the reluctantly-testifying wife is a highlight.

Raymond Huntley by the way, the original "Dracula" on the London stage and not seen much on the screen of late, is still, at age 85, active on the London stage, currently playing a judge in a legal melodrama. And watch for director John Schlessinger playing the balding solicitor in the film's climactic court case. Jill Adams, a low-key British Marilyn Monroe whose career never quite took off as it should have, was nevertheless seen to advantage in a number of British films of the 50's, "The Green Man" being one of the best.

--- William K. Everson ---

Program ends: 11.00. No discussion period.