THE NEW SCHOOL  

FILM SERIES 47: Program #2  
October 7, 1952


Apart from a title that seems to bear no resemblance to anything happening in the plot (one might stretch a point here and accept its referring to the scene where Lloyd Nolan is lured into hiding with a briefcase), "Ambush" is another extremely enjoyable example of the "B" movie quality and taut little crime type that Paramount did so well in the late 30's. Almost none of them were duds; if they were below standard, it was either because they were too ambitious in cramming in too much plot, or because accidentally a hack director like Nick Grinde happened to be assigned. But even then they were slick and glossy. At their best, as in those made by Robert Florey (see "Daughter of Shanghai" and "Good Time Charlie" in this series) they were superior products. "Ambush" is not top-grade, but of far more than average interest. Its director, Kurt Neumann, was a reliable journeyman director whose films from the early 30's to the very late 50's, followed the same pattern as last week's Ben Stoloff—slick, enjoyable, covering every genre, and turning out best in the area of the small, tight little thriller. The film is also notable for being the last film of Gladys Swarthout. After a quartet of operatic musical comedies, pictures that didn't duplicate the success of Columbia's Grace Moore series, Paramount wound up with this contract with this entirely non-singing role. Paid from feeling that she was slumming (or not shewing it if she did) Miss Swarthout gets a surprisingly good straight performance. For the rest, casting sometimes goes surprisingly against type—Ernest Truex as a cold-blooded con man is an especial opportunity for his customary wit, but he does work in some good comedy, and even contrives to plaster his name across a flashy-lit billboard—

Ten Minute Intermission—

AS THE EARTH TURNS (Warner Brothers 1935, rel 1934) Directed by Alfred E. Green; Screenplay by Ernest Pascal from the novel by Gladys H. Carroll; Camera, Byron Haskins; 74 mins.


It's a pity that, denied a reputation and prestige stars, such warm and human little films as this one continually remain buried. There are signs that it was perhaps not intended to be a "little" movie. The novel created a great deal of attention at the time, and presumably the film was initially intended as a major production. Certainly there are several roles that could, with a little polishing and expanding, been turned over to Paul Muni. But somewhere along the line faith in the film's commercial possibilities ran out. Like the not too dissimilar (and Louis Bromfield-derived) "A Modern Hero" released at the same time the picture was being spliced and edited out, or, as seems likely, having those chunks edited out of the shooting. Even given the episodic nature of the story, it is disjointed, and the comparatively short running time makes it difficult to establish who all the characters are, and their relationships to one another. However, the decision to economise seems to have been made to late to affect the film, which is much more than a fair film of such modest commercial aims could normally afford. Entirely studio-bound, the film nevertheless does create a creditable mood of farm life and changing seasons. There's an interesting off-beat set of credits, and the rather grimy page-turning device for continuity is fortunately discarded very early. A pleasant and creative touch is the re-orchestration at a slower tempo of "I'll String Along With You" (from the same year's musical "Million Sweethearts") as an at-first subdued love theme, although then it does tend to become a bit overdone. Welcome too, is the decided non-dynamic ending—incorporated into the idea of changing and repeating seasons. It certainly isn't the major work that it might have been. On the other hand, as a Paul Muni-Bette Davis vehicle it might have become far more formulaised, and robbed us of the excellent performances of David Landau and the much under-rated Jean Muir.

Program Ends approx. 10.06, followed by Discussion period.

For your future reference, Jazz Concerts precede our programs on Nov.4 and Dec.16. These break at about 7.25 so will inevitably cause minor delays. It's unfortunate for Rev. 4 since it's a longish program, but the Dec.16 show is quite short. Lectures, which are scheduled to break at 7.10 but sometimes don't, will precede our shows on Oct.14, Nov.11 and Dec.9th.

Word came in from the coast, as these notes were being typed, and not at all unexpectedly alas, that NGM does not have the 1929 LAST OF MRS CHEYNEY in any shape or form. At least the notice came in ample time. The substitute, as announced, will be A NOTORIOUS AFFAIR with Kay Francis, Billie Dove and Basil Rathbone.