"Two Programmers" is a category of film that has long disappeared. Its very name indicates its range and usefulness in literally finding its own level in any program. It was far above the level of "B" movies, yet, by the standards of the day, it was a "C" or "D" movie. It was at the same time short enough and long enough to serve as either the top or bottom half of a double bill, or even to play single bill, depending on its content and the area in which it was booked. Those that turned out unexpectedly well, or were blessed with a starring team that accidentally clicked, or a story that somehow caught the imagination, could really take off and make big money. They were also useful to distributors — a really solid programmer could often take the stress off the normally hard-pressed theater, and help to make a double bill that would still send customers home happy. Not least, programmers were a useful way of trying out new talent (writing, directing, acting) or of winding up the last commitments on old contracts. Some of the most enjoyable films — and some of the best — of the 30's were programmers, and tonight's two films are good examples. Economically, they could only be made when the mass-production studio system was going full blast; when that system changed and died, so did the production of programmers.


Despite being the decidedly noveletish story so prevalent in the 30's ("Klondike" remade by William K. Howard as "Klondike Fury" was a very similar movie), "The Outcast" has a great deal of power, and is one of the best of the many B plus and A minus movies that Robert Florey made for Paramount in the 30's. (We've shown quite a few of his very stylish movies in the past, and intend to show more in the future.) "The Outcast" is dramatically "big" in the good old dramatic sense of the word, but intelligently written and played never let it get out of hand. Too, its very stylised pictorialism is often deliberately non-realistic - the stark lighting and backdrops of the lynch mob sequence for example recall the climactic hue and cry of the original "Frankenstein" - so that one never feels obliged to accept the story on completely realistic terms. Dramatically, it has quite a few scenes that especially for the formula-ridden late 30's do run very contrary to expectations. And Rudolph Mate's camera work is―― full of lovely closeups of rugged rural faces, at times recalls his former association with Carl Dreyer. There are other echoes of the past too - the shot of the pawnbroker's shop is pure Fritz Lang. But the borrowing isn't lazy, and it's to a purpose. It's always good to see Warren William in a solid dramatic leading role, and the rest of the cast seems hand-picked — right down to Harry Woods and Dick Alexander, happily stirring up mob turmoil as though they'd casually wandered over from a Buck Jones unit and decided to make themselves useful in the most effective way!

Ten Minute Intermission

WIFE, HUSBAND AND FRIEND (20th Century Fox, 1939) Directed by Gregory Ratoff; Associate Producer and Screenplay, Nunnally Johnson, from an original story by James W. Cain; Camera, Ernest Haller; 80 minutes. With Loretta Young, Warner Baxter, Binne Barnes, Cesar Romero, George Barbier, Helen Westley, Eugene Pallette, J. Edgar Bromberg, Ruth Terry, Helen Erisson, Kay Griffin, Harry Rosenthal, Edward Cooper, Lawrence Grant, Howard Hickman, George Irving, Harry Hayden, Charles Williams, Rene Riano.

One can be forgiven for having "misplaced" this delightful comedy. Warner Baxter was then within a year of ending his long and extraordinarily prolific tenure at 20th Century Fox — and many of his films overlapped not only in content but in title. In memory it's as hard to separate "Doctors' Wives" from "Wife, Doctor and Nurse" as it is to separate that latter film from "Wife, Husband and Friend" — and many of the films of the 30's that were thoroughly made, were increasingly routine. Thus one has no reason to expect a great deal from a film like "Wife, Husband and Friend" — but the combination of a good original story, plus a tasteful writer-producer, the flawless type-casting of practically the entire Fox stock company, and the usual impeccably lush Fox photography and art direction, all team up to make it work like the superb piece of work that it is. As genial, likable characters into comic bitchness or villainy to make for tidier (and more cliched) construction, and even the choice of director seems just right. With a bigger and more important director, the production would have had to be bigger — and longer too. As it is, it never overplays its hand, content to remain brief and snappy, and to settle for the continuous chuckle rather than aiming for some kind of froth that would soon disappear from the screen in the coming war years. Incidentally, it was remade — well, but not as well, and slightly longer — in 1950 as "Love That Brute", with Paul Douglas, Jean Peters and Cesar Romero in his original role. (PROGRAM ENDS: 10:25)