I must admit that my enthusiasm for this film was initially sparked a year or so ago by seeing Paramount's studio copy of the film, a beautiful 35mm nitrate print that just shimmered, and showed off Sparkuhl's fine photography and art director Hans Dreier's slick if unobtrusive art-deco to tremendous advantage. Our print however turns out to be a physically perfect but pictorially lack-lustre one, typical of the kind of grey prints made up for latter-day tv. (And at that we're lucky to get it, since the old Paramount prints of this type have now been transferred to tape for tv showings, and prints are increasingly hard to find). Hopefully the New School's projection system will restore some life into the print, but pictorial qualities were so striking in the case of the nitrate print that it's a pity to have to settle for second best. However, the film is certainly entertaining enough in its own right. Though a post-Production Code film, and thus devoid of the snappy, near-the-knuckle dialogue that made earlier examples of this kind of fare so delightful, it's a classy film, a little slow in getting under way, but gripping and exciting once the melodrama of the second half takes hold, with the miniature work, if never totally convincing, intriguingly expert in the hands of George Beauchamp and Percival Bequet. Director Leisen islistless on the threshold of becoming one of our most promising directors, and Fred MacMurray had become a fine producer-director, in a far shorter period of time, than Paramount had expected. MacMurray and Leisen had made "Hands Across the Table" together as their immediately prior film, and "Thirteen Hours By Air", a respectable programmer, was a way of keeping them both busy until bigger properties were ready. The cast is full of old favorites, though one could cheerfully trade a lot of the (not very funny) Zasu Pitts-Bennie Bartlett comedy for a more generous dose of Grace Bradley! As with all civil aviation films of the day, the fun comes from watching how much interest the producers paid to realism, assuming (probably wrongly) that most of the audience had never flown. In any event, with today's security checks in mind, it's amusing to see how easily guns are produced and used and dropped overhead, how passengers constantly stroll in and out of the cockpit -- and how long a telegram one could send for 87 cents! Incidentally, the title is a bit misleading, since in 1956 the coast to coast trip (now about 5½ hours) took a fall nineteen hours. However, United Airlines which provided cooperation for the movie were surprisingly generous in not demanding too many obvious plugs in return.

Because of Him" is the 17th Durbin, and while, through no fault of her own, her peak was over (she was essentially a product of the 30's, and the innocence that was the strong point of her best films just seemed passe and out of place in the post-war period) her films from these later years do still retain a definite charm.

(ever)
Universal, to their credit, did do their utmost to pump new life into her pictures. They constantly tried out new plot elements, surrounded her with top casts and elaborate production values. The assigned crew were always the best available with, as here, Hal Mahr on the camera and Mikles Ressa, in a rare vacation from film noir, providing the musical score.

"Because of Him" is a Durbin that many have forgotten, partly because its uninspired title was so interchangeable with two other movies of the same general period ("Because of You" and "Because You're Mine") and also because the co-starring presence of Franchot Tone and Charles Laughton sent one's mind scurrying back to those halcyon Pasternak days. Charles Laughton had co-starred in the last of them, "It Started With Eve", and Franchot Tone had been in the earlier "Nice Girl?". In that film he was the older, sophisticated man who returns Deanna to the boy next door, Robert Stack. It was a sign of the times perhaps that only four years later Durbin and Tone were playing on an equal level as the romantic leads. Laughton, whose sagging career had been given a huge boost by "It Started With Eve", clearly has the time of his life here playing the flamboyant actor to the hilt — and perhaps wisely, Richard Wallace (a subtle director given to demanding restraint from his players) gives him his head. It's a wonderfully rich comic performance.

"Because of Him" doesn't have that fresh, seemingly spontaneous quality that the earlier Durbins had. Even though the plot is a good one in terms of light frothy comedy, it doesn't altogether escape the accusation of being contrived. Perhaps that's because it is taken just a little too seriously; Deanna is only given three opportunities to sing, and the film thus becomes a comedy with songs rather than a Durbin vehicle with songs, comedy and romance rather more equally balanced. But that too was part of Universal's experimenting to find a new image for her. Nevertheless, "Because of Him" gains every time one looks around at what passes for "comedy" and "light entertainment" in movies of the 50's, and undoubtedly many of the other past-Pasternak Durbins will too. So we'll add them to our schedule periodically, along with some overdue repeats of "It Started With Eve", "Nice Girl?" and others.

Program Ends: 10.33.
Discussion period follows

Note:
The three unconfirmed MGMs — THE GREAT MEADOW, WAR NURSE and TELL NO TALES have been confirmed. There should be no problem, other than for MGM's tendency to try to forget these films as much as possible. (They did that once last semester, and the prints had to be shipped in by air at the last moment!) So while we don't anticipate any problem at all, it would be a good idea for anybody coming a great distance specifically to see these films to call 741-5634 earlier in the day, or the day before.

Next week's program:

Stuart Oderman at the piano.