THEIR MAD MOMENT (Fox, 1931) Directed by Hamilton MacFadden and Chandler Sprague; Scenario by Leon Gordon from the novel "Basquiere" by Eleanor Mercein; Associate Producer, A.L. Reckett; Camera, Arthur Todd; 55 mins.

With: Warner Baxter, Dorothy Mackaill, Zasu Pitts, Nance O'Neall, Lawrence Grant, Nella Walker, Mary Doran, Leon Janney, John St. Polis, Douglas Walton. (Our apologies for not having the usual full cast list. None appears on the print, the film was not reviewed in the NY Times, and pressure of time did not permit for a re-viewing of the film just to note down character names).

Normally, Their Mad Moment (which we last screened, privately, some 20 years ago!) would have been shunted to a more appropriate "Archive Night" slot. But tonight's main feature is both longer than usual and a little more familiar than usual. We needed something really short and virtually unknown to restore the balance, and Their Mad Moment filled those requirements. It is probably the only extant print, and if not it is certainly the best extant print since it was made directly from a nitrate original.

Clearly something went sadly awry with the film. Neither the print itself nor most reference books give a directorial credit, and the film was withheld from press reviewers until two months after release. And it is obviously much shorter than any film co-starring Baxter and Mackaill in that period should be. Chalk it up as a casualty of that strange period in Fox's history when it was virtually leaderless and had no clearly defined production policy. A lot of really worthwhile (if commercially dubious) films got made because there was nobody to stop them, and conversely some pointless films got made because nobody headed them off at the script stage. Oddball misfire or not, Their Mad Moment is too short and unpredictable to be dull, and anything with Dorothy Mackaill is worthy of attention. It's difficult from this distance to know whether its climax delighted, angered, or just flabbergasted depressed-era audiences, although admittedly setting the whole film so far away from America geographically does minimise its application to contemporary reality.

-- 10 MINUTE INTERMISSION --

GUEST IN THE HOUSE (United Artists, 1944) Directed by John Brahm; Produced by Hunt Stromberg; Screenplay by Ketti Frings from the play by Hagar Wilde and Dale Bunson; Camera, Lee Garmess; Production Design, Nicolai Remisoff; Music, Werner Jansen; 121 mins.

NY premiere, Capitol Theatre, February 1945.

With: Anne Baxter (Evelyn Heath); Ralph Bellamy (Douglas Proctor); Aline MacMahon (Aunt Martha); Ruth Warrick (Ann Proctor); Scott McKay (Dan Proctor); Jerome Cowan (Mr. Hackett); Marie McDonald (Miriam); Percy Kilbride (John); Margaret Hamilton (Hilda); Connie Laird (Lee Proctor)

Although a substantial success in England, Guest in the House was less so here. Based on a reasonably well received play, it is too talkative - and too obvious - as a film, and gives its noir director (fresh from The Lodger) too few opportunities for stylized pictorialism, although the camerawork by Lee Garmess is never less than expert. However, in fairness one should remember that Guest in the House comes early in the day in the cycle of psychological thrillers, which really only got fashionably underway at the end of 1945 with Hitchcock's Spellbound, and peaked in 1947 with The Locket (also Brahm) and Goulding's Nightmare Alley.

If Anne Baxter's machinations seem a little obvious, it is probably because the producers felt that audiences needed a little help with "difficult" material. It's an interesting blueprint for her less lethal but equally venal Eva in All About Eva, and for all of the psychopathic baby-sitters and room-mates that infest today's horror films.

United Artists had few really big films in this period - Spellbound was certainly the biggest - and a lot of rather arty European-styled films from refugee producers and directors like Seymour Nebenzal and Douglas Sirk. Guest in the House was a big film for then, but, Baxter apart, it was marred (commercially) by second-string players, all of them good but more importantly economical, who worked against audience acceptance of the film as a major production. Nevertheless, it remains an interesting footnote to psychological film noir.

--- William K. Everson ---

Program ends approx. 10:50. No discussion period tonight (especially as the jazz concert may mean a few minutes' delay in starting).

Full titles and other details of the major directors and shorts program due the week after next will be listed on next week's notes (if space permits) or printed separately and posted at the rear of the hall.

The Summer Bulletins should be out by now, and if so you will have noticed that there is no Film Series (at least, not in this series) this Summer. There are good reasons for this, but it also gives us more material to select from for the Fall, and I (immodestly) feel that our Fall series is one of our best in a long while. Listings for that will be published on the last two sets of notes in the current series.