

Two Overlooked British Films

THE STRANGER'S HAND (British Lion, 1954) Directed by Mario Soldati; a John Stafford Production produced by John Stafford, Peter Moore and Graham Greene; screenplay by Guy Elmes and Georgino Bassani from a story by Graham Greene; Camera, Enzo Serafin; Music, Nino Rota; 85 mins.
 With Trevor Howard (Major Court); Alida Valli (Roberta); Richard Basehart (Joe); Eduardo Cianelli (Dr. Vivaldi); Richard O'Sullivan (Roger Court); Stephen Murray (British Consul); Giorgio Constantini (Pescovitch)

Technically I suppose "The Stranger's Hand" must be considered a failure, or at least a misfire. The idea was clearly to take two of the stars of "The Third Man", reunite them with its author, substitute Venice for Vienna, and come up with a similar film. To consolidate its sure-fire quality, there is also some duplication of the theme of "The Fallen Idol", another Greene/Carol Reed collaboration, that of a small child caught up in a bewildering adult world. From a commercial and melodramatic viewpoint, the ploys (if indeed they were that) don't work, and the film as it emerged must have been much less dynamic than planned. But what did emerge is a pleasingly offbeat little film, more touching than thrilling, disturbing and satisfying at the same time. It's certainly an interesting change of pace for its director, more noted for rather wild and woolly thrillers and extravagant Italian sex farces. One key reason for its misfire qualities may be the inadequacies of the child player, Richard O'Sullivan. Admittedly, he is meant to be an unhappy and insecure child - but even before the plot proper gets under way, he comes over as such an unappealing youngster that one just doesn't care too much about him, and the exasperation of other characters with him is quite understandable! More than compensating for him however is the beautifully modulated performance by Eduardo Cianelli as the nominal villain. It's as though Cianelli, the master spy of "Foreign Correspondent", is here living out his days and dwindling usefulness in work that has become routine, shoddy, and no longer even has the saving grace of patriotism. It's a superb performance, and gives the film unexpected depth and poignancy. For the rest, the Venice backgrounds are a constant fascination, and the rest of the small cast is uniformly good. The film was released here, but disappeared very quickly.

Ten Minute Intermission

80,000 SUSPECTS (Rank Organisation, 1963) Written, produced and directed by Val Guest; Assoc. Producer, Frank Sherwin Green; based on the novel "The Pillars of Midnight" by Elleston Trevor; Camera, Arthur Grant; Music composed and conducted by Stanley Black; 110 mins approx.

With Claire Bloom (Julie Monks); Richard Johnson (Steven Monks); Yolande Donlan (Ruth Preston); Cyril Cusack (Father Maquire); Michael Goodliffe (Clifford Preston); Mervyn Johns (Buckridge); Kay Walsh (Matron); Norman Bird (Mr. Davis); Basil Dignam (MO); Andrew Crawford (Dr. Ruddling); Ray Barrett (Insp. Bennett); Norman Chappell (Welford); Arthur Christiansen (Mr. Gracey); Vanda Godsell (Mrs Davis); Ursula Howells (Joanna Druten)

"80,000 Suspects" was never released theatrically in this country, but saw some limited exposure as part of a big Rank tv package. In some ways less interesting (as a film) than its co-feature, it is a much more successful "audience" picture - basically a high-class soap opera, with the lives of hospital staff intertwined as they combine to fight off an attack of plague and track down the original carrier. It's somewhat like Kazan's "Panic in the Streets" in its race-against-time suspense values, but of course doesn't have the film noirish aspects of crime in the underbelly of a big city. And to its credit, while the individual characters are up to their necks in the usual marital problems, these elements take a very proper second place when the main theme gets under way. The relatively unfamiliar Bristol area locations add a touch of novelty and realism, and the cast is certainly a good one. Yolande Donlan, an interesting and peppy (in other films more than this) personality who never became quite the star she might been, was producer-director Guest's wife, and Arthur Christiansen, editor of the London Daily Express (who played himself in Guest's prior film "The Day the Earth Caught Fire") is brought back for another cameo role. Guest, who started out as an excellent scenarist on British comedies of the 30's, became a notable producer/director in the 40's and 50's, with "Expresso Bongo" and the first two Quatermass films among his credits. One of his long unseen productions (he didn't direct), the Bette Davis "Another Man's Poison" is about to be put into re-release here.

William K. Everson

Program Ends approx. 11.00

Obviously no discussion time tonight, but next week's program will be shorter so hold questions until then.

A reminder: next week's program will be preceded by a Jazz concert. They have been very good lately about vacating on time, but even so, admission to the theatre can't be before 7.15. Buying tickets early and then returning is recommended, to prevent a slow-moving line at the boxoffice.

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