SURRENDER (Fox, 1931) Directed by William K. Howard; screenplay by Sonia Levien and S. J. Behrman from "Ankle" by Pierre Benoit; Camera, James Wong Howe; Art Director, Anton Grot; 69 minutes. 
Both of tonight's films deal with fringe aspects of World Wars one and two respectively, without really becoming "war films". From 1930 on, with "All Quiet on the Western Front" as the catalyst, the big war "shows" seem to change direction a bit, and take on a more serious mien, as in "Farewell to Arms", "The Eagle and the Hawk" and tonight's film. "Surrender" also has considerable interest in being something of an unofficial forerunner to Renoir's "La Grande Illusion". It's less pacifist and more melodramatic, but nevertheless the roots are there, and the impersonal, impersonal role played by Ralph Bellamy here, and that played by von Stroheim in the Renoir film, is remarkably strong. There's also a similar visual "look" to both films, suggesting that Renoir saw his original, though he must also have been aware of the French play on which "Surrender" is based. It's not a film to be over-rated, nor does it take itself pretentiously. It tells its story in a very brisk 69 minutes, although it never looks hurried or condensed; and while there are some typically vivid William K. Howard action sequences, it doesn't sell out the dignity of drama for thrills. As with all Howard films, it is well composed and edited, and full of stylish but never obtrusive technique. Howard worked with cameraman James Wong Howe ("Transatlantic" and "Fire Over England" were other abortive attempts) pictorially the film is splendid. Howe's photography is matched by the fine sets and art direction of Anton Grot, who did some of the best work of his career that same year in designing John Barrymore's "SVengali" at Warners. Despite its brief running time, "Surrender" was a major film and opened single-bill at the Roxy in New York. Complications over expired rights to the original play have limited its showing, and in any case the film was thought lost until its rediscovery at Fox in the late 60's. Aubrey Smith seems no more German than he was French in "Love Me Tonight". The same holds for "Surrender". Nonetheless! — Intermission of 10 mins.

PERFECT STRANGERS (MGM-London Films, 1945) Produced & Directed by Alexander Korda Screenplay by Clementine Dane and Anthony Pelissier from a story by Dane; Camera, Georges Perinal; Music, Clifton Parker; U.S. release title, "Vacation from Marriage"; 102 mins. 
"Perfect Strangers" was Alexander Korda's first film as a director since the 1936 "Rembrandt", and in fact he would return to direction only once more, in the 1948 "Alfred The Great". For "Perfect Strangers" was actually as a producing producer, he was a good director as this film certainly shows. It was the story of a man who was to make a co-production deal with MGM, but as it happened, it was the only one to be made. It started out unpropromisingly under director Wesley Ruggles, was abandoned temporarily for re-writing, and then resumed wholly under Korda's control, though benefiting no doubt from the considerable creative input by the earlier producer, Ian Dalrymple, and also by the contributions of earlier and talented writers. It is a film that the British liked a great deal, since it dealt with the "underbelly" of wartime life and problems in a glossy and Hollywood way, unlike the more realistic or British films of the period, such as "Millions Like Us" or "Waterloo Road". Its polish is all the more remarkable in that it was made at the height of the robot-bomb attacks, a considerable disruptive influence at the time. It's story basically honest, though it comes off so well mainly because of the almost inspired teasing of Robert Donat and Deborah Kerr, who had co-starred on stage (in Shaw's "Heartbreak House") but were here in their first and only film together. The story is of a drab and dull married couple who find new excitement in the life of the civilians - thanks to wartime experiences. It was a not infrequent wartime phenomena, backed up of course by the sense of purpose and unity that the war provided. Unfortunately, when the war ended so did the excitement and the unity of purpose. Initial elation gave way to disillusionment and a sense of let-down when peace-time meant, for several years, a continuation of wartime frustrations and austerity. Most dull and drab people didn't retain their new-found verve, and went back to obscurity and reasonable security, most of them of course not being very much like Donat or Kerr. On the other hand, if they kept at it, laced it with a bit of sophistication, at least it carefully avoids all sorts of opportunities for contrived romance and complications and remains credibly simple and direct. Audiences in this country (it hasn't had a theatrical revival in years) remember it with affection and often ask about it, but tend to forget the title. The American title is a misleading one, more suggestive of comedy, and to add to the confusion, the original British title was re-used by Hollywood for a Ginger Rogers vehicle. — Wm. X. Everson

Program ends: 10.32 app.