

## Document Citation

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SPIONE (SPIES) (UFA, 1928; US release in 1929 by MGM). Produced and Directed by Fritz Lang; Scenario, Thea von Harbou, Fritz Lang; Camera, Fritz Arno Wagner; 80 mins approx. German film, English titles.

With Rudolph Klein Rogge (Hagghi); Willi Fritsch (Agent 326); Gerda Maurus (Sonia); Lupu Pick (Masimoto); Fritz Rasp (Ivan); Lien Deyers (Kitty); Craighall Sherry (Burton Jason); Julius Falkenstein (Hotel manager); George John (train conductor); Paul Rehkopf (Stolch); Paul Horbiger (Valet); Louis Ralph (Hans); and Hermann Valentin, Greta Berger, Hertha von Walther.

Lang's prior film "Metropolis" had been so expensive (and would take so much time to recoup its costs) that Lang had to follow up immediately with a film that was economical, commercially sure-fire, and could re-establish Lang's reliability as a combination of artist and boxoffice draw. "Spies" was the result, produced independently by Lang for his own company, and virtually an extension of his earlier "Dr. Mabuse". Many of his stock characters and situations reappear, polished and honed to perfection. If it's less nightmarish and expressionistic than most Lang, it's also, relatively speaking, more realistic (it was initially based on a very specific Soviet spy ring scandal in London, although fiction tended to take over as writing and production progressed) and is quite uncharacteristically light-hearted for Lang, the closest he ever came to the spirit of Hitchcock, and this due no little to the engaging personality of his hero Willi Fritsch, who was also closer in spirit to the Donat/Grant heroes of Hitchcock than to the dour and doomed heroes of Lang. An infinitely more imaginative and polished production than "The Silent Command" (hard to realise that only about 4 years separates them), it is also the first of the deliberately gimmicky spy films, and thus a direct ancestor of the Bond movies. There are typically nightmarish Lang elements, and a sequence that influenced as recent a film as Ken Russell's Valentino epic, but basically it's a serial-like entertainment. The version we are seeing tonight is of the American (slightly shortened) release version. A longer, reconstructed version does exist - but even initially, it was much shorter than the average Lang spectacular, designed to be played in a 2-hour slot (as proven by existing ads from German papers of the period) and thus garner as many showings per day as possible. The excised scenes are all good, but unlike the major deletions made in other Lang films (and especially his two-parters) their loss does not materially affect the film.

Program ends approx. 10.30.

--- William K. Everson