FILM NOIR: "A" and "B"

DESPERATE (RKO Radio, 1947) Directed by Anthony Mann; produced by Michael Waxman; screenplay by Harry Essex and Martin Rackin, from a story by Howard Duff and Anthony Mann; Camera, George Diskant; Music, Paul Sawtell; 70 mins.

With: Steve Brodie (Steve Randall); Audrey Long (Anne Randall); Raymond Burr (Walt Radak); Douglas Fowley (Pete Lavitch); William Chalies (Reynolds); Jason Robards (Lieut. Ferrari); Freddie Steele (Shorty); Lee Frederick (Joe Daley); Paul Burns (Uncle Jan); Ika Gruning (Aunt Klara); Cy Kendall (Ace Morgan); Larry Nunn (Al Radak); Robert Bray (policeman); Carol Forman (Mrs Roberts); Ereville Alderson (Simon Pringle); Teddy Infurh (Richard); Ralf Haroldo (Doctor); Milt Kibbee (Mac); Dick Elliott (Sheriff Lewis); Michael Visaroff; Ernie Adams (villagers); Robert Clarke (bus driver); Donald Kerr (newsvendor); Snub Pollard (dancer); Gail Davis (neighbor)

Rko was unique in making some of the very best "A" Noirs ("Out of the Past", "Murder My Sweet") and also some of the very best and most imaginative "B" Noirs, virtually kicking off the whole cycle with "The Stranger on the Third Floor" in 1944, and continuing with such solid pictures as "Road Block" (shown a few seasons back). Their Bs had the same care and craftsmanship, often the same definitive noir cameraman in Nicholas Musuraca, and usually extended to about 70 minutes in running time, so there was at least a modicum of time for development of character and mood. Although relatively new director Anthony Mann had made thrillers with tangential noir elements before (including his first, "Doctor Broadway"), "Desperate" was his first real traditional noir, traditional in both theme and stylistics — and paved the way to a traditional, and for a while, "straight" for such major noirs as "Border Incident", "T Men" and "Raw Deal" and a long collaboration with cinematographer John Alton. "Desperate" has a typically nightmarish noir plot with a young couple on the run by both criminals and police, and visually has many echoes from German expressionist cinema of the 20's. Like its co-feature, it is from 1947 - the absolutely peak year (qualitatively as well as quantitatively) of Noir both in America and in Britain.

--- TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION ---

THE SUSPECTED (Warner Brothers, 1947) Directed by Michael Curtiz, produced by Charles Hoffman (Michael Curtiz Productions); screenplay by Ronald MacDougall and Berth Meredyth from the novel by Charlotte Armstrong; Camera, Woody Bradell; Asst. Director, Robert Vreeland; Music, Franz Waxman; Art Direction, Anton Gaudet; 103 mins.

With: Joan Caulfield (Matilda Frasier); Claude Rains (Alexander Grandison); Audrey Totter (Althea Keane); Constance Bennett (Jane Moynihan); Burt Hatfield (Oliver Keane); Michael North (Steven Francis Howard); Fred Clark (Richard Donovan); Harry Lewis (Max); Jack Lambert (Mr. Press); Ray Walker (Donovan's assistant); Nana Bryant (Mrs White); Walter Baldwin (Justice of the Peace); Barbara Woodell (Roslyn); Douglas Kennedy (Bill); Ross Ford (Irving).

"The Suspected" is a perfect example of a traditional mystery novel having noir elements grafted on to it purely by filmic stylistics, particularly the use of light and shadows and (non-photogram) symbolic compositions. Although this was always intended for Warner release, the film was made by Curtiz for his own company, and it's interesting that he went outside of the Warner contract pool for much of his talent. None of the stars were really big names by standards, and by avoiding traditional Warner players for the most part (name no Zachary Scott, no Victor Francen) it's less type-cast, and the red herring are more pleasingly confusing. (Cinematographer Bradell was Universal's noir specialist ("Phantom Lady", "The Killers" etc.) and clearly was just what Curtiz wanted and needed for this film. Waxman of course had scored other Warner noirs, but again his major noir music had been away from the studio. But there was no breaking up the Curtiz-Anton Grot team. Grot had been Curtiz's most oft-used art director since 1929's "Noah's Ark", and indeed was the man most responsible for the whole "look" of Warner films of the 30's and 40's and indeed in Gothic melodramas. The ensemble playing and the visual stylistics are indeed, the most fascinating aspect of "The Suspected". Despite its title, it isn't really a mystery since the audience is led into the secret of the killer's identity fairly early on. But the labyrinthine plot, the off-beat characters and the interesting juxtaposition of the elegant high-society life-style with a sleazy underworld keep it constantly alive and interesting.

--- William K. Everson

Program Ends approx. 10:43.

No discussion these evenings.

NOTE: Since the Summer Bulletin is already out (and available in the lobby) there is no need to print an abbreviated version of our Summer series in these notes next week. But that gives us a little extra space to talk about various problems, upcoming series, etc. If anyone who won't be here next week would like a copy, just send a postcard c/o the School and I will be glad to mail one.