PLEASE be reminded of our erratic schedule this semester. Next program is on March 17, preceded by a jazz concert. It is a short program, allowing time for discussion and questions afterwards.

**THE NEW SCHOOL**

**FILM SERIES 77: Program #2**

February 24, 1955

**Two Thrillers**

**THE MYSTERIOUS MR. MOTO** (20th Century Fox, 1938) Directed by Norman Foster; Produced by Sol Wurtzel; Original screenplay by Philip MacDonald and Norman Foster, based on the character created by John F. Marquand; Camera, Virgil Miller; 62 mins. NY premiere, Globe Theatre, Nov. 1938.

With Peter Lorre (Mr. Moto); Mary Maguire (Ann Richman); Henry Wilcoxon (Anton Darvay); Erik Rhodes (David Scott-Frensham); Harold Huber (Ernst Litman); Leon Ames (Paul Brissac); Forrester Harvey (George Higgins); Fredrik Vogeding (Bruno); Lester Matthews (Sir Charles Marchison); John Rogers (Sniffy); Karen Sorrell (Lotus Liu); Mitchell Lewis (Nola); Frank Hagney (Commissionaire); William Austin (archivist); John Ridgely (Sergeant), Paul McVey (Detective); Major Sam Harris (Lord Gilford); Reginald Barlow (policeman); Jimmy Aubrey (paper-seller); Clyde Cook (sandwich man); Billy Bevan (Customs inspector); Noble Johnson (Native sergeant); Charles Bennett (cockney singer); Norman Foster (thug in tavern); Leonard Mudie (Monk); May Beatty (woman at enquiry); Lew Borzag (accordionist); Harvey Perry, Billy Jones (stunt extras).

Between 1937 and 1939, Fox made eight of the Mr. Moto B movies, all of them expertly made, fast-paced, endowed with good writers, casts and production values. They were a great improvement on the now increasingly formulised Charlie Chan films, which, though still enjoyable, were slower, always quite predictable, and dominated by dialogue. The Motos were economically made, but as with most Fox Bs, never showed it. Standing sets, and those borrowed from other movies, added visual production values. Two of the later films were remakes of earlier Fox movies ("Jardin in Trinidad" and "Karrie Galante") and one was a reshuffling of a Charlie Chan script. While there were a couple of lesser entries, the series as a whole maintained a consistently high standard right up to the last one. They were terminated partly because increasing war tensions in Europe made a Japanese hero somewhat less sympathetic, and also because Peter Lorre's work at Fox and elsewhere was expanded beyond the B market. With the aid of expertly edited-in doubles in tight scenes, he made an excellent, colorful and certainly lively hero, although a trifle incredible in his insight, foresight and total invincibility. "The Mysterious Mr. Moto" was the fifth in the series and certainly one of the better ones; its strong plot has vague forshadings of Hitchcock's "Foreign Correspondent", although rather unwisely its "hidden mastermind" villain keeps his secret until the very end (Hitch spilled the beans early on) and of course it is no surprise at all to anyone even remotely familiar with Hollywood casting methods! The film was good enough, as were many Bs in the 30's, to rate a Broadway first-run, though it played under the title "Mr. Moto of Devil's Island". Curiously, Fox bought a few seconds of Devil's Island footage from Columbia, quite forgetting the extensive and superior footage they had in their own "While Faris Sleeps"! Perhaps the explanation was that Foster had starred in the Columbia film three years earlier, so it came readily to mind. Foster was a useful actor in the thirties, but actually a better director. We'll be running his interesting but out-of-print "A Voice in the Night" this December, and the "Mr. Moto" in this September series. Although maximum use is made of Fox's standing sets, they don't always suggest the British ambience that they're supposed to. To help out, Fox also trot out that old Cockney chestnut "It's The Syme The Whole World Over", which they used whenever (and no matter how inappropriately) they tried to stress a London locale. Lang's "Man Hunt" was another example of its use. The other song, "Black Black Sheep" is recycled from the 1934 "Springtime for Henry".

