LOVE FROM A STRANGER (United Artists-Trafalgar Films, 1937) Directed by Rowland V. Lee; Screenplay by Francis Marion from a story by Agatha Christie and a play by Frank Vosper; Assoc. Producer, Harry Edington; Camera, Phihp Tannura; Music, Benjamin Britton; 85 mins. app. With Ann Harding (Carol Howard); Basil Rathbone (Gerald Lovell); Binnie Hale (Kate Meadows); Bruce Seton (Ronald Bruce); Jean Cadell (Aunt Lou); Bryan Fowley (Dr. Gribble); Joan Hickson (Emmy); Donald Calthrop (Hobson).

Although technically a British film, "Love From a Stranger" has a Hollywood director, scenarist, cinematographer and stars. The first of four thrillers in which director Lee exploited Basil Rathbone's talent for nervous hysteria, it is the true ancestor of "Gaslight" and the definitive husband-trying-to-murder-rich-wife (or drive her mad, which is even more fun) school of melodrama. Written by both Agatha Christie and Frank Vosper, a noted actor-writer who played the lead on stage, and whose own disappearance from an ocean liner remains an unsolved mystery, it certainly betrays its stage origins, but the dialogue and performances are so good that it hardly matters, and its climax reaches a pitch of tension quite denied its heavy-handed Hollywood remake (which pushed it back into a gaslight period setting). Although the play is opened up a trifle, especially at the beginning, and there are other characters involved, it is essentially a well-sustained duel between Basil Rathbone and Ann Harding, each enjoying one of their best and most demanding roles.

-- Ten Minute Intermission --

Q PLANES (Columbia-Korda, 1938) Directed by Tim Whelan and (uncredited) Arthur Woods; produced by Irving Asher; Screenplay by Brock Williams, Jack Whittingham, Arthur Wimperis; Camera, Harry Stradling; Music, Muir Mathieson; Art Director, Vincent Korda; US title "Clouds Over Europe"; 82 mins. With Laurence Olivier (Tony McVane); Ralph Richardson (Charles Hammond); Valerie Hobson (Kay Hammond); George Curzon (Jenkins); George Merritt (Barrett); Gus McNaughton (Blenkinsop); David Tree (McKenzie); Sandra Storme (Daphne); Hay Petrie (Stage Doorman); Gordon McLeod (Baron); John Longden (Peters); Reginald Purcell (pilot); John Laurie (Editor); Pat Aherne (Officer) and Roy Emerson, David Farrar, Raymond Lovell, Herbert Lomas, Leslie Bradley.

Released almost simultaneously with Michael Powell's "The Spy in Black", the duo of Columbia releases stressed that the smaller-scale non-prestige Korda items were often superior to his bigger productions. A wonderfully light-hearted spy romp, with much of the spirit and even the gadgetry of the James Bond, it was designed to both cash in on the war scares and allay them with proof of Britain's defences and counter-intelligence. Its serial-like hokum is elevated to a higher status by its tongue-in-cheek approach and especially by the richly comic performance of Ralph Richardson. His impact was such that critics both here and in England urged that he repeat the role in a whole series. He wouldn't and didn't, but his performance is credited with inspiring the role of Steed in the later "Avengers" tv series. Olivier is pleasing, doing his straight hero role without any condescension showing, and Valerie Hobson, Britain's (largely unexploited) answer to Myrna Loy, is all cool elegance as always. The film was a big success in England, not least because a series of plane disasters made it oddly topical, but also because its modern swashbuckling answer to the threat of German aggression made it comforting (if unrealistic) propaganda. US reviews were frequently outstanding, though one NY critic made the odd remark that it proved at last (1) that the British did have a sense of humor. A handsome film, it was also an economical one. The front of Denham Studios doubles as an airport exterior at one point, though most of the airport scenes appear to have been shot at the old de Havilland aerodrome at Weybridge.

Program ends approx. 10:15 -- William K. Everson