Tonight's program is perhaps the most light-weight that we've ever used to launch a new series, but the form seems to gratitate together so well, and to sum up the purport of the series so nicely (a kind of "Pilgrim Orphans 2", in contemporary title parlance) that it seemed well worth taking the chance.

I don't think there's any specific difference in style or content in this series from prior ones; if there is, it's a subtle one. I'll be away in Europe for the latter part of the series, so the one common denominator this time is that the films had to be ones that could be rented, borrowed or acquired and kept for the duration of the series, and all programs could be made up before I left, and that came all programs of last-minute non-arrivals.

The European trip by the way will produce a number of quite rare items, and a whole cache of rare material has just presented itself over here too, so while Series #45 in the Spring has no special anniversary to celebrate, I think it will be one of our most exciting in some time.

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Comedy and Crime: Two attractively Minor Movies

BUY ME THAT TOWN (Paramount, 1941) Directed by Eugene For;Produced by Sol Siegel
Screenplay by Gordon Kahn from a story by Harry Gourfain, Murray Boltinoff and Martin Rackin; Camera, Theodor Sparkuhl; 70 min.
With: Lloyd Nolan, Constance Moore, Robert Cameron, Russell Hicks, Charles Lane, Edwin Maxwell, Pierre Watkin, Jack Oakin, Keith Richards, Trevor Bardette, John Harron, St John, Guy Usher, Phil Tad, George Chandler, Lillian Yarbo, Ann Doran, Jean Phillips, Eleanor Stewart.

Paramount "B"s of the thirties and early 40's were often quite superior to many of their "A" films. (The "A" product could boast Lubitsch, von Sternberg, Mamoulian and Sturges — but also far too many sheer mediocore "talents" like Edward Griffith) "Buy Me That Town" is an excellent example of their solidly entertaining "B" product, and it was considered good enough to open with a Broadway first-run at the Paramount. As with many "B"s, the story seems good enough in concept to have been expanded to an "A". The plot here, with its Damon Runyon characters combined with Frank Capra sentiment, would seem to justify much more elaborate treatment. It could have easily been turned into another "A" slight Case of Murder." On the other hand, it could have sunk beneath the weight of too much plot and too many stars. As it is, while it's never as witty as it could be, at the same time, given its limits, it's consistently amusing, moves quickly, and offers a most enjoyable array of the breed of character actor (Edward Brophy, Warren Fykes, Olin Howland etc.) that has now virtually disappeared from movies. It also offers the considerable pleasure of Constance Moore, a lovely and very graceful actress (and on occasion, a good singer too) who never attained the major stardom that she should have, but who certainly added class to "B" movies (including Westerns as a "Flash Gordon" serial) throughout an approximately ten year movie career. While the film doesn't date at all, it's a little looked into its period, and is an interesting off-shoot of that early wartime period in which gangsters (including Bogart and Iad) were being sentimentalized through patriotism.

--- Ten Minute Intermission ---

MR. DYNAMITE (Universal, 1935) Directed by Alan Crossland; Produced by E.M. Asher; Screenplay by Boris Malloy and Harry Clark from the story "On the Make" by Dashehill Hammett; Camera, George Robinson; Editors, D.W. Stroehman, Vernon Hall; With: Edmund Lowe, Estelle Winwood, Eric Blore, Jean Dixon, Victor Varconi, Robert Gleckler, Minor Watson, Matt McHugh, Greta Meyer, Jameson Thomas, Bradley Page, Pat Collins, James Curtis, Ferdinand Munier, Huntley Gordon, Joyce Compton, Dick Elliott, Olaf Hyten, Harry Tyler, Sam Flint, Al Hall, Billy West, Monty Montague, Harry Semels, Leo Phelps, Lee Shumway.

Just as last season's "Money and the Woman" was a totally forgotten and very worthwhile James Cain, so this vintage Dashiell Hammett story, though extremely well reviewed and received at the time, has escaped new attention in the recent flurry of interest in Hammett, presumably because it's never been as important to solid programmers (a step up the social ladder from the humble "B" represented by the co-feature), it was clearly an attempt (one of many) to cash in on the huge success of "The Thin Man" the year before. Apart from the indistinguishable (at least in terms of a movie translation) "Woman in the Dark" of 1934, and 1935's "The Glass Key" it was the only authentic Hammett material to reach the screen in that period. (His output was never prolific, but could have been tapped further than it was.) It is a feature of proven success whenever possible. Although Edmund Lowe's private detective is more of a maverick and less domesticated than Nick Charles, the pattern of cocktails and wisecracks is pretty much the same. The mystery is a good one and typically complicated, and it's all so slick and fast-paced that it's hard to realise that it's all told in 69 minutes. What a pity that the economics of today's movie business, and the shortened Hollywood screen, make it impossible for such solidly crafted and thoroughly entertaining "little" pictures as these two to be made today... even for television.

Program Ends approx. 10:10.

Discussion session follows.