— 10 minute Intermission —

**WANTED FOR MURDER** (Excelsior-20th Century Fox British, 1946) Directed by Lawrence Huntington; Produced by Marshall Hellman; Screenplay by Emeric Pressburger, Rodney Ackland and Maurice Cowan from a play by Perry Robinson and Terence de Marney; Camera, Max Greene (Hutz Greenbaum); Music, including the theme "A Voice in the Night", by Mischa Spoliansky; 103 mins. NY premiere, Victoria Theatre, Dec. 20.

With: Eric Portman (Victor Coleman); Dulcie Gray (Anne Fielding); Derek Farr (Jack Williams); Roland Culver (Insp.Conway); Stanley Holloway (Sgt.Sullivan); Barbara Everest (Mrs Coleman); Kathleen Harrison (Florrie); Bonar Colleano (Cpl. Kappolo); Jenny Laird (Jeanie McLaren); Viola Lyn (Mrs Cooper); John Ruddock (Tramp); Moira Lister (Miss Willis); George Carney (Boatman); Kappolo's girl (Edna Wood); Bill Shine (Detective Ellis); and John Ruddock, John Seale, Wilfrid Hyde White, Gerhard Kemypsy, Mary Mackenzie, Cavan Watton, Beatrice Cameron (who as usual, played both roles). Note: the cast list initially referred to gavo Portman's (and his mother's) screen name as Coleman. This is in error however; other sources confirm that the name is Colebrooke.

(Continued overleaf)
"Wanted For Murder" came out almost at the peak of the film noir cycle — it would crest in 1947 — and was surrounded on all sides by similar British and American thrillers. It is also a part of a small and bizarre British sub-genre involving protagonists who are public hangmen "(Daybreak)", are haunted and driven to madness by ancestors who were ("Wanted For Murder") or who are threatened with or wrongly executed by hanging ("London Belongs to Me", Portman again in "Corridor of Mirrors"). Technically, "Wanted For Murder" is only partially a film noir: its apparently trapped young lovers very soon escape the nets that fate usually weaves much more inexorably, and the usual stress on night time activity is lessened. However, in placing the emphasis on the doomed serial killer, and inviting a measure of sympathy for him, "Wanted For Murder" is certainly much influenced by film noir stylistics.

Actually, what it really lacks in essence, is style. This is a Lang or Siodmak type film, and would have been ideal for Arthur Woods, one of Britain’s most promising directors of the 30's, who died tragically in the early days of the war. Huntington specialised in thrillers, all of them very entertaining, but usually lacking in real suspense or surprise. What style this film has comes mainly from the typically neurotic Portman performance, and from the evocative score by Spoliansky — admittedly, almost inseparable from the piano-cantata scores that accompanied so many British films of the 40's, but effective nonetheless.

The original play has probably been improved by its three good scenarists, though they have retained much of the humor (itself dependent on type-casting) which was so typical of British stage thrillers. Kathleen Harrison, Roland Culver, Bonar Collesano, all good certainly, are nevertheless type-cast with a vengeance.

A major asset is the extensive use of exterior London locations, and especially the parks and the Hampstead Heath areas so convenient for the mayhem of homicidal maniacs. An interesting minor episode is the one where the two young lovers go to a restaurant and can’t find anything worth eating on the menu. It was still sufficiently close to the end of the war that the public didn’t complain too much about the retention of strict austerity conditions and rationing. Here they can still joke about it — one suspects that this may be part of Emeric Pressburger’s contribution to the script since he knew and understood the British so well. In 1950, with this austerity virtually unchanged, the subject was treated with more bitterness and less good natured humor.

There is an unfortunate jump-cut in the print where only a few seconds are missing, but which is distinctly jarring. It’s not a tv trim, nor is it anything one can smooth over by further cutting; presumably the footage was damaged, removed and not replaced. It’s a key scene since it reveals to Portman’s mother that the madness she feared in him is very much present. Everything is fully explained, but it’s the kind of interruption of continuity that is so annoying, but that we have to put up with when other prints are hard to come by. At least, except for these few seconds, our print is of the full British version, and not of the slightly trimmed (by nine minutes) American release version.

——— William K. Everson

Program ends approx. 10.58.

Clearly there will be no time for a post-screening discussion tonight, but assuming that the Jazz Concert clears the auditorium promptly, we will open up the podium at 7.45. for general questions.