



TWO  
EXCITING episodes from  
the new ZB feature "Spy Exchange." Left:  
Stanislaw Prail (Ronald Morse), makes love to Betty Lee  
Andrew (Lola Kelly, formerly of New Zealand). Right: Bradley Drake, chief  
of Washington's "Black Chamber" (Jack Arthur), finds himself in a tight corner

## FILM TASTES IN WARTIME

(Continued from previous page)

in the newsreels. Give her something to make her forget about it, she said.

"Do you prefer comedy or more serious drama?"

"Well, I must say I like a good serious drama. And it doesn't matter if it's a bit sad."

The soldier, a 1914-18 veteran, said that he had been in the army all his life and expected to die in it, but when he went to the pictures, which wasn't often, he liked to get away from it all. After all, he supposed a dairy farmer wouldn't be very keen to see a film about dairy-farming. He wanted anything but realism in his screen entertainment. Musical comedy was his favourite fare.

### Theatre Usher's Opinion

A theatre usher was next on our list. She confessed surprisingly that she didn't see many pictures—she seldom had time for much else but helping patrons into their seats and helping them out again. When she did settle down and see a picture through from start to finish, she certainly didn't go round looking for war pictures or depressing sidelights on European politics. Musical comedy was her first preference, with an especially warm corner for Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy, and after that "crazy comedy."

A young housewife showed the same preference for light entertainment. After reading the evening paper and listening to the latest BBC news, she seldom felt in the mood for a further dose of the international situation at the pictures. *Escape* and *The Mortal Storm* she had found a little too close to the headlines. Her preference was for straight comedy.

The nervous tension of the past year or so may be reflected in her dislike of rowdy musical comedies and swing music. She liked a good Western or an exciting outdoor picture, even if it did

include fighting, though she admitted that this came under the heading of escapist entertainment.

### One Light, One Heavy

We seized the opportunity to mix business with a hair-cut, and the barber whom we questioned while his scissors passed over us turned out to be another escapist. "Give me something light," he said between snips. "Especially now, when things look pretty black. By the time you've read the paper and listened to the radio—well, it's only natural if you want something to brighten you up, isn't it? Musical comedy, or something like that. I like a good drama, too, but nothing too heavy."

A fellow journalist whom we questioned on the 'phone took a rather unusual line. "For myself I like films about persecution by the Nazis, such as *The Mortal Storm*," he said. "I think it's a good thing for us to be reminded frequently that the Jews in Germany, and the Socialists, suffered first—that Germany fouled her own nest before she started smashing up other peoples." We're rather too inclined to regard this war as simply a straight-out issue between the British and the Germans. Oh, yes, and I'd make straight for any film if I knew it had anything about battleships in it—but then, battleships are a weakness of mine. I love 'em."

### Odd Reaction

Another odd reaction came from a refrigeration engineer. He said that if he had the choice of going to two pictures he would go to the one which did not deal with the war. But if he did get inside the theatre and found a war film showing, he would be intensely interested. He admitted that he had pacifist leanings, but at the same time he had an absolute passion for anything mechanical, and if there was a film which showed any details about modern tanks, guns, tractors or aeroplanes, he would be there to see it, despite his pacifism. He expressed the opinion that just re-

cently there had been a change in public taste away from war pictures.

The radio salesman said tersely: "War pictures? I shun them like the plague." He used the illustration: "Do people who have their house burnt down want to see a film of another house being burnt? Or do people who have had a bereavement like films about funerals?" As an afterthought he added that his two sons at secondary school would climb two miles over broken glass to see a really "live" war picture. The young liked them tough.

### The Brighter the Better

Two typists when interviewed were quite definite that their taste in films was "the brighter the better." They hated scenes of fighting, or stories with unhappy endings, and wouldn't dream of going to a film with a title like *The Beast of Berlin*. However, they had adored *Rebecca*, but in general they liked their movies bright.

An interesting point is that practically everybody said how much they were interested in newsreels of the war, and how disappointed they were that there were not more newsreels of the big events.

### The Lawyer Was Shrewd

Perhaps the most acute comment came from a lawyer. After cross-questioning the interviewer as to the reasons for the inquiries, and what he expected to learn, he expressed his own opinion that so far we had not seen any real war pictures, with the possible exception of *Convoy* and *The Lion Has Wings*, and both of these were very popular. The reason was that they were not direct propaganda, but highly skilful entertainment. In other words, he said, entertainment would draw crowds whether or not the theme had anything to do with the war. He said that *The Listener* might question half the country and arrive at the conclusion that everybody disliked war pictures, but immediately there came along a first-class war picture with a good story and that touch of some-

thing which constitutes what we call popular entertainment, the cinemas would be packed out—and the very people who told us they disliked war pictures would lap it up no matter how grim or terrifying it was. "No matter what we say, we are all horribly fascinated by the war," he said.

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