A WOMAN'S VENGEANCE (Universal, 1947) Produced and directed by Zoltan Korda; Screenplay by Aldous Huxley from his short story "The Gaconda Smile"; Camera, Russell Metty; Musical Score, Miklos Rozsa; 95 mins. NT premiere, Winter Garden Theatre.

With: Charles Boyer (Romantic); Ann Blyth (Doris); Jessica Tandy (Janet Spence); Sir Cedric Hardwicke (Dr. Ibbard); Mildred Natwick (Martha Braddock); Cecil Hughes (General Spence); Rachel Kempson (Emily Murrier); Valerie Carden (Clar); Carl Harbord (Coroner); John Williams (Prosecuting Counsel); Leland Hodgson (Warden); Ola Lorraine (Nalsey); Harry Cording (McNabb); Al Ferguson (2nd Warden).

Of all the romantic vehicles in which Charles Boyer starred, perhaps only "Algiers", "History Is Made at Night", "Love Affair" and "Hold Back the Dawn" could be considered truly outstanding - but it was in others, by virtue of Boyer's performance and/or the quality of the films themselves, there are the several that have broken up, and tonight's two films are very much in the running. "A Woman's Vengeance" is one of a quite unofficial group of Universal films that seemed to be trying hard, in the post-war years, to retain the big wartime audience, now threatening to evaporate, via distinctly mature subject matter, making minimal compromises to the Production Code or the boxoffice. ("All My Sons", "Another Part of the Forest" and "An Act of Murder" were other Universal films to fall into this category). While its content may not seem quite so striking today, in 1947 it was an unusually literate film, and quite daring in allowing a largely sympathetic hero to have a mistress, albeit one that he soon marries. Huxley's adaptation of his own short story keeps all of his sour outlook on women in general, but it is a little too obvious, paced as though for a play, slow getting under way and with most of the drama reserved for a talkative last act. Extremely well acted (though the casting itself does give away some of the plot in advance) and well directed by Zoltan Korda - the last of approximately half a dozen Hollywood films before rejoining brother Alex in England - its film noir quality is also underlined by a typically neurotic Miklos Rozsa score.

-- Ten Minute Interval --

BACK STREET (Universal, 1941) Directed by Robert Stevenson; Produced by Bruce Manning; Screenplay by Bruce Manning and Felix Jackson from the novel by Fannie Hurst; Camera, William Daniels; Music, Frank Skinner; 89 mins. NT premiere, Rivoli Theatre.

With: Charles Boyer (Walter Saxel); Margaret Sullivan (Ray Smith); Richard Carlson (Art Stanton); Frank McHugh (Ed Porter); Frank Jenks (Harry); Tim Holt (Richard Saxel); Peggy Stewart (Katherine); Samuel S. Hinds (Darren); Esther Dale (Mrs Smith); Nell O'Day (Elizabeth Saxel); Kitty O'Neill (Mrs Dilling); Nella Walker (Corrine Saxel); Cecil Cunningham (Mrs Miller); Marjorie Gateson (Vet Adams); Dale Winter (Miss Evans)

Although America was not yet in World War 2, and the wartime-related emotionalism of such films as "Remember The Day" was still almost a year away, still, "Prelar Pearl "41 was a time of unease and anxiety, and audiences were responding to nostalgic romances of another, earlier, simpler day. "Back Street" was followed into release by "Strawberry Blonde", another remake, and then "Cheers for Miss Bishop" and "One Foot in Heaven". Remakes of the kind of fare usually tend to be bigger than their originals and correspondingly less effective, but on this occasion both "Back Street" and "Strawberry Blonde" were superior to both the originals and to third, later versions. The big liability of the original "Back Street" was John Boles, who was not only callow and unsympathetic, but made virtually a career of such roles, playing basically the same character in "Only Yesterday" (with Margaret Sullivan) and "The Life of Vergie Winters". While Boyer's character has the same flaws, his performance is much superior; if his Saxel is still selfish, he is also much more tortured. Sullivan is perhaps more type-cast than Irene Dunne in the original, but she still plays well. What makes this "Back Street" work so well however is its basic taste in direction (it was the second Hollywood movie of Robert Stevenson, for whom good taste as well as craftsmanship were always common denominators) as well as its extremely lush production values. It's a far slicker production than the original, and its very gloss makes some of the earlier story premises, which are patently absurd, seem much easier to take since it is now all so much larger than life. (Though not nearly as gargantuan larger than life as the 1961 color version with Susan Hayward!)

The early 40's represented a kind of Hollywood production peak, not so much in size, as in overall expertise. It's a pleasure to watch the camerawork, art direction and flawless type-casting, all have picked up, and in an unusually beautiful print. William Daniels, an almost exclusively MGM character, who had photographed Margaret Sullivan in "The Shop Around the Corner" and "The Mortal Storm" (and who would photograph her again in the upcoming "So Ends Our Night") was clearly borrowed by Universal at her request (or more likely, insistence) and the results more than justify the choice. Surprisingly though, when Universal re-united her with Boyer later that year for the slight but pleasing romantic comedy "Appointment For Love", their own Joseph Valentine did the camerawork. As with last week's two films, tonight's fall into the loose and now discarded category of "miscellaneous" - as my wife points out, if the classification has gone, the category still lives on, with somewhat more blood and guts, in films like "Thelma and Louise" and "Fried Green Tomatoes" and "Frankie and Johnny" - although the difference speaks for itself.

-- William K. Swenson

Program Ends at 10:55. No discussion period.