ARCHIVE NIGHT  Two independent British movies from the 30's

With John Lodge (Inspector Bonnard); Judy Kelly (Carmen); Joan Marion (Lydia Lavalle); Hugh Williams (Rene Nissen); Edward Chapman (Lohrmann); Steve Geray (Frollich); Edmond Breon (Morell); Wallace Godfrey (Renoir); Geoffrey Sumner (Capt. Curry) and Joss Ambler.

"Premiere" is a remarkably close remake of an Austrian film with Sarah Lander, bearing the same title. Presumably the musical/choreic scenes are lifted from the original, with the star removed, as they are used mainly as atmospheric background and rarely as musical entities on their own. Certainly they are too expensive to have been shot specially for this film and then so minimised. One of the last films directed by Walter Summers ("The Lost Patrol", "Dark Eyes of London"), it is not only a remake, but also derivative of the much earlier American "Murder at the Vanities" in which a murder is committed and solved during a single performance at a variety show. Quite elaborate for a co-feature or C.P., it was assured of a release at home since Associated British-Pathe had a large interest in the big ABC circuit, but didn't have enough going for it in terms of content or names for it to make much of an impression abroad. It did get a tentative US release, but disappeared quickly. Our print is of this American version, which is about five minutes shorter than the original. It's a handsome-looking and enjoyable film, although the mystery element is not plumbed to any great depth and it is mainly a matter of the French inspector (that always reliable and interesting but decidedly non-French actor John Lodge) being on hand when the killer, for no very valid reason, goes to pieces and confesses. Since the killer is the British equivalent of Ralph Morgan, and had been unmasked on several other occasions as the unsuspected killer, there's not too much guess-work involved there either. (However, we're not giving the game away entirely — there are two British Ralph Morgans in the cast!) Also the film follows one of the basic rules of the good who-dunnit, best exemplified in "The Kennel Murder Case", in establishing the murderer as such a swine that everybody in the cast has a perfectly valid motive for polishing him off.

--- Ten Minute Intermission ---

BLOSSOM TIME (British International Pictures, 1934; released by Wardour) US release in 1937 by MCM under the title "April Romance". Directed by Paul Stein; produced by Walter C. Mycroft; Screenplay by John Drinkwater, Roger Burford, Paul Perez and G.H. Clutchan; Camera, Otto Kanturek, Brian Langley; approx. 75 mins.
With Richard Tauber (Fritz Schubert); Jane Baxter (Vicky Wimpassinger); Carl Esmond (Paul); Athene Seyler (Arch Duchess); Paul Groetz (Alois Wimpassinger); Charles Carson (Lafont); Maryerite Allan (Barones); Edward Chapman (Mayerhofer); Lester Matthews (Schmidt); Gibb McLaughlin (Bauernfield); Frederick Lloyd (Captain); Hugh Dempster (Willli); Bertha Belmore (Madame); and Ivan Samson, Cecil Ramage, Spencer Trevor.

"Blossom Time" was one of the biggest of the British Richard Tauber musicals, as witness its (somewhat delayed) U.S. release by MCM. As with the co-feature, it was slightly trimmed over here to speed it up for US audiences. It has been many years since I saw the full British original, but I can't recall any specific scenes that are missing. The print, though quite adequate, has also seen better days and may be missing the odd bit of footage just through wear and tear over the years. But it's a delightful and charming, if deliberately schmaltzy Viennese musical. Schubert apparently was an even better singer than he was a composer, and the Tauber voice is at its best. The plot is the same old one that you'll recognise immediately — without the singing it could have been played by Edward Arnold — but it still suffices. The cast is full of old British and Continental friends; Jane Baxter is charming as the heroine, and Carl Esmond (were the romantic leads in these films ever called anything but Paul?) gives his usual efficient imitation of Anton Walbrook. Paul Stein, whose Hollywood career was very brief, was always an uninspired director, but luckily was usually handed material like this where, as long as the art direction was picturesque and the music virtually non-stop, inspiration hardly matters. It's an unusually elaborate film, especially for a struggling-to-survive independent company like B.I.P. The costs of this one, and the next year's "Abdul the Damned", probably had a great deal to do with the company's demise. Logic is hardly important when Tauber sings, but the sequence in which Esmond learns to waltz stretches time and coincidence to an absurd extent. And the sequence where Schubert's grand piano is hauled up from the street via a tiny stairway takes place, alas, entirely off-screen. Had that been presented in on-screen realism, we might have had a sequence to rival Laurel and Hardy's "The Music Box".

Program ends 10.15 approx. Discussion follows.

William R. Everson
A reminder — no screening next weekend.