FORBIDDEN (Universal 1953, rcl: 1954) Produced by Ted Richmond; Screenplay by William Sackheim and Gill Doud; Camera, William Daniels; Music, Frank Skinner; 85 mins.

NY premiere: Rko Palace Theatre, January '54.

With: Tony Curtis (Edith Darrow); Joanne Dru (Christine Lawrence); Lyle Bettger (Justin Keit); Marvin Miller (Cliff Chalmers); Victor Sen Yung (Allen); Alan Dexter (Barney); Barry Lauter (Investigator); David Sharpe (Leon); Reginald Sheffield (Dancing partner)

Universal were making some highly enjoyable action-programmers in the early 50's, basically little more than "B"s upgraded to "A" status by length, production polish and a star or two. It was a good way of keeping their contract stars like Tony Curtis and Jeff Chandler busy, of borrowing slightly-slippered stars from other studios (such as Glenn Ford) and by adding Technicolor in films like "Yankee Fasha" and "Man from the Alamo", battling the still black-and-white Television competition. "Forbidden" is one of the most typical and most enjoyable of this breed, a sort of last stand of the old studio system, but it's especially interesting today in that it is virtually a steal from the more famous "Gilda" (just as Columbia's "The Walls Came Tumbling Down" was a steal from "The Maltese Falcon") and none of the critics of the time seemed to notice, perhaps because the locale of Marseo provided some camouflage, and because there was a medium ol different motivation in the framing story. But basically Curtis-Dru-Bettger repeat, with remarkably few variations, the old Ford-Hayworth-Macready triangle; even the initial meeting of the two men - hero rescuing villain from a back street assault - is the same, as is the smouldering pre-film relationship of hero and heroine. Victor Sen Yung performs much the same function as Steve Geray in the original. It must have been especially obvious to director Mate since he photographed "Gilda", and here gets exactly the same kind of lush cinematography from Garbo/Crawford cameraman Daniels. Apart from that largely academic fascination, it's a fast-moving and entertaining melodrama, though a patently artificial one, both in terms of writing (which is careful to avoid Production Code pitfalls) and Production, which mixes cut-in footage of Marseo with back projection and obvious studio sets. However, it has one deathless moment near the beginning when, after the street attack, Lyle Bettger grovels at his body-guard where were you and Leon all this time?" Body guard #2, Leon, is played by David Sharpe - who was very busy "all that time" doubling for Tony Curtis and his assailants in the street brawl.

--- TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION ---

UNION STATION (Paramount, 1950) Produced by Jules Schermer; Screenplay by Sydney Boehm from a story by Thomas Walsh; Camera, Dandal L. Fapp; Music, Irwin Talbot; 80 mins.

NY premiere, October 1950, Paramount Theatre.

With: William Holden (Lt. William Calhoun); Nancy Olsen (Joyce Willecombe); Barry Fitzgerald (Insp. Donnelly); Lyle Bettger (Joe Rescamb); Jan Sterling (Marge Wrighter); Allene Roberts (Lorna Murcell); Herbert Hayes (Harry Murcell); Don Dunning (Gus); Fred Graft (Vince); James Seay (Detective Shattuck); Ralph Sanford (Ray); Harry Hayden (Conductor Seally); Ralph Byrd (Priest); Edith Evanson (Mrs Willecombe); Trevor Bardette (Policeman); Clifton Young (Ambulance driver); Howard Higley (conductor); Douglas Spencer (Stationmaster); Dick Elliott (employee); Byron Foulger (Horace); Edgar Dearing, Thomas Jackson, Al Ferguson (detectives); Bob Ryan (cowboy); and Laura Elliott, Barbara Knudson, June Earle, Bob Hoffman, John Crawford.

While Mate never quite duplicated the success of his "D.O.A.", he nevertheless continued to direct some excellent thrillers, and "Union Station" (it's the Chicago station, not Los Angeles) is a first-rate welding of the documentarian technique of Dassin's "The Naked City" (Barry Fitzgerald is a link with both films) with the characters and mood of film noir. By the 50's, this was becoming an increasing pattern in Noir, though many traditional essays still lay ahead. One of the more realistic noir qualities is the acceptance of police brutality and/or trickery as a justifiable means to an end. Lyle Bettger, so smooth in "Forbidden", is even more despicable here, while apart from being a good thriller, "Union Station" helped to solidify the reputation of the Holden-Olsen team, who had been introduced in "Sunset Boulevard", and would appear again in "Force of Arms" and "Submarine Command". Admittedly, it is not too difficult to extract suspense out of the situation of a blind girl lost in an electrified train tunnel, but even so Mate does well in getting the best out of both the documentarian and the thriller aspects of his material. "Union Station" isn't exactly an inaccessible film; the pity is that once this kind of film gets a TV exposure and/or by release to video cassette (though apparently not a very successful one) it just never shows up on a big screen again. Hence its revival today as a joint Mate/Bettger tribute.

By the way, as a post-script to the notes on "Forbidden", one should mention the stirring, sweeping use of "You Belong to Me" as a romantic musical theme - possibly wasted on Curtis and Dru when it is more appropriate to super-stars of the 30's, but it does give the film a decided added elegance.

----- William K. Everson -----