LIMELIGHT (Herbert Wilcox Productions for General Film Distributors release, 1935)
Directed by Herbert Wilcox; Screenplay by Laura Whatter; Camera, Freddy Young; and Henry Harris; Dance Director, Ralph Reader; US release in 1937 under the title "Back Stage"; original length, 80 mins; exec. mins of tonight's print, 62 mins.
With: Anna Neagle (Marjorie Kaye); Arthur Tracy (Bob Grant); Jane Winton (Kay Madison); Ellis Jeffries (Lady Madeleine); Muriel George (Mrs Kaye); Anthony Holles (impresario); Jack Buchanan (himself); Alexander Field (Al Sparkes); William Freshman (Joe); Helen Pickard (Pixie); Queens Leonard (Queens); Ralph Reader (Ralph); Ronald Shiner (stage manager); Tilly Losch (Dancer); and V. MacQueen Pope, Frank Boor, Andrea Malandrinos, Geraldino and his Orchestra, The Hippodrome Girls, Bobbie and Virginie.

As we've stressed since we first acquired and announced the film, this is, regrettably, a cut print - but having waited many years without finding a full print in 16mm, we decided to go with this version. Although released in the US under a different title, it apparently had been NT first-run, and thus no reviews. However, since our print bears the original title, my guess is that it is a Canadian television print which was physically cut (rather than officially edited) to fit a shorter time slot. Since the whole film has little real plot and is in any case disjointed, it's difficult to separate out what was剪裁的, and what was not.

There must have been substantial early footage establishing the friendship of Neagle and Tracy, and now the film jumps right into its plot. It's a surprisingly elaborate film, and certainly Wilcox didn't stint in giving Tracy a handsome showcase for his first British film - he even made him very much the star, with far more to do than Anna Neagle. (Although those big boots on the showgirls' costumes steal the film away from them all.)

Arthur Tracy's movie career in the US was limited to "The Big Broadcast of 1932" and some early Paramount shorts, but he was extremely popular with British audiences (perhaps because street singers and buskers were very much a part of the British scene), and his films played top of the bill at the best circuit houses.

However, there was little continuity to his career: "Limelight", his first, was made for Herbert Wilcox; his second, "The Street Singer" (with Margaret Lockwood) for Associated British; and the third and fourth "Follow Your Star" and "Command Performance" were made independently but for G.P.D. release. The first two were far by the best; then too much overlapping and repetitiveness in something that probably wouldn't have happened if he had been under contract to one company and his career carefully planned. A similar pattern of sentiment plus music was applied to the British films of Richard Tauber, and the British-Italian co-productions with Gigli. Nevertheless, with one film in '36 ("Limelight") was a '35 production, but released early in '36, two in '37 and one in '38, Tracy made an impressive showing at the British boxoffice, and only film #3 - "Command Performance" - went overboard with itsolson-like sentiment and a ludicrous climax.

All in all, Mr. Tracy should be with us this evening to introduce the film, and we're delighted to welcome him. Out print or not, his admirers should be quite happy since he sings virtually non-stop, and the climax is not only more of the same, but an interesting reversal of cliches. (But I wish there were more of those truly astounding chorine outfits!)

--- TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION ---

SAILING ALONG (Gaumont British-GFD, 1938) Directed by Sonnie Hale; Screenplay by Lesser Samuels and Hale from a story by Selwyn Jepson; Music & lyrics by Arthur Johnston, Maurice Chevalier; Camera, Glen MacWilliams; 90 mins. NY premiere, Criterion Theatre.

With: Jessie Matthews (Kay Karns); Roland Young (Anthony Gulliver); Barry Mackay (Steve); Jack Whiting (Dick Randall); Allyn Purvis (Stevens); Noel Madison (Mimsy); Athersey Vyles (Victoria Gulliver); Frank Pettigrew (Skippy Barnes); Margaret Wyner (Stephanie); Peggy Novak (Jill); William Dewhurst (Winton); Patrick Barr (reporter); and Bruce Winston, Edward Cooper, Leslie Laurie, Charles Paton, D.H. Plumb, Arthur Denton, Cot D'Orcia, Tronme Dunc, Frank Fox, Bombardier Billy Wells, Clement Dutt, Eve Chipman, Alexander Ramsay, Edna Searle, Edna Marsden, Nelly Gaskell.

The last of the Jessie Matthews musicals is often unfairly maligned because it isn't up to the standards of her best, earlier work for Victor Saville, but it was a graceful, large-scale, satisfying farewell to her career as Britain's only real musical Superstar. And it was easily her best film under director Sonnie Hale, a song and dance man who was also her husband. Like Sid Field (from the stage) and Tommy Handley (from radio), Hale was never able to translate his stage talent into a movie persona; at best he seemed to come across as a British Jack Haley, though he did well in purely comic roles. As a director he certainly didn't have Saville's panache, but he was also a novice as a director, working only with Matthews - and the three that he did with her picked up in pace and style with each successive film. As with most Matthews musicals, a good deal of American knowhow helped, including that of cameraman Noel Madison and players Young, Noel Madison and the very likeable Jack Whiting, whose Hollywood career was based on three very early talkies and the forgettable "Give Me a Sailer" in 1929. There are some excellent songs and dance routines, and the only liability - as always - is Gaumont-British's over-worked and under-talented Barry Mackay. But he does little real damage, and there's compensation in having Alastair Sim in a key supporting role.

Program finishes approx. 10:25. Discussion session follows.

Please note: Next week a Jazz Concert precedes the screening. I will be in London - the one session I'll miss this semester - so there'll be no introduction, and the program will start as close as 7:20 as possible, assuming the concert doesn't run over.