MURDER IN BRITISH SUSPENSE WITH STR RALPH AND STR JOHN

HOME AT SEVEN (U.S. title: "Murder on Monday") (Korda-British Lion, 1952)
Directed by Ralph Richardson; Produced by Maurice Cowan; Associate Producer, Hugh Perceval; Screenplay by Anatole de Grunwald from the play by R.C. Sherriff; Camera, Jack Hildyard, Edward Scaife; Music, Malcolm Arnold; U.S. release by Mayer-Kingsley; 85 mins.

With: Ralph Richardson (David Preston); Margaret Leighton (Janet Preston); Jack Hawkins (Dr. Sparkling); Campbell Singer (Inspector Hemmngay); Frederick Piper (Mr. Fatherbridge); Diana Beaumont (Ellen); Mariel Forbes (Peggy Deben); Michael Shenefield (Major Watson); Margaret Withers (Mrs Watson)

Ralph Richardson was one of Britain's finest actors, yet despite an astonishing variety of roles and basically outstanding performances, never seemed entirely at ease on screen. Perhaps because he was such a gentlemanly man, he always seemed to be partially off in a world of his own, never really a part of the movie. Sometimes, as in "O Planes", this added insubstantiality to the comic properties of the role. The problem is somewhat emphasized in "Home at Seven", since he also directed (for the only time), and directs much as he acts, concerned almost solely with his own role. This is not a matter of age, and he certainly does not upstage the other excellent players, but it does tend to throw the film even more out of orbit. Richardson was a master at roles involving self-sacrifice, integrity and anything larger than life. But he was never terribly convincing as the "average" man caught up in a near-ideal world as here (where he plays an ordinary bank clerk) or as in the genuine man of the Theatre where he played the barber caught up in blackmail and murder. Somehow, since most problems can be defeated by integrity or a sense of humor, one is never quite convinced that Richardson would be thrown by such situations - any more than one had any real fears for Lillian Gish's survival in "Way Down East". But these are picayune complaints in a film like this, so full of good dialogues (by one of Britain's top playwrights) and good performances, even if denied its full suspense potential. Quite incidentally, and the film gives no signs of it, "Home at Seven" (given a more commercial and less essentially British title for its U.S. release) was made on a very small budget and in only two weeks, indicating that Richardson was an efficient and well-prepared director if not an inspired one.

--- 10 MINUTE INTERMISSION ---

TOWN ON TRIAL (Marksman Productions for Columbia release, 1956) Directed by John Guillerman; Produced by Maxwell Setten; Screenplay by Robert Westerby and Ken Hughes; Camera, Basil Emmett; Music, Tristram Carey; 90 mins.

With: Jean Mills (Supt. Mike Halloran); Charles Cawburn (Dr. John Fenner); Barbara Bates (Elizabeth Fenner); Derek Farr (Mark Roper); Elizabeth seal (Peggy Dixon); Alec McGowan (Peter Crewley); Fay Compton (Mrs Crewley); Margaret Scott (Melan Dixon); Geoffrey Keen (Mr. Dixon); Maridith Edwards (Sgt. Regers); Harry Leake (Sgt. Beale); Raymond Huntley (Dr. Reese); Maureen Connell (Mary Roper); Madga Miller (Molly Stevens); John Warwick (policeman); and Danny Nichols, David Qutak.

Possibly influenced - somewhat belatedly - by Clouet's thriller "Le Cerbeau", "Town on Trial" is a solid, yet startlingly original, but always engrossing murder mystery. Perhaps it works better as a hard-bitten police film than as a who-dunn-it? since the list of suspects (at least those worthy of our respectful attention) is quite small, and the list of obvious red herrings rather large, that the identity of the sex-slayer is not too hard to guess. If it doesn't keep one guessing at least it keeps one hopping, and moves well to an exciting and suspenseful climax. The cast is full of interesting old favorites and one or two (them) newcomers like Alec McGowan, while for John Mills it was part of an interesting transitional phase. 1952's "The Long Memory" had introduced us to a new, tougher Mills as a bitter noir hero; more traditional roles and some comedies followed, most of them casting Mills in parts that were really too young for him; "Town on Trial" returned him, though not permanently, to a more hard-bitten type. For director John Guillerman, who had started out on interesting British Bs and programmers, it was his best and most ambitious film to date, to be followed by a number of other British action-oriented films, a brace of Tarzan, and some Hollywood work highlighted by "The Towering Inferno".

--- William K. Everson

Program ends approx. 10.40.
(No inter or discussion period tonight, since I'm presenting the equivalent of our New School programs in Helsinki and Stockholm this week). Because of Easter one week and an alternate use of the auditorium on another, our next program is on April 8th - FORBIDDEN and UNION STATION.

Tonight's was the last of the programs incorrectly dated in the N.S. Bulletin; for this point on, the Bulletin - and the schedule we issued last December - are in sync again and corrected.
A reminder that the snowed-out Film Noir program is being repeated on Tuesday May 17.