In an age when the Cinemascope screen is dominated by "heroes" who are either roughnecks (Widmark, Bogart, Ladd) or vapid youngsters (Tab Hunter, Robert Wagner, Race Gentry) and "heroines" who are either bimbos (Monroe, Marcia Van Dyke, Mansfield) or empty-headed college campus queens (Lori Nelson, Joan Taylor, Rita Moreno) — it is not only relaxing and pleasant, but essential to one's peace of mind, to look back on the truly "good old days" when leading "ladies" were just that.

Without paying any disrespect to the considerable charms of Billie Dove, the exquisite Novak sisters, Eva and Jane, Esther Ralston or any of the many other wonderful stars who made the word "star" mean something in the silent era, it seems to us that BETTY BRONSON and GRET A GARBO best sum up the grace and glamour of the leading ladies of the silent era.

BETTY BRONSON, winsome, elfin heroine of two of the loveliest films ever made, "Peter Pan" and "A Kiss for Cinderella", exuding a charm and warmth quite unique even in the heyday of the silents, shows that the attributes considered essential and startling in Audrey Hepburn had been enchanting silent-day audiences years earlier. And unlike Hepburn, who becomes intolerable after the first picture or two, Bronson's screen personality is not self-consciously sué or cloying in its sentimental appeal. Bronson's career, alas, was mishandled, and she failed to remain the top star that she should have done. Nevertheless, she added distinction to some two-score silent films, and a number of talkies. Her last filmic appearance was opposite Gene Autry in a 1937 western, "The Yodelin' Kid from Pine Ridge" — a typical Cinderella role in which Miss Bronson came across in fine style.

With no apparent interest in returning to the screen, Miss Bronson — happily married since 1932 — now lives quietly in Pasadena. And her charm has not diminished one whit with the passing of the years.

GRET A GARBO, better-known than Miss Bronson thanks to the legends that have circulated and expanded since she first hit Hollywood in the mid-twenties, represents quite the opposite brand of feminine charm — glamour, mystery, irresistibility. We need hardly reminisce about her here, except to add that, as in Miss Bronson's case, the silent screen produced a figure which the sound era has been unable to duplicate. Even the few newcomers who don't look like gangster's molls, and Grace Kelly is perhaps one of the very few recent discoveries who have had the visual appeal of the silent greats — have been limited in such other departments as dramatic ability.

If Messrs. Zanuck and Schary could offer personalities like BRONSON and GARBO today, in pictures like ARE PARENTS PEOPLE? and THE KISS, and if projectionists could be persuaded to show them in focus — the boxoffice climate today might be a lot healthier!
"ARE PARENTS PEOPLE?" (1925-Paramount) presented by Adolph Zukor and Jesse Lasky; scenario by Frances Agnew from the Saturday Evening Post story by Alice Duer Miller. Directed by Mal St. Clair; photographed by Bert Glennon. A toned original print.

"Are Parents People?" is a typical example of the light, charming social comedy that has completely disappeared from the screen today. With a plot that is admittedly no more than pleasant trivias, it sparkles from first scene to last, wagging an amusing - yet friendly - figure at the audience, and sending it home with an understanding pat on the back. Almost completely forgotten by the trade today (although it enjoyed considerable success on its release) it has nevertheless been completely taken to heart by lovers of the film, and one is constantly finding references to it in writings on film history. An index to the films of Mal St. Clair, published by "Films in Review" in 1954, (author: George Geltzer) dealt with the film at some length; so did another article in "Sight and Sound" that same year. The film marked St. Clair's directorial debut at Paramount, following several years of directing Buster Keaton comedies, Rin-Tin-Tin adventures, and miscellaneous melodramas. It established the 28-year old director instantly and led to a wonderful series of frothy comedies - "The Grand Duchess and the Waiter", "A Social Celebrity", "The Show Off" and "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes". During the talkie period, St. Clair remained active, but for the most part was given inferior material to work with, including some mediocre Laurel and Hardy subjects at Fox. But occasionally the old spark shone through: 1948's "Arthur Tales Over", a "M" for Sol Wurtzel and one of Mal's last films (he died in 1952) had much of the old comic invention and gentle charm. One of his greatest talents (and "Are Parents People?" provides good examples of it) was an ability to build minor incidents into fine comedy sequences. The episode with Andre Beranger, as a satirised Barrymore, is typical. Too, his intelligent pacing and cutting, and the spare use of titles, help to tell the story visually so that one hardly notices the rather static camerawork. (A nice little sequence shows Betty Bronson passing through several stages of indecision merely by a close-up of her ankles in differing attitudes; another similar episode conveys the idea of distain and indifference by close-ups, from the back, of Miss B. shrugging her shoulders). Notwithstanding the smoothness of St. Clair's direction, the slick photography of Bert Glennon ("The Ten Commandments", "The Wagon Master", "Rio Grande") and the assured playing of Manjou and Vidor, a good deal of the film's wholly engaging charm is due to the delightful performance of Miss Bronson. A unique product of the period, she was in her mid-teens when this film was made. It was her first film after "PETER PAN" (prior to which she had appeared only in bit roles in some half-dozen pictures) and showed right away that she was no one-picture star. Her seemingly perpetual gaiety attaches itself to every scene in which she appears, and yet, with the slightest alteration of a facial expression, she switches effortlessly to a mood of abject pathos. (This characteristic was at its most expressive in the second Barrie film, "A Kiss for Cinderella", which contained Bronson's best acting, and probably Bronson's best direction). With Bronson, St. Clair's slick yet sensitive direction, and with a pleasingly nostalgic mid-20's plot, "Are Parents People?" is a thorough delight in every department.

