FILM NOIR peaked in 1947, both quantitatively and qualitatively, but thereafter maintained itself on a fairly high plateau, diminishing slowly as increasing color production and the virtual elimination of censorship removed both the stylistics and the moral attitudes that were essential. In the late '40's and early '50's, much of the extreme visual style of noir had been toned down, and there had been a matting with the semi-documentary style of thriller introduced by Louis De Rochemont in the mid-'40's. Both of tonight's films fall into this kind of neo-man's-land, and both benefit from the welding of separate genres.

MYSTERY STREET (MG M, 1950) Directed by John Sturges; Produced by Frank Taryer; Screenplay by Sydney Boehm and Richard Brooks from a story by Leonard Spigelgass; Camera, John Alton; Musical Director, Alfred Newman; with: Ricardo Montalban (Lt. Morel), Sally Forrest (Grace Shankay), Bruce Bennett (Dr. Moldoo), Ethe Lancaster (Mrs. Smurrling), Marshall Thompson (Harry Shankay), Jan Sterling (Vivian Holden), Edman Ryan (James Barkley), Betsey Blair (Jagie Eletti), Wally Maher (Tim Shankay), Ralph Dumke (Fattestad), Willard Waterman (mortician), Walter Burke (omnithologist), Dan Shelton (The D.A.), Brad Eaton (Pantderer); King Deneuve, George Cooper, John Crawford (reporters); Red Glass (Dr. Levy), Matt Moore (Dr. Reekton); Jack Shea (policeman); Kay McAvoy (Nurse); Perry Twins (alienist)

John Alton's stunning lighting and cinematography - he was virtually the definitive noir cameraman - gives this enjoyable mystery thriller its main noir characteristics. Otherwise it borrows slightly from the semi-documentary cycle, and being an MGM thriller made under the Dore Schary regime (and he was responsible for some first-rate middle-budget thrillers from Anthony Mann and John Sturges in particular) it also has its share of socially-conscious comment on racial issues. Had it been made a few years earlier as a full-fledged, bona-fide noir, the emphasis would probably have been shifted from the detection of the crime to a concentration on the plight of the lesser victims, as played by Marshall Thompson and Sally Forrest. Like most MGMs of its type and period, it's just a shade longer than it needs to be, but 13 minutes are saved. Jan Sterling is particularly effective as the murder victim that its occasionally too leisurely pacing hardly seems to matter. (Some location work was done at Harvard and in Boston and Cape Cod.)

THE UNDERCOVER MAN (Columba, 1949) Directed by Joseph H. Lewis; Produced by Robert Rossen; Screenplay by Sydney Boehm; additional dialogue by Malvin Wald, from a treatment by Jack Robin based on the article "Undercover Man: He Trapped Capone" by Frank J. Wilson.

Music: Bernard Caffrey; Camera, George Dunning; 85 mins.

With: Glenn Ford (Frank Warren); Eva Maria de Falco (Judith Warren); James Whitmore (George Pappas); Barry Kelley (Edward O'Rourke); David Wolfe (Stanley Weinberg); Frank Tweedall (Inspector); Howard St. John (Joseph S. Moran); John F. Hamilton (Sgt. Shannon); Lee Penn (Sidney Gordon); Jean Lassar (Rosa Roco); Esther Mincottti (Maria Rocco); Angela Clarke (Theresa Rocco); Anthony Caruso (Salvatore Roco); Robert Osterle (Nancy Zanger); Kay Medford (Claude LaVerne); Patricia White (Muriel Gordon); Peter Brocco (Johnny); Everett Glass (Judge Parker); Joe Mantell (Newby); Michael Clancy (Fred Ferguson); Marcella Clancy (Alice Ferguson); Sidney Dabih (Narrie); William Vedder (Duggins); Ralph Voike (The Big Fellow); Franklyn Farnum (Judge); Frank Mayo (Judge Foreman); George Douglas (District Attorney); Edith Max (Manager); Sam Hanlin (Newsreel announcer).

Joseph H. Lewis is most celebrated for his two smaller noirs, "My Name Is Julia Ross" and "So Dark The Night," and his bigger, more stylized "Gun Crazy" and "The Big Combo," "The Undercover Man" (written incidentally by Sidney Boehm who also scripted "Mystery Street") very often falls into the cracks and is overlooked, partly because its semi-documentary treatment was fairly familiar by then, via such films as "T Man," and also because thematically it anticipates Fritz Lang's "The Big Heat," a bigger and more dynamic film which tended to eclipse it because it came so soon afterwards. Nevertheless, it has many original touches and illustrations of Lewis' individual style: much of the dialogue between Mildred and Glenn Ford is improvisational, and the murder of Anthony Caruso (a touching performance from a player usually typecast in hoodlum bits) in broad daylight is a bravura sequence of camera mobility to match the bank holdup in "Gun Crazy." (Some location work in Chicago.)

— William K. Everson

Program ends 10:40 am.

Note: I am out of town this week (bringing film history to the mountains of Carolina!) so tonight's program will start without an introduction. Questions and discussion can be held over until next time.

Please also note that because of New School scheduling of other functions for the auditorium, dates for the next week or two are a little erratic. The next screening is on April 2. And program # on April 16 will be transferred to the former 5th Avenue Cinema just around the corner. It will start a few minutes late to allow late arrivals unaware of the changed time to get there. A reminder will be published on the April 2 notes.