The Man I Married (20th Century Fox, 1940) Directed by Irving Pichel; Associate Producer, Raymond Griffith; Screenplay by Oliver H.P. Garrett from an original story by Oscar Schisgall; Camera, Feveryell Markey; Musical Director, David Buttolph; 77 mins.

With: Joan Bennett (Carol); Frank Lederer (Eric Hoffman); Lloyd Nolan (Kenneth Delane); Anna Steen (Freda Heinkel); Otto Kruger (Heinrich Hoffman); Maria Ouspenskaya (Frau Gerhardt); Ludwig Stossel (Dr. Hugo Gerhardt); Johnny Russell (Ricky); Lionel Royce (Herr Deckert); Fredrik Vogeding (train passenger); Ernst Deutsch (Otto); Egon Brecher (Czech); William Kaufman (conductor); Charles Irwin (British newspaperman); Frank Reich (Frishof)

At a time when America was still officially neutral (and would remain so for another year and a half), Hollywood was supposed to follow suit and not make movies that took political sides. Obviously, with Germany's war in Europe could not be denied, and could be used as a back- ground for romances, adventures and thrillers, but propaganda fantasies had to be subtle and oblique. The remarkable thing about "The Man I Married" is that its propaganda, while intelligible and balanced, is right out in the open. In fact it is so much of a propagandist tract that one is inclined to question its entertainment value at that particular time, since there is not even a secondary love interest to minimize its hard-sale story -- which, incidentally, is exactly the same as in the recent Sally Field Iran-located film "Not Without My Daughter". Since Darryl Zanuck produced the film, presumably he wasn't interested in pulling any punches and didn't -- which might explain the ad campaign, which gives no indication at all of its topical and political content, and suggests, ambiguous, that it could be either a soap opera or a "Gaslight" type of suspense thriller! Possibly the Production Code allowed the film to pass (possibly with cuts, at 77 minutes it is surprisingly short) on condition that its anti-Nazi stance was not exploited in its publicity. In any event, it is quite one of the strongest and most uncompromising of Hollywood's pre-war anti-Nazi movies, and would have been even stronger with a better actress than Joan Bennett in the lead -- or alternatively, had her role been better written. Somehow she just doesn't have the passion to match the pro- and anti- Nazi types that surround her, and, whatever job the production provided with longer and more literary chunks of dialogue than are afforded her character. We're very comfortable in the film's "The Man I Married" (on the quality of Irving Pichel's unacknowledged group of war films, which also include "A Letter for Emmy" and "The Moon is Down."). A good actor (especially as a villain), and with a fine musical voice (frequently used by John Ford for voice-overt narrations), Pichel was a reliable, tasteful director which probably never made a great film, but made an uncommon number of good ones in a great variety of genres. It would be an exaggeration to attach autarkist characteristics to his work, yet in a way he was a workmanlike, smaller-scale Renoir. The war films he made could well have been made very differently from the same basic scripts by a number of top directors; yet there is an overall humanity and respect to them all which suggests some kind of personal signature. "The Man I Married" is a film we've never played for laughs, but rather, is a film about a man's fight for his life. The print on hand was in weak condition and hardly did it justice. Fortunately another, imperfect but much better print, did present itself recently, and from the two we have been able to fashion one of quite acceptable quality. Without big star names or any kind of reputation (its initial reviews were very good, but boxoffice response was mild) it has disappeared through the cracks, and one hopes that somehow along the line good preservation material has been struck. 

--- TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION ---

Joan of Paris (RKO Radio, 1942) Directed by Robert Stevenson; produced by David Hempstead; Screenplay by Charles Bennett and Ellis St. Joseph from an original story by Jacques Theery and Georges Kessell; Camera, Russell Metty; Music, Roy Webb; 95 mins. NY premiere, Rivoli January 14th.

With: Michele Morgan (Joan); Paul Henried (Paul Levaller); Thomas Mitchell (Father Antoine); Laird Cregar (Herr Funk); May Robson (Nina, Rosay); Alexander Granach (Gestapo agent); Alan Ladd (Baby); Jack Grigs (Robin); James Monks (Splinter); Richard Fraser (Geoffrey); Paul Weigel (Janitor); John Abbott (British spy); and the Robert Mitchell Boy Choir.

Occupied country/resistance thriller were the least popular war films at the time, partly because there were so many of them, but largely because Hollywood didn't really know yet what conditions were like under the Nazi occupation, so created a series of clichés which were repeated and adjusted to story and star requirements, but overall created a uniformity that could -- then -- seem rather tiresome. Seen individually half-a-century later, they fare much better: "Joan of Paris", a very expensive production (and a profitable one) was just beaten into the theatres by Universal's "Paris Calling", both films using the recent fall of France as their background. With Morgan and Henried in their Hollywood debuts, Alan Ladd in his biggest pre-"This Gun For Hire" role (playing a Canadian airman to help maintain the illusion of American neutrality), a couple of wonderful villain performances (especially Cregar and (especially) Alexander Granach, and the usual tasteful, polished, incisive direction from (relative) newcomer to Hollywood Robert Stevenson, "Joan of Paris" is a beautifully crafted, unsensational film, not as moving as it might have been (possibly because of too many similar films since) but certainly quite touching and increasingly suspenseful. The cat-and-mouse chase through the streets near the end is excellently staged and edited, and gains immeasurably from the presence of Granach, whose German villain usually had a sense of humor without in any way lessening their menace. He did a superb job in "In Lang's "Eagle Also Died", literally replaying Lang's old bowler-hatted detective hero Inspector Lohmann, but now, still a dedicated policeman, working for the Gestapo, not for political reasons but merely because that's where he's most needed. His performance here is almost a warm-up for that classic Lang role, and quite steals the thunder away from Cregar's impressive but more showy performance.

--- William K. Everson ---

Program Ends 10:45. Brief Discussion Session follows.