The Players: BETTY BRONSON, Adolphe Menjou, Florence Vidor, Lawrence Gray, Andre Beranger, Emily Fitzroy, Mary Beth Milford, William Courtwright.

"THE KISS" ( MGM, 1929) Directed by Jacques Feyder; scenario by Hans Kraly from an original story by George M. Saville; photography by William Daniels; edited by Ben Lewis; art direction - Cedric Gibbons.

The Cast: Greta Garbo, Lew Ayres, Conrad Nagel, Anders Randolf, Holmes Herbert, George Davis.

The old cliche that Garbo never made a really great film is perhaps too old to bear repeating here; certainly we will not elaborate on the theory. But "great" or not, her films all have tremendous style, and the utmost in veneer that MGM could offer. "The Kiss" was her last silent, made when talkies were already established. Thus it represents the silent cinema at the very zenith of its achievements - when the things it could do well were being done supremely well, and when too, its flaws (a tenency of the later years of silents to let the moving camera run riot) were at their most apparent.

Jacques Feyder was brought to Hollywood by MGM, and this was his first assignment. He directed Garbo in German, English being too difficult for him, and French unknown to her. Like many other European imports, Feyder has announced that he was dissatisfied with his Hollywood product and that he was forced, too often, to "compromise" - a much-overworked phrase by visiting firemen. In many cases, such reunciation is justified. Fritz Lang, certainly, has no cause to be proud of the over-all quality of his Hollywood product, although one can't put all the blame on indifferent scripts. But Feyder's renunciation is a little hard to take, if he seriously regards his
European films as "pure cinema" as opposed to the "commercialism" of "The Kiss". Without decrying his interesting European work, it is impossible to sum up too much enthusiasm for such ponderous bores as "L'Atlantide" or even the erotic and colorful "Le Grand Jeu". "Crainquueille" certainly was a notalbe film - but not so notable that he is justified in dismissing his Hollywood product so scornfully. In any event, there are some notable moments in "The Kiss", and some effects - the remarkable camerawork in the sequence where Garbo reconstructs, for detectives, a falsified account of the events leading up to her husband's death - which are really quite unique. The whole production has a tremendous sheen and gloss, and quite certainly an individual and European style - even if the French locale seldom manages to suggest itself as being more than a few blocks from Culver City. The art-direction is out of Mr. Gibbons' most bizarre top-drawer, and features some of the most untenable living rooms - and some of the most impractical pieces of furniture - that even he has devised.

But of course Garbo is 90% of the show, and what a magnificent performance she gives! Lew Ayres is fine too, in his first important role, and Conrad Nagel (strangely cast in a silent at a time when his vocal talents should have been much in demand) makes a traditionally gentlemanly hero - another fast disappearing species. At seven reels, the film is quite short - but then many of Garbo's earlier films ("Torrent", "As You Desire Me") did tend to brevity. Of course, at silent speed, its running time was still substantial. Incidentally, the camera speed on "The Kiss" seemed to have varied considerably; the earlier sequences seem to have employed a standard silent speed, while later scenes are far too slow if run at anything but the sound speed of 24 frames per second. We will of course endeavor to adjust our projection speed to match the original intention.

"Officer H H" - episode 4, "Gassed", of our Ben Wilson serial. With the serial now almost at the half-way mark, there is still no sign of any plot-line emerging - but it remains lively fun nevertheless.

"The Coming of Amos" - excerpt. Directed by Paul Boane for DeMille. As a "bombe" item, we are including this delicious little thriller. At nine reels the film is a bit of a bore - but our one reel excerpt (the last reel) is a thorough delight. Noah Beery tosses his unwilling bride, Jette Goudal, into a dungeon which gradually fills with water - but hero Rod la Rocque takes a hand. An unsophisticated and thrilling reel.

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