"I Take This Woman", which has no connection with the MGM '40's film of the same title, has virtually disappeared, never given a tv release because of the expiration of story rights. It was the third of Cooper's four 1931 releases, initially intended as another co-starring vehicle with Fay Wray. It was also Marien Gerig's first film as a director, following a long and very colorful career in theatre, dating back to Russia in the early 20's. It is doubtful because this was his directorial debut that he was given, as was the custom in early talkies, an associate director to help him over the technical rough spots. It's odd however that he should have been assigned Slavko Veraskich, essentially a montage specialist (and a genius at it) but here given an opportunity to display that talent, and certainly not an experienced director. Given the lack of experience, the actor-director (it was a surprisingly well written script), the film is surprisingly well made and unchalenging. Essentially it's another - though more superficial - variant on that late 20's genre of the Woman Against the Wilderness. In such films as "The Canadian", "The Wind", "City Girl" and "White Gold", directors Beaudine, Sjostrom, Murman and Howard created highly stylised films out of this simple theme; by the early thirties however, the idea was getting a bit threadbare, and was being diverted to providing star vehicles for Stanwyck, Nancy Carroll and others. Of "I Take This Woman" has added interest however in that (a) it seems almost a straight blueprint for Cooper's later Goldwyn comedy "The Cowboy and the Lady", and (b) for its surprisingly modern performance from Carole Lombard. Lombard made five films in 1931; you may well remember the first, "It Pays To Advertise" (which we ran a year or two ago) in which she was frankly bland and unexciting and in need of better direction and photography. Here however, in the last of her 1931 films, she gives a performance that foreshadows her work in later, more sophisticated films and that would (arguably) remain her best performance until "20th Century" in 1934. Incidentally, trivia devotees will probably enjoy the scene near the end where Lester Vail opens a box of matches upside down, spilling the contents. It's a key dramatic scene, fortunately only in medium shot. He covers well, and the scene was left alone.

- - 10 Minute Intermission - -

SPRING PARADE (Universal, 1940) Directed by Henry Koster; Produced by Joe Pasternas; Screenplay by Bruce Manning and Felix Jackson from an original story by Ernst Marischka; Camera, Joseph Valentine; Music and lyrics, Robert Stolz, Gus Kahn; Musical Director, Charles Previn; Dances staged by Larry Ceballos; 89 mins.

With Deanna Durbin (Iiona Telnay); Robert Cummings (Harry Marten); Anne Gwynne (Jenny); S.Z. Sakall (Raschen); Burch and Budy (Max and Moritz); Allyn Joslyn (Count Zornorob); Reginald Denny (Captain); Henry Stephenson (Franz Joseph); Samuel S. Hinds (Vea Simmer); Mischa Auer (Gustav); Walter Catlett (Head Waiter); Wade Boteler (Sergeant); Leon Belasco (Orchestra leader); Peggy Moran (Irene); Franklin Pangborn (Whidameyer); Edward Gargan (Iage); Henry Victor (Dutch officer); Aubrey Mather (Baron); Howard Hickman (Colonel); Douglas Wood (General); Herbert Heywood (Sepp); Frank Sully (Bert); Eadric Tetley (Baron); Harold Holmes (Bugler); Gene Morgan (Wallace); John Patric (William Gould (Detectives); Joseph Breen (Director); Pauline Mallis * (Minnie); Kathryn Adams; Paul Hurst. *film debut of Polly Connell, later a well-known literary agent and Disney story analyst. (Other bits: Virginia Vale, Fay Holderness, Virginia Engels).

"Spring Parade" has been withheld for much the same reasons as its companion feature, namely expiration of story rights; it was a remake of a Fasternak produced 1924 Hungarian film starring Franziska Gaal and (of course) S.Z. Sakall. It has never been shown on television, hence there are no good new 16mm prints around. This very few that have to be about 40 years old, and until now we had trouble finding one good enough to play. Our print tonight does show its age and occasional wear and tear a little, but it is by far the best we've come across, and of course, not being a tv print, it is complete and uncut.

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The eighth of Deanna Durbin's ten in a row for producer Pasternak (the best of them being directed by Henry Koster), it is a delightful, charming and thoroughly escapist piece of fluff, and we're pleased to have finally been able to track it down. At the time, it was the first Durbin film to attract (mildly) critical comment. Some critics resented the transplanted of down-to-earth Deanna into such a patently artificial, non-contemporary and certainly non-American locale, and others felt that it strove perhaps a little too earnestly to be gay and light-hearted. But all the critics agreed that Deanna herself was maturing well, and that as a performer and singer had never been in better form. And certainly the few mild criticisms did nothing to hurt the film at the boxoffice. In wartime England especially, its gaiety and charm made it a most welcome piece of escapism.

Today, when we are so starved for charm on the screen (though "Peggy Sue Got Married" and one or two other films -- see "Critical Condition" I hasten to add! -- give indications that it may be returning) the artificiality of "Spring Parade" is an asset if anything. The welcome unreality of it all is heralded by a wonderful introductory subtitle, and then the Hollywood hills coupled with skilled glass-shots create a fine illusion of Alpen Austria. Deanna's meandering over the hill with her goat captures a "Sound of Music" kind of charm immediately, and her arrival in Vienna sustains the mood. From then on it's schmaltz, Grade-A style, all the way -- from Robert Cummings' miraculous composing and arranging of "Waltzing" on scraps of paper in just a minute or two to dear old Henry Stephenson as Franz Joseph, solving romantic problems just as Abraham Lincoln used to do in American movies.

The plot is certainly full of holes, and Deanna's accidental uprooting from hearth and home seems to bother nobody, but that's all part of the fun. So are the economies designed to add production values without too much extra cost. Mischa Auer, a contract player, is thrown in for good effect at the beginning, and then discarded after he has served his purpose. One of the ballroom musical fanfares is lifted from "First Love", and Universal's standing street sets are bedecked to greet joyous Viennese mobs rather than the peasants with flaming torches from the Frankenstein films ... being given a longer rest than usual before being conscripted into service again in 1942.

All told, it's a delight to have "Spring Parade" back with us ... and what a pity it is not generally available to brighten TV and the revival theatres.

-- William K. Everson

Program ends approx. 10.30, followed by short discussion and question session.

As a postscript to the "Spring Parade" notes:

We should have remarked on the quite striking performance of Peggy Moran in a very untypical role as the courtesan/vamp who fails to arouse Robert Cummings' interest. Her eventual marriage to director Koster kept this vivacious performer off-screen permanently, and their happy and long-lasting marriage was, in a sense, our loss.