ARCHIVE NIGHT ENTERPRISE BRITISH INDEPENDENTS OF THE THIRTIES

THE LOST CHORD (Julius Hagen-Twickenham Productions, 1933) Directed by Maurice Elvey Screenplay by H. Fowler Mear from an original story by Reuben Gilmer Camera: Sydney Blythes; 78 mins. With: John Stuart (David Graham); Elizabeth Allan (Joan Elten); Mary Glynn (Countess Madeleine); Leslie Perrins (Count Zara); Anne Grey (Pauline); Jack Hawkins (Dr. Jim Selby); Garry Marsh (Joseph Mendel); Betty Astell (Nadge); Frederick Rampling (Beppe); Barbara Everest (Mother Superior) and Elliot Makeham, Tudor Davis, Emily Maywiler.

Perhaps, for the protection of our audience, we should have a sub-division of "Archive Night" headed "Evenson's Youthful Follies", consisting of films that impressed me as a child and that I feel impelled to share with others. I first saw "The Lost Chord" when it was reissued in the mid-30's and I was eight. At the time, it seemed to have a larger-than-life emotional quality quite missing from current films, and it also suggested that this was what silent films were like. It was a revelation when it was released as a take of a 1919 silent film of the same name starring Malcolm Keen and directed by Wilfred Noy. Curiously, Noy made an independent American remake in 1924 with David Powell and Dagmar Godowsky, apparently no longer extant. All three versions follow the same plot line with remarkable fidelity.

The 1937 British remake was handled by a small company called The Dawn Trust, which dealt solely with films that had some, albeit often remote, religious undertone. Their exhibition outlets were understandably small, and once I'd seen it, it promptly disappeared. It took exactly 54 years to track down this print, in Hollywood of all places, where it seemed to be of no particular interest to anyone, maybe as part of a treasured package. The film itself had no U.S. release. Obviously, after such a long search, a captive audience has no chance of avoiding it! Equally obviously, and this was expected, it isn't the great film that it seemed to be an eight-year-old, bored with such 1937 releases as "Make a Wish", "Fight For Your Lady" and "The Man Who Found Himself". But it does have a certain power and poignancy, and despite its almost uninhibited mixture of sentiment and melodrama, it's echoes of silent film work rather well. It's certainly no less of a film than "The Lost Chord". It's good to think that the same name starring Malcolm Keen and directed by Wilfred Noy would later become. Perhaps it is best to say very little about it, and hope that its surprise quality will work some of the magic on a 1992 audience that it did on me in 1937. Incidentally, the film was presumably made as a follow-up to 1932's "In a Monastery Garden" (same producer, director, writer and star). Despite being made a year earlier, "In a Monastery Garden" now seems the sequel, since its very first scene picks up with John Stuart and set in the last scene of the same name starring Malcolm Keen and directed by Wilfred Noy. It's good to think that the same name starring Malcolm Keen would later become. Perhaps it is best to say very little about it, and hope that its surprise quality will work some of the magic on a 1992 audience that it did on me in 1937. Incidentally, the film was presumably made as a follow-up to 1932's "In a Monastery Garden" (same producer, director, writer and star). Despite being made a year earlier, "In a Monastery Garden" now seems the sequel, since its very first scene picks up with John Stuart and set in the last scene of the same name starring Malcolm Keen.

THE END OF THE WORLD (Rock Studios, 1937) Written and directed by Michael Powell Camera: Monty Berman and Skeets Kelly; 75 mins. ** With: Miall McGinnis (Andrew Gray); Belle Chrystall (Ruth); John Laurie (Peter Manson); Finlay Currie (James Gray); Eric Berry (Bobby Manson); Kitty Kirwan (Jean Manson); Grant Sutherland (The Catechist); Michael Powell and Frank Curling Peace (visitors); and Hamish Sutherland, Campbell Robson, George Sumners. ** To these credits should be added the names of Ernest Palmer (camera), Derek Twiss (editor), and a future director) and Vernon Sewell (production assistant).

For a full account of the filming of this fascinating work, we refer you to Michael Powell's autobiography, "Michael Powell: A Life in Movies", which is included in an "Archive Night" showing only because of the rather shabby condition of the very old print. It appears to be of the original American release version, with a censor's cut of astounding idiocy in the love scene between Miall McGinnis and Belle Chrystall, surely a very tasteful one anyway, has been totally removed. This makes rather mysterious the subsequent appearance of their child subject to any such censorial editing! The film that established Powell as a major new British director, and led to his signing with Korda for "The Spy in Black" and uniting with his long-time collaborator Emeric Pressburger, it immediately followed the last of Powell's smaller films, an exhilarating mystery thriller called "Behind the Mask" starring Hugh Williams and Maurice Schwartz. We have also just unearthed a print of that film which we'll be showing in the Fall; a pity that the two rediscoveries didn't come closer together so that they could be presented on the same program. If this "The End of the World" succeeds in the U.S., where it rated a National Board of Review award, it presumably must have impressed Sam Goldwyn or his writers, since its opening was pillaged, and in an identical context, for his "The Hurricane".

A film much in the tradition of "Man of Aran" and "The Turn of the Tide" - there was a small but solid sub-genre of British films about the lives of islanders and fishermen, mostly semi-documentary and climaxing perhaps in the 40's with "Johnny Frenchman" and "The Edge of the World" is in almost every way superior to Flaherty's "Man of Aran". Not only was that film blatantly dishonest, but it also failed to explain or make logical the islanders' obstinate clinging to a way of life. Powell's film - based on the evocation of the island
of St. Kilda (in the Hebrides) though shot on the island of Foula (in the Shetlands) — not only dealt with the tragedy of a way of life that had to change, but that change gave him a dramatic climax for his film, something that Flaherty's lacked. Ironically, in later years, off-shore oil drilling restored prosperity to St. Kilda. In 1978, Powell went back to the island — along with John Laurie (near the end of his life) and other cast and crew members — to shoot additional material, interview old inhabitants, and record those changes. The results, incorporated into a new version entitled "Return to the Edge of the World", were shown at the Museum of Modern Art in a Powell/Pressburger cycle some years back, but have not otherwise gone into general release as yet.

Many of Powell's players and crew-members, especially those associated with location work on such later films as "The Spy in Black", "49th Parallel" and "I Know Where I'm Going", worked with him on this film. Powell, and his wife-to-be Frankie, appear as the visiting yachting couple in the opening sequence. Apart from the excellent account of the film in his autobiography, Powell also (in 1938) wrote a book "200,000 Feet on Foula" dealing with the film in great detail, and this has just been reissued with new material as "Edge of the World - the making of a film", published by Faber and Faber, and highly recommended.

Program ends approx. 10.25.

Discussion session follows.

— William K. Everson —