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THE LION HAS WINGS
AN AIRMAN'S LETTER
THE VOLUNTEER

MICHAEL POWELL

and

POWELL & PRESSBURGER

November 20, 1980 - January 5, 1981

Thursday, December 18 (8:30)

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Three films: THE LION HAS WINGS; AN AIRMAN'S LETTER TO HIS MOTHER; THE VOLUNTEER

THE LION HAS WINGS. 1939. Great Britain. Michael Powell, Brian Desmond Hurst, Adrian Brunel. Produced by Alexander Korda for London Film Productions. Associate Producer: Ian Dalrymple. Screenplay: Adrian Brunel, E.V.H. Emmett, from a story by Ian Dalrymple. Photography: Harry Stradling. Additional Photography: Osmond Borrodaile. Art Director: Vincent Korda. Supervising Editor: William Hornbeck. Editors: Henry Cornelius, Charles Frend. Music: Richard Addinsell. Music Director: Muir Mathieson. Sound: A.W. Watkins. Technical Adviser: Squadron Leader H.M.S. Wright. (London Films). 75 minutes.

With: Merle Oberon (Mrs. Richardson), Ralph Richardson (W.C. Richardson), June Duprez (June), Robert Douglas (Briefing Officer), Anthony Bushell (Pilot), Derrick de Marney (Bill), Brian Worth (Bobby), Austin Trevor (Schulemburg), Ivan Brandt (Officer), G.H. Mulcaster (Controller), Herbert Lomas (Holveg), Milton Rosmer (Head of Observer Corps), Robert Rendel (Chief of Air Staff); E.V.H. Emmett (Narrator-English version), Lowell Thomas (Narrator-US version), Archibald Batty (Air Officer), Ronald Adam, John Longden, Ian Fleming, Miles Malleon, Bernard Miles, Charles Garson, John Penrose, Frank Tickle.

AN AIRMAN'S LETTER TO HIS MOTHER. 1941. Great Britain. Produced, photographed, directed by Michael Powell. Additional Photography: Bernard Browne. Narrator: John Gielgud. (Imperial War Museum, London) 5 minutes.

THE VOLUNTEER. 1943. Great Britain. Produced, written, directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger for The Archers. Photography: Freddie Ford. Editor: John Seabourne. Art Director: Alfred Junge. Music: Allan Gray. (Anglo-American) 46 minutes.

With: Ralph Richardson (Himself), Pat McGrath (Fred Davey), Laurence Olivier, Michael Powell.

Britain's first major filmic propagandist effort, THE LION HAS WINGS was completed and rushed on to British screens within a couple of months of the start of the war! While it was granted a certain amount of cooperation by various branches of the Government and the Armed Forces, it was not an officially commissioned film, and was undoubtedly conceived by Alexander Korda as a patriotic gesture towards the war effort. Despite a notable three-pronged directorial thrust, it was inevitably a patchwork quilt of a film, as any film made so quickly and for very little money must have been. Most of the talent involved worked for very little money, or no money at all. Designed to inspire confidence in Britain's defences, and quell any thought of panic, it was a hodge-podge put together from newsreel footage, stock material from older films, and a modicum

of new scenes enacted by players of some note, but in roles that were little more than thumbnail sketches. Some of it was quite creative, notably a satiric sequence compiled from newsreel material and debunking Hitler and the Nazis, but the film was too short (a mere seventy minutes) to gain much momentum from its dramatic inserts. It was, however, very highly publicized, even the posters exuding an air of preparedness and invincibility. Actually Britain was so ill-prepared, and so out of date in its often bureaucratic methods of getting down to the war, that its survival in those early days of the conflict now seems somewhat of a miracle. Facts and reality soon caught up with the film; once its message could be seen to be out-of-date, it was very quickly withdrawn and forgotten.

Britain never had much luck in making unrestrained propaganda films; 1942's THE BIG BLOCKADE (made by Ealing and with a notable star cast) likewise smacked of smugness and even that far into the war treated the Nazis as buffoons. Far more effective propaganda (although the word is not entirely appropriate, since it automatically implies a distortion of truth) came from films like Launder and Gilliat's MILLIONS LIKE US where the propagandistic message, if there was one, was allowed to come naturally and logically from the underplayed dramatic narrative.

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Right through the war, but especially in the early years, the British film industry, under the overall supervision of the Ministry of Information, turned out an incredible number of informational and propagandist shorts dealing with everything from the approved methods of dousing fire bombs to how best to use the slightly increased cheese ration. Many of these were little more than short flashes running no more than a minute, and the need to get over a vital message in a short space of time, without big production costs, resulted in some ingenious and often very funny little films. Many of the films were carefully produced one-reelers warning of the dangers of careless talk, and doing so either in terms of hard-hitting melodrama (in which the leading and very likable protagonists were often killed off, while the spies escaped unscathed to continue their depredations) or via comedy. These were a solid block of films, usually (though not always) made at Ealing Studios and by top talent. Major directors and stars worked on them, and the major distributors took turns in releasing them. There is no doubt that they did a good propaganda and informational job, and, because of their skillful production, audiences didn't resent them. It was just as well, for there was no avoiding them. They were distributed free of charge to all theaters, and since wartime Britishers went to the movies a great deal, if only to enjoy a few hours of escapism, they often saw the same short time after time. Exhibitors welcomed them since they cost nothing and helped out with their British quota problems. Many of these films still exist (as do their American counterparts) and they are an invaluable record not only of ingenious film-making, but also of changing attitudes throughout the war.

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AN AIRMAN'S LETTER TO HIS MOTHER (based on a letter from a dead flier, published in "The Times", and something of a forerunner to Humphrey Jennings' later feature-length A DIARY FOR TIMOTHY), is typical of the subtle propaganda efforts to solace the bereaved, and to justify sacrifice and loss of life.

_ Wm. K. EVERTSON