A reminder that our next program, the silent program on December 6th, will take place at the Parsons Auditorium/5th Avenue Cinema, just around the corner on 5th Avenue between 12th and 13th Streets. Program will begin at 8:00 pm. It's a short program, so the delayed start should be no inconvenience.

THE NEW SCHOOL
FILM SERIES 69: Program 6
November 22, 1971
TWO FILMS NOIR: "A" and "B" 1947-48

Although both of tonight’s films are unquestionably Noir in style and characterization, one is a typically complicated murder story, the other a decidedly modern crime/gangster story, stressing the very wide boundaries of the Noir school. For direct comparison purposes, it is also convenient that both are from the same studio, Paramount, both are from the same period (1947 was the peak year of Noir, both in quality and quantity) and further, one is from Paramount’s "B" unit while the other is a major "A".

FEAR IN THE NIGHT (Paramount, 1947) A William Pine-William Thomas Production, directed by Maxwell Shane; Screenplay by Shane from the short story "Nightmare" by William Irish (Cornell Woolrich); Camera, Jack Greenhalgh; 70 mins.
With Paul Kelly (Cliff Herlihy); DeForest Kelley (Vince Grayson); Ann Doran (Lil Herlihy); Ray Scott (Betty Winters); Robert Emmet Keane (Lewis Belnap); Jeff York (Tommy); Charles Victor (Captain Wimmer); Janet Warren (Mrs Belnap); Michael Harvey (Bob Chune); John Harmon (Mr. Hlyou); Gladys Blake (Bank clerk); Julia Faye (Mrs Tracey-Lytton); and Dick Keane, Joey Ray, Chris Drake, Loyette Thompson, Jack Collins, Leander de Cordoba, Stuart Holmes.

In the thirties and early 40’s, Paramount’s "B" product was often vastly superior to their "A"s. By 1944 however, they had abandoned their worthwhile "B" product and were doing just the Henry Aldrich comedies and the Pine-Thomas actioners. The latter, after a promising start in the early fifties, became flat and routine. The "A"s made good exploitation properties, being made as cheaply as possible. "Fear in the Night" was however, a notable exception -- possibly the best of all the Pine-Thomas "B"s, and a special pet of its writer-director Maxwell Shane, who rarely directed, and liked this property so much that he not only made this initial version, but later remade it on a bigger scale as "Nightmare". In many ways it emphasises the advantage the "B" film format had for the nightmarish stories and novels of Cornell Woolrich. Unlikely coincidence always played a major part in his themes, and when expanded into major productions -- "Phantom Lady" or "The Leopard Man" -- the plots and lack of noir were sometimes harmful. But in "F" the story forms the slice of lo st fast for the holes to be too obvious, although in 1947 (the same year as this film) Monogram made "Fall Guy" (from the Woolrich story "Come in") which had a virtually identical plot and even a visually identical villain, so audiences might well have been confused more than usual if they saw both in close proximity. From its imaginatively staged surreal opening dream sequence (or is it a dream?) to its quite unusual denouement, "Fear in the Night" is a decidedly superior "B" and above average Noir.

"B" pictures often employ "B" characters and settings for essentially the same reason; when you get two of them in one title, as you often did, and as you do here, it's almost a guarantee of a good time! (Other examples of two-pronged noir titles: "So Dark the Night", "The Night and the City", "The Dark City"). DeForest Kelley, though an interesting newcomer here, found his career marked time until "Star Trek" came along.

-- 10 minute intermission --

I WALK ALONE (Paramount, 1948) Produced by Hal B. Wallis; Directed by Byron Haskin; Screenplay by Charles Schnee, adapted by Robert Smith and John Bright from the play "Beggars Are Coming to Town" by Theodore Reeves; Camera, Leo Tover; Music, Victor Young; 84 mins. With Dietrichson (Frankie Madison); Elizabeth Scott (Kay Lawrence); Kirk Douglas (Nell Turner); Wendell Corey (Dave); Kristine Miller (Mrs Richardson); George Rigaud (Maurice); Marce Lawrence (Rick Pelastro); Mike Mazurki (Dan); Mickey Knox (Skinner); Roger Neary (Felix); John Bishop (Ben); Bruce Lester (Charles); Jean de Val (Hendri); Gino Corrado (chef); Freddie Steele (Tiger); Dewey Robinson (Policeman); Pat Corcoran (Butcher); Charles B. Brown (Leut. Hollaran); Bobby Barber (newboy); Jack Perrin (policeman): Olia Heslin (night watchman).

When "I Walk Alone" first appeared, the term "film noir" was not being used, and it was regarded as another tough thriller -- but even then it seemed above average of its kind. Both it and 1940's "Ossis Cross" (also Lancaster, with Siodmak directing) seemed to benefit from coming late in the Noir cycle. Their characters were less stereotyped, and the stylishness has not been lost. The villains are still amusingly critical of being lumped into an overall "tough crime film" cycle which took in the private eye films as well as the legitimate noire. Now films like this can be seen as part of more specific noir categories, and probably appreciated a great deal more. "I Walk Alone" has no great reputation, although rather curiously -- perhaps because of its powerful cast - it has become quite familiar on television. A big screen exposure is however long overdue. A remarkable directorial debut from former cameraman Byron Haskin, it is tough and violent (one burning scene is especially vicious) yet it also has a warmth and mild sentimentality rare in noire; it is so well done that it is surprising than in an extremely varied career that notoriously Westerns and Sci-fi and the much under-rated "The Naked Jungle", Haskin returned to Noir only in "Too Late For Tears" (which we ran a couple of years ago). Music is effectively used in conjuring up the past (especially Rodgers and Hart's Isn't it Romantic?) but not as obviously and as lazily as in so many current movies. While admitting that Kirk Douglas was too good an actor to be typed as a villain, he made such a great villain in earlier noirs like this one and "Out of the Fast" that it's pity he didn't play more slimy heavies in later years!

Program Ends 10:40.
No discussion session this evening.

-- William E. Evenson