FATHER TAKES A WIFE (RKO Radio, 1941) Directed by Jack Hively; produced by Lee Marcus; screenplay by Dorothy and Herbert Fields; Camera, Robert Florey; Editor, Jack Diamond; With: Adolphe Menjou (Frederic Osborne sr.); Gloria Swanson (Leslie Collier); John Howard (Frederic Osborne jr.); Desi Arnez (Carlos Berde); Helen Broderick (Aunt Julie); Florence Rice (Enid Osborne); Neil Hamilton (Vincent Stewart); Grady Sutton (Tallor); George Meador (Henderson); Mary Treen (Secretary); Ruth Dietrich (Miss Patterson); Grant Withers (Judge Waters); Pierre Watkin (Mr. Fowler); Frank Reicher (Captain); and Jack Briggs, Lee Bonnell, Lois Austin, Georgie Cooper, Edeythe Elliott, Ruth Dwyer, Wm. Gould.

Gloria Swanson's first bona-fide comeback film (although she always seemed to be making "comebacks" after an absence as little as a year!), "Father Takes A Wife" was her first film in seven years -- and it would be another nine before her next and the major comeback of "Sunset Boulevard". Despite giving Menjou the first "A" approval, the film was early designated as a Swanson vehicle, fashioned around her talents, temperament and reputation. The critics as a whole were quite kind to it, especially the N.Y. Times, but even so it never recouped its cost, and doubtless Swanson was made a scapegoat for that. RKO were making some very curious "little" pictures at that time -- Menjou's remake of the Barrymore "A Bill of Divorcement" is a further example. They were too far expensive to rank as "B" pictures -- yet there was something lacking that prevented them being "A"s. What was lacking was probably RKO's confidence in them, since they were invariably handled by second-rate directors. Jack Hively, for instance, who directed this film, remained resolutely in Rko's "B" unit, and his most interesting film was the minor but worthwhile Cornell Woolrich film noir that he made on loanout to Paramount, "Street of Chance". With a top director and a slightly more pungent script, "Father Takes A Wife" could well have been a first-rate screwball comedy. Even as it is, with the present dearth of sophisticated comedy, it seems a lot better now than it did in 1941. It's glossy, amiable, some scenes are successful, full of pathos and sentiment, but it doesn't seem at his most urbane best, possibly annoyed at having to play second fiddle to Swanson, despite his preferred billing. It's a film to relax with, enjoy, and probably forget almost immediately, but there's certainly nothing wrong with that.

-- Ten Minute Intermission --

CHANCE OF A LIFETIME (British Lion, 1950) A Filmark Picture produced and directed by Bernard Miles; screenplay by Walter Greenwood and Bernard Miles; associate director, Alan Osbiston; camera, Eric Cross; music by Noel Newton-Wood; U.S. release through Ballantine Pictures; 89 min. With: Basil Radford (Dickinson); Niall MacGinnis (Baxter); Bernard Miles (Stevens); Julien Mitchell (Harris); Kenneth More (Adam); Geoffrey Keen (Solger); Josephine Wilson (Miss Cooper); John Harvey (Bland); Russell Waters (Palmer); Patrick Troughton (Kettle); Hattie Jacques (Alice); Amy Veness (Lady Dysart); Compton Mackenzie (Sir Robert Dysart); Peter Jones (Xenobian); Bernard Rebel, Eric Pohlman (Xenobian's assistants); Stanley Van Beek (Calvert Norman Pierce (Franklyn); Gordon MacLeod (Garrett).

"Chance of a Lifetime" was something of a cause-culture in British film in 1950, in that it was an independent film that took its chances on distribution and exhibition -- and then found that nobody (meaning the exhibitors) wanted it. This gave the press a field-day and they probably exaggerated the film's virtues at the expense of the mainstay of the mainstream commercial fare from Britain and especially Hollywood. Finally, the government stepped in and forced theaters to give it long runs, an unprecedented and undemocratic move which did at least have the saving grace of rescuing a worthwhile film from oblivion. However, in one sense, the exhibitors had been right: it was not a film to attract the public, despite all the press attention. As a "message" film it has quite enough entertainment value to balance its seriousness rather nicely. Its main problem is that its plea for management-labor cooperation, while a worthy one, is presented in a kind of Never-Never-Land in which both capital and labor are reasonable, willing to learn and willing to change. Such ideal conditions may exist in Brum, but in the social and economic union, the existing gulf and inflexibility of the unions is a constant threat, as witness the recent prolongcd coal strike over there. It is thus too civilized a film to be truthful or effective, yet at the same time too much of a "message" film to qualify wholly as entertainment. Bernard Miles who wrote (along with "Love on the Dole" author Walter Greenwood) the story, was a frequent scenarist, occasional narrator, two time director (his other film being the charming "The Tawny Pippit") and most of all of course a fine character actor. His determination to be fair and non-abusive robs the film of some punch, but thankfully death of excellent Collett and Pohlman saves it from being a heavily underlined political tract film like "Salt of the Earth". Although given a brief theatrical release here, and a limited tv life, it generally fell into the obscurity over here that overtook it so quickly in England. -- -- -- Wm.K.Everson --

Program ends approx. 10.35, followed by brief discussion session.