

SPEAKING CANDIDLY

SPRING PARADE

(Universal)



BEFORE I saw this film, I had somehow got it into my head that Deanna Durbin was going to appear in a story about West Point Military Academy. It must have been something to do with the toy-soldier uniform one of her boy friends was wearing in an advertisement I noticed. Instead, it turned out to be a story about Old Vienna, which, at any rate, shares with West Point the distinction of being a place that every screen star seems destined to visit at least once in her career.

Now it is Deanna's turn to sing and frolic through the fairy city of the benign Emperor Franz Josef, whose sole preoccupation (if we are to believe countless films), was to take a fatherly interest in ambitious artists, struggling composers of waltz music, and young lovers temporarily estranged. The only occasion I can remember when a more realistic view was taken of the Emperor and he was shown as a rather grim old tyrant, was in the French film "Mayerling"; but the weight of cinematic evidence is so strongly against this interpretation that it is obviously as false as that other heresy that the Blue Danube is not really blue but a muddy grey.

"Spring Parade" will certainly shatter no cherished romantic illusions about the Old Vienna of 50 or 60 years ago (nor about Deanna Durbin either, for that matter). This is a city of gaiety, spring blossoms and song, inhabited by a race of friendly, jovial Teutons, who dress up in pretty uniforms but never fight—except over the lovely girls who throng the streets and beer-gardens. It is surely a striking commentary on our conservatism that even two bitter wars against the Austrians have done nothing to shake the popularity of this legend about Old Vienna with British people.

However, few among the crowds who see "Spring Parade" will worry much about this aspect. It is enough that Deanna Durbin, who continues to grow up gracefully, is seen here in a story as light as thistledown and that she is once again guided, with an unerring insight into popular taste, by her "discoverers," Joe Pasternak and Henry Koster. Miss Durbin (as from now on she has a claim to be called), has not yet quite got to the stage of being kissed in public (the director intervenes a convenient lamp-post on one occasion), but one is left with a very clear impression at the last that, thanks to the good offices of the benevolent Franz Josef, there will be wedding bells in Old Vienna for the little peasant girl from the village with an unspellable name, and her soldier-lover who preferred to write waltzes. Between the village where the story starts and the court ballroom where it ends, there is an airy succession of flirtations, misunderstandings, lovers' tiffs and reconciliations, interspersed by cheerful music, some of it composed in Hollywood for the occasion, and some of it of the genuine Old Viennese variety. It struck me that Miss Durbin is not singing as much as she did in her earlier films—

perhaps the intention is to put increasing stress on her talent as an actress—but I have no complaint of the quality of her voice or of the music. One original number, "It's Foolish, But It's Fun," has all the earmarks of a "hit," and "The Blue Danube" is, for me, still the best waltz ever written.

Of the supporting cast Robert Cummings is the soldier who preferred to be a composer, and I would have preferred it not to be Robert Cummings. Henry Stephenson plays Franz Josef exactly as tradition dictates, and the physical resemblance is at least striking.

It's foolish, but it's fun.

SUSAN AND GOD

(M.G.M.)



A COUPLE of years ago, Dr. Frank Buchman, leader of the Oxford Group movement, discovered America, and many Americans, for their part, discovered what a thrilling thing it was to be on conversational terms with God.

TIME Marches ON!

If there is one voice in radio or films capable of conveying a sense of the drama and fatefulness of history in the making, it is that of Westbrook van Voorhees, "March of Time" commentator. Van Voorhees was formerly a free-lance radio actor, but lately he has been kept busy on "March of Time," and has little spare time for radio. He was once heard frequently on both the Columbia and NBC networks.

Interviewing him some time ago, that alert magazine "The New Yorker" gathered that the voice of "March of Time" is properly impressed with the seriousness of his job. "When I open up with THE MARCH OF TIME it isn't so bad," he explained. "But when I come to the final TIME MARCHES ON, I give it all I've got."

While "Buchmanism" did not exactly sweep the States, or even achieve the spectacular publicity that has always attended Aimée Semple McPherson and Father Divine, the movement served to bring home to a vast number of Babbitts that the Almighty (as Aimée would say), was still on the job. Perhaps "Buchmanism's" greatest triumph was when Mae West was gathered into the fold.

The film "Susan and God," which was adapted very closely from the stage play, is the story of a skittish American society woman who goes to England and is swept off her feet by a movement (obviously the Oxford Group movement), and returns to find that the task of filling the lives of sophisticated playboys and playgirls with sunshine isn't as easy as it should be.

Susan (Joan Crawford) has had her life changed almost as deeply as it had been the previous season by that thrilling new card game; but the effect is slightly

A PITY TO DISTURB HER

It must have taken Joan Crawford hours to pose for this "still" from "Susan and God"



more dangerous in that Susan is imbued with an ardent missionary spirit. Having publicly confessed about the Great Change that has come over her ("The first time I was asked about God I was so embarrassed . . . but eventually I confessed, and admitted that I had had my hair touched up in Paris"), she sets about changing other people.

Arm in arm with God, as it were, she flits from couple to couple at a swanky house party, distributing pamphlets and airy aphorisms. (Interrupting a couple at distinctly the wrong moment, she observes brightly, "These awful moments when we know we have come in at the wrong time . . . but how much worse to go out again.")

But Susan has apparently forgotten that she has a husband (Frederic March), and a growing daughter (Rita Quigley). And the husband, who has drowned his loneliness for many months, isn't easily "Buchmanised." And it isn't easy to be bright and loving and full of sunshine (even with God's assistance), when you have a drunken husband in the background.

But trapped in a hard bargain, Susan does go back to husband and daughter, and, as you've probably guessed, she eventually finds out that that particular brand of God doesn't work.

"Susan and God" is quite obviously a stage show, and quite obviously the director, George Cukor, found entrances so right and situations so tight, that he didn't fool around with them, just to show that this is a movie and that George Cukor is up to all the tricks, however, he trots out some good, if occasionally obvious cinema.

But it isn't the direction, and it isn't Joan Crawford or Frederic March that will bring women along to see "Susan and God." It's what Miss Crawford wears. A life is being remade in the crucible of God, but you can be sure that when the new life is poured out, it will emerge in a breathtaking gown.

However, in spite of all attempts on the part of Adrian, M.G.M.'s fashion designer, to steal the show, Crawford and March remain the stars — as, of course, was intended. March is excellently malevolent when drunk, and handles his part easily and competently.

As for Joan Crawford, I'll admit she's not everybody's favourite star, but personally, I find something sufficiently irresistible about the sight of that beautiful face emoting across three quarters of the screen to take me away from the fireside on a wet night.

DANCE, GIRL, DANCE

(RKO)



AS I had occasion to remark the other week, Hollywood has recently recognised the existence of ballet. It happens again in "Dance, Girl, Dance." But this time ballet has some strong opposition from, of all things "burlesque" (or, as it is perhaps better known, "strip tease"). Indeed, the whole theme of the film is the competition between a ballet dancer (Maureen O'Hara) and a "burlesque artist" (Lucille Ball) for the affections of a rich, unreliable young man (Louis Hayward).

At the risk of seeming to possess a low brow (or even worse, a low mind) I must say that my interest all the way through was with the strip-teasing Miss Ball. But then the rather simpering sweetness of Miss O'Hara's role never has a chance by contrast with the latter's high spirits and frank vulgarity. Lucille Ball would dominate any company. She is the nearest approach to Jean Harlow since the original died. In the story, of course, it is obvious that virtue, as personified by Miss O'Hara, will eventually emerge triumphant, but Miss Ball gives everybody a run for his money and does not come out of it so badly.

The story of "Dance, Girl, Dance" was written by Vicki Baum. Its chief feature, apart from the ballet v. burlesque motif and the scope given to Miss Ball to exhibit her personality, is the bewildering number of divorces, desertions, and re-marriages which it contains. Husbands and wives are tossed away so freely and nonchalantly